

**THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ON THE  
REPRODUCTION OF RURAL ELITES:  
FIELD STUDY IN M'ZIRAA MUNICIPALITY, BISKRA CITY-  
ALGERIA-**

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***Abstract:***

Through this empirical study, which is interested in the modes of action and intervention of social groups operating in the municipality of M'Ziraa, likely to have an effect on territorial development, we attempt to characterize the local rural elites. , retrace their history and process of evolution, estimate their symbolic capital as well as their role in local development. It also aims to understand the mechanisms of production and reproduction of this social category.

**Key words:** The elite, rural elite, reproduction, social capital, symbolic capital.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Since the beginning of the nineties of the last century, Algeria has undergone series of socio-economic transformations, which has coincided with the politic openness and transition to democracy, especially after the Algerian civil war, 1992–2002, that affected all aspects of life in the country (Khaldoon et al, 2019). Moreover, the consolidation and development of the agricultural sector as an effective economic alternative have taken a great significant among the total government reforms to advance the country's economy and to diversify exports during the transition (Sahli, 2010). However, these transformations have affected the public space by producing new social relations and redistributing new social centers and roles. Therefore, the harmony of the general social structure was affected; more particularly in the regions where the tribe system management was still control all life domains in these tribal societies (Bessaoud, 1999). In the wake of the general transitions, and like other regions, Biskra has experienced a large transformation in several fields, especially in the agricultural sector, which considered as the basis of all local advancement (Ouendeno et al, 2015). Actually, Biskra look forward to being a new vegetable garden in Algeria thanks to its two major agricultural centers: to the east, Sidi Okba, Ain Naga and M'Ziraa, and to the west, El Ghrous and Doucen. The region supplies about 45% of agricultural products to over the country (Métaoui, 2018). The witnessed economic development of these tribal areas in the past thirty years requires a systematic and sociological study of the tribal authority system as an important factor influencing the local developments, dominated by a large interdependence in the social structure.

In this study, we have taken the notables as a unit of analysis that forme the local elite of M'Ziraa, as well as, by studying its characteristics, following the path of its production, reproduction, resources, role and position in social life, from the independence until

now. Obviously, the introduction of such investigation is an essential input for understanding the formation and transformations of the elite in this society. Furthermore, to know the active groups nature in social life and their extent impact in local development, in reason of their crucial role in the gregarious composition unity, their leadership as a qualified influential force, and their effectiveness as an important actor. Similarly, this social structure is affected and changed at the same time, and the elites have changed to redistribute the social ranks again. As a concept, the notable group has changed throughout its historical path with the change of the group members' view and the choosing elite's criteria. Consequently, this leads to create new elites and emerging parallel groups, which engendered a kind of class struggling and destabilizing the community harmony. Indeed, this would affect any attempt to modernise or develop society

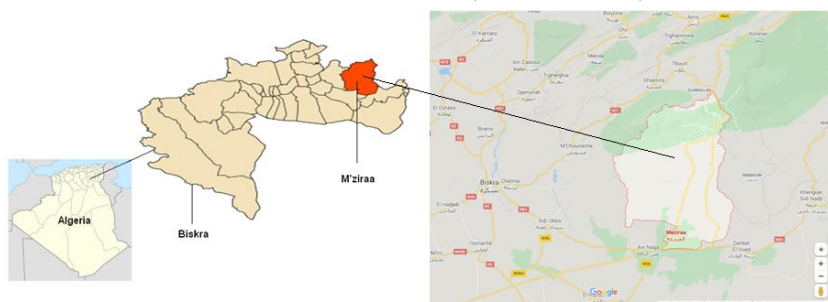
## **2. - Description of the study area**

M'Ziraa municipality is located in the foot of the last foothills of the Aures at 60 km in the east of Biskra, which is bordered in the north by Tekut and Ghassira (Batna), Ain Naqa and Zeribat El-Oued in the south, Zeribat El-Oued and Kimmel in the east, and M'Chounech and Ain Naqa in the west (Graph 1). This area is characterised by its Saharan semi-arid climate with less than 100 mm of rainfall and temperature reaching more than 45 in the summer (Mellah et al, 2019). This area is the first plain benefited of the floodwaters carried by the Oueds descending from the Mont of Ahmar Khaddou. Therefore, this character explains the relative abundance of its groundwater compared to the parts located in the center and downstream of the region (Khiari, 2003). The depth and flow of the boreholes vary from upstream to downstream as shown in Table 1 (DHB, 2003). The average depth of the boreholes located upstream of the plain are for M'Ziraa 361 m, and Zeribet el-Oued 261 m, which are the half compared to the boreholes located in the center and

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downstream of the plain like Aïn Naga with 611 m, and El-Feidh with 647 m (DHB, 2003).

