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Tuareg Moving Global: An Introduction

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Increasingly forced to switch from nomadic to urban lifestyles over the last few decades, lots of Kel Tamasheq in the Sahara and Sahel are being squeezed into sedentarization. Furthermore, the vagaries of international politics are pushing them into making transnational border crossings without documents, nationalities or citizenships. Global economic interests, EU sanctions, as well as several local and supra local attempts to enforce political hegemony have turned nomadic life into a challenging business. Recent geopolitical changes have had a crucial impact on the Saharan-Sahel population, but the rest of the world has neglected them. The Sahara and Sahel are more and more being transformed into a gateway for international politics and economic manoeuvres. Anthropologists should have a responsibility to bring the harsh political and economic circumstances with which these people are dealing to a broader audience. The contributors to this volume were free to approach the Kel Tamasheq from a wide range of themes, angles and regions. Our aim in this book is to identify a population living in deserted areas in the central Sahara and on its Sahelian fringes in the context of 'global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange'.¹ While on the one hand complex mobilities and interconnections with economic and cultural flows² characterize the globe today, we are faced on the other hand with more fortified territorial borders and strengthened political boundaries. As a transnational society, the Kel Tamasheq are wedged in between. The Sahara and Sahel are in the periphery in terms of global flows. Geographically, these regions are far from the global centres, even far from the centres of the periphery, which is the category into which North

African and sub-Saharan cities fall.³ Thus, the Kel Tamasheq occupy a peripheral position within the periphery. As they oscillate between resistance and accommodation, they have found several ways of dealing with global networks, the examples of which can be found in this volume.

On the title of this chapter we want to stress three points. The word Tuareg, which is still used in anthropological literature, is a colonial construct, so in this volume we prefer to abandon foreign designations and concentrate on emic terms. We thus remedy an outdated approach that excludes nomads from the globalized world and associates them with a declining society. We should like to focus on local transformation and creative engagement by considering the Kel Tamasheq as embedded in the global 'scapes'.⁴

The word 'moving' implies that we are dealing with and participating in global discourses. In recent years, Kel Tamasheq have been nomads, residents and borderliners⁵ who deal very actively with supralocal influences. Moving means agency, actively negotiating within a global space. Mobility has always been a crucial factor in acting successfully in the Sahara. Recent forms of mobility go beyond the movements of nomads with their livestock, but challenge national loyalties and policies in their translocal, transregional, or transnational design.

Through a sense of the 'global' we should like to emphasize that the Sahara is not an isolated area apart from supralocal influences; it is a space of transition, agency and of movements of the people, goods and ideas that supralocal and global impulses power and activate.⁶ Global interweaving can have several different local effects because Kel Tamasheq society is a heterogeneous construction with an assortment of forms of living and acting depending on their respective place and time. Global interconnectedness means more than the intensification of economic, political, cultural and ecological circuits. Following Harvey,⁷ globalization is a process of speeding up and a manifestation of a changing experience in time and space.

