VAGABONDS OR ELITES? THE MOBILE LIFESTYLE OF CONTEMPORARY TUAREG

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ABSTRACT

Vagabonds or Elites? The Mobile Lifestyle of Contemporary Tuareg

A large proportion of contemporary Tuareg no longer move in traditional nomadic cycles, but according to individual choice. Always on the move and in search of making a living, they drift between the Saharan states. Relatives and friends provide lodging; a small bag of personal effects and a mobile phone with beloved modern Tuareg guitar music complete their appearance. Their lifestyle may be characterized by the term "vagabonds", but I shall argue that these people may also be seen as a certain elite of their society because of their mobility strategies. In my case study of Nigerian Tuareg moving between Niger, Algeria and Libya I respond to the characteristics of their mobility and lifestyle. I shall illustrate their strategies in dealing with the borders of the Saharan nation states, and clarify that "vagabonds" and "elites" are not inevitably mutually exclusive terms, and that moving may not be an exception of normal life, but can be the rule.

KEY WORDS: Tuareg, mobility, transnationality, elites, vagabonds

IZVLEČEK

Vagabundi ali elite? Tuaregi, moderni nomadi na poti

Večina Tuaregov ne sledi več tradicionalnim nomadskim ciklom in se premika po osebni izbiri. Venomer v gibanju in iskanju hitrega zaslužka drsijo med saharskimi državami. Sorodniki in prijatelji jim zagotavljajo nastanitev, majhna torba z osebnimi stvarmi in mobilni telefon z najljubšo moderno tuareško kitarsko glasbo pa zaokroža njihovo pojavo. Njihov življenjski stil bi lahko označili s terminom vagabund, vendar pa bi zaradi svojih mobilnih strategij ti ljudje lahko predstavljali tudi elito svoje družbe. V svoji študiji primera nigerskih Tuaregov, ki se premikajo med Nigrom, Alžirijo in Libijo, avtorica obravnava značilnosti njihove mobilnosti, ki je ni mogoče uvrstiti med konvencionalne kategorije. Nadalje ilustrira njihove strategije spoprijemanja z mejami med saharskimi nacionalnimi državami in pojasnjuje, da vagabundi in elite niso nujno medsebojno izključujoči se termini ter da premikanje ni nujno odklon od normalnega življenja, ampak je lahko tudi pravilo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Tuaregi, mobilnost, transnacionalnost, elite, moderni nomadi

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BACKGROUND OF THE TUAREG´S CONTEMPORARY LIFESTYLE

The Tuareg[1] are a predominantly pastoral nomadic[2] society living in the Sahara and its Sahelian fringes. Since decolonialization and the subsequent nation-building process in the 1950s and 1960s they have been attached to five states – Libya, Algeria, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso – where their political, economic and social participation has developed differently. In Libya and Algeria the Tuareg have been facing a rigorous Arabization policy (see Keenan 2004; Kohl 2007; Maddy-Weitzmann 2012), whereas Niger and Mali inaugurated a policy of administrative Africanization (Grégoire 1999; Lecocq 2010). The political participation of the Tuareg has been limited mostly to a local (partly only informal) level. Economically they have not profited from the rich mineral resources of their region, and on a social level the newborn nation states have reinforced their minority status (see Claudot-Hawad 2013).

During recent decades, the Tuareg´s traditional lifeways of nomadism and pastoralism have been facing significant changes. Post-colonial dependencies, climatic and ecological crises, global economic interests, and local and supra-local attempts to enforce political hegemony have turned nomadic life into a challenging business (Kohl, Fischer 2010: 1). These developments have led to a dramatic decline in their way of life. Nomadism has virtually disappeared in Libya, and to a large extent also in Algeria. In Mali and Niger, where nomads were once the most prosperous, numerous and wealthy group, a steep population decline is evident (Claudot-Hawad 2006: 655). The Tuareg have increasingly been forced to switch to urban lifestyles, or have been forced into making transnational border crossings in order to make a living. Transnational mobility strategies, such those I describe in this paper,[3] contribute to their new lifestyles.

