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## **Tuaregs and Citizenship: ‘The Last Camp of Nomadism’**

**Delphine Perrin<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The paper questions the widespread perception according to which Tuaregs’ relationship to citizenship would be characterized by hostility, skepticism or indifference, a perception which is often applied to transnational minorities, in particular when they are associated to a mobility culture and/or a remote territory. It focuses on both mobile and sedentary Tuaregs from Niger and Mali in their various and complex relationship to state membership, which spans legally from statelessness to multiple citizenship, and practically from semi-passive attitudes toward the state to active assimilation. The paper shows how new forms of belonging, including belonging to the state(s), have emerged among Tuaregs together with the reconfiguration of territorial and community bonds, and seeks to assess the impact of some variables, such as mobility and territorial localization, on individual and collective attitudes towards citizenship.

**Keywords:** Tuareg; Ishumar; Citizenship; Mobility; Territory; Rebellion; Integration

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## Introduction

The Declaration of Independence of Azawad proclaimed by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in Mali on 6th April 2012 highlighted the sensitive relationship of Tuaregs<sup>2</sup> to state membership. Though this claim was limited to Mali, it also had a transnational dimension, as it raised the issue of a Sahel-Saharan space beyond state control, and revived the threat of Tuareg irredentist movements. Divided fifty years ago between five states – Mali, Niger, Algeria, Libya and Burkina Faso -, Tuaregs' loyalty to the state has continually been questioned. The recent events in Mali have contributed to reinforcing suspicion against a population often marginalized and stereotyped. Because of their history and their culture, Tuaregs are indeed deemed to be hostile to the states among which they are divided – a consideration sustained by successive rebellions in the 1960s, 1990s and 2000s. Likewise, they are generally described as reluctant or at least “agnostic”<sup>3</sup> or indifferent<sup>4</sup> when it comes to citizenship. With a focus on Tuaregs from Niger and Mali, this paper questions the latter hypothesis. It seeks to understand whether and why the Tuaregs' relationship to citizenship would be characterized by hostility, skepticism or indifference, a perception which is often applied to transnational minorities, in particular when they are associated to a mobility culture and/or a remote territory. A combination of variables make Tuaregs from Mali and Niger typical, while having a broader resonance, such as the settlement of a historically nomadic people, its connectivity to a desert territory located across various countries, its inclusion into weak and fragmented states. This paper hence aspires to assess to what extent these variables have impacted the relationship of Tuaregs to citizenship. It presents individual and collective attitudes of the Tuaregs, as well as practices in relation to

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<sup>2</sup> *Tuareg* is the plural of *Targui*, but the paper follows its most widespread use, as a singular form, and adds an “s” for the plural. Tuaregs generally call themselves *Kel Tamasheq*, i.e. those who speak Tamasheq. They indeed define themselves by a common language – even if this language slightly differs and is spoken with various accents and idioms from one region to another.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Dörrie, “The origins and consequences of Tuareg nationalism,” *World Politics Review: Feature Report*, 9 May 2012 [http://basque.unr.edu/docs/Zoe-World\\_Politics\\_Review.pdf](http://basque.unr.edu/docs/Zoe-World_Politics_Review.pdf), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Inès Kohl, “Saharan-‘Borderline’-Strategies: Tuareg Transnational Mobility”, in *Mobility, Transnationalism and Contemporary African Societies*, (ed.) Tilo Grätz, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, 92-105.

state membership<sup>5</sup> to explore the meaning of state belonging for Tuaregs from Niger and Mali, and how they position themselves as citizens.

Mali and Niger are the two countries which host the highest number of Tuaregs.<sup>6</sup> They are also those which have been particularly affected by Tuareg rebellions. They are both hourglass shaped, with the capital in the southwestern part, eccentric and remote from a large mostly desert northeastern region. Tuaregs are intrinsically associated with these desert “northern regions”, as they are with the Sahara, which has forged their culture during centuries. The constraints of the desert have nurtured a specific Tuareg know-how and oriented their socio-economic activities toward pastoralism, trade and war, all of which are linked to mobility. During the 20th century however, the Tuaregs had to face the decline of the large caravan trade, the reduction of pastoral space, the loss of herds due to droughts and

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<sup>5</sup> Legal membership to the state is termed “nationality” in Niger and Mali, where it is supposed to imply “citizenship”, i.e. legal rights and duties attached to the status of citizen (with the exception of naturalized persons who have to wait for a number of years to get some rights linked to public service and political participation). It is ruled in Niger by law n°1961-26 of 21 July 1961 and in Mali by law 62-18 of 3 February 1962 revised by law 95-70 of 25 August 1995. Due to this last revision but not only, the two laws significantly vary. The paper refers to “citizenship” rather than “nationality” to avoid any ambiguity with notions of nation and ethno-national belonging, and to cover three dimensions of state membership: first, citizenship as a political and legal status; second, legal rights and duties attached to this status; and, third, individual practices, dispositions and identities attributed to, or expected from, those who hold the status (Rainer Bauböck, “Citizenship and Migration – Concepts and Controversies,” in *Migration and Citizenship: Legal Status, Rights and Political Participation*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006, 16).

<sup>6</sup> In the absence of any official community census, crossing various sources situates the number of Tuaregs from 1.5 to 3 millions, with at least 800,000 in Niger (up to 1,5 million, as it is at times estimated at ten per cent of the Nigerien population) and at least 500,000 in Mali. The lack of registration and important cross-border movements in the 1970s and 1980s mainly to Algeria and Libya can explain the large differences between the estimates. In Algeria, the Tuareg population is generally estimated at 40,000, and in Libya around 10,000. Tuaregs are actually much more in those two countries, and especially in Libya where there is an estimation of 250,000 persons (*IRIN humanitarian news and analysis*, 24 May 2012 <http://www.irinnews.org/report/95524/analysis-libyan-minority-rights-at-a-crossroads>). There is no data about the number of Tuaregs in Burkina Faso, as well as in other countries like Chad, Sudan and Saudi Arabia. The number of Tuareg refugees registered by UNHCR is also important: More than 175,000 *Malian* refugees (mostly Tuareg) were in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and other surrounding countries in 2013 (*The UN Refugee Agency*, 7 May 2013 <http://www.unhcr.org/518907756.html>). Ten years before, there were already between 145,000 and 220,000 Tuareg refugees in various countries, including Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Algeria (Hélène Claudot-Hawad et Hawad, *Touaregs: Voix solitaires sous l'horizon confisqué*, Paris: Ethnies-Documents 20-21, 1996, 11).

armed conflicts, as well as state policies aimed at rendering them sedentary. In short, they have had to renounce to their nomadic way of life, which partially explains the Tuareg *mal-être*.<sup>7</sup> Most Tuaregs are nowadays sedentary. A majority lives in towns, not only in such Saharan towns as Agadez in Niger or Gao in Mali, but also in towns situated closer to the centres of power in their respective states, Niamey and Bamako for instance. Yet, being sedentary does not exclude mobility, and some Tuaregs move within a limited area situated near the fixed residences and places of work of family members.<sup>8</sup> Whereas Tuaregs' contemporary mobility is generally intra-state, a specific transnational mobility practice has been developed since the 1970s and 1980s, in the context of drought and rebellion, among young Tuaregs who left Mali and Niger to head to Algeria and Libya. Those young people, who departed from their territories of origin, where they were feeling marginalized, called themselves *Ishumar*, in reference to the French word for unemployed (*chômeur*), and played an important role in subsequent rebellions in Mali and Niger. Their mobility differs from migration movements of people and families fleeing drought and/or violence to neighbouring countries in the 1970s, 1980s, and more recently.

Relationship to citizenship certainly varies among Tuaregs according to the degree and nature of their mobility practice. Nevertheless, remaining nomad or sedentary is not the key variable that conditions the relationship Tuaregs have today with state membership. Territorial localization is. Whether or not one lives in the northern regions of Mali and Niger, as well as the evolution of these regions over the last fifty years, has orientated citizenship practices. Even sedentary, Tuaregs may consider themselves as geographically and culturally remote from the state on which they depend. Even mobile, Tuaregs may remain deeply attached to their territory of origin and, thereby, to the state.

The relationship between Tuaregs and citizenship is actually practically as diverse as the Tuareg people themselves, who have not only been divided between several states but also show a great variety in tribal affiliations, in familial memories, in mobility practices, in their current position *vis-à-vis* the state, and in their felt identity. Amidst those Tuaregs who, in the

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<sup>7</sup> Claudot-Hawad 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Successive droughts have also led some Tuareg leaders to consider an evolution of the pastoral system: keeping part of the tribe and herds on a fixed place where supply in cereals can be guaranteed by NGOs or the state administration, while the rest of the tribe continues transhumance or trade (Charles Grémont, "Ancrage au sol et (nouvelles) mobilités dans l'espace saharo-sahélien: des expériences similaires et compatibles," *L'Année du Maghreb* VII (2011): 182).