Demographically, the old social structure forming the six tribal fractions of the municipality of M'Ziraa are overlapping between them and each fraction occupies a territory that spans in the three horizontal physical environments. Recently, this Saharan region has known unprecedented rural changes thanks to agricultural activities, the introduction of the drilling technique and the remarkable use of plasticulture, which affects the socio-economic and geographic order established since centuries on this area (Khiari, 2003).



Graph 1. location of M'ziraa in Biskra city

Table 1. Depths and flow of borehole rates (DHB, 2003).

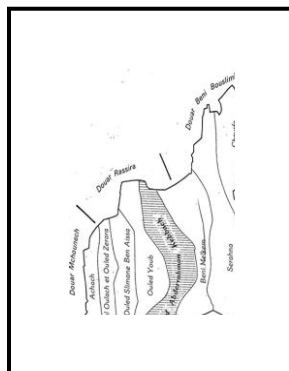
Municipalities	Depths (average/borehole)	flow (l/s) (average/borehole)
M'Ziraa	361	18,4
Zeribet el-Oued	261	20,3
Aïn Naga	611	19
El-Feidh	647	11

### **3. The social structure characteristics of M'Ziraa residents**

The morphological structure of M'Ziraa region consists of four main thrones as shown in Graph 2: 1/ the throne of Ouled Sliman ben Issa, located in Blida, "Zemmoura" at 7 km in the west of M'Ziraa municipality. 2/ the throne of the Ouled Ayoub, located in Sidi Masmoudi, at 12 km northwest of M'Ziraa. 3/ the throne of the B'ni Melkem, located in the municipality of El-Bghila, at 14 Km from

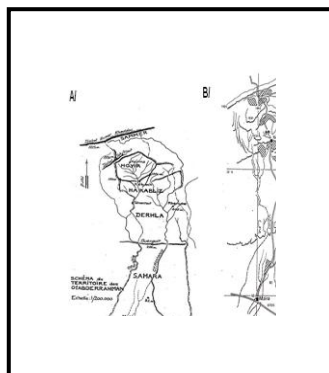
M'Ziraa. 4/ the throne of Ouled Abd El-Rahman, located in the center (Graph 2 gray area) (Rivière, T.,p192, 1987).

(Graph 2. Ouled Abd El-Rahman's throne (Rivière, 1987).



→ We will focus in this study on Ouled Abd El-Rahman's throne, which consists of five teams: Ouled Sidi Mohamed, Ouled Si Ali Moussa, Ouled Daouad, Ouled Rimili, and Ouled Khlef. We point out that before the independence of Algeria; they were half Bedouins, and they were making three trips a year in their area as shown in Graph 3. They are depending on grazing, wheat cultivation and producing almost everything they use in their daily lives (A semi-closed economy) (Rivière, T.1987, p197,1987).

Graph 3, A/ Ouled Abd El-Rahman's throne territory, B/ Ouled Abd El-Rahman's throne trip areas (Rivière, T.1987, p198-192).



#### **4. Methodological approach**

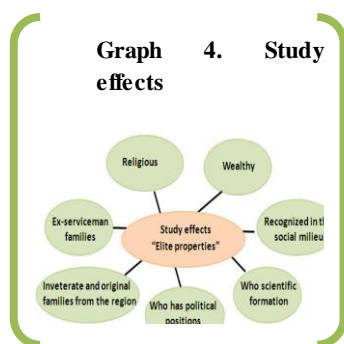
##### **4.1 Conceptual frameworks**

→ The Dictionary of Sociology presents the elite as a group of people who are considered, in particular, to be most worthy of an influential social policy practice (Akoun et Ansart, 1999, 178). As for the Oxford dictionary, the word (elite) refers to the social group that is believed to be the best and most important among others thanks to their possession of power, wealth, or mental skills such as: the ruling elite and the educated elite (The Oxford Thesaurus, pp. 476, 1994). However, the use of the concept of the elite depends on studies and disciplines such as economics, sociology, politics, religion and even culture (Bouammar, 2009). Through this study, the term “elite notables” will be used for a simple reason mainly related to the