Mobility has always been a crucial factor in functioning successfully in Africa (see De Brujin, van Dijk, Foeken 2001), and in the Sahara mobility strategies contributed to a system of connectivity and linkage (see Austen 2010; McDougall, Scheele 2012). Trade, pilgrimage, and travel have been connected with collective wealth and economic, societal, political, cultural, religious, and psychological concerns (Claudot-Hawad 2002a: 8ff.). Especially for nomads, travel assisted in their understanding of their environment not only in terms of geography, but also in terms of politics, culture and society (ibid.: 9). Until the invention of the nation states the residents of the Sahara operated a network extending from the Arabian Peninsula to the West African sub-Saharan regions and up to the Mediterranean. The Sahara thus has never been an isolating barrier, but has been characterized throughout time by movements of people, goods and ideas (see Marfaing, Wippel 2004). European colonialism brought the disruption of the trans-Saharan links and profoundly altered the social, political and economic structure of the Tuareg. Colonial administration was imposed on the Tuareg and the once flexible, permeable nomadic boundaries between the various groups of the Tuareg were severed (Kohl, Fischer 2010: 4). With the decolonization process the Tuareg have experienced a final split into five completely different states

1 "Tuareg" is a foreign designation which has found entry into linguistics. Although I prefer their emic names *Imuhagh* (Algeria, Libya), *Imajeghen* (Niger), and *Imushagh* (Mali), I will use the term "Tuareg" in this paper, as it is easier for a broader readership. Note that "Tuareg" is plural, therefore I refrain from using the English pluralizing "s". Sing. fem.: Targia; sing. masc.: Targi.

2 Not all Tuareg have been nomads. Dida Badi (2012) suggests a new approach which considers the sedentary dimension of the Tuareg.

3 The material for this article was collected with Akidima Effad during ethnographic fieldwork in Libya, Algeria, and Niger between 2004 and 2012. During this time I was funded by the University of Vienna, the OMV and the Austrian Science Fund (P20790-G14 and P23573-G17). The research is based on a methodological combination of multi-sited ethnography, participant observation, travelling along with mobile subjects, and visual anthropology. Qualitative narrative interviews and informal interlocutions have been proven to be successful since the respondents responded to the specific opportunities and challenges in terms of trust, rapport, and access.

with diverging school systems, different lingua franca, varying economic opportunities, and unequal integration in politics. Impenetrable frontiers were set up in the Sahara as a clear manifestation of the modern state (ibid.: 5). The Tuareg´s radius of movement has thus been restricted, their territory has experienced a breakdown of cohesion, and they have become pushed into the periphery in terms of global flows, contact and linkages.

The Tuareg way of life includes both regular cyclic nomadic movements (*aggal*) and irregular travels (*awezelu*) for various reasons such as pilgrimages, social visits, or education (Claudot-Hawad 2002b). But the recent forms of mobility of the Tuareg go beyond movements of nomads with their livestock, and beyond ordinary travel.