1960s, formally became citizens of Mali and Niger without wishing to, irredentism has become a residual aspiration. Based on reason-dictated options, the recognition of states' legitimacy has known significant progress but is still facing a number of obstacles. Today, the issue lies less in an ideological or principled antagonism between a nomadic culture and the state logic, than in the persisting feeling of marginalization of a community whose members expect or grasp at rights and benefits that they associate with citizenship. Most Tuaregs have deplored the deprivation of their rights both as a community (loss of their resources, way of living, territory) and as citizens (discrimination in their access to various rights). This widespread conviction of being endangered as a community and left-aside as individuals has led to a variety of attitudes toward citizenship, which go from active assimilation (beyond and independently from the community<sup>9</sup>) to semi-passive<sup>10</sup> survival strategies (based on community and/or territorial ties). The Tuareg identity being intrinsically linked to the Sahara, some attitudes toward citizenship can hence be defined as "de-territorialized", i.e. disconnected from the territory of origin, while others appear as "re-territorialized". Among the latter, certain citizenship practices tend to revive the value and use of a "Tuareg" territory, to "*mend the deserts*"<sup>11</sup> whereas others aim to anchor it within state borders. Part of those practices seem to challenge the state, but most are grounded on or call for participation in a (mis)governance which has been shared in Mali and Niger and shaped citizenship expression modes.

Based on desk research and a series of interviews,<sup>12</sup> this paper examines the evolution of Malian and Nigerien Tuaregs' sentiments and attitudes as regards citizenship. In the first part,

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<sup>9</sup> We use "community" rather than the controversial "ethnic group" to design a group of individuals sharing the identity feeling to form a nation and a people within or beyond the state. This is the case for Tuaregs, but also for Hausa, Djerma, Peuls, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Semi-passive" refers here to the relation to the state. It means that there is hardly any active (economic, social, political) participation to the state but some strategies nevertheless based on or linked to the state and to citizenship.

<sup>11</sup> Hawad, "Touaregs, la 'marche en vrille,'" *Le Monde diplomatique*, May 2012 <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2012/05/HAWAD/47655>; Hélène Claudot-Hawad, *Touaregs: Apprivoiser le désert*, FR: Découvertes Gallimard, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Interviews were carried out all along 2012 and 2013 with Tuaregs from Niger and Mali: six Nigeriens (cited as A., S., Af., Ag., Ab., Am.) and two Malians (cited as I. and F.) defining themselves as *Ishumar*; two sedentary Nigerien women (At. lives in Agadez, M. in Niamey) and two semi-sedentary Nigeriens (H. is a trader moving between the northern regions of Air and Azawad; Ma. is a semi-nomad woman moving between Arlit and Agadez in Aïr)..

the presentation of some historical background paves the way to show how new forms of belonging, including state membership, have emerged among Tuaregs together with the reconfiguration of territorial and community bonds. The paper highlights the very specific case of the *Ishumar*, for whom mobility within the Libyan-Algerian-Malian-Nigerien borderland is a “*way of life*,”<sup>13</sup> which has impacted their sense of identity and their attitudes toward citizenship(s). Research on these transborder citizens is the thread of this paper. The *Ishumar* have been both serious challengers to state loyalty and vectors of inclusion forms into state affairs. Through them, the paper then shifts to a larger exploration of how Tuaregs, as political subjects of a territorial nation state, have changed and varied their individual and collective postures and actions *vis-à-vis* the state along decades of divisions, rebellions, and claims within and beyond state borders.

## **I- Home Feeling and State Borders: From Irredentism to New Nationalisms**

Tuaregs from Mali and Niger live or used to live in a territory which constitutes the poorest region in some of the poorest countries in the world. The two countries are former French colonies and figure among the least developed countries.<sup>14</sup> They share unenviable characteristics, among which are an incapacity to develop the country economically and socially, an imbalanced territorial allocation of resources, a high level of inequality among citizens, and a substantial emigration rate – the latter, interestingly, being not significantly fuelled by Tuareg individuals. Politically, both countries have been marked by several undemocratic political changes,<sup>15</sup> weak institutions, political volatility, the importance of community belonging in power sharing, and a culture of predation.

Those features evidently impact the nature and extent of citizenship. While they generally do not influence legal membership to the state – Mali and Niger have not used citizenship granting or removal as a political tool like Libya did -, they heavily affect citizens’ rights and attitudes toward state and citizenship. Among these citizens, Tuaregs constitute a minority

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<sup>13</sup> Kohl 2010, 94.

<sup>14</sup> 2013 UN Human Development Index shows Niger at the 186<sup>th</sup> rank and Mali at the 182<sup>nd</sup> rank. 60% of the Malian population live in degraded land, 25% in Niger. 81.8% of the Nigerien population live in severe poverty, 68.4% in Mali (UN Human Development Report 2013 available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2013-report>).

<sup>15</sup> Mali had three *coups d’Etat* (1968, 1991 and 2012) and 24 years of military dictatorship (Moussa Traoré); Niger had four *coups d’Etat* (1974, 1996, 1999, 2010) and seven various Republics.

who mostly live in the desert part of those states. They share with other populations not only this territory, but also the fate of confronting the dilution and extinction of their culture, be it based on a language, a socio-economic model, or a way of life. Mutual misunderstanding and mistrust, which were at the core of their meeting with states, nevertheless gave rise in the late 1980s to new forms of relationship with them.

### ***The Division of Tuaregs among States: A Mutual Misunderstanding***

Obviously, there was at first a confrontation between a nomadic people, which used to live and circulate in the Sahara, and the territorial logic of states that emerged in the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the creation of those states, which implied the division of the Sahel-Saharan area along borders inherited from colonization, actually accelerated the decline of the Tuareg way of life already observable in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the political space dominated by Tuaregs was still huge and covered large parts of the desert territories currently in Algeria, Libya, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso<sup>18</sup>. An initial dividing of the Sahara appeared with a 1905 boundary agreement, which defined the limitations between Algeria and French West Africa (the present states of Mauritania, Niger and Mali). The fight against French colonialists heavily affected the Tuareg society, divided by divergent political and military strategies. The French domination, achieved around 1920, put an end to their hegemony in the Sahel-Saharan space<sup>19</sup> and introduced the first projects to displace, control, and settle them down. The large territory where Tuaregs were living was then divided into the aforementioned five states in the 1960s. While those borders had a relatively low impact on nomadism and pastoralism during colonization - as Algeria, Mali and Niger were all part of the same colonial power - they became international borders and thus obstacles to mobility in

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<sup>16</sup> Claudot-Hawad 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Finn Fuglestad, "Les révoltes des Touaregs du Niger (1916-1917)", *Cahiers d'études africaines* 13, no. 49 (1973): 82-120.

<sup>18</sup> The "making" of the Tuareg nation had followed a number of historical steps and, at that time, it could be delineated by a language, a culture, shared values and social rules as well as a complex political scheme (Claudot-Hawad 2002, 18). Different political poles interacted, each of them being represented by a chief, named *amenukal* and all of them functioning on a confederal basis (Ibid, 28). This coherent system was constantly evolving on the basis of a power-legitimacy logic and of interactions between various groups, not only within the Tuareg world but also with other peoples living in the desert and at its borders.

<sup>19</sup> Emmanuel Gregoire, *Touaregs du Niger: Le destin d'un mythe*, Paris: Karthala, 2001.



the Sahara since independence. The Tuaregs formed a minority in each of those states, which sought to develop unity between their diverse populations. More importantly, their geographical and cultural distance from the centres of power in their respective states has placed misunderstanding and a mutual lack of knowledge at the core of the relationship between Tuaregs and the states since then.

There was firstly the Tuaregs' failure to understand the changes generated by independence, and their surprise to see the French administration so quickly replaced by southern military and civil servants, while they were remaining optimistic of a Common Organization of the Saharan Regions (O CRS), as promised by France a few years earlier.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the O CRS created by French law of 10 January 1957 bolstered hopes for a Saharan State. It was presented as an economic project to valorize the resources of the region, but was actually a "state within the state" as it depended on the French ministry of the Sahara<sup>21</sup> and was supposed to remain so despite the march towards independence of Niger, Mali (Sudan at that time), Chad, and Algeria. The O CRS confirmed the role of colonization in the individualization of Tuaregs, who were always treated differently by colonialists, either negatively or positively.<sup>22</sup> Its delimitation was not only geographical but also ethnical: nomads were included in the O CRS while the sedentary peoples of the zone were not. This project, inspired by French interests in the Sahara, was understood by Tuaregs as a promise for a Tuareg state. The war of independence in Algeria led France to give up the project and the Tuaregs were divided among the new states. Nevertheless, Tuareg hopes to obtain their own structure persisted and, in 1960, the first Nigerien president, Hamani Diori, denounced French leaders' secessionist attempts in the Sahara, "*wishing to play the role of colonel Lawrence of Arabia toward the nomads.*"<sup>23</sup>

Independence obviously implied great changes. Not only has it divided populations between different political structures and engendered the creation of states with strong internal diversity, it has also led to changes in power relations. The new masters in Mali and Niger were sedentary southerners, who had been educated and trained by the colonialists, something

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<sup>20</sup> Pierre Boilley, "Géopolitique africaine et rebellions touarègues. Approches locales, approches globales (1960-2011)", *L'Année du Maghreb* VII (2011): 151-162.

