SOULEYMANE DIALLO

“The Truth about the Desert”

Exile, Memory, and the Making of Communities among Malian Tuareg Refugees in Niger

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Content

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Cologne, April 2017 Souleymane Diallo

Summary

This publication examines the diasporic living conditions and their effects on Tuareg refugees' self-understandings, changing socio-political hierarchies, cultural practices and religious identity formations in Niger. It focuses, in particular, on male refugees's responses to the loss in social status and respectability induced by adverse conditions of exile. Unlike most others, it is not a study of a Tuareg polity with a traditional emphasis on the nobility, whose loss in power, and status, and alterations in nomadic and semi-nomadic life style in the course of twentieth century due to droughts, and famine induced exile, and the persecution or simple neglect of northern populations by the Malian central state have been documented by scholars over the past decades. Instead, this book offers an ethnography of two Tuareg groups of inferior social status, and examines arguments and social practices by which the two refugees groups in Niger redefine themselves as two social collectivities in response to their living conditions in exile. It argues that by presenting themselves as collectives, the refugees groups redefine their inferior social status in the Tuareg society left back home in northern Mali.

One protagonist group is composed of free-born non-noble, white or red Tuareg, who fled Mali to settle in urban Niamey between 1963 and 2012. The second group of refugees comprises the unfree Bellah-Iklan who came from Menaka region and live since 2012 with several other non-Bellah-Iklan refugees in Abala, southern Niger, in a refugee camp administered by the UNHCR. In spite of significant differences between the situation in Niamey and Abala, in both settings, a situation of material deprivation and rampant structural or enforced unemployment, and experiences of being treated with hostility or arrogance, as foreign, dependent and supplicant undermine male refugees' sense of dignity, male honor and respectability, fuel intergenerational struggles over economic and moral responsabilities and obligations, and intra-marital conflicts.

These conditions prompt the refugees with vassal social status background to imagine all white free-born Tuareg as a homogenous social collective, "a Tuareg people", and through this, the informants in urban Niamey seek to become equal to the noble groups at the top of the social structure by blurring intra vassal cleavages and variations between free-nobles and the nobility. In their part, the unfree born, Bellah-Iklan refer to their living conditions in Abala, common history of servitude, and subjection, their racial and also their religious identity as well as marginalization within the Malian nation-state, as reasons to renounce membership in the Tuareg ethnic group, and to claim a common identity as "Black people of the desert" in the exile situation. Through this claim, the Bellah-Iklan reflexively downplay intra-Bellah-Iklan cleavages and redefine themselves as morally superior and the powerful group in relation to the free white Tuareg, implying a significant inversion of power vectors between the former Tuareg masters and the former slaves.

While this book analyses in fine detail these refugees' arguments in several chapters, one chapter examines how both groups of informants define their membership of the social collective they express attachment through daily practices. In Niamey, these daily practices consist of visiting each other, listening to Tuareg music by Tinariwen, speaking Tamasheq, their language back home, clothing, through endogamy, mutual solidarity, and the desire to return back home in the future. In Abala, the Bellah-Iklan express their membership to the social collective through attending male conversations under the hangar in the refugee camp, mutual solidarity, endogamy, the desire to return back home to change the political imbalance between them and the free-born Tuareg in Menaka, and listening to guitar music by the Bellah-Iklan musical group while rejecting free Tuareg music. These practices not only express the differences, for example, between free-born Tuareg refugees and their neighbors, Hausa, and Zarma Niamey, or between the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg in Abala, but also they differentiate the informants of this study from other free-born Tuareg refugees who did not engage in the mentioned bonding practices in Niamey, and from other Bellah-Iklan who do not come to the Hangar, creating new lines of in-group cleavages that, ultimately, make their project of an all-inclusive community formations unfinished at this stage.