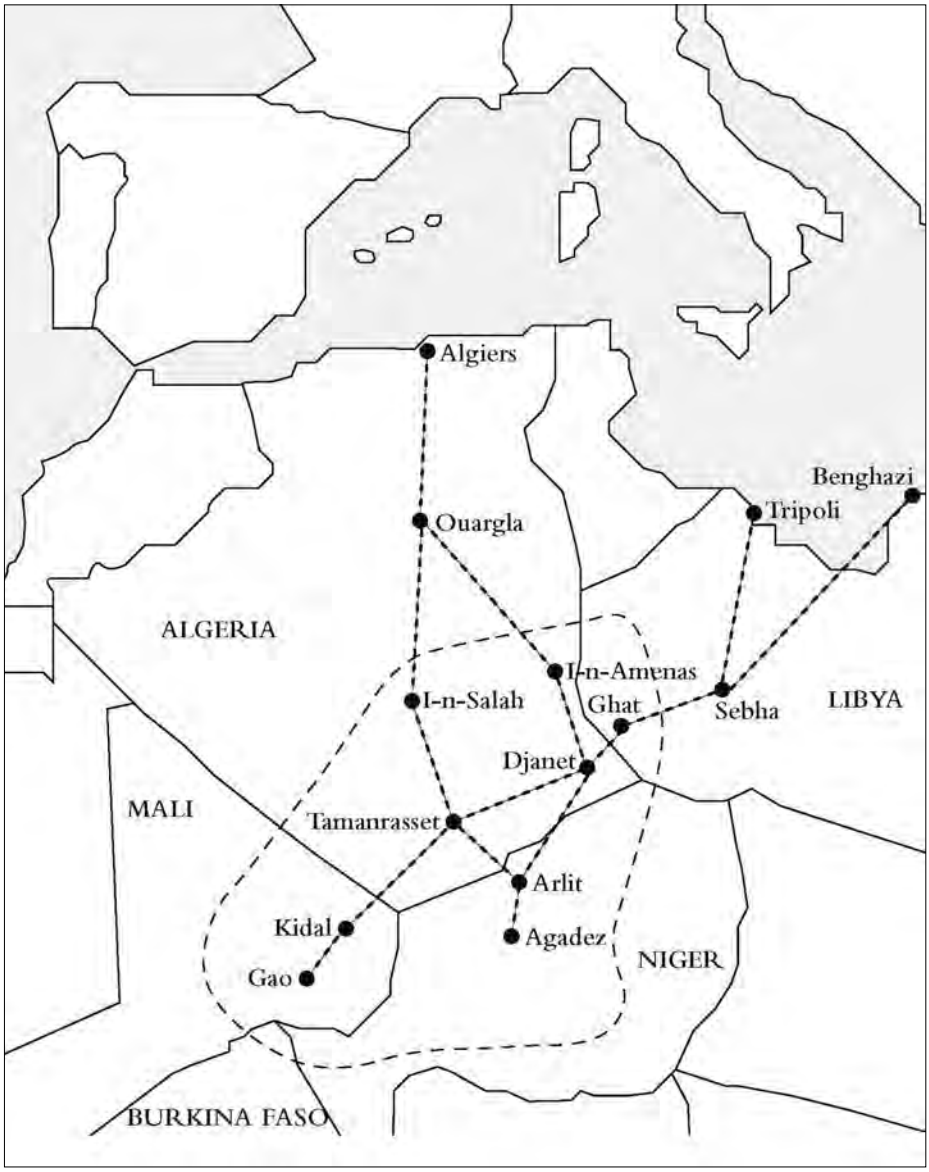

Figure 1: A map of the Tuareg's transnational mobility in the borderlands of Mali, Niger, Algeria and Libya. The dashed continuous circular line represents the traditional living environment of the Tuareg. (Source: Kohl 2010, 451).

In this paper I will refer to Nigerian Tuareg from the Aïr Mountains (from Arlit, Agadez, and the surrounding nomadic sites) who currently move in a zigzag pattern irregularly between Niger, Algeria and Libya in order to make a living. This itinerant mobility is mostly pursued by young people, called *ishumar*.[4] The term *ishumar* is derived from the French *chômeur* (unemployed person), and was transmuted into Tamasheq, the language of the Tuareg (Ag Aher 1990; Bourgeot 1995: 437ff.; Hawad 1991). Originally it described male unmarried Tuareg between 16 and 35 years old (Bourgeot 1995: 437) who gave up their nomadic life and went to neighbouring countries, particularly Algeria and Libya, to look for casual employment. Their lifestyle represented a change from a nomadic to a vagabond way of life (ibid.), and highlighted their ruptured environment.

The term has changed its meaning since first emerging 40 years ago. It has undergone several stages of varying self-definition and external interpretation, and is today characterized by a multidimensional situation in which women, called *tishumar*, represent a large part of the moving generation. In general, the term *ishumar* refers to a generation of border-crossers whose living conditions have created special strategies regarding mobility, and whose lifestyle goes far beyond traditional norms and values (Kohl 2009, 2010a, b, c). Before framing the lifestyles of contemporary Tuareg ex-nomads, I shall sketch the lives of three Nigerian Tuareg to illustrate their multifarious strategies.

ON THE MOVE: EXAMPLES OF CONTEMPORARY TUAREG EX-NOMADS

Talla[5] is a tough Nigerian woman in her forties. One day in winter 2008 she stood in front of our door in Libya, quite exhausted from a three-day foot march from Djanet (in Algeria) to Ghat (in Libya). With nothing other than a small handbag over her shoulder, she had crossed the border illegally on a small path in the mountains between Algeria and Libya.

Figure 2: Talla (on the right) with kin in Libya (Photo: Ines Kohl, Ghat, Libya 2008).

4 Masc. sing. *ashamur*, fem. sing. *tashamurt*, masc. pl. *ishumar*, fem. pl. *tishumar*.

5 All names in the following description have been changed.

Talla has no passport or identity card. Years ago she abandoned her husband in Tamanrasset (in Algeria), left one child with him, and sent the other one back to her mother in Niger. From that time on she decided to stay with various relatives in Algeria and Niger and moved between these countries. In 2008 she moved to Libya due to the good reputation the country had among Tuareg. Al-Qaddafi was considered a supporter and mediator for the Tuareg, and Libya was called the "Europe of *ishumar*" (Kohl 2010c: 143–145, 2011) due to the comparatively good living conditions. After a while Talla had become quite well off, with a mobile phone, beautiful dresses, gold jewellery and several marriage proposals. Later she married a man from Mali and organized a huge wedding. A month later she came back to our house, announced the end of her marriage, left two enormous suitcases full of wedding presents behind, and moved to Tripoli. For months we heard nothing from her. One day we got news that she had married again, this time to a man from Niger. During the Libyan war the couple fled to Algeria, and shortly afterwards they went back to Niger. Recently (in the first half of 2013) Talla and her husband re--settled in Ubari, in Libya.

