

The tree of life

In a rural place somewhere between Essaouira and Agadir, where you can hear nothing but wind blowing, see nothing but illusions, feel nothing but the void. I drank some water from your bottle, and gazed in front of me letting my reach as far as they can. Under a hot boiling sun, I caught sight of a surviving symbol, a tree that has lived and stayed green God knows how many years. It is Argania or how Amazigh like to name it "Argan tree".



Hamza Hemouzal

These wonderful trees estimated to be millions of years old. Taking place nowadays in an area of approximately 800.000 hectares; around Essaouira and Agadir. It can live up to 250 years old. They are considered an enduring symbol because it can survive such difficult circumstances; its survival is thanks to its roots that can reach 30 to 70 meters deep to find water. Furthermore, Argan trees are well adapted to the climate in the south Morocco; they can remain dormant and fruitless during years of drought, but still protect the land from soil-erosion and desertification.

Unfortunately, there are threats that target the continuity of this treasure. One of these dangerous threats is wood-hunger; it is well known that Argan tree's wood is expensive and its charcoal is considered the best. Local population has reduced the number of surviving trees down to less than half compared 50 years ago. In addition to that, goats are a huge menace to Argan trees as well; the number of goats has significantly risen over time causing more danger to the remaining forests. I hope that there will be solutions to this situation; otherwise, Argan will be just a memory like all the other gone memories.

Argan has a symbolic existence in Amazigh's life; I cannot imagine Amazigh people without Argan oil. It is a sign of generosity, hospitality, and a source of pride, especially that it is endemic exclusively in their region. There is a strong bond between Argan oil and Amazigh women; they use it in every to prepare almost every meal, to do their hair, to soften skin, to name but a few. Lately, they have started relying on it to cover some of their financial needs. In fact, many cooperatives provide customers with Argan oil locally and even now worldwide. Yet, they cannot provide machines that will help those women to increase their productivity. They desperately need that as the process of extracting Argan oil is extremely long, tough and tiring. One liter for example of Argan oil requires 24 hours of continuous work and 40 to 50 kilograms of nuts.

On the May5th, 2021 we will celebrate – for the first time - the international day of Argan. That is an interesting step towards recognizing this wonderful symbol. But there is a lot of work to do, starting with raising awareness about Argan, showing its

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health, cosmetic, and ecological benefits. I hope that one day, we will not have before us just vast empty landscapes, but rather a far-reaching mesmerizing space full of millions of Argan trees covering every inch of our forests, deserts and everywhere.

Hamza Hmouzal