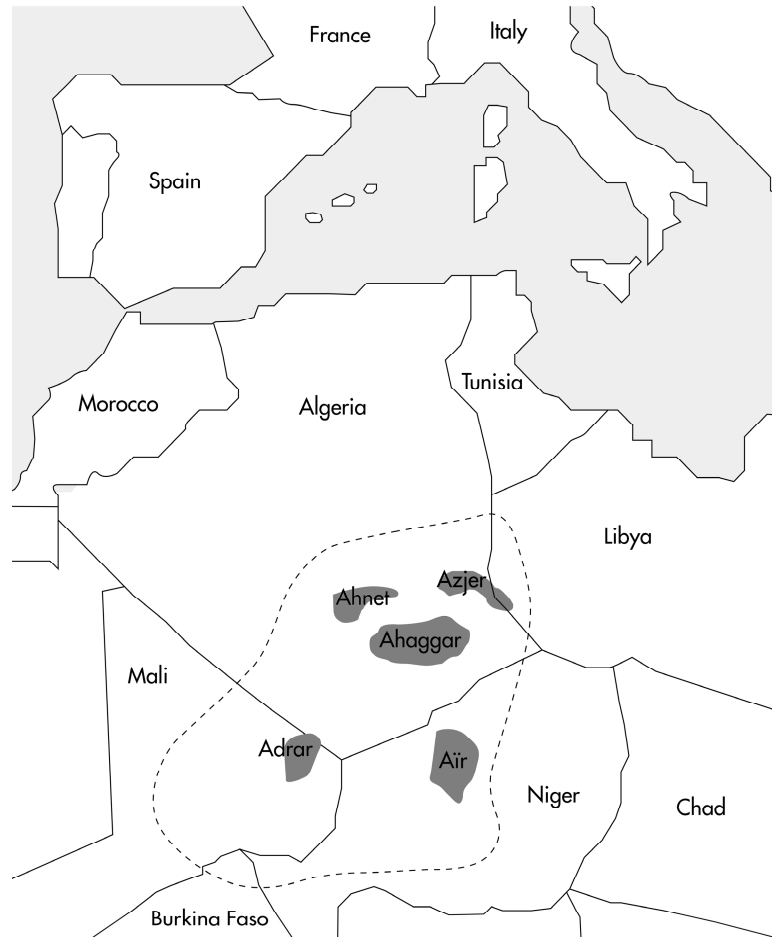
Shrinking space and compressed time became evident among the Kel Tamasheq during the insurgence in Niger in 2007, when the rebels posted film of all their missions on the internet. People all over the world could virtually take part in the attacks the rebels carried out. Improved modes of communication and information, together with more rational forms of mobility, have made it possible for Kel Tamasheq to engage more actively with their surrounding world. With the introduction of the internet,

satellite communications and greater use of four-by-four cars, the Kel Tamasheq were able to establish a new space of agency in the central Sahara.⁸

These newly developed strategies often go beyond national loyalties but they never disturb or undermine the national economies. 'On the contrary, they can make remarkable contributions to the subordinate economies by smoothing the imbalance of the national systems.'⁹ These new possibilities pull the Sahara and Sahel out of its peripheral position, and bring the whole region a bit closer to the rest of the globalized world. This development can go even further. The Sahara and the Sahel turn into an economic and political playground. Global players are looking for new resources to absorb the increasing consumption in the West.

Before going on to give a short description of the chapters and topics in this volume, it may be helpful to outline some of the main events in the political history of these people. The Kel Tamasheq live in the central Sahara and on its Sahelian fringes at the gateway between Maghrebian, Arab and West African influences. Official agencies estimate their numbers at approximately one-and-a-half million, while the Kel Tamasheq believe it to be closer to three million. The variation does not rely on any reliable census but is dependent on the political stake represented by the ethnic demography in respective African states.¹⁰ Until the colonial period the Kel Tamasheq acted autonomously and interacted successfully with the surrounding societies.

Five mountains served as central 'meeting points' in the Sahara and around them smaller social groupings of Kel Tamasheq were formed. The five mountains define the corners of a virtual parallelogram. The Ahaggar in Algeria, a powerful volcanic mountain in the centre of the Sahara, developed as the territorial home of the Kel Ahaggar, the inhabitants of this mountain. To its east, the Tassili n Azjer, a high narrow plateau located between Algeria and Libya, accommodates the Kel Azjer. The Ahnet and Mouydir mountains to the northwest of the Ahaggar are where the Taytoq and Kel Ahnet reside. To the south, the Aïr in Niger, which is a continuation of the same range, became home to the Kel Aïr. The Adâf n Ifuñas, the smallest of the massifs, is the centre for Kel Adâf in Mali. Later on other groups, like the Kel Azawad, the Kel Gress, the Kel Denneg, the Iwellemmeden, the Kel Ataram or the Kel Tademekkat have developed in the Sahel.