Figure 3: Alhousseini (Photo: Ines Kohl, Ghat, Libya 2008).

Alhousseini was born in Algeria, but in his early years his Nigerian father brought him to his family in Niger where he grew up in the Sahara. He has never been to school and spent his childhood herding goats. Later he decided to leave the Sahara. For a couple of months he stayed in Arlit, a mining village where the French company Areva is exploring for uranium. But finding a job without any qualifications was impossible, so he went to Algeria, and afterwards to Libya, and worked for a couple of months on the huge Libyan farms. In 2007 he moved back to Niger and joined the rebellion. Finally he served in the Libyan war on the side of Qaddafi – not because of ideological convictions, but for money. Alhousseini has a Nigerian passport and a Libyan identification card, but with another name and date of birth. Dur-

ing the era of al-Qaddafi, Tuareg could easily obtain documents which allowed them to stay and work in Libya (see Kohl 2009: 52ff.). Alhousseini has married and divorced several times. His children stay with their mothers, who have to take care of them. Before the Libyan war he was constantly in search of making a fast buck and moved irregularly and according to his own choice between Niger, Algeria and Libya. In the aftermath of the Libyan war he returned to Niger, as he was afraid of staying in Libya. Now (in the first half of 2013) he is stuck in Agadez looking for occasional jobs.

Figure 4: Rhissa (Photo: Ines Kohl, Mandara, Libya 2008).

Rhissa grew up in Libya. His mother is Nigerian, his father half Algerian, half Libyan. He went to school in South Libya, worked for a couple of years as a driver in the desert tourism industry, and finally bought a Toyota pick-up with his savings.[6] When desert tourism broke down as a result of the insecure situation in the Sahara-Sahel region, the taking hostage of European tourists beginning in 2003, and the US-launched "war on terror" in the Sahara (see Keenan 2009), he turned to *afrod*, the border business (see Kohl 2009, 2013). He transported illegal passengers between Libya, Algeria and Niger, up to thirty people in one Toyota, driving in a convoy of several cars through the Sahara for three days. In the event that there were no passengers he smuggled fuel, macaroni, fruit juice and even potato seeds from Algeria to Niger. Rhissa has Libyan and Nigerian citizenship, an Algerian identification card, and owns a car registered in Algeria. Since he has two wives, one in Libya, and one in Niger, he is constantly moving between his two families. Since the Sahara crossings have become risky owing to the Libyan war, the increasing drug and weapons smuggling and the drift of Islamist terrorist groups from Mali (see Deycard 2012; Kohl forthcoming), Rhissa has lost his profitable income from small-scale trade and transporting passengers over the borders. He is still moving between his two families in Niger and Libya, but the circumstances of moving have totally changed.

These three examples of contemporary Tuareg ex-nomads point to several aspects of their mobile lifestyle. Different mobility patterns become visible which range from cyclical, irregular and situational to seasonal. The mobility patterns allow implications on morality and correspond to a vagabond way of life which usually ends in marriage. Some mobility strategies of the Tuareg apply to a border business, where strategies of smuggling (whether of goods or passengers) and small-scale trade become blurred.

6 The Toyota Land Cruiser is a symbol of a modern lifestyle. It generates wealth and has become the substitute for a camel herd. The analogy is expressed in the term *akh n mota*, meaning the milk of the car, referring to the money a car brings. The Toyota Land Cruiser is also called *alam n japonais*, the Japanese camel, or is given names like such as those usually accorded to camels (Scholze 2010: 188).

The mobile life of contemporary Tuareg is possible since the Tuareg are spread over several countries and therefore can use a support network of kin and friends. Additionally, the Tuareg use multiple identities in order to be able to support their mobile lives. Finally, their mobility strategies are highly dependent on the geopolitical situation in the Sahara and the Sahel.