<sup>21</sup> Andre Salifou, *La question touareg au Niger*, Paris: Karthala, 1993, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Juliette Seguin, *La rébellion touarègue au Niger*, Toulouse, FR: Mémoire de recherche, IEP de Toulouse, 2008, 37.

<sup>23</sup> National Conference of Party Leaders, Niamey, 2 August 1968, Mamoudou Djibo, "Rébellion touarègue et question saharienne au Niger," *Autrepart* 3, no. 23 (2002): 135-156..

that the Tuaregs had refused.<sup>24</sup> Despite the diversity of the Malian and Nigerien populations, antagonism between Tuaregs and the “other populations” of those two countries settled. While Tuaregs felt excluded from the emerging state order, southerners were seeing there the confirmation of the Tuaregs’ sense of superiority.

Antagonism was particularly severe in Mali, where nation-building aimed to neutralize communities and traditional structures to make the Malian citizen emerge. Like most of its African counterparts, the new state tended to build unity by advocating for ancestral values and valorizing a common native past, in this case the Mali Empire which had dominated West Africa in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>25</sup> Whereas Tuaregs could barely find themselves in those cultural and historical references, and thus in this nation-building policy, the socialist Malian state itself was suspicious in regards to the Tuaregs, who were deemed to be feudal and slaves holders. Tuaregs’ loyalty was also constantly challenged due to the potential natural resources in the regions which they inhabited, and an imagined conspiracy between the Tuaregs and France to control those resources.<sup>26</sup>

The first Tuareg rebellion in Mali was triggered in 1963 in Adrar, a Tuareg region of the northwest. It was mainly due to unfulfilled promises, such as the non-division between Tuareg groups<sup>27</sup>, and to Tuaregs’ socio-political marginalization. The repression of the Malian army was severe and heavily affected civilians. When the rebellion ended in 1964, Mali’s northern regions were managed as a military zone, without any economic investment,<sup>28</sup> a situation that lasted until the 1990s. The trauma and resentment of Tuareg populations in Mali were accentuated by severe droughts in 1973-1974 and again in 1983-1984, and led to an exodus, people moving to towns, or going into exile in Libya, Algeria, and other neighbouring countries. Livestock resources were lost, and Malian officials were also accused of diverting international aid.

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<sup>24</sup> Seguin, 35.

<sup>25</sup> Amadou Keita, “Etat-Nation du Sahel et citoyenneté à l’épreuve de la démocratie et de la mondialisation: l’exemple du Mali,” *Quelles constructions politiques au Mali face aux crises dans le Sahel ?*, Conference in Paris, 19 June 2012 <http://www.gabrielperi.fr/5-4-Etat-nation-du-Sahel-et>; Dörrie, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Amadou Keita 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Specifically between the *Kel Adagh* then mostly in Mali and the *Kel Ahaggar* fully in Algeria (Claudot-Hawad 2002: 97). *Kel* means people in Tamasheq.

<sup>28</sup> Dörrie 2012.

Similarly in Niger, terrible droughts, marginalization, state repression and predation led thousands of “*interrupted nomads*”<sup>29</sup> into exile in surrounding countries. The drought and accusations of corruption against Nigerien president Hamani Diori resulted in a *coup d’Etat*, which put an end to the single-party civilian regime in 1974. The ministry “in charge of Saharan and nomad affairs” in Agadez, supposedly imposed by France at independence<sup>30</sup> was suppressed. General Seyni Kountché, now in power, was suspicious of Libyan subversion *via* the Tuaregs and the attraction of the latter for the former. Gaddafi, who had led Libya since 1969, indeed continually used the Tuaregs of neighbouring countries and their discontent to support his hegemonic policy in the region and beyond. He opened his territory to Tuareg rebels and refugees, and supported the structuration of political movements<sup>31</sup>. After the droughts and repression in Niger and Mali in the 1970s and 1980s, the number of Tuaregs in Libya rapidly increased. Gaddafi offered to train them militarily for their own rebellion, and to use them as a special part of the Libyan army, like he did in Chad.

Some Tuaregs’ attempts to overthrow autocrat Seyni Kountché at that time generated harsh state repression which, added to starvation, fuelled the Tuaregs’ resentment and exile<sup>32</sup>. Programs aimed at reinserting those who had left the country were nevertheless launched by Seyni Kountché and his successor, Ali Saïbou. During a friendship visit to Libya in 1989, Saïbou called upon the Nigerien Tuaregs to go back to Niger, where a general amnesty had been proclaimed.<sup>33</sup> At the end of 1989, thousands of exiled Tuaregs in Algeria and Libya turned back to Niger, but placement in camps, financial, and organizational problems led both to bitterness among Tuaregs and resentment among the rest of the Nigerien population, who did not understand why aids were aiming at Tuaregs.<sup>34</sup>

The exasperation of returnees joined the continuing feeling of marginalization of those who had stayed, in a context where the democratization process was creating expectations which would not be fulfilled. For thirty years, Tuaregs from Mali and Niger had felt a growing marginalization. Their region was less developed than the rest of the country; they deplored

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<sup>29</sup> Claudot-Hawad 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Djibo 2002.

<sup>31</sup> In 1980, in his Ubari speech, he also announced the possible creation of a “Central Sahara”.

<sup>32</sup> Part of that, is the accusation addressed to public servants of having diverted international food aid aimed at Tuaregs. Besides, in 1985, nomads who had come to take food in Tchín-Tabaraden in Niger were repulsed by the army, which led to violence and death on both sides.

<sup>33</sup> Salifou, 47.

<sup>34</sup> Seguin, 42.

the absence of public response to the hard droughts from which they suffered and which destroyed their resources, the lack of economic alternative, their exclusion from any national economic benefits - including when said benefits were generated on their territory -, their social marginalization, as well as a series of administrative discriminations, in particular in Mali, where the military and repressive management of the northern regions had fostered resentment. This situation led both to divisions among Tuaregs who had to compete to survive, and to the radicalization of identity claims. Tuaregs had become increasingly aware of their ongoing disappearance as a community. While most of them had become sedentary, either in their northern territory of origin or in the south, part of the younger population – the post-independence generations - turned their malaise into a renewed Trans-Saharan nomadic way of life. Brought together beyond their respective states, the *Ishumar* have developed a nationalism that has coupled and merged both a Tuareg identity and the state reality.

### ***Trans-Saharan Mobility and Multi-Citizenship: “Mending the Deserts”***

As mentioned above, the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, and rebellions of the late 1980s incited a number of Tuaregs from Mali and Niger to head to Algeria and Libya. Among those who left, some were families fleeing starvation and violence,<sup>35</sup> and others were young individuals searching for meaning and means to live. The latter shared a strong feeling of multi-faceted marginalization, between familial stories of a lost past, state repression and discrimination, and chronic under-development of their region. From the late 1970s, Gaddafi had been calling them to join the country “*where they originally come from*”.

Past and present *Ishumar* do not experience their departure from their origin surroundings as an expatriation. Although they cross the border to another state, they join members of their community there and remain within the Saharan “Tuareg” territory. Due to the division of Tuareg tribes among those four countries, and of the subsequent displacement of Tuaregs, the *Ishumar* generally have some family in all of those countries, who they join and with whom they reside when they travel. They do not intend to settle. Their path is evolving along with social and economic opportunities, which can bring them back to Niger or Mali, and forth to Libya or Algeria. Here is how Kohl describes the *Ishumar*’s way of life:

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<sup>35</sup> Most of those were hosted in camps in Algeria.

...it can go in all directions, is temporally variable and adapted to individual taste. If one assumes an *Ishumar* in Sebha (Libya), he emerges in Ghat (Libya). Here he remains for several weeks or months before he turns to Djanet (Algeria), returns somewhat later again, moves to Agadez (Niger), and works finally for a couple of months in Tripoli or Benghazi (Libya). His property fits in a small bag.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas this way of life seems to evolve out of and independently from the state's framework and rules, it has also altered the *Ishumar*'s sense of belonging. Considered as foreigners in Algeria and Libya,<sup>37</sup> they have renewed their sense of identity, as is generally observed in a migration situation. Due to their shared fate and circumstances, the *Ishumar* have more strongly adopted an ideology of common affiliation and belonging,<sup>38</sup> which was "gradually eroding a normative, ethnic and political Tuareg identity linked to an imagined stateless nation."<sup>39</sup> While Tuaregs who had not migrated were still referred to in relation to kinship, the *Ishumar* have distinguished themselves through national categories and origin (Tuareg from Mali, from Niger, from Algeria, from Libya) than through social or tribal belonging.<sup>40</sup>

The *Ishumar* consider the Libyan-Algerian-Malian-Nigerien borderland as their natural space of mobility and living, but their way of life has reinforced their national affiliation to the state and has developed their relationship to citizenship. Identity reference to national affiliation actually lies in the attachment to the territory of origin, the territory where the *Ishumar*'s family has been living.<sup>41</sup> It is also a way for *Ishumar* to anchor their individual histories in some steady though renewed benchmarks. This "sort of cosmopolitan elite,"<sup>42</sup> which transcends both national loyalties and tribal belonging, actually needs to situate its origins.

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<sup>36</sup> Kohl, 94.