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concept of the elite as a comprehensive and broad concept (Hafez , 2006), which includes even notables and sheikhs. To illustrate, those who exert social influence and power in their own ethnic community (Harold, 1979). Their social ranks may also be redistributed again according to Raymond Aaron (Al-Suwaidi, pp. 46 1986). Moreover, this appears in the works of Alfredo Barreto, who divided the elites into ruling and non-ruling elites, Tom Bottomor in “The Elite and Society”, Karl Mannheim, Gaetano Mosca and Charles Wright Mills, through Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens and Jürgen Habermas



## **5. The methodology used**

According to Paul Pacson (look at the section III), It is difficult to build a theoretical model for understanding society without returning to history. Therefore, the subject of the study dictates the comparative historical approach, which we will adopt in our study of rural elites, starting by analysis of some indicators (Graph 4), to find out the criteria that control the formation and reshaping of these elites that allows us to observe the changes that have affected the social structure and the social organisation reshaping.

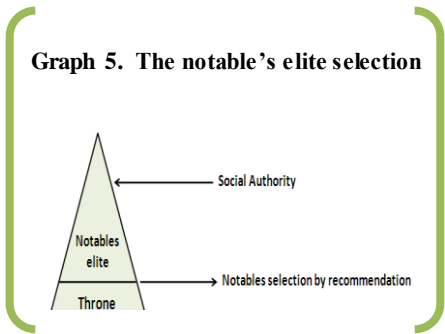
### **5.1. Data collection tools and sample selection method**

**Interview:** In the first exploration stage at the beginning of 2014, we conducted a series of interviews (Table 2). The study is started by 11 interviews with individuals and groups, with the help of some individuals as mediators between the people of the region and us, which facilitate to contact with some notables in order to get large

information about the historical of the region. The second exploration stage was started in 2019 with 19 interviews with variety of samples, in which we took from each group of the throne of Ouled Abd El-Rahman about at least five, i.e. about 25 samples. Finally, we interviewed three of the notables out of five.

Table 2. Characteristics of the targeted samples in the study.

Throne	Old (years)	Gender	Sample number
Ouled Abd-el-Rahman	>30	Male	05
Ouled Daouad	>30	Male	05
Ouled Si Mohammed	>30	Male	05
ouled Si Ali Moussa	>30	Male	05
ouled R'mili	>30	Male	05
ouled Kh'lef	>30	Male	05
Notables	>40	Male	03 from 05
Total			28



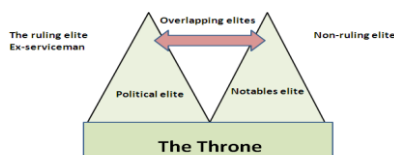
## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**6.1. The formation path of the traditional elites "notables" in M'Ziraa :** Since independence in 1962, the social authority has been distributed among the elite "notables of the region" (five members) (Graph 5), which means one from each group. The throne Supremes is chosen during the village council meeting called the El-Jama'ah (community), whereby El-Jama'ah selects a tribalism leader. The leader represents the group tribalism in its three dimensions: the environmental component, i.e. the geographical location, the lineage

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biological component and the moral component (the dignity, the wealth and astuteness) (ENS, 2011). Moreover, El-Jama'ah chooses notables by recommendation in the presence of all family representatives that make up the group unanimously (Harhar, 2012). As well as, the consent shall be collective, deriving their legitimate authority from reason, wisdom, and good religiously behavior (E'Zaouya religious formation) (Hadri, 2013). The chosen notables should be worldly known in their social space, and people are satisfied with them, and their role is prominent in the conflict settlement, agricultural water distribution, and agricultural lands division (Bencheniti et Filali, 2014). In this context, it should be noted that the division form is granted to each member of the family (1 ha). Additionally, we point out that about 9000 ha belonging to the throne were divided, including 200 ha for the agricultural revolution. Thus, the division is equally between all members of the throne, whether men or women, unless she marries outside the throne, then she will be forbidden from division. As a consequence, we note a fair division between all, and there is social solidarity that maintains the social structure harmony, as well as, there is no difference between the five thrones in terms of social or economic features.