BEYOND TRADITIONAL NORMS AND VALUES

The nomadic and sedentary population attributes a mostly negative connotation to *ishumar* and *tishumar* because their lifestyle has become partly removed from Muslim customs and traditional merits. For example, the modification of the traditional men´s face veil (*tagelmust* or *eshesh*) has become a synonym for the *ishumar* lifestyle. Originally it was a sign of adulthood, a symbol of belonging to a cultural unit, a representation towards the outside world, and an expression of social norms. The *eshesh* can be understood as a "conception of social distance and degree of respect" (Keenan 1977: 131); it signalizes reserve and honour (Claudot-Hawad 1993: 36–43) and is an elementary gesture to express politeness. It is important that the veil covers the forehead, ears and mouth of an adult man. In the past it was worn even while eating and drinking. Today, this is done only by a few old men. *Ishumar* reject the traditional way of wearing the *tagelmust*. In all colours, combined with sunglasses, jeans, and leather jackets, casually worn around the shoulder, or boldly combined with rasta hairstyles, the *tagelmust* has become a fashion accessory of the new generation (Kohl 2007: 152, 2009: 114f.). In the *ishumar* context it is still partly worn as a matter of social etiquette and respect towards elders; in general, however, it has lost its symbolic meaning. The *tagelmust* is instead an expression of social attractiveness (Kohl 2009: 116). Men call the veil pretty and feel more attractive to women when veiled (Rasmussen 1991: 108).

Along with the breakdown of the Tuareg dress code in terms of modesty and decency, the *ishumar* lifestyle is characterized by a pattern of behaviour and attitudes strange or even embarrassing to the elder nomadic population. In their eyes *ishumar* are irresponsible people without honour (*iba n ashak*) or respect (*iba n tekarakit*), as the following quotation illustrates:

> *Ishumar*, those are the people who are moving permanently (*tekle ghas*). If it occurs to them to go, they shoulder their bag and they are gone. And nobody knows where they go. Ishumar are of no use (*wurelen faida*), they don´t have any work (*wurelen eshughl*), always live alone (*egawaran ghasnesen*), forget their parents and siblings, and they are always chasing after women (*eghan tyadoden wullen*). They are not included in the calculation of parents, marriage and their people; they scrounge through life, only sit around the whole day, drink tea and listen to tapes. The same applies to *tishumar* (women). They spend a few days in Tripoli, then travel to Ghat, and eventually you will find them in Sebha, where they are staying with friends or relatives. Their parents don´t know anything about them, sometimes weddings between *ishumar* happen without their parents knowing and often without Muslim customary law (*tamerkest*). The number of their illegitimate children increases and they don´t have any prospects for the future (cited in: Kohl 2009: 14f., 2010: 151).

This typical description of an *ashamur* or a *tashamurt* mostly changes with marriage. Following the buzz phrase "being married, having worth" (Kohl 2010c: 152), establishing a family corresponds to original concepts of norms and values. Marrying and having children are traditional values that turn *ishumar* into respectable, full members of society. With marriage they break out of the *ishumar* loop and re-enter a state that conforms to a "proper" world-view (ibid.).

VAGABONDS OR AN ELITE?[7]

Considering the life strategies, behaviour, norms and values of the *ishumar*, their lifestyle can be summarized by the concept of "vagrancy, the opposite of nomadism" (Claudot-Hawad 2006: 662). But can these people also be considered an elite of their society because of their transnational experiences? Yes. I argue that *ishumar* embody a new elite, which to a large extent shapes the contemporary Tuareg society and gives direction to new ideas and development.

Elites are normally a relatively small group within the societal hierarchy that claims power, prestige, or command over others (Abbink, Salverda 2013: 1; Schijf 2013: 29f.). They are dominant in some sectors of society on the basis of material or non-material characteristics, skills, and achievements (ibid.). They form groups whose cultural capital positions them above their fellow citizens and whose decisions crucially shape what happens in the wider society (Shore 2002: 4).

In traditional Tuareg society the tribal leaders (*amenukalen*, *ettebelen*, *imgharen*) and Muslim specialists (*ineslimen*) have formed the intellectual elite (Lecocq 2004: 92). The overarching term for a member of the former elite was *anefren*, "one who is chosen" (Claudot-Hawad 2000: 18). The criteria for the choice included blood (meaning descent), honour, prestige and status, but other qualities such as knowledge, courage, strength, beauty and charisma have been incorporated.

I suggest that the new elite embodied by *ishumar* today is better described by the word *anefreg*, "one who is able or capable" (Kohl 2010a: 458). This new elite is not chosen; rather their own ability empowers them to act as leaders of society. The *ishumar* are mostly autodidact intellectuals whose insights developed not through formal education, but through their experiences of transnational or international travel, smuggling, and employment in various sectors previously unknown to the Tuareg (cf. Lecocq 2004).