<sup>37</sup> Georg Klute, "From Friends to Enemies: negotiating Nationalism, tribal Identities, and Kinship in the fratricidal War of the Malian Tuareg," *L'Année du Maghreb* VII (2011): 163.

<sup>38</sup> Kohl, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, citing A. Giuffrida, "A Systematic Approach to Networks of Mobility and Stasis of Local and Global Tuareg," London: "Tuareg": *Moving Global: Saharan Life in Transition* (2010)..

<sup>40</sup> Klute, 166.

<sup>41</sup> Interviews with A., S., Ag., Ab. and F..

<sup>42</sup> Kohl, 99, citing S. Lecocq "Unemployed Intellectuals in the Sahara: The Teshumara Nationalist Movement and the Revolutions in Tuareg Society" *International Review of Social History* 49 (12) (2004): 87-109.

*Ishumar* are indeed not only economic, but also political and cultural exiles.<sup>43</sup> Breaking with many traditions of camp living, they have maintained a nostalgia, expressed in poetry and songs,<sup>44</sup> as well as in the political idealization of a Tuareg “essence” figured in particular by nomadism, language, and veil.<sup>45</sup>

Coming from Niger and Mali, the *Ishumar* generally hold Malian and/or Nigerien citizenship.<sup>46</sup> Identity documents and visa issues are nevertheless superfluous when it comes to moving within this borderland that they consider their own.<sup>47</sup> *Ishumar*’s mobility evolves within their historical territory and they feel everywhere at home when they travel in Niger, in Libya, in Algeria, in Mali. Whether they possess identity documents or not, they consider that nothing can prevent them from crossing borders in this area. They do not care about administrative rules and do not pass through the border posts. They use their own roads and cross the borders thanks to their familiarity with the desert, to their know-survive, as well as to corruption, in the event of border control.<sup>48</sup> The desert nature of this space, in association to weak state institutions and border control there, as well as the widespread existence of corruption among civil servants<sup>49</sup> obviously play a role in these practices. Besides, “*Ishumar can count on their tribal affiliations, on kinship, and social and trade networks which have formed across ethnic boundaries and nation.*”<sup>50</sup>

The *Ishumar*’s relationship to citizenship is of great interest since their way of life is based on multiple places of residence and often resorts to multiple citizenships.<sup>51</sup> Yet, citizenship is not used as a tool to circulate. This is a noticeable and specific feature among people who seek

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<sup>43</sup> Frédéric Deycard, “Les Touaregs du Niger et la crise du Sahel,” *Sahel: Eclairer le passé pour mieux dessiner l’avenir*, GRIP (2013): 22.

<sup>44</sup> The *Ishumar* music has recently been popularized worldwide (see below).

<sup>45</sup> Deycard, 22.

<sup>46</sup> In Niger and in Mali, citizenship is granted on the basis of *ius sanguinis* by paternal descent, and by maternal descent in Mali since 1995. It is also granted on the basis of *double ius soli*, i.e. birth in the country of the individual and one direct ascendant.

<sup>47</sup> Interviews with A., S., Ag., Ab., I. and F..

<sup>48</sup> Interviews with A., Ag and F.

<sup>49</sup> In the 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, out of 177 states, Algeria was ranking 94<sup>th</sup>, Niger 106<sup>th</sup>, Mali 127<sup>th</sup> and Libya 172<sup>nd</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Kohl, 101, citing A. Giuffrida.

<sup>51</sup> Nationality laws in Mali and Niger stipulated that citizens getting voluntarily another citizenship would lose their Malian/Nigerien citizenship, but it has generally not been implemented. Besides, Mali dropped this incompatibility in 1995.

additional citizenships worldwide and particularly in this region. Since obstacles to mobility and migration have been considerably multiplied and strengthened, including in North Africa, and given the inequality in the right to mobility, getting a “useful” citizenship is the objective of a growing number of citizens from developing countries, i.e. obtaining a citizenship that offers more facility to move and migrate to other countries. In the Sahel-Saharan space, one citizenship in particular appears to have the attributes of a “useful” citizenship: the Malian citizenship. Malian citizens indeed, unlike Nigerien citizens, are allowed to enter without any visa into certain countries that are not in the traditional Tuareg area, like Mauritania, Tunisia or Morocco. For this reason, some Tuareg traders may be interested in acquiring Malian citizenship in order to enlarge their mobility space.<sup>52</sup> Those with this objective, however, constitute a minority among the *Ishumar*. More generally, the *Ishumar* do not feel the need to have any citizenship of the Sahel-Saharan space to cross borders, as they do not use legal ways to enter those countries. Crossing borders according to the rules, even with the proper documents, would not protect them from trouble<sup>53</sup> and would be too costly.<sup>54</sup>

Unrelated to border crossing, *Ishumar*'s unexpected need of additional citizenship is correlated to their (temporary and alternating) place of residence. During their stay in Libya or in Algeria, citizenship can help them to “*be left alone*”, i.e. not be worried by the local authorities and by the threat of being imprisoned, harassed or expelled.<sup>55</sup> It also allows them to go beyond the “Tuareg” territory within those states (e.g. to Tripoli or Benghazi). During rebellions in Niger, getting the Malian citizenship for Nigerien *Ishumar* was a way, too, to feel secure in a brother country at times imagined as more friendly to their fate.<sup>56</sup> Being a foreign Tuareg in Mali, Niger, Libya or Algeria may raise suspicion, and since identity checks are frequent on Tuaregs, presenting national papers facilitates life. Hence, getting the citizenship of the country of regular alternative residence is a means for *Ishumar* to reside and circulate in the country in good conditions. They do not use citizenship for benefitting from any other privilege or advantage other than being left alone.<sup>57</sup> Relying on kinship ties, citizenship thus follows and accompanies mobility to strengthen *Ishumar*'s home feeling.

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with S..

<sup>53</sup> See Julien Brachet, “Migrants, transporteurs et agents de l’Etat: Rencontres sur l’axe Agadez-Sebha”, *Autrepart* no. 36 (2005): 43-62.

<sup>54</sup> Interviews with A., S., Ag. And F.

<sup>55</sup> Interviews with A. and S.

<sup>56</sup> Interviews with A.

<sup>57</sup> According to interviews, they could not expect for much more anyway...

Getting the citizenship of part of the family is also a way to maintain and deepen the link with it.<sup>58</sup>

To obtain the citizenship of Mali, Niger, Libya, or Algeria, kinship ties are generally used. Getting a citizenship is made possible thanks to a member of the family, an uncle or a cousin, who holds the citizenship of the country and agrees to request that the authorities add the *Ishumar* to the family record book.<sup>59</sup> In each “Tuareg” country, someone from the familial lineage will rely on a (Tuareg) “resource person” in charge of document and administrative procedures, all the more as many Tuaregs cannot read and write. In Libya, an uncle may resort to an intermediary, who will connect with the administration and get both the mention in the family book, and a birth certificate of the *Ishumar* mentioning the “Libyan origin” – but stating the individual’s country of birth, Niger or Mali. In the absence of family ties, the *Ishumar* can try to obtain his<sup>60</sup> birth certificate through two or three witnesses ready to certify his Libyan origin. This strategy to get citizenship is not fraudulent, as the *Ishumar* is convinced to have, and does indeed have, some origin in the country, through his family and through history.<sup>61</sup> True, the applicant may at times provide false information about his birth. In Mali for instance, he may state that he was born in Djebock at some date, that his parents are resident in Mali, and have his statement confirmed by witnesses. Even in doing so, the *Ishumar* may feel that he is within his rights, insofar as he considers that he actually is from this territory, and thus country. Lies only aim at facilitating the administrative process. Being a witness also implies that one is convinced of the veracity of the requested belonging. Witnesses are aware of the risk they may take, especially in Libya.<sup>62</sup>

The conception of national affiliation for those Tuaregs does not go against state logic, but goes both with and beyond it. It tends to follow the rules of the state and to make familial and territorial belonging endorsed by legal bonds. The *Ishumar*’s sense of belonging is multi-faceted. They have developed a new way of thinking the Tuareg nation, and revived a (different) Tuareg nationalism, which has brought Tuaregs from various states and diverse tribes together. Yet, they also define themselves on the basis of their initial state affiliation.

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<sup>58</sup> Interviews with S.

<sup>59</sup> Interviews with A. and S.

<sup>60</sup> We use the masculine since, even if women from Niger and Mali also left to Algeria and Libya, the *Ishumar* - as defined through their way of life - are men in great majority.

<sup>61</sup> Interviews with A., S., F.

<sup>62</sup> Interviews with A.



The multi-national Tuareg indeed keeps an attachment to one of those citizenships: his origin citizenship, which corresponds to the territory of his core family, the “*last camp of nomadism*.”<sup>63</sup> For Nigerien nationals, the attachment may also come from the sense that their territory is “*not to the east, not to the west, but at the center*.”<sup>64</sup> The *Ishumar* hence feels engaged into the life of the state. Not for the state itself (“*Niger is not worth a briq*”), but since this state owns and rules his “identity territory”, the *Ishumar* has both hopes and claims with regard to the development of his region and the integration of the members of his community within the state. Citizenship, which provides the right to claim and obtain rights, is a way for *Ishumar* to be recognized as natives of the state/territory, and as an essential part of the state.