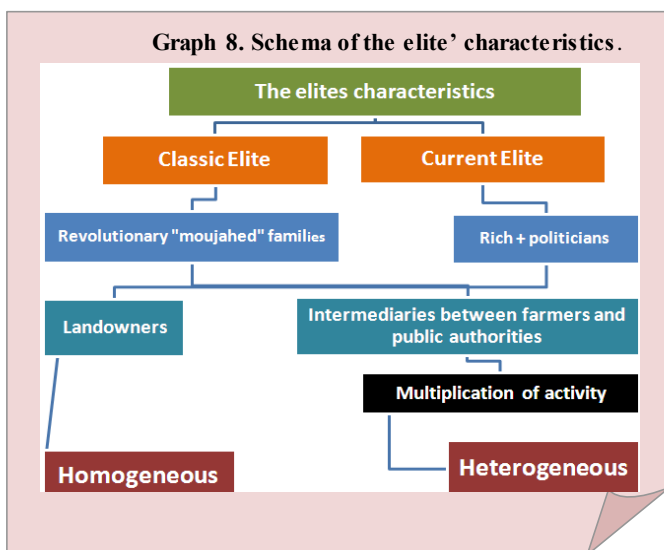
**Graph 6. Schema of ex-serviceman and non-ruling elites in the throne.**



**Graph 7. Schema of the ruling and non-ruling elites**







**6.2.The elite's regeneration is a multi-impact path:**By tracking the elite's traditional historical path, how they were established, their role, their standing, and impact on social life in general, our logical question was about whether elite notables still have the same influence, status, and role that they previously played on social life??. Obviously, with the beginning of the seventies appeared new emergence resource consists of the class of the old Mujahidin (ex-serviceman) (**Graph 6**), which imposed itself as a new characteristic of the local elite group formation (Rahali, 2013). As a result, the appearance of this class was the latest change in the elite group composition. Thereafter, they were getting a significant political influence that formed the first nucleus of the ruling political elite and economic influence in the period of one-party rule (Bakki, 2019). In fact, the elite's choice is not inherited by certain families, but rather it is relatively variable, in which the person may change his social position in the tribe by exploiting various economic, social, and political circumstances. Too, many people have reached the highest rank in political hierarchy and social standing (Akoun et Ansart, 1999p178), by taking advantage of special circumstances that led

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them to create wealth. Thus, they moved from a specific social and political rank to a higher level, since independence until the end of eighties. Indeed, Algeria has known a democratic openness since the beginning of the nineties of the last century; thus, the Algerian society has experienced important general changes. Similarly, with regard to M'ziraa study area, like other parts of the country and as part of this of these arid-regions societies have experienced an accelerating dynamic transformation, especially in the agricultural sector. Particularly, this transformation has affected, as well, the social relations, by the coming of new external people from other regions for work, the emergence of new relations patterns like renting agricultural lands. Thus, the local elite has emerged with new characteristics and new mechanisms (Graph 7, 8). Consequently, unlike in the past; it produced and reproduced active elites nowadays, where the tribe or the throne retracted its behavior degree as a discrete cohesive mass as it was in the past. Currently, the called 'Al-Waqar' by Ibn Khaldoun, which is the respect and appreciation that was prevalent between the tribe members towards the elite as a social capital has disappeared. Therefore, with the vanishing of the prestige and the great respect that the notables were receiving from the throne members, which gives them a kind of social authority, their role became confined in settling conflicts, as confirmed many interviews with notables.

As a result, it can be inferred that the concept of the elite no longer only to notables, in reason of the individuals' perception change towards them, and no longer depend to the last chosen characteristics and criteria. Actually, the elite concept has extended to new emerged parallel classes, which created a kind of overlap and plurality of elites, referring in this regard that the party and political affiliation has replaced the tribal affiliation that prevailed in the past. Finally, the throne is no longer the fundamental reference for the political authority formation, especially, by joining of new learner's elements, which represented a new class or new category that got involved in

the political and social field since about the mid-nineties and the beginning of 2000 (Scott, 2008). This period until today, was characterised by a clear disparity in the production of the rural elite. Consequently, the change in the criteria that control the elite's selection, where the political influence and higher education have become the most important features used to choose members of notables. After that began the contrast of goals and interests between elites, and appeared the term of the plural elites, which means the egression of a new elites group such as commercial elite, cultural elite and political elite, and sometimes they overlap with each other.

**6.3. The new elites impact on the economic-social life:** Despite the actual elite studies, we returned to early nineties and questioned the possibility of the emergence of rural elite as defined in the elite heritage in reason of the democratic openness in Algeria. However, the field research with the people of the region allows us to conclude the possibility of appearance of modern rural elite or unconventional. Therefore, the new elite consists of senior owners; educated people who occupy job positions inside or outside the region, and other category of whom possess a social capital obtained from their family's affiliations or their religious activity. In addition, the new elite is formed, as well as, by official administrators such as a municipal mayor, members of parliament, members of local councils, and members of the agricultural cooperative society, in which these jobs are considered as a political position. Consequently, through this study, it became clear the impact of the new elite on the economic and social life by bringing many agricultural investments and projects to the region thanks to their social or political ranks, which was confirmed by interviewers. Therefore, it can be inferred that the changes of new elite position in the society lead to a greater change in its social roles.