Baz Lecocq (ibid.) argues that *ishumar* can be perceived as an elite because first of all, they have seen themselves as such since the 1980s when they engaged in rebellions which would lead their people to independence or at least to increased decentralization and better life conditions. Secondly they can be seen as an intellectual elite because they put their thoughts on migration, mobility, modernity, politics, and social life into words: the poems and songs of the guitarists (groups and individuals such as Tinariwen, Bombino, Abdallah Oumbadougou, Terakaft, Tamikrest, Nabil Othmani, etc.), who have entered the world music scene (see Belalimat 2010). With their lyrics they transport their ideology into the nomadic camps.

Lecocq primarily refers to the rebel leaders, poets and guitarists as the new intellectual elite. I shall augment the group with "ordinary" *ishumar*, who have spread new ideas, knowledge and skills into their community simply due to their transnational life strategies. These achievements are often quite basic, but very useful to engage more actively in a globalized world, where pastoralism and nomadism are becoming ecologically fragile and economically unviable. *Ishumar* who have had contact with their surrounding neighbours, such as Arabs, Hausa, Tubu or Europeans, are much more open-minded with regard to political attitudes and economic strategies than their nomadic fellows living far away from inter-ethnic relations. Many *ishumar* from Niger have worked on huge farms in Libya and brought the idea of garden cultivation to the Aïr Mountains. Gardening meanwhile is a main pillar of the nomads in Northern Niger. It provides a strategy against poverty in times when pastoralism is very risky due to climatic changes. Gardening supplies the local population with a very balanced diet. Formerly, nomads have been nourished primarily with millet and milk. With the widespread idea of garden cultivation their menu has increased to include with all sorts of vegetables (such as carrots, potatoes, lettuce, cabbage, green beans, pumpkins, tomatoes, etc.) and fruits (such as oranges, pomegranates and grapes). The families can work together (the women usually take care of the livestock, while the men are engaged in cultivation) and young men in particular are no longer forced to migrate

7 I have elaborated parts of this passage elsewhere (Kohl 2010a).

in order to make a living, since they have work at home and additionally receive an income from the sale of their products.

Most *ishumar* have become familiar with the internet and improved modes of communication and information, and have realized their unequal political and economic situation. They have started to engage in civil society in order to struggle for political, economic, and social justice. Human rights activism and the foundation of local NGOs (such as the in Arlit-based NGO Aghirin man which is fighting for environmental protection against the French uranium mining company Areva) have arrived the Sahara.

KINSHIP TIES AND MULITIPE IDENTITIES

The transnational mobility of the *ishumar* is backed to a large extent by kin and friends on all sides of the Saharan borders. Additionally, the use of multiple identities provides a basis for crossing the borders easily.

The Tuareg are a tribal society where belonging is based on kinship and blood relations. After colonial division and the African nation-building process, blood relationships were replaced by nationalist ideas and after that have been based on territorial concepts. Instead of blood, the soil, the land and the territory are used as the new binding factor (Lecocq 2004: 104). Since the territorial fragmentation the Tuareg now classify themselves as "Libyan Tuareg", "Nigerian Tuareg", or "*Kel* (people of) Mali". Nationalism has thus had a strong impact on the Tuareg and nowadays belonging on a formal level is based less on tribal structures than on national constructs (Kohl 2007: 200).

Kinship is still a major element for defining belonging on an informal level, and is a basis for help, assistance and support. *Ishumar* can count on (even quite distant) kin and friends living on all sides of the borders. They provide lodging and food, and give any assistance required in the new environment. But ties between *ishumar* are often weak and loose. Their life circumstances have ripped the social fabric to pieces and loosened ancient ties of solidarity (Claudot-Hawad 2006: 666). On the other hand, *ishumar* have formed interethnic relationships which enable them to take part in many worlds without framing a community with fixed boundaries, as is typical for cosmopolitans (Caglar 2002: 180).

Friendship has become an important additional factor for *ishumar* (cf. Klute 2011). There is, however, one remarkable aspect. *Ishumar* mostly do not mix much across regional and national categories. Those from the Aïr mountains in Niger create and sustain networks of friends and feel a deep loyalty among each other, but do not extend their relations towards Tuareg from other regions (such as Azawad in Niger), or other countries (such as Mali; see Kohl 2010a).