Sketch of the Kel Tamasheq area in the Sahara and Sahel (from Anja Fischer, *Nomaden der Sahara: Handeln in Extremen*, Berlin: Reimer-Verlag, 2008, p. 29).

The forced penetration of European armies into the Sahara in the mid-nineteenth century profoundly changed the social, political and economic structure of the Kel Tamasheq. Ottoman, French, British and Italian troops entered central Sahara from different directions, occupied the five poles and imposed their own colonial administration. The flexible, permeable nomadic boundaries between the various groups of Kel Tamasheq were severed and new colonial frontiers were established with a view to serving the purely economically motivated expansion of European interests.

Following decolonization and the subsequent independence of African nation-states in the 1960s, impenetrable frontiers were set up in the Sahara and Sahel, which are seen as a clear manifestation of the modern state. The Kel Tamasheq were thus split between five completely different states with different school systems, competitive economies and hostile political ideologies. The five artificial countries – Niger, Algeria, Libya, Mali and Burkina Faso – took over not only the colonial borders but also the European models of states and democracy. The new states maintained their centres of power in Niamey, Algiers, Tripoli, Bamako and Ouagadougou respectively, thousands of kilometres away from the Kel Tamasheq areas.

These recent political groupings, built on the Western model of the nation-state, have produced a new type of territoriality. In each of these states, the desert zones frequented by the nomads are situated on the periphery. ... This is why in the Sahara the modern states are viewed as machines for turning out minorities who are relegated to the margins of the new centralities which are settled and urban, and in other respects separated from their ancient poles of attraction.¹¹

The newborn states showed no consideration for the social, political and territorial integrity of the Kel Tamasheq and other societies like the Peul (Fulbe, Wodabee) or Berber (*Imazirén*), but in fact established their marginalization. Because membership and belonging are now divided into national categories, the Kel Tamasheq have become partial minorities even in their own areas. Thus, one speaks of 'Algerian Tuareg', 'Libyan *Imbar*' or 'Kel Mali'.

The political division has also resulted in a splitting of the language. Whereas all Kel Tamasheq living in the Sahara speak their own language, those in the cities are forced to communicate in French, Bambara, Hausa or Arabic. If they do not turn to these foreign languages and adapt to local habits they immediately lose their already precarious position in the political or economic environment. The Kel Tamasheq of today are forced to create new strategies to overcome their radical break in traditional structures.

A new development is exacerbating the Kel Tamasheq's current situation: up until now former colonial powers, especially France, have been present in the Sahara and functioned in the background as political 'watchdogs'. Now new forces, like China and the United States, have

come along and want to join the scramble for the natural resources and exhaustible raw materials that are becoming rare in their own countries. The presence of oil and gas in Libya and Algeria, and uranium in Niger have created huge problems and, in 2007, led to a rebellion breaking out among the Kel Tamasheq of Niger, followed shortly thereafter by those of Mali. The Kel Tamasheq face brand-new global circumstances, which once again challenge their society. In this book we should like to address the recent consequences of global influences on Kel Tamasheq society. We aim to locate the Kel Tamasheq in a global space and examine a Saharan life in transition at a theoretical, historical and practical level.

The first three chapters in Part I, 'Where is Saharan Anthropology Going?' clarify new tendencies in the social anthropology of the region and concentrate on new approaches in research on nomads. Anja Fischer examines the current position of nomads and discusses recent theoretical approaches. She asks if the concept of nomadism is still adequate in the age of globalization and argues that, by overcoming Eurocentrism in postmodern nomadology, one can attempt to develop a new holistic approach, a Saharan nomadology. Alessandra Giuffrida explores different categories and variations of mobility and stasis in the Sahara and Sahel. She argues that mobility among the Kel Tamasheq is a system as well as a strategy, and that examining mobility in systemic terms beyond pastoralism can help us to understand structural fluidity and change in contemporary Kel Tamasheq societies. Baz Lecocq looks at how the pastoral nomads' cultural and social capital decisively influence the ways in which they participate in a globalizing urban world. He argues that the essential element in shaping the participation of groups and individuals in patterns of globalization and the creation of a cosmopolitan environment is found in the shape, constitution and potential of human networks rather than in the form of mobility.