The distinction they make between their various citizenships is paramount and significant. While they expect little from their additional citizenship(s) (security and tranquility), they feel much more engaged (socially, politically) into the citizenship of their country/territory of origin. Many consider themselves second-class citizens in all those countries through which they cross, and in which they live. This is again a consequence of territory, as they mainly move and live within the Saharan borderland, which is everywhere remote from socio-economic development and political decisions. However, the position of second-class citizen in Libya or Algeria, which grants better status than that of foreigner and limits the state’s coercion, is much more tolerated than would be a similar position in the country of first affiliation. There indeed, origin belonging provides a sentiment of legitimacy to intervene in state’ governance and to aspire to be fully part of the state. These variations in relationship to citizenship(s) do not denote indifference. In contrast, they imply a hierarchy among various senses of belonging, including among belonging to state(s). Various strata of identity affiliations (Tuareg, African, Nigerien, Libyan, etc) overlap and melt together. Which identities may prevail depends in part to situation and location.

Citizenship appears to be both devalued and revived by these practices. Devalued, insofar as it may take the form of semi-passive attitudes toward the state, which is considered as a reality with which to cope in order “*to be left alone*”. Revived, as it has a meaning for *Ishumar* who have addressed claims only to the state to which they firstly belong. The *Ishumar* have indeed played an important role in the concomitant rebellions in Mali and Niger in the 1990s and the

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with S.

<sup>64</sup> Interview S.

2000s. They have also greatly contributed to citizenship practices being “re-territorialized” and “de-territorialized”.

## **II - Re-Territorialization and De-Territorialization of Relation to the State: Shaping Citizenship Practices**

The citizenship practices that follow include relationship to state affairs and positions regarding state membership of both mobile and sedentary Tuaregs. As mentioned earlier, Tuaregs’ localization in or outside of the northern regions impacts those practices much more than mobility.

Tuaregs’ citizenship practices have evolved along with the evolution of the Saharan territory and with the evolution of their own relation to it. The Sahara has experienced major changes since independence, and more specifically since the 1980s. One is the diversification of the population living in Saharan towns that have significantly grown during the last decades, like Agadez in Niger, which has become a trade and migration hub where people from various parts of the country and various countries come and go. A second change is the scarcity but significance of the resources there. Whereas droughts destroyed livestock, i.e. Tuaregs’ economic and cultural wealth, other sources of income have developed and generated competition, in particular NGOs’ local projects, reinsertion programs, people and goods smuggling, and in Niger, mineral exploitation<sup>65</sup>. Concurrently, many Tuaregs have had to leave their territory of origin, pushed away by droughts, by operating companies, by violence, and by general necessity for survival. These major territorial and socio-economic reconfigurations, among other things, have shaped the Tuaregs’ situation *vis-à-vis* the state. Furthermore, the state itself and its mode of governance – through clientelism, communitarianism, political violence - have influenced various Tuaregs’ citizenship practices.

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<sup>65</sup> Uranium deposits have been found in Aïr in 1966 and exploited since the 1970s. Already during that decade, social movements denounced the spoliation of those resources, but this is above all since the 1990s that it has become a core issue of the relation between Niger’s northern population and the central government.

Although a number of Tuaregs, having left Mali and Niger, are stateless,<sup>66</sup> most Tuaregs from Mali and Niger hold the citizenship of those countries.<sup>67</sup> More importantly, they do consider themselves citizens of Mali or Niger. The meaning of citizenship nevertheless greatly varies from one Tuareg to another. There is at first an acceptance, which has been progressive, of a reality: Tuaregs are now part, at least legally and geographically, of those states. The historical, cultural and affective link they have with their territory of origin may be the basis of their sense of belonging to the state, which now rules it. Yet, the relationship to state citizenship is not such indirect for all Tuaregs. Some of them feel “pride” to be a Nigerien<sup>68</sup> or a Malian national, and their community identity is like fused with that Nigerien/Malian belonging. Others are, consciously or not, losing their Tuareg identity to fully embrace state membership.

To this large array of sentiments toward state citizenship among Tuaregs corresponds a similar variety of citizenship practices. As already mentioned regarding the *Ishumar*, citizenship is firstly meant as a recognition to be part of the state and to have the right to acquire rights, or at least to claim them. This is indeed what has been revealed by the rebellions of the 1990s and of the successive decades, whose claims rapidly appeared to be integrationist. Those claims have contributed to “re-territorialize” citizenship practices, insofar as their territorial scope, as well as their community basis, have significantly evolved. At the same time, Tuaregs have also developed certain citizenship practices which can be described as “de-territorialized”, either since those practices have effectively broken away from the Sahara, or since the significance of territory has been devalued as such.

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<sup>66</sup> All the Tuaregs do not share the same genealogic know-how which would enable to find the kinship ties necessary to get citizenship, as described above regarding the *Ishumar*. Many Tuaregs live for instance in Libya for decades and do have a “Libyan origin”, without having found a way to get a family book - which has to be showed to apply for a job or participate to elections for instance – or a passport. Besides, many have lost their documents in Libya, Mali or Niger. Without any real and effective birth registration system in those countries, getting identity documents may imply for applicants to provide some evidence of their citizenship, mainly through witnesses.

<sup>67</sup> Birth registration may be a problem as many Tuareg children are not born at hospital. Getting a birth certificate afterwards is charged. The date of birth may also be uncertain and some Tuaregs regret the negative and degrading effect of having a birth certificate mentioning a birth “around” a date.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Af.

### *From Ethno-territorial Despair to State-oriented Claims: The Calls for Integration*

Tuareg rebellions launched in the 1990s by returnees in Mali and Niger cannot be detached from a political context in which the means of political expression was mainly based on violence, threats, and clientelism.<sup>69</sup> The persistence of Tuaregs' identity claims, in terms of recognition of their specificity, had been fuelled by thirty years of socio-economic marginalization and state repression in the northern regions of both countries. While those regions were still particularly under-developed, Tuaregs additionally felt that they were abused and mistreated in their own territory. When the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MPLA), led by Iyad ag Ghaly, took arms against the Malian regime in 1990, it accused it of having stolen tons of food aid which had been aimed at saving Tuaregs from the drought – something which was also denounced in Niger. In parallel to this movement, which was present in South Algeria, North Mali, and North Niger, the Front for the Liberation of Air and Azawak (FLAA) was created in 1991, following the so-called Tchén-Tabaradene massacre in 1990.<sup>70</sup> Its main demands were to obtain autonomy and development in the northern region, and a larger participation of Tuaregs in the local economic activities, in particular uranium exploitation.

In both countries, claims were clearly territorialized, they were circumscribed to the northern regions. Also, while the rebellions in Mali and Niger were concomitant and the rebels of both countries were connected, claims were addressed to their respective states. Most of those claims did not aim to break with the states, but rather to force them to develop their desert, to allow it to benefit from public policies. The identity dimension was twofold, the marginalization feeling being based in both territory and community. As intrinsically rooted in those deprived regions, Tuaregs had claims that concerned their territory and their community there. In addition, since they felt that they were discriminated against by the regime, they also wanted to be recognized as a specific group, which would need to be ruled autonomously, and to benefit from a sort of positive discrimination.

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<sup>69</sup> Mali was ruled by autocrat Moussa Traoré from 1968 to 1991 and Niger was under the military regime of Seyni Kountché from 1974 to 1987. Illustrative of that is Nigerien General Kountché placing Tuaregs under surveillance, repressing them harshly and also containing them through nominating Tuareg government chiefs (Salifou, 42) (see below) or granting micro-subsidies to some Tuareg rebels (Interviews with S. and Ag).

<sup>70</sup> For more details, see ICG, "Niger, Another Weak Link in the Sahel?," Crisis Group Africa Report no. 208 (2013): 10.

Thus, before evolving along with negotiations and reconfigurations of the rebel groups, the main claims, similar in both countries, mostly consisted in obtaining the following:

- Economic and social development of the regions, implying local development initiatives (economic activities, infrastructures, also schools and hospitals),
- An employment priority for the local population, and in Niger, the transfer of part of the national resources generated by mineral and industrial exploitation in the zone to the local authorities,
- An autonomous management of the region within a federal system, including local security forces,
- The inclusion of local inhabitants in national military and civil State corps.

Claims aimed both at promoting the Tuaregs and their territory within the state and at protecting them from it. Indeed, the harsh repression against Tuaregs - including the civilians - during the past years and the current rebellions, had not only fostered civilian support to the rebellion, it also had strengthened the mistrust between the Tuaregs and the “other populations” in Mali and Niger.