To understand these dynamics of constructing in-group inclusions and exclusions in the Nigerien diaspora, this book centers on the following aspects: exile as a transformative social experience; the "interplay of narratives and moral projects"; and stereotyping as reflexive social practice. The analysis draws on the literature on productive repercussions of the social conditions of exile; the theoretical spheres of studies of memory; and, finally, to the body of literature on stereotyping, and ethnicity. The results afford a much more dynamic understandings of Tuareg socio-political hierarchies, and highlight refugees' aspirations and capacities to remake their imaginary and material worlds through moralizing labels and racial stereotypes that reformulate their own social and ethnic identity in the face of adverse and often deeply humiliating living conditions. By highlighting the dynamic nature of moralizing discourses, and their relevance to collective identity formations, and how "othering" practices entail the positing not only of social difference, but of moral hierarchies, the study contributes to the anthropology of morality, anthropological debates on ethnicity, and memory politics.

1. Introduction

1.1 The scope of the study

In recent decades, the Niger Republic[1] has become an important destination for thousands of refugees fleeing hunger, political persecution, and recurrent ethnic conflicts as well as rebellions in northern Mali. By the beginning of 1973, over 13,000 Malian refugees had already arrived in Niger (Boilley 1999; Bonnecase 2010a; Bonnecase 2010b; Bonnecase 2011). A more recent census by UNHCR suggests that the number of displaced Malians in Niger had increased to around 50,000 persons by 2013.[2] This publication focuses on Tuareg refugees who formed a significant part of this number in 2012.[3] It examines narrative accounts and social practices through which two groups of Tuareg refugees redefined themselves as two distinct collectivities in response to the predicaments induced by exile. This book stresses that the constitutions of the refugees' collectivities entail redefinitions of the (former) social status hierarchy that existed in Tuareg society back home in northern Mali (cf. Bourgeot 1990; Bourgeot 1995; Grémont 2010; Hureiki 2003; Klute 1992a; Lecocq 2010).

1.1.1 A study of two Tuareg groups of inferior social status

The two protagonist groups of Tuareg at the center of this ethnographic study live in two different locations under contrasting conditions in Niger. One group of informants is composed of free-born, non-noble, white or red Tuareg.[4] They historically formed an inferior social status group that stands below the free-born nobles and above the unfree Tuareg, the former slaves.[5] They live interspersed with non-refugee residents in urban Niamey, the capital town of the Niger Republic. Originally, these white or red Tuareg inhabited the northern regions of Mali (Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal). They fled to Niamey between 1963 and 2012. While

1 The Niger Republic is located northeast of Mali.
2 Point de presse du 10 Novembre 2015 par l'Agence des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés.
3 It should be noted that this number does not trace refugees's temporary movements back home and to Niger between 1970 and 2012.
4 I use the term "free-born Tuareg" to refer to those conventionally called free–white Tuareg or former masters in the literature. The population of free white Tuareg is quite diverse in Niamey. They are mainly Idnan, Idiaroussouwane, Chamanamas; Kel Essuk, Tagat Mallat, Ifergoumoussen, Ishadenharen, Kel Amdiliste, Immakalkalen, Iradianaten, Dawsahak, Kel Ullili, Ikougandène, Kel Talatayt, and Kel Antsar. Despite their diversity, they can be roughly categorized as free-born, white, non-noble people, and free-born white, noble Tuareg. My research focused on the non-noble white Tuareg who are inferiror to nobles.
5 I will refer to them as free-born or white/red Tuareg throughout this book.

some arrived in Niger between 1963 and 1968,[6] others left Mali due to the well-known devastating droughts in 1973–1974 and 1983–1984, and the ethnic conflicts in the 1990s and later in 2012. The second group of refugees comprises the unfree, Bellah-Iklan[7], known as former slaves. This group comes from the area surrounding Menaka in the Gao region. Since 2012, they have lived with several other non-Bellah-Iklan refugees in Abala, southern Niger, in a refugee camp administered by the UNHCR.[8]