The contributors to Part II – 'From Past to Present: Ongoing Discourses' – connect historic factors to recent changes occasioned by globalization, which have led to ongoing discussions about slavery, social stratification and reactions to foreign influences. Gerd Spittler analyses the relationship between cloth and identity among the Kel Ewey and raises the question of whether the Kel Ewey of Timia have a greater sense of tradition than other groups, and whether foreign commodities are important to their identity. Dida Badi looks at traditional social stratification and, through examining sedentary processes in Algeria,

shows to what extent changing land rights affect social strata; he also delves into the origin of the binary structure that presses the Kel Tamasheq into a system of vassals and nobles. Benedetta Rossi gives a detailed overview of the status of the *iklan*, former slaves, and focuses on transformations of social hierarchies from 1850 to the present. She examines epistemological shifts in terminology, identity and status and refers to the last 20 years during which the political mobilization of slaves took place.

Part III of the book – ‘Diversified Norms and Values’ – deals with changing norms and values. Annemarie Bouman focuses on marriages and marriage payments among the *iklan* in Burkina Faso. She discusses marital payments, refers to issues like fertility, domestic labour and sexuality, and raises the provocative question of whether marriage payments in money rather than in goods compromise women’s agency and turn the institution of marriage into a modern form of slavery. Susan Rasmussen explores changing concepts of the body, particularly female fatness or sense of beauty among Kel Tamasheq in Mali. She focuses on relations between local and global processes and asks to what extent they have changed among rural communities and in the urban context. Ines Kohl deals with the attractiveness of Libya for impoverished *ishumar* from Mali and Niger, Gaddafi’s national strategy of attracting young nomads and the complex relationships between locals and newcomers. Furthermore, she describes how changing structures of belonging and settlement are modifying the *ishumar* movement and turning irresponsible *ishumar* into proper *Imajeřen*. Nadia Belalimat focuses on the musical style ‘*al guitara*’ and how from the 1970s to the beginning of the twenty-first century globalization has affected the topics of the songs and the contexts of the performances. She also gives examples of local *ishumar* bands entering the world music scene. Marko Scholze describes how Kel Tamasheq are becoming actively involved in tourism and on which strategies and resources they rely to succeed. In becoming acquainted with the modern world these people are creating their own subculture within the society, mixing modern and traditional elements to form a unique cultural blend.

The contributors to the last part of the book – ‘Sahara: Global Playground’ – face up to the fact that the Sahara and Sahel region is becoming more and more of a playground for global actors. Sarah Lunacek describes Kel Tamasheq relations with Europeans and the ambiguous meanings, images and perceptions that Kel Tamasheq have

constructed of the so-called *ikujar*. Her focus is on looking at the meaning of development by examining development projects at a personal level through the narratives, opinions and comments of people involved in them. Finally, Jeremy Keenan deals with the recent problematic situation in the Sahara and the rebellion that broke out in the north of Niger in February 2007. After describing the causes of the rebellion, he turns to the global 'war on terror' that the United States unleashed in combination with European and Chinese forces and the manoeuvrings of several secret services to obtain power in the Sahara-Sahel region and gain access to uranium and oil resources.

The various chapters in this book clarify the plurality of Kel Tamasheq society. It is a society in which one finds people adopting different strategies for living and acting, in which nomadism coexists alongside all kinds of sedentary lifestyles, in which transnational movements impose harsh local state sanctions, in which tribal affiliations collide with national loyalties and in which people adopt a range of strategies either to elude supralocal influences or merely to join the global process.