In both countries, the rebellion was not united, rivalries and scissions were numerous, which helps to explain why clashes between Tuaregs and governments alternated with negotiations and agreements during the entirety of the 1990s. Evolutions in claims and divisions among the rebels were noticeable as far as two major aspects were concerned: the definition of the local population and the scope of autonomy for the regions. In a memorandum displayed in 1994, the Nigerien Coordination of Armed resistance (CRA), issued from a FLAA scission, listed the native populations who should benefit from the new territorial status, to the exclusion of the others: Tuaregs, Arabs, Toubous, Native Peuls Bororo.<sup>71</sup> This ethnical circumscription was then abandoned during negotiations, but it suffices to stress the difficulty to merge territorial and community claims, when diverse communities coexist there – something that has since and even recently been revived in northern Mali between Songhay, Peuls, and Tuaregs (see below). The federalist option was also progressively abandoned during negotiations, in favour of autonomy, which was more acceptable for unitary states.<sup>72</sup>

The 1990s thus constituted a turning point in Tuaregs’ relations to the states. The political movement set the most extremists aside in a strategy of political communication.<sup>73</sup> Despite or

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<sup>71</sup> Seguin, 50.

<sup>72</sup> Boilley 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

thanks to divergences and divisions among Tuaregs, community claims and individual paths progressively oriented themselves towards integration into the state. In the meantime, both Mali and Niger had resumed democratization processes. National conferences led to elections, which put Alpha Oumar Konaré at power in Mali in April 1992, and Mahamane Ousmane in 1993 in Niger – yet, Niger further remained politically instable and vulnerable to *coups* until the election of Mamadou Tandja in 1999. After a preliminary agreement signed in Tamanrasset on 6 January 1991, planning the de-militarization of Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu, a peace agreement (“National Pact”) was signed between the Movement of Unified Fronts of Azawad (MFUA), which brought together four different rebel groups, and the Malian government on 11 April 1992. The implementation started in 1994. In Niger, the Ouagadougou peace agreements were concluded in 1995. The 1990s rebellions could be considered over when two “Flames of Peace” ceremonies were organized in Timbuktu in 1996 and in Agadez in 2000.

The rebellions having similar roots, the content of the agreements were alike and included the following:

- A reinsertion program for the rebels *via* integration in State military corps and support to micro-projects,
- Inclusion of Tuaregs in civil and military State corps,
- Local development projects, and support to pastoral and livestock activities,
- In Niger, sharing of resources generated by mineral and industrial exploitation through prioritized employment for the local population and the transfer of part of the resources to the local authorities,
- Decentralization of State administration, implying an autonomous management of the region.<sup>74</sup>

Formally, Tuaregs’ main claims for socio-economic development and participation as well as for autonomy had been heard and adopted. Yet divisions among Tuaregs were still important and only some of them signed the agreements. Moreover, lack of financial means and of political will postponed or impeded the implementation of promises. The hopes generated by the peace process, like those generated by democratization, gave way to disappointment and resentment. The northern regions remained chronically underdeveloped and Tuaregs felt likewise left aside. Actually, this could be said for the whole Nigerien and Malian society,

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<sup>74</sup> Seguin, 55; Frédéric Deycard, “Le Niger entre deux feux. La nouvelle rébellion touarègue face à Niamey,” *Politique africaine* no. 108 (2007): 127-144.

who was disappointed by political elites having failed to meet their promises. As heads of State changed in 1999 (Mamadou Tandja in Niger) and 2002 (Amadou Toumani Touré in Mali), the socio-economic situation was a disaster and clientelism and predation remained the norm. Part of the Tuareg resentment in Niger was due to the feeling of being betrayed by their former leaders, who took individual benefits from the implementation of the peace programs, which had put emphasis on the reintegration of ex-rebels. The programs themselves had fuelled corrupt practices that were aimed at grabbing scarce and identifiable resources (see below).

While insecurity and sporadic violence never really ceased in either countries' northern regions – turned into a “grey zone”<sup>75</sup> – rebellions broke out again in 2006 in Mali and 2007 in Niger. Ex-rebels of the 1990s reconstituted and formed new groups such as the MNJ (Movement of Nigeriens for Justice) to resume armed action. Like the MNJ denomination suggests, the claims of the 2000s rebellions were similar to those of the 1990s, and similarly embraced a national (i.e. Nigerien/Malian) dimension. The MNJ denounced the absence of development and the repression in the northern regions, but also the state's bad governance and authoritarianism in general. It thereby shared certain concerns of the civil society as a whole in Niger, and in the northern regions in particular, and this has been an important trend of the last decade in the country – unlike in Mali, where claims remained focused on material development in the north. State repression against civilians of the zone encouraged social support, or at least understanding, for the rebellion. Yet, the majority of the Tuareg population was exhausted by decades of violence and conflict and, in contrast to the previous decade, this support rapidly eroded. This, together with multiple divisions within the rebellion, and alternating cease-fires and renewed violence, went towards further throttling any socio-economic activity in the northern regions.

The arrangements and peace agreements that followed confirmed the objectives assigned in the 1990s agreements which, for the most part, had not been implemented. Tuaregs from Niger, where authoritarian president Mamadou Tandja had been replaced in 2010 by Mahamadou Issoufou, then seemed to be more satisfied with the result than their counterparts in Mali.<sup>76</sup> This may be confirmed by the latest Tuareg rebellion to break out in Mali in 2012, which was absent of a corresponding action in Niger. Despite the exceptional nature of

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<sup>75</sup> Boilley 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Dörrie, 18.

MNLA's initial and temporary claim – independence of Azawad<sup>77</sup> -, the Tuareg “issue” and their relation to the state have not been renewed. They are part of a continuing and evolving process that started with the 1990s rebellions. The claim for independence is circumscribed within the Malian state borders, which confirms the end of Tuareg irredentism. The Tuareg rebellion does not search for the reunification of Tuareg populations within a single territory, and separatism - then replaced by effective decentralization - respects the principle of border intangibility. Furthermore, even if the claim is brought by Tuaregs, their requirements are not ethnically based. The MNLA renews both the territorial and the community basis of Tuaregs' collective claims. While its members still denounce the underdevelopment of their territory and the twofold discrimination against them (as a community living on an abandoned territory, and as a community *per se*), territory appears to transcend community. Indeed, the MNLA proclaims to fight for the rights of the “people of Azawad”. The territorial notion is limited to the Malian borders, and the “people” is defined through inclusion of the diverse communities living in the same territory - more precisely the “native” populations.<sup>78</sup> The “people” is delineated as a “*human group situated on a same territory and brought together by common relations*”. While the reference to the native populations may appear to be a return to 1990 (i.e. the CRA's claims), the voluntarily elliptic definition of the people on the basis of the territory tends to transcend community as ethnically circumscribed. However, it has not impeded harsh anti-Tuareg reactions, not only in the south – where Tuaregs have been at times depicted as “stateless” people - but also within the north – where the *Ganda koy* was reconstituted.<sup>79</sup>

This fourth rebellion in Mali confirms the perpetuation of a mode of political expression based on violence and threat addressed to the state. Independence is nevertheless an extremely residual claim among Tuaregs – even if it may remain an unexpressed utopia for a number of

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<sup>77</sup> This claim was dropped in February 2013.

<sup>78</sup> See official website of the MNLA: <http://www.mnlamov.net/>.

<sup>79</sup> In the 1990s, a Songhay auto-defense militia (*Ganda Koy*, “the masters of the land”) was created in North Mali. Supported by some other communities like Peuls and Bozos, they “*were hunting white people*”, i.e. Tuaregs and Moors (Klute, 170), killing civilians and leading 100,000 persons to flee the country to Burkina Faso and Mauritania. In 2012, a new version of the *Ganda Koy* appeared to “*free the country from invaders*” and get their revenge on Tuaregs considered to have got benefits from rebellion, that the Songhay did not get (such as integration in the army) (*L'Essor*, 2 August 2012, <http://www.courrierinternational.com/article/2012/08/02/plongee-dans-la-milice-d-autodefense-ganda-koy>).



them. “*Many Tuaregs have actually come to accept the countries they live in as legitimate*”<sup>80</sup> and they claim rights and benefits that they consider themselves entitled to as citizens of those countries. This position is more the result of a rational calculation than a convinced acceptance of state legitimacy, but it has dominated since the 1990s, when claims started to seek to change the state, to take part in it, but not to destroy it.<sup>81</sup> The creation in April 2013 of a “platform of executives and leaders *Kel Tamasheq* for national unity in Mali” is also representative of part of the community, which has found its place within the state and dissociates itself from any differentialist claims. More than fifty years of inclusion in the state have led to the adaptation and diversification of Tuaregs’ collective and individual ways of relating to the state. Citizenship has increasingly been practiced through a fragmentation of both the territory and the community.

### ***Individual Paths and Remodelled Collective Actions: Between Margins and Assimilation***

As mentioned earlier, many ex-rebel, but also civilian, Tuaregs have been disappointed by the implementation of the 1990s peace agreements. This does not only stem from the lack of socio-economic development of the northern regions, but also from the individualization of the benefits that were allocated. Tuaregs, and specifically *Ishumar*, have been even more divided. While some of their historical leaders were assigned to public office, or educated individuals – whether rebel or not - obtained reinsertion slots, the vast majority were left in the margins. Solidarity had been based on a shared fate and feeling of marginalization, and on the aggregation of individual aspirations to be in. It ended together with the unequal result of the fight, all the more since clientelism also ruled the allocation of reinsertion places and funding opportunities.<sup>82</sup>

Among the former leaders of the Nigerien rebellion, Rhissa ag Boula, who had led the FLAA, became minister for tourism and handwork from 1997 to 2004. He was also a member of the single party MNSD (National Movement for a Development Society), before taking leadership of the UDPS-Amana (Union for Democracy and Social Progress) in 2005, in an attempt to regain legitimacy amidst Tuaregs. In 2013, he was called again by president

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<sup>80</sup> Dörrie, 14.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>82</sup> Deycard 2007.