When the Bellah-Iklan were asked about what motivated their violent and abrupt departure to Niger, they contended that the free white Tuareg have singled them out and subjected them to collective violence. They also explained that in order to understand the roots of the current conflict between themselves and the free-born Tuareg in Menaka, it is important to reflect upon the political processes that have been at work since the early 1990s. For instance, some informants stressed the importance of the formation of a political party (UMADD) in 1992 and later the creation of a propaganda radio station by Bellah-Iklan in Menaka.[9] The radio station had introduced a weekly public discussion program that centered on the history of the desert. More specifically, the radio program, called "Tessayt n-Azawagh" (literally, assessing the history of *Azawagh*: read desert), broadcast and called for critical conversations about the historical status of social groups in northern Mali. These actions began to undermine the domination of the free white Tuareg. For example, according to informants in Abala, the Bellah-Iklan organized themselves and succeeded in electing Aghamad Ag Azam-zim as Deputy of Menaka between 1992 and 1997, which marked a victory for the former slaves over the former masters as Aghamad Ag Azam-zim had defeated the noble free white Tuareg, and Bajan Ag Hamatou, the leader of the Tuareg Ouillimeden

6 Since most military operations of and subsequent restrictions from the Malian authorities around that time took place in the region of Kidal, the informants I met in Niamey who fled this conflict were also from this region.

7 The term "unfree-born" or "Bellah-Iklan" refers to former Tuareg slaves at the bottom of the social structure (Hall 2011b). While they are called Iklan, in the Kidal region they are referred to as Bellah, a term originating from the Songhay word, gaa-bibi, meaning Black person in the area surrounding Menaka and the Niger Bend. See also Lecocq (Lecocq 2005, 48). A third name often used to refer the former slaves in northern Mali is Haratin, but this is mostly used for former slaves of the Arabs, another important social group living in northern Mali who have not attracted scholarly attention as compared to the Tuareg (see Scheele 2012; Scheele 2013). My dissertation focuses on the Bellah-Iklan who primarily come from the following fractions: Dabakar, Kel Talatayt, Ishadenharen, Kel Abaket, Kel Essuk, Kel Tabonant Bellah, Tagassassante, Elhadji Moussa, Ikarkawane, Tarbanassa, Tamizguida Bellah, Ibhawane, Kel Tabonan Imajorène, Tamizguida Imajorène. Igueressanane-Tabaho, Kel Tessayt, Targuitamant Wan Adrar, Targuitamant wan Agayok, Zamburuten, Kel Talamène, and Ikarabassan.

8 According to the census conducted by UNHCR between 2012 and 2013, an estimated number of 11,795 persons live in the refugee camp of Abala. The findings stemming from this survey classify 68% of refugees in the camp as unfree-born Tuareg, referred to as former slaves or Bellah-Iklan, followed by 19% of Hausa, 10% Songhay, and 2% Fulani; 1% were free-born Tuareg.

9 The radio station is called radio Adrar.

in Menaka.[10] Others still pointed to the creation of the association, *temedt* (placenta), as another major event that exacerbated the tension between the free-and unfree-born Tuareg in the area around Menaka. This tension stemmed in particular from the fact that the association took on the role of a human rights activist by fighting for the Bellah-Iklan's freedom from domestic or herding slavery, which is still practiced by "free white Tuareg" in twentieth (first) century northern Mali (Lecocq 2005, see also Lecocq 2015, 194f.). This tension culminated in the expulsion of the former Bellah-Iklan from Menaka and its surrounding area in 2012. I divided my fieldwork between these two social locations in Niger, and this division is reflected in the book. The first part of each chapter will focus on the free white Tuareg in Niamey, while the second concentrates on the Bellah-Iklan in the refugee camp at Abala.

In Niamey, the group of free-born white Tuareg I examined during my fieldwork interpreted their exile as one episode in a sequence of Tuareg suffering that began in Mali and will only end once they return there. They explained this through the belief that this long history of suffering had induced their consciousness of themselves as a collectivity, *tumast tan kel tamasheq* ("Kel *Tamasheq*" people[11]), which can be conceptualized as one homogenous community encompassing all free-born Tuareg in northern Mali. They argued that this collectivity will offer better living conditions to free-born Tuareg after their return to northern Mali in the future.

For them, however, the consciousness of this collectivity involves cancelling out historical cleavages and social differences between the free white Tuareg' constellations in northern Mali that have been emphasized in research on the subject (cf. Grémont 2010; Hureiki 2003; Klute 1992a, 2013; Lecocq 2010).[12] This constellation also implies the homogenization of social status differences that distinguish free white nobles from non-noble, free white Tuareg. I argue that by claiming homogeneity that blurs the social status variations between free non-noble and free noble white Tuareg, the informants I met in Niamey sought to redefine their inferior social status and become equal to the free white, noble Tuareg groups.