#### **6.4 The economic and agricultural activities in M'Ziraa**

This municipality of M'ziraa is divided to 13 provinces, where the population is estimated at 11,000 people. Admittedly, the agriculture has experienced a remarkable development since the beginning of the nineties of the last century in this area, which substantially classified it

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as a promising land for the agrarian exploitation. Furthermore, the total area of M’Ziraa municipality is 96,080 ha, of which 70% are mountainous areas. The total agricultural area is 48,859 ha, while about 993.00 ha are not suitable cultivation area and the irrigated area is 4,497 ha. As for cultivated land areas, they are estimated to be 4,758 hectares (Table 3) (CUSA, 2016).

**Table 3:** The agriculture used lands (DASB, 2019).

GRAZING AND BROWSE	IMPRODUCTIVE LAND	TOTAL AGRICULTURAL SURFACES (T. A. S)
Including		
uncleared land and		
undergrowth.		
(ha)	(ha)	(ha)
TOTAL of exploitations	40,061,00	993,00
		48 859,00

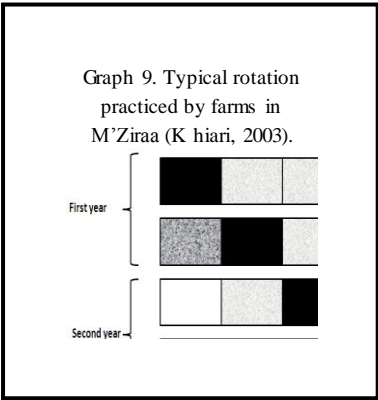
**Table4:** Farms exploitation according to fractions (DPAT, 1998)

Fractions	perimeters	Number of farms	Rate (%)
Beni Malkem	B’Ghila	260	29,0
Ouled Abderrahmane	M’Zirâa	345	38,5
Ouled Youb	Guerbia	40	4,7
Sliman Ben Aïssa	Kharboucha	79	8,7
Ahl Oulach, Ouled Zrara and Achach	Zammoura	172	19,2
Total		896	100

Generally, M’Ziraa’s farms are recent creation, which back to 1980s, more precisely after the promulgation of the 1983 Law establishing the right to own agricultural land. Thus, this incentive law gave the right to land developer farmers located in steppe areas to become owners after five years of exercise. So, during the period 1985–1995, about 896 farms were created in the plain, covering an area of 7,200 ha, spread over five perimeters. These farms are concentrated in the central-eastern and eastern sectors of the plain shared between Ouled Abderrahmane and Beni Malkem, with 38.5% and 29% respectively,

compared with 4.7%, 8.7%, and 19.2% in the center-west and west, that including the two major agglomerations of M’Ziraa (Table 4) (DPAT, 1998). These sectors are the most populated in the municipality enjoying some privileges, particularly in the administrative sector.

Thereafter, several farms were created outside of those perimeters reached about 268 exploitations, to attain 1163 in 1998 on an area of 1609 ha, spread over 8,847 ha (DPAT, 1998). Usually, the farms have an average size varied between 2 and 9 ha, consisting some gardens with average size superior or equal 1 ha. The gardens are often divided into three soles: 1/3 is devoted to cereals (usually wheat), 1/3 for field vegetable crops (mainly beans and peas grown in the fall, watermelon and melon grown in April), and 1/3 occupied by greenhouses (1/4) and (3/4) at rest. However, the market crops are achieved an abundance in the production of variety of vegetables and fruits period between 2018–2019 such as carrots with 5,942.00 quintal, tomatoes with 1,167,000.00 quintal, green beans 25,500.00 quintal, melons 293,600.00 quintal, watermelon 112,000.00 quintal. Graph 9 shows the typical rotation practiced by farms in M’Ziraa (Khiari, 2003), in the last period before 2003, so this typical rotation has changed with changing in the agriculture systems and the introduction of new fruits and vegetables.



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The plasticulture is largely used in M'ziraa, where its total area was reached 1,832.00 ha in 2019, in which they are varied between Greenhouses tunnel with 1,482.00 ha, Multichannel greenhouse with 350,00 ha as shown in Table 5.

