

North Africa

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The political institutions of Moroccan tribes are closely intertwined with the central state. By allying with state officials, tribe members actively contribute to state authoritarianism. The state has seen to it that neither the rural council nor the customary village council offers positions for representation of the tribal population. However, the recent *gouvernement d'alternance* of Prime Minister Youssoufi and King Mohammed VI have both declared the introduction of a local government intended to serve the population, instead of controlling it through this non-representation. Nonetheless, in view of Morocco's political culture, it can be argued that this will be a long-term affair.

Since the independence, the political system of Morocco can be described as based on patronage relations. For example, in November 1988, King Hassan II visited Azrou, the most important market place of the Beni Mguild pastoralists in the Middle Atlas, on his way to his palace in Ifrane. On that occasion, the main roads were paved with carpets collected from the Beni Mguild by the *caïds* (district officers) and their assistants. Once the King had arrived, the reception ceremony commenced – his donation of a mosque to the town being central. Before leaving, the King allowed men to hand him letters in which they had worded their preoccupations, such as lack of work.

Some days later, several herdsmen were dissatisfied because the hunting expeditions of the King near Ifrane had closed off certain forests. Enraged, the herders set fire to parts of the forests. As recounted by locals, the police responded by rounding up several people in randomly selected villages, putting them into jail for several days. In exchange for submission – in this case the obligation to lend carpets and the closure of some forests – the population was left with a gift and a certain degree of hope. The belief that having the right contacts with influential people is a precondition for success in life is greatly cherished in Morocco. Indeed, the notion of *pistonnerie* (pulling strings) is essential in Beni Mguild culture (and Morocco in general) and this becomes clearly manifest in Morocco's political culture.

Key role of the Ministry of the Interior

Recent research shows that Morocco's state power remains very hierarchical. The Ministry of the Interior at the provincial level, represented by the governor, operates in an authoritarian fashion. The governor is the guardian of law and order and therefore has a *tutelle sur les collectivités locales* (tutelage of local collectivities). On 9 November 1999, the dictatorial Minister of the Interior was suspended from his office by King Mohammed VI, but the governor still maintains control over his territory. Thus, he supervises the activities of the regional headquarters of the line ministries and it is at the provincial level that the information is gathered on local conflicts. This information is collected by the *caïds*, themselves being informed by their assistants, the sheikhs and *moqaddems*. By introducing a less inhibiting territorial administration, the new King did away with almost all governors on 31 December 1999 and appointed new officials that were more open to communication with the population. However, the general secretary, a crucial figure at the provincial headquarters, handles affairs just as he used to do. His influence is unsurpassed in the province. Each time he passes through the provincial headquarters, people hurriedly bow on their knees. When he has a meeting with a *caïd*, all notables

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pay their respects by prostration and hand kissing, a dramatized representation of the obedience to authoritarian power.

The province's *tutelle sur les collectivités locales* continues to strike at the heart of the local economy. The Beni Mguild's main source of livelihood is sheep farming on the collectively owned pastures. It is the governor, following the instructions of the Ministry of the Interior, who ultimately decides on the criteria of access. According to the governor, people having recently settled in the area may herd on these pastures as well – a move deeply resented by several autochthonous sheep farmers.

At the province hall, one can meet the important men. It is here that the development plans of the province and how they can fit into the national plan are decided upon. Informally, the general secretary has meetings with the chairmen of the district councils, informing them on how to make their local plans coincide with those of the province. Once these men agree, the plan is elaborated. The population is well aware of the decision-making power of the province. The sheep farmers connive with the governor by regularly sending him letters, asking him to redress certain decisions taken by lower authorities which they resent; secret information about countrymen who were their adversaries in disputes often accompany these letters, enforcing the key position of the province in conflict resolution.

What is happening at the level of the province is replicated at the district level. The main function of the *caïd* is to maintain law and order in his district. However, many disputes about access to the pastures and other conflicts are directly put forward to him. Especially on market days, his office is crowded with people. Most *caïds* find great difficulties in the straightforward handling of affairs as they are confronted with people who opt for other avenues to solve their problems.