In recent years national identities have become important. All Tuareg-inhabited countries have started to count their populations and equip them with identification cards and passports. *Ishumar* use this system and claim ID-cards in all of these countries, but often with different names and birth dates (cf. Scheele 2012: 97). Many *ishumar* operate with multiple citizenships and have multiple places of residence. This relates to their ability to communicate in many languages (Arabic, French, Hausa, and English) in addition to their native one (Tamasheq).

Other *ishumar* do not possess any papers at all and cross the borders surreptitiously. This stems on the one hand from the fact that for a nomadic society born into the desert without exact reference in terms of time and place, providing evidence still has little importance among nomads. Many *ishumar* are quite proud of their life strategies, as one of them expresses:

> We *ishumar*, we are the only ones who still have freedom. We are permanently moving between Niger, Algeria, and Libya. Once you have come to know this life, you can't go back anymore. We are free! (Kohl 2007a: 140).

On the other hand, crossing the Saharan nation states legally is a major problem (cf. Brachet 2009: 166ff.). Visas are difficult to obtain,[8] require money, and people are often strung along for weeks or months with the words "come back tomorrow", until the applicant loses his patience and travels clandestinely.

Because of the overall insecurity in the Sahara and the Sahel, moving freely in those regions has become more difficult. As a result of the Libyan war (see Politique Africaine 125/2012), the political crisis in Mali (see Claudot-Hawad 2013; Galy 2013; Morgan 2012), and the rise of extremist Islamists involved in drug and weapon contraband smuggling (see Burbank 2012; Daniel 2012; Larcher 2012; Mohamedou 2011), the Tuareg´s mobility strategies have become disordered. The territorial borders have increased in control and fortification, and Tuareg moving in the borderlands are strongly suspected of being weapon and drug traffickers or allies of Islamist terrorists. Many of the young *ishumar* are afraid of moving as before, and so stay in Niger and have to find other solutions for escaping the unemployment, impoverishment, and lack of prospects. The unrestrained mobility of the *ishumar* described in this paper has most likely recently come to an end.

MARGINAL MOBILITIES?

In the last chapter I shall try to apply the concept of marginal mobilities[9] to the example of the *ishumar*. According to Juntunen, Kalčić and Rogelja (fothcoming), marginal mobilities share five basic characteristics: (1) Their movement is constant, and occurs along loosely defined trajectories. (2) The mobility is not entirely voluntary nor is it forced. (3) The social world is marked by uprootedness and liminality. (4) Marginal mobilities lack a politicized public space. (5) The subjects are in a constant process of negotiation with the state bureaucracies that impose a sedentary norm on their lives.

Hawad (1991: 129) defines the mobility of the *ishumar* as a modified form of nomadism. This mobility does not have any regulated stages and cyclic consequences like that of pastoral nomads. Instead, it takes the form of zigzag patterns and follows primarily situational rules. The mobility of *ishumar* is disorganized, anarchic and becomes more and more disengaged from the original centres and traditions. Although there is little to nothing left of the pastorals´ original cyclic movements with their livestock, *ishumar* still embody a certain philosophy of being mobile (Claudot-Hawad 2006: 658). That is why their movements are neither purely voluntary, nor are they always forced by political and economic circumstances.

To summarize, the *ishumar´s* movements are irregular. They are partly cyclical, partly situational and sometimes seasonal. Some *ishumar* drift between their transnational families, some work as seasonal workers (before the Libyan war often in tourism), others try to find a living through casual employment on the other side of the border. And yet others use the borders to fulfil strategies of small-scale trade and smuggling.[10]

Their movements have three characteristic features in common: they are transnational, they are constant, and they follow very loosely defined trajectories. The first, transnational aspect is in part the consequence of the harsh economic and political situation in the Sahel-states of Mali and Niger. Neither country provides any support for impoverished nomads, and the living conditions in Algeria and especially in Libya during the Qaddafi era were much better.[11]

8 In al-Qaddafi's Libya for example it was almost impossible to enter the country legally, and Nigerians entering Algeria still need a visa.

9 Marginal mobilities is an analytical concept developed by Juntunen, Kalčić and Rogelja (2013).

10 The boundaries between small-scale trade and smuggling are fluid. They only differ in accordance to their legal status. See various articles in Bruns and Miggelbrink (2012).

11 One may also argue that the Tuareg are not moving trans-nationally, but trans-regionally. This is a perception Tuareg themselves often express. Although *ishumar* cross state borders, they still operate in their former tribal radius, which was only cut due to colonial borders. If, for example, an *ashamur* from Mali is heading to Libya

Secondly, *Ishumar* move constantly. Even most *ishumar* who have already settled down with families have not given up their continuing peripatetic movements. But it is a male business. Most women, once they have been married, give up their continuous movements and only occasionally travel back to their places of origin and visit their parents. Men, however, more often continue to pursue a mobile life in order to earn their living, even if they have been married and have settled down with their family in one of the countries. Thirdly, *ishumar* follow very loosely defined trajectories. Their trajectories are characterized by situational motives, personal choice, and individual desires and patterns.