The irrigated crops areas are estimated with 2,782.00 ha of winter cereals, 963,00 ha of fruit crops, 3,515.00 ha of vegetable crops, and 12,00 ha of vineyards (Table 6). Concerning the type of irrigation, various models are used, and according the Table 7, the drip irrigation system is largely used in superficies estimated with 5,926.00 ha, this can be explained by its economic character which is more appropriate system of irrigation in arid regions, followed by the gravity irrigation system with 1,667.00ha

**Table5./**Plasticulture (Covered area) (DASB, 2019)

Type	Greenhouses tunnel (ha)	Multichannel greenhouse (ha)	total (ha)
	1 482,00	350,00	1 832,00

**Table 6.** Irrigated crops areas. (DASB, 2019).

	Winter cereals (ha)	Fruit crops (ha)	Vegetable crops (ha)	Vineya rds (ha)	Diver s *(ha)
TOTAL of exploitations	2 782,00	963,00	3 515,00	12,00	416,00

**Table7.** Irrigation mode (DASB, 2019).

Irrigation system	Aspersion (ha)	Gravity (ha)	Drip (ha)	Pivot (ha)	Total (ha)
TOTAL of exploitations	73,00	1 667,00	5 926,00	22,00	7 688,00

**7. - Promising agriculturally for a social pole.** In recent years, M'Ziraa has become an important pole of agricultural production in Biskra with a significant contribution in the general income estimated at 250 billion dinars. This is due to the rise in cultivated areas, especially in the period between 1984–2020 as shown Graph 10 as well as by the direction of their farmers to greenhouses exploitation (Graph 11), and their relentless pursuit to develop its agricultural economy (Bossena, 2019). On the other hand, the tribal nature of the region and the interconnectedness of man with his social environment led the peasants to raise the challenge, despite the problems of water shortage and storage, as well as the lack of employment and organised market (Bossena, 2019). Although the land is the only treasure of the population and agriculture is the only local development means, under the slack tribal system as a local authority, the farmers are still facing major administrative issues such as the real-estate settlement problems. In the last decades, the agriculture sector was subject to many ministerial regulations, which makes all regions, even those, who are under the tribe's system, depending to the government authority and the application of its strategic development programs as a systematic structured framework (Bouammar, 2009).

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**Graph 10. The agriculture land evolution during the period 1984-2019 in M'ziraa.**

Recently, the large agricultural expansion in this semi-arid region led to the influx of new foreign workers, which created to some extent a mixture between locals and newcomers in the social structure of M'Ziraa (Naouri et al, 2015). For many years, the area has opened wider to the outside areas because of the economic growth and the ascending trend of agricultural transactions with the exterior, which gained the region some locally influence and importance by the emergence of a new category of investors and businessman, who have acquired a kind of authority on the local decision as illustrated by the answer of some notables (Ammari, 2020). In fact, this confirmed by the municipality administrative council that counted some local exporters and investors, in which some of them represent M' Ziraa in the state parliament.

Furthermore, the peasant divisions planning within professional associations have improved the integration of the areas in the economic and trade environment (Hermouch, 2010). On the other hand, the government contributed through its approved mechanisms to



counting local products that are eligible to obtain a trademark in order to value them and made them competitive in foreign markets (Wag, 2019). Moreover, M'Ziraa has benefits of the government's decisions that favored the development of the agricultural sector in rural areas by engaging more young people with innovative projects in order to ensure sustainable and qualitative farming (Chaabna, 2017). In this context, the strategy seeks to provide the necessary facilities that enable them to contribute to the agricultural investment and the development of production systems, especially in arid-regions, in order to meet the challenge of food security (Maata-Allah et Amrani, 2013). Currently, the municipality of M'Ziraa, with its various structures and notables, is trying to improve the livelihood framework of the population, by providing the requirements of life such as electricity linking water points with the farmers of these areas, as well as the completing and preparing of agricultural crossings (Wag, 2019).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

We cannot affirm that the traditional elite or what we call notables, as a social group, are completely removed from social life, but we can affirm the decline of its role and its status in the present. The notable's elite has lost some of its position to be replaced by the political and central authority represented by the law force. However, the emerged group of cultural, economic, and political elites imposed us to talk about a new concept of the elite's pluralism, where the question that must be asked is: Among the actual elites, which one is exercising a real influence and playing the important role in social life, and which elite controls the rest of the other elites?

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