While the free-born Tuareg informants presented themselves as "the Tuareg people" in exile in Niamey, the unfree-born Bellah-Iklan in Abala referred to themselves as "*le peuple noir du désert*" (the black people of the desert).[13] They

10 The same argument has been used to support Mossis Bocoum, the former Mayor of Menaka. However, unexpectedly (from the unfree's side), since 1997 the former political dominant clans have won the other parliamentary elections.

11 According to Lecocq, the term means either "people" or "nation" (2002, 200).

12 I will present these scholarly accounts in chapter 3. While these accounts focused on specific regional groups, for example, Kel Adagh in Kidal, Ouillimeden in Menaka, I focus on informants from all of these regions.

13 The Bellah-Iklan informants used the expression *tumast ta kawalet n azawagh* (literately, the black people of Azawagh) or just called themselves in French "le peuple noir du désert" or "les noirs." I will call them the Bellah-Iklan throughout this book, thus adopting the denomination used by Hall (Hall 2011a; Hall 2011b).

imagined themselves as a collectivity defined by race, their inferior social status, experiences of exile, and a long history of marginality *vis-à-vis* Tuareg local clans as well as the Malian state. For them, the theological development of their suffering would eventually result in freedom and prosperity upon their return from exile to Mali. This serves as the basis of their consciousness as a collective, the *peuple noir*, which they believe will allow them to return to Mali and alter the imbalance of power between the Bellah-Iklan and the free white Tuareg in the area surrounding Menaka.

The informants in Abala stressed that being a collective of the *peuple noir* first involves the homogenizing of status between different Tuareg former slave categories that Hall, for instance, emphasizes in his four social types of the Bellah-Iklan (Hall 2011b, 67f.).[14] Hall argues, as an example, that under colonial rule, there were those Bellah who practiced agriculture for part of the year and owed their free-born masters a share of the harvest. Hall called these the *Iklan n eguef*. Until late 1949, these Bellah-Iklan were officially taxed and administered by their masters unless otherwise stipulated by the colonial administration.[15] Another category of Bellah-Iklan that Hall presents are those who constituted autonomous groups of herders (*iklan n tenere*). Characteristically, these people were usually under the control of a larger federation led by non-slaves. The third type in Hall's classification are those who lived with masters in domestic settings (*iklan daw ehan*). It was these domestic slaves who were the most likely to remain the longest with their masters. The fourth type of Bellah-Iklan are those who left their masters to settle in towns[16] (Hall 2011b, 68). The accounts from the refugee informants in Abala also indicate that being the collectivity of the *peuple noir* involves redefining their group identity as non-Tuareg people in contrast to their former masters. Examining these claims, I shall show that by reconstructing themselves as non-Tuareg people, the informants in the refugee camp in Abala also redefined the former social status hierarchy that had existed between the Bellah-Iklan and the free white Tuareg in a radical way.

Studying the two groups of refugees of inferior social status from their own perspectives will complement scholarly accounts that have focused on Tuareg societies from the point of view of free, white, and politically dominant groups (e.g. Boilley 1999; Grémont 2010; Hureiki 2003; Lecocq 2010; Lecocq 2004; Lecocq

14 See also Klute for an overview on similar classifications of the Bellah-Iklan (Klute 1995).

15 However, Hall stresses that in 1949, the French government introduced a policy of taxing the Bellah-Iklan directly, rather than indirectly through their masters.

16 Hall reports that the colonial administration feared that these people acted as advocates for other Bellah-Iklan to leave their masters. For example, in a report on the Tuareg Kel Sidi Ali in 1950, the French administrator Henri Leroux indicated that "the emancipated and settled elements [of the Bellah-Iklan] in Timbuktu rapidly became the champions of Bellah emancipation and the counselors for their brothers still in the tribe." It is they who gave the first asylum and assured the subsistence of the new fugitives (Hall 2011b, 67f.).