The sheikh and *moqaddem* are the mediators between the *caïd* and the population. The former represents a clan, while the latter represents a lineage. Both are recruited from among the local population. Despite not receiving any compensation, many compete for these positions because they offer ample opportunities for self-enrichment. Some may even go so far as to tattle on other candidates in order to get into office. Because of the lack of consensus, the village council is not able to nominate a candidate, leaving the appointment to be decided upon at the level of the province. It is for this reason that the population sees the positions of sheikh and *moqaddem* as being equivalent to those of state representatives, although it does not prevent them from making deals with those in office.

Encapsulation of the elected council

The district council (*conseil rural*) is composed of elected members. Among the Beni Mguild, most members adhere to the Mouvement Populaire, a conservative Berber party. Party ideology, however, is not much taken into consideration. The most impor-

tant factor is what a candidate can do for the voters; therefore entire lineages act as voting banks.

The council has its own funds, including the 30% added value tax it receives and income from forest exploitation. By means of a meeting, the councillors vote on the development plan, already elaborated for them by the province. At such a gathering, the *caïd* and technical staff of the province are present. Should the councillors, for example, wish to change budget allocations in the plan, the governor has the right to veto. But because the minutes of the meeting are sent to the province, councillors are reluctant to suggest major changes.

Part of the budget is allocated to inter-district projects, such as a sports stadium in the 1980s and a more recent tourist complex in Ifrane. These projects, however, were not priorities for the local population. Part of the budget is used to pay the staff of the district office, with few funds remaining for small projects, such as street cleaning. For these reasons, the population is very dissatisfied with the council. In addition, there is a general belief that councillors take money from the budget for personal use – a belief that has caused great distrust.

Autochthonous institutions: an alternative?

The Beni Mguild society is segmentary, the minimal lineage being the smallest unit. Formerly, this unit constituted the group that would trek to summer camps. The maximal lineage often coincides with a village at winter sites. Several lineages comprise a clan, the members of which defend their interests in larger pastures. Clans make up a tribe, coinciding with still larger tribal areas. Actually, now that the Beni Mguild have sedentarized, the *jemaa* (village council) has become the most influential local power centre.

Within the *jemaa* are the influential elders who have the reputation of being wise. Those known as religious men will be invited as members too. The *jemaa* still runs internal village affairs such as mosque maintenance and the payment of local irrigation watchmen, and helps in organizing marriages and funerals. One very important task of the council is to elect *naïbs*. The task of each *naïb* is to control access to collective pastures and to maintain the resting period (*agdal*).

At a higher level, there were tribal councils composed of representatives from the maximal lineages, which would elect a leader by rotating among the lineages. No longer operative, this council had the function of distributing land and water amongst the lineages. Now sheikhs and *caïds*, appointed by the government, decide on most matters.

Although the *jemaa* is still operative, several factors have undermined its functions. In the first place, there is the introduction of party politics. Because a lineage generally acts as a voter's bloc, a village cannot nominate one candidate if it consists of different lineages. In such cases, the affair generally ends with one part of the village feeling underrepresented and acting accordingly.

Second, people tend to go to the *caïd* if they feel the village council has not done justice. Members of the *jemaa* frequently go to the *caïd* to look for help with a dispute.

The Berber brotherhood of the hunters (*rmaa*) is still important among the Beni Mguild. *Rmaa* members organize the annual visits to Berber and Arab saints' shrines and the tribal offerings in spring and in autumn. Only men considered religious and honest are asked to become members. Because the *rmaa* members are highly respected, they are important men in the *jemaa*. But nowadays their importance is waning as they are no longer respected by educated people. The latter go directly to the *caïd* or to the court if they have a dispute.

Next to the *jemaa* and the *rmaa*, the position of the *naïb* is weakening. People are now very reluctant to accept a request of the *jemaa* to take up this post. They know that they will be frequently invoked by the *caïd* to help in sorting out access problems, and while the latter ultimately decides, this decision may be contested, the *naïb* receiving his share of resentment. In addition, they receive no compensation for their troubles. It is thus that the Beni Mguild no longer have an *agdal*, and the consequences have, among other things, grave ecological implications. ◆

Note

* Hammoudi, A. (1997), *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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