James Clifford (1991) has introduced the term "travelling culture" to describe a mobile society for whom moving is not an exception in life, but a normal condition. For these societies one could say that "moving is the rule". The *ishumar* correspond to this approach and illustrate that certain forms of contemporary mobility contrast substantially with conventional categories (such as migrants, refugees, displaced persons, exiles, or diaspora societies). I agree with Alessandra Giuffrida (2010: 23–40) that "the study of mobility through conceptually isolated categories (like pastoralists, exiles, refugees or labour migrants) has not been conducive to understanding mobility as an overarching system in all its variations". We should rather recognize that "mobility is system, a subsystem, as well as a strategy" (ibid.: 23).

Another characteristic of marginal mobilities concerns uprootedness and liminality. Both terms represent the *ishumar´s* life, as I have tried to indicate by reference to their break with norms and values. Through their mobile life from early youth on (sometimes even beginning in childhood), *ishumar* experience a rupture with their original partly nomadic background. In their new environments (mostly Libya and Algeria) *ishumar* normally stay among each other.

Algerian and Libyan Tuareg strongly distance themselves from their fellow Tuareg from Niger and Mali. Their relationship is characterized by a mutually noticeable negative attitude, which emphasizes and overemphasizes the differences between the two groups, while at the same time neglecting existing similarities. The complex relationship between Libyan Tuareg, for example, and *ishumar* is a variation on the theme of "locals versus newcomers" and can be interpreted as follows: each group predominantly employs a strategy of "belittling avoidance" of the other. For the Libyan Tuareg this means above all distancing themselves from migrants, who in the present age of globalization are classified as "aliens to the nation state", despite speaking the same language and having a similar culture. By contrast, from the *ishumar´s* point of view, the "belittling avoidance" is rather the inevitable result of the power relations that they have encountered. For them, the Libyan Tuareg are resident representatives of Libya. Coming from a weaker, asymmetrically structured starting point, they need to deal with Libya to secure supralocal opportunities for participation (Kohl 2007: 132f., Kohl 2010c: 146).

This is the reason why the *ishumar* lack a politicized public space. They live on the margins of their own society, and they are not included in the new one. They act in an intermediate space and muddle through life until, through marriage, they enter a proper, honourable life and re-enter their own society.

Since their formation, the Saharan and Sahelian nation states have imposed sedentary norms on nomads. The Tuareg (and not only the *ishumar*) are thus in a constant process of negotiation with the state bureaucracies. Mali (before the crisis) and Niger accepted the illegal border crossings of the Tuareg to a certain extent. Algeria and Libya are much more dependent on EU regulations which are committed to the control of their southern borders in order to prevent illegal migration to Europe.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The harsh ecological, political, and economic situation in the Sahara and the Sahel challenges the nomadic population more than ever. In large parts of their region, nomadic pastoralist activities are no

via Algeria, he crosses two state borders, but still moves in the original territory of the Tuareg. He in fact is just changing tribal boundaries.

longer feasible for ecological reasons, but also because of global economic interests in uranium, oil and gas. Today the Tuareg deal actively with these supra-local influences and have developed strategies to overcome ecological, economic and, recently, political crises. The case of the *ishumar* presented here shows that mobility is a crucial factor in making a successful living in the Sahara and the Sahel. Their recent forms of mobility go beyond moving with livestock, and challenge national loyalties and politics in their trans-local, trans-regional, or trans-national nature.

The example of the *ishumar* confirms and supports the concept of marginal mobilities. It has become clear that certain modern ways of being mobile cannot be subsumed under the umbrella of conventional categories. *Ishumar* are moving constantly. They have no fixed trajectories, but range corresponding to their situational needs and demands and according to individual choice between Niger (or Mali), Algeria, and Libya. In doing so, they follow a life which comes near vagrancy. In this paper, however, I have tried to show that these people may also be seen as a certain elite of their society. The new elite have nothing to do with the former tribal and religious leaders, but have developed their ideas and reflections through experiences which are highly connected to transnational mobility. Being mobile is a strategy for making a living in unsecure times, and corresponds to the fact that mobility is often not an exception in life, but may represent normality.

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