Issoufou to be a special counsellor.<sup>83</sup> Mohamed ag Anacko, who led the Popular Front for the Liberation of Sahara (FPLS) in 1994, became counselling minister of the presidency, after Rhissa left the government in 2004. Other Tuaregs became ministers or were given local public responsibilities, including recently after the regional councils' first elections – this being one major step in the decentralization process.<sup>84</sup>

While nominating Tuaregs, in particular ex-rebel leaders, for public offices has often been depicted as an opportunist manipulation of the central government to quell Tuareg resentment, Tuaregs' political marginalization is at first glance difficult to argue, in particular in Niger. In the parliament, eight seats (out of 113) are dedicated to the representatives of special districts, including ethnic minorities and nomad populations. The UDPS-Amana mentioned above was created in 1990 to support Tuaregs' federalist claims in the northern regions. It was recognized in 1991 despite its community-based nature, and had some elected representatives in parliament. Even before the 1990s, each of the Nigerien governments had an average of two Tuareg ministers, which corresponds to a proportion of 22%, compared to a Tuareg population which represents 8 to 9% of the general population.<sup>85</sup> The Nigerien prime minister is currently a Tuareg, as was also true for the period of 1983 to 1988 (Hamid Algabid, under General Kountché), and as are the mayor of Agadez, the army's second in command, and some state company leaders. Most elected political leaders in the northern towns of Niger are ex-rebels.

To a much lesser extent, Mali has also had Tuaregs involved in public and political responsibilities. A Tuareg was in the government as early as 1978 under Moussa Traoré. Then, during the presidency of Amadou Toumani Touré, a Tuareg (Ahmed Mohamed ag Hamani) was prime minister from 2002 to 2004.

Some of the Tuaregs have felt betrayed by the fact that certain individuals were elevated to a higher status, as they have not observed any benefits for them as a community, as a territory, or as individuals, except in the framework of a sort of clientelism. This feeling towards Tuaregs in power is similar to the idea Nigerien and Malian citizens generally share regarding their political leaders, deemed to be more motivated by personal ambition than by general interest. Having a Tuareg in a high position in the state does not appear to the majority of Tuaregs as evidence that they are or would be treated and considered equally in the country.

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<sup>83</sup> Deycard 2013, 35.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Salifou, 85.

They are indeed aware that a number of them have integrated into society, but they are also suspicious about the meaning of having Tuareg high profiles: an alibi for the central government? The result of personal ambition of a Tuareg who abandons his fellows and his culture? Assimilation, acculturation and confirmation of the forthcoming disappearance of Tuaregs as such?<sup>86</sup>

Nigerien prime minister Brigi Rafini indeed declared in 2012 that he deplored being qualified as a Tuareg and was hoping to see considerations for this identity diminish with time.<sup>87</sup> While this position could be seen as favouring national unity and public interest, the negation of his origins and community belonging has obviously been felt badly by Tuaregs, who have seen there his acculturation within the state. Rafini's position is not shared by most Tuareg high profiles. Those among the ex-rebellion leaders, who are criticized for having "sold their soul", argue in contrast that the 1990s fight attained its goals, and that it is time for political action. Yet, the presence of Tuaregs at high national or local positions has obviously had a calming effect on the community, and some observers have found in this reality, which is more pronounced in Niger, one major explanation of the current difference between Tuaregs from Mali and from Niger.<sup>88</sup>

At a lower level, thousands of Nigerien and Malian Tuareg individuals, most of them formerly engaged in the rebellion, have been integrated in state civil and military structures. This has enabled a number of young Tuaregs to find a stable life, particularly in the northern regions for many of them<sup>89</sup>, and has also progressively improved the image of Tuaregs in the population.<sup>90</sup> However, many ex-rebels deplored the low number of places, the attribution criteria (by their leaders), and the lack of advancement opportunities – in which they saw another form of discrimination. Among the left-aside and the disappointed who resigned, many turned back to Libya, some reformed the rebellion, and most resumed life in the margins, to use and leverage their know-how in the Sahara mainly *via* smuggling.

Reconversion of ex-rebels and engagement of the latest generation into politically-engaged artistic activities is also noticeable, as it constitutes a form of commitment oriented both to state affairs and to the valorization of a Tuareg identity. Some musicians - like the Malians

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<sup>86</sup> Interviews with A. and Am.

<sup>87</sup> *Jeune Afrique*, 22 May 2013, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2651p046.xml0/>.

<sup>88</sup> IRIN News, 11 April 2013, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/97823/can-niger-offer-mali-lessons-on-the-tuareg>.

<sup>89</sup> In Niger for instance, some Saharan Security Units were created to be dedicated for reinsertion.

<sup>90</sup> Deycard 2007.

forming Tinariwen, the Nigerien Abdallah ag Oumbadougou, or Bombino (the latter never involved in the rebellion) - are representative of this trend. Unlike ex-rebels engaged into politics, as mentioned above, they feel the taking up of arms has proved to be inefficient, while carrying the voice of Tuaregs throughout the state and around the world may be of greater help to improve the fate of their fellows. Most importantly, they claim their Nigerien/Malian citizenship, and address their messages to their respective states as well as to the international community to foster support for their cause.

On another note, Tuaregs living outside of the northern regions may try to hide or soften their Tuareg belonging in order to not be associated with their community and the mistrust it inspires, as well as to seek individual integration. The decline of *Tamasheq*, which is much less spoken,<sup>91</sup> is not the only sign of it. Clothes, habits, territorial and familial distance, and even name changing also constitute elements of those attitudes in order to favour assimilation<sup>92</sup>. According to interviews, these trends are more widespread in Niger than in Mali, where Tuaregs are less dispatched in the country, where antagonism between them and the state has remained severe and where discrimination, particularly in regards to state institutions, is also more widely felt.

The relationship to the state is obviously more distended in the northern regions. Yet, the diversification of the population living in those territories has also distended a possible “Tuareg”-based attitude toward the state. Collective actions and claims are less clear-cut than they were before the 1990s. The state remains the addressee of those claims, which take different forms. In Niger for instance, claims aimed at obtaining a greater benefit for the local population from the exploitation of mines are brought by citizens from various communities (Tuaregs, but also Haussa and Djerma), that have organized successive demonstrations in Agadez and Arlit to pressure the state in its negotiations with Areva. When President Tandja was overthrown by a military *coup* in 2010, hopes were running high in the negotiation between the Tuaregs and the junta. They sought for a resolution, that would reinvest uranium profits into northern socio-economic development to reverse a situation where resource exploitation appears to have been more detrimental to the local population – in terms of displacement, pollution, limitations on movement and access to water points – than beneficial – in terms of employment and socio-economic benefits. At that time, the results of a survey

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<sup>91</sup> The Constitutions of Mali and Niger states and guarantees the linguistic diversity in the country. French is the official language.

<sup>92</sup> Interviews with A. and M.

on the environmental impact of the exploitation of uranium were also disclosed by scientists, which documented dangerous levels of radioactive contamination still present in the water and dirt in the villages of Arlit and Akokan.<sup>93</sup> The documentation of this concern also offered an opportunity for Tuaregs to develop communication directed at the international community to get its support – something which has been an important trend in Tuareg movements and their relationship to the state during the last decade. In 2013 and early 2014, the announced renegotiations of the exploitation contracts between Areva and the Nigerien state raised high hopes again in the population. Starting in October 2013, local inhabitants have mounted demonstrations, requesting benefits from the lucrative exploitation of uranium on their territory, but also more firmness from the Nigerien government in its relationship to the French company. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014, a “Collective for Renewal and Innovation” was created, gathering a dozen of NGOs, to oblige the development of the Agadez region. It organized several demonstrations, which were prohibited, and some of its members were arrested. Its Memorandum contains claims around education, health, and infrastructures, but also effectiveness of the decentralization process and employment priority for the natives – in short, claims identical to those that have been presented by Tuaregs for decades. In the early 2014, while the political climate in Niger was tense, the National Commission for Human Rights warned against the risk of ethnic violence and destabilization in the country.<sup>94</sup> This situation, resulting from a harsh opposition between President Issoufou and other political parties,<sup>95</sup> shows that, beyond any Tuareg issue, participation in the state, and thus citizenship practice, has a weak basis in this country, where ethnic instrumentalization and threats remain tools of governance. The “Tuareg issue” refers more generally to the state issue in Mali like in Niger: political instability, competition for resources, bad governance, and clientelist parties have weakened legal means of political expression.<sup>96</sup> To many, arms and force appear as the only effective mode of participation to the polity, and legitimacy is based on the capacity to mobilize military, human and logistical forces.<sup>97</sup> This is all the more true in the northern regions, where resources are scarce and identifiable: uranium and oil exploitation,

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<sup>93</sup> See the results of the survey conducted by Greenpeace International and France’s CRIIRAD (Commission de Recherche et d’Information Indépendantes sur la Radioactivité), in 2010: <http://www.criirad.org/actualites/dossiers2005/niger/somniger.html>

<sup>94</sup> AFP 8 February 2014.

