



Montagnards dans la mondialisation: Réseaux diasporiques et mobilisations sociales dans l'Atlas (Maroc), les Highlands (Ecosse) et les Alpes françaises. By Mari Oiry Varacca

Author: Rudaz, Gilles

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sociales dans l'Atlas (Maroc), les Highlands
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Varacca**

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Gilles Rudaz

Gilles.Rudaz@unige.ch

Department of Geography and Environment, University of Geneva, 1205
Geneva, Switzerland

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Every stakeholder, community, society, and area is confronted by globalization. And this is also true in mountains. The starting point of this book is an observation of the economic and political marginalization of mountain regions in the context of globalization. In the first chapter, the author highlights the factors leading to this marginalization. This contextualization of the background offers a good comparison of the 3 studied mountain regions—in Morocco, Scotland, and France—and is based on a historical approach. The processes of marginalization are set out in the context of the constitution of nation states and the advent of the capitalist system. A strong positioning of the book is its consideration that the transformations experienced by mountain societies and territories can be understood as the results of choices of certain political and economic models. Thus, the author does not hesitate to assert that the marginalization of mountains is “a matter of political choices” (p 29).

The objective of the book is to “study different ways of dealing with marginalization, of resisting political models that produce inequalities, of adapting to or rejecting the capitalist system, of proposing alternatives” (p 14). The originality of the argument developed in the book is not to consider only mountain societies as losers or victims of globalization. It focuses on the way these societies position and adapt themselves in relation to this context—and can even take advantage of it. As a result of this approach, it is interesting that the author does not talk about “projects” carried out by actors but uses the word “experimentations.” She focuses on “experimentations which have in common to seek to reverse the stigma, to create spaces of autonomy, and in which the mobilization of networks of actors, especially international actors, often diasporic, constitutes a resource for the associative collectives or individuals to maneuver locally” (p 21). Taking into account the influences of the diasporas is another original approach of the book. As a

geographer, the author pays particular attention to the interplay of scales and processes of mobilization in the mountains.

Regarding her epistemologic position, Varacca refers to “subaltern studies” (p 16), which is relevant for a researcher examining the systems producing marginality in mountain areas. She does not really focus on the marginalization of a generic category of “mountain people” but examines the constitution of other identities and the power relations surrounding these identities. Specific attention is devoted to political identities, such as the Amazigh identity in Morocco (Chapter 3).

Women’s networks are also at the heart of the book. The way in which the author addresses labeling processes for agricultural and tourist products clearly reveals this subaltern studies approach: “In the labeling processes, the balance of power between public authorities and civil society, and, at the local level, between social classes and between gender classes, is at stake. Representations of the area concerned by the labeling process are in conflict with each other” (p 187). The power relations are highlighted at the local level through in-depth analyses. Local initiatives are not only seen as a response to globalization but also show how it can strengthen local elites and thereby, in some cases, reinforce inequalities.

The title of the book indicates the study areas, and 3 maps illustrate them (p 22–24). In addition to these areas, there is a brief incursion into the Air mountains in Niger. If, in the introductory part, there is a certain balance among the 3 study areas, the Moroccan terrain easily wins out throughout the book: Chapters 3 and 4, at the heart of the book, are exclusively devoted to the Moroccan Atlas. They are based on the author’s long expertise in the region, where she undertook the research for her doctoral thesis in geography on alternative tourism projects. She acknowledges this “bias,” noting that “comparing them term by term would be meaningless” (p 148), and she further specifies: “It is not a question of strictly comparing regions that understand each other in very different contexts, but of studying the multiple facets of the processes of marginalization and struggles against them in the mountains, and of putting into perspective the Moroccan terrains from which the reflection started” (p 20). Tourism is clearly the predominant theme, but the book is not limited to it and examines, for example, agricultural production and labeling processes (Chapter 6).

The book offers a fresh and innovative look at social mobilization in mountains. It conducts a fine analysis of the articulation between local contexts, considered according to their specificities, and the trend of globalization. Varacca shows not only how mountain societies are marginalized by globalization but also how they intend to take advantage of it by rethinking their identities and resources. In the end, the book highlights the resilience of mountain communities and their ability to adapt and innovate.