<sup>95</sup> It is worth mentioning that the UDPS-Amana has recently confirmed its support to President Issoufou.

<sup>96</sup> Deycard 2007, 142.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

development projects and subsidies from the state, NGOs and international organizations, and smuggling, for which local stakeholders compete. Bargaining insecurity is therefore a key element in the regional scene in order to get benefits for both the group and the individual. Although these actions appear to defy the state, they are also the result of assimilating state logic, not only because they are addressed to the state, but as well because they rely on the same culture of predation that is conveyed by state elites. Besides, it is noticeable that actions and positions are growingly based on the tribe or the sub-region, instead of a Tuareg community or territory.<sup>98</sup> The majority of the population obviously does not benefit from such attitudes, unless it is affiliated with a group (a tribe or a “social group”) which is likely to obtain the resources.

As part of that trend, criminality remains a mode of pressure *vis-à-vis* the state, by which the territory and its control become bargaining tools. Even if those methods can hardly be deemed as constitutive of a political commitment to state affairs, they aim at obtaining the same rights as have been claimed for decades by Tuareg groups. It is worth remembering the offer made by the MNLA before choosing the separatist option linked to the opportunity offered by the military *coup* in March 2012. The group had several times offered national authorities the Tuaregs’ know-how in the Sahara in order to get rid of Islamists in this “grey zone”, in exchange for a better recognition of their rights and needs and for development efforts in their region. Simultaneously, the Bedouins in Sinai were making the same offer to the Egyptian regime. Tuaregs, and nomads in general, emphasize the improvements in security and public order from which states could benefit – including preventing any rebellion and obtaining a precious help to stabilize desert regions where smuggling and criminality proliferate – if they would accept to endow these populations with more rights associated to citizenship. Tuaregs are aware of the decline of their way of life, and are desperately trying to find a way to valorize their know-how, and “sell” it to the state. The territory and its control become assets for individuals and groups that claim to be both the potential source of disorder and the solution.

While some Tuaregs and other communities, in some fashion, take advantage of the institutional *vacuum* in the Sahara to pursue illegal activities as an alternative to the lack of socio-economic perspectives, the vast majority of Tuaregs and their counterparts in the

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<sup>98</sup> Naffet Keita, “Du pouvoir ethnique touareg à la sanctuarisation de l’AQMI et les « dire » de l’État dans l’espace saharo-sahélien au Mali,” *Quelles constructions politiques au Mali face aux crises dans le Sahel?*, Conference in Paris, 19 June 2012 <http://www.gabrielperi.fr/2-2-Du-pouvoir-ethnique-Touareg-a#nb14>,

northern regions are generally victims of this situation. Due to the widespread climate of insecurity, their political claims cannot be heard, tourists and NGOs have disappeared from the region, thus rarefying possibilities for legal activities, except some pastoralism.<sup>99</sup> The region ranking as a red zone in terms of security-risk adversely impacts tourism, which had offered a reconversion for many *Ishumar* and younger Tuaregs, and sustained local businesses and artisans in Saharan towns like Agadez<sup>100</sup> or Timbuktu. The chronic Tuareg *mal-être* remains in Nigerien and Malian northern regions, and this is mainly due to the lack of perspectives beyond acculturation.<sup>101</sup> As a result, attitudes *vis-à-vis* the state are indeed inspired by skepticism for the vast majority of Tuaregs. Many do not see what they can expect from the state and how they can practice citizenship otherwise than through paying their taxes<sup>102</sup>. They thus rely on familial and tribal survival strategies rather than on a failing and mistrusted state.

## Conclusion

By remembering the evolution of the Tuaregs' community claims since independence, and addressing some collective and individual practices *vis-à-vis* the state, this paper has intended to show the great variety of relationships to, and the complexity of sentiments toward state membership among Tuaregs. For more than fifty years, the meaning Tuaregs have attached to citizenship has been neither stable nor uniform. While the persistence and significance of a Tuareg identity is an undeniable reality - which is also felt in many different ways depending on whether it is effectively lived in its socio-cultural traits or is mentally perceived in its essence - it is not justified to talk about a distinctively "Tuareg" manner of citizenship. There is no doubt that national affiliation now makes sense to most Tuaregs. State membership is a fact that has been progressively assimilated throughout half a century despite marginalization

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<sup>99</sup> Boilley 2011.

<sup>100</sup> Economic activity linked to the transit of African migrants in Agadez on their road to Libya or Algeria is also at stake. After the deaths of Nigerien migrants in the desert in October 2013, president Issoufou decided to close the "ghettos" of transit migrants in Agadez.

<sup>101</sup> The 2013 Malian government includes a ministry for National Reconciliation and Development of the Northern Regions, through which the obvious link between territorial marginalization and community/identity recess seems hence to be recognized.

<sup>102</sup> Birth registration in remote and nomad territories generally relies on a "key" Tuareg who regularly comes to these territories to collect taxes and register births on behalf of the administration. Interviews with A., At. And Ma.

and resentment. Tuaregs' territorial roots constitute the main basis of attachment to the state. As developed in the core of the paper, citizenship is primarily understood as a way for Tuaregs to be recognized as natives of the state/territory, therefore as an essential part of the state, and to be entitled to rights. Citizenship is also significant for some Tuaregs beyond the territorial bond, especially in Niger, where both Tuareg salience in the country and cohabitation with other communities and people have given rise to some sense of belonging to the state. In any case, indifference does not define the relationship Tuaregs have with state membership, be they in the margins or integrated. Skepticism might.

Indeed, feeling a citizen is one thing, practicing it is another. Most Tuaregs face difficulties when it comes to acting as citizens. Those difficulties primarily come from the nature of the states in which they live, and are thus shared with other populations of Mali and Niger. They also stem from the progressive breakdown of their community, of their living means and way of life, and from the escheat and marginalization of their territory. Many Tuaregs in Agadez or Kidal live without any contact with state affairs and rely on familial and local solidarity. They often feel like second-class citizens, and expect nothing from corrupted and weak states. In Mali and Niger, which are reputed for providing few rights, especially in their northern parts deprived of any sufficient public services, citizenship is practiced at the local rather than at the national level, e.g. through participating in local discussions and projects. Relationship to state authorities is either absent or focused on claims and complaints. Geographical remoteness and territorial marginalization make it difficult to be heard by the national authorities, unless by collective and/or challenging means. Therefore, the various demonstrations of populations in northern Niger and the threats or "service proposals" of local groups addressed to the Malian state can be qualified as citizenship practices. They indeed constitute ways to impact public policies and to interrelate with state authorities. To that extent, some of this paper's observations go far beyond this specific situation. They address the salient question of the relationship between a transnational community and the state, on which territorial inequality and bad governance appear to have much more impact than any cultural specificity. The Tuaregs' relationship to citizenship in Mali and Niger refers to more general issues, that also apply to minorities and territories in Morocco and Algeria, in Egypt, the European Union, or Canada,<sup>103</sup> such as social justice and cohesion; the effectiveness and

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<sup>103</sup> For a comparison between Morocco and Canada, see Abderrahim El Maslouhi, "Le corporatisme territorial contre l'Etat-nation? Politiques publiques et lien national au Sahara occidental," *L'Année du Maghreb* VII (2011): 191-210.



equity of public policies; relationship between center and periphery; resource-sharing and governance.

The limited options and difficulties to integrate or interact with the state have led to fractionalizing the Tuareg community along various individual and collective paths. Misgovernance in Mali and Niger has been an obstacle both to national cohesion and to community unity. While opposition to public policies has at times brought the Tuareg community or diverse community groups together, aspirations and expectations associated to state membership have fostered competition, divisions and fragmentation. The yearning to “get its share” has been a motivation both for group radicalization and individual assimilation. The way the Malian and the Nigerien polity functions is a determinant in Tuaregs’ relationship to and practice of citizenship, and on that note, we can consider that Tuaregs have adapted to the way citizenship is widely practiced in countries where general interest is missing: while a majority live in the margins and rely on familial and community bonds, a minority compete and predate to take their part. The “dynamic” and “flexible” nature of Tuareg society has several times been stressed to address the evolution of the Tuaregs in relation to the states.<sup>104</sup> The Tuareg’s culture and history do not cause them to be intrinsically indifferent or hostile to state affiliation, but lead them to adapt and invent a relationship to citizenship through which they seek to not disappear. Whether they be considered as a way to support individual integration or as a tool for community or territorial claim, whether they be based on active participation or a semi-passive attitude, their citizenship practices are above all inspired by survival strategies.

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<sup>104</sup> Jeremy Keenan, *The Lesser Gods of the Sahara: Social change and contested terrain amongst the Tuareg of Algeria*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004, 38; André Bourgeot, “Le lion et la gazelle: Etats et Touaregs,” *Etats et sociétés nomades, Politique africaine* no. 34 (1989): 29.