2005).[17] The results will generate new insights into debates on changes in the relations between different social status categories in the Tuareg societies in northern Mali on two levels. On one level, this study will contribute to scholarly discussions about changes in the relations between non-noble, free white and noble white Tuareg (Boilley 1999; Klute 2003; Klute 2013). For example, Klute traces how the non-noble, free white Tuareg of vassal social origin sought to challenge the social status hierarchy between them and the free, white, noble, and politically dominant groups, the *Ifoghas*, by claiming the social status of autochthons in the Kidal region (Klute 2003). However, while Klute's account discusses how the non-noble, free white Tuareg sought to challenge the domination of the noble free whites by emphasizing their differences (2003), I examine how free white Tuareg of inferior status sought to become equal to noble white Tuareg by blurring differences, (therefore emphasizing commonality) between themselves and the noble free white Tuareg groups.[18] On the second level, this study will offer insights into on how the long-standing conflicted relations between the Bellah-Iklan and their former masters since the colonial era informed contemporary social processes of the refugees' constructions of collectivity in both Niamey and Abala (Hall 2011b; Lecocq 2005).

1.1.2 An ethnography of male social conditions and imaginations in exile

This study is based on a dense ethnographic exploration of the biographies of men interviewed while I completed my field research in Niamey and Abala. It reflects on how these men articulated their group identities with specific aspects of their conditions of exile. To quickly introduce these men here using the pseudonyms I assigned them, Mossa Ag Attaher, Ibrahim Ag Irgimit, Alhabib Ag Sidi, and Ibrahim Ag Mohamed were the main informants in Niamey town.[19] Mossa Ag Attaher, a quiet and relatively tall free white Tuareg man was the first informant I met a few days after I arrived in Niamey in 2012. As I remarked on several occasions, Mossa only became talkative once the discussions among peers focused on the free-born Tuaregs past or culture in Mali and the present conditions in Niamey. He was born in 1961 in Gossi (near Gao town). Mossa arrived in Niamey as a refugee for the first time in 1973 at the age of 12. During that time, he had fled with

17 What is remarkable is that very few studies that explicitly focused on the Bellah-Iklan approached them from the perspective of the former masters (Klute 1995), or the colonial archive itself dominated by local racial discourses as Hall insistently suggested (Hall 2011a; Lecocq 2005).

18 As I argue throughout this book, claiming commonlality between free non-noble Tuareg and noble free white Tuareg groups is a response to informants's longer history of suffering in Mali and Niger. At the same time, the refugees's claims introduce long-standing tense relations between the free non-noble Tuareg and noble free white Tuareg groups. Seen in this light, the claims show that there is no agreement on the social status hierarchy between them.

19 I have given pseudonyms to all free-born Tuareg informants and their relatives in this book.

his parents to Niger due to the drought that had devastated their entire livestock in northern Mali. On their arrival in Niger, the state first hosted them in the refugee camp of Lazaré in suburban Niamey, and they were later transferred to Hamdallaye, about sixty kilometers from Niamey.[20] After the closure of Hamdallaye, Mossa Ag Attaher returned to Gossi with his parents, who had divorced in the meantime, and Mossa stayed with his father. Like many of his generation, he had been unable to stay in Gossi because his family's resources had been devastated in the preceding years by the drought. Moreover, before they overcame the consequences of the first drought, a second arrived in 1983–1984, leading to the decimation of what the returnees had managed to build to provide subsistence. Under such circumstances, he and several of his peers moved back to Niger in search of employment. As Mossa told me, his lack of education made it difficult to find formal employment. He then began to work as a guard and currently works for the French organization, IRD. His wife, Fadimata, is a free white Tuareg woman (from the *Ifoghas*' clan) who was born in the Gossi region. She also relocated to Niamey under the same circumstances at the time she met Mossa Ag Attaher. They got married in 1985 and now have four children: Iba (27), Ibrahim (21), Mohamed (17), and Mariam (14). With the exception of her daughter Mariam, their children all quit their education before finishing elementary school and have since been moving between jobs as either waiters or security guards in restaurants and private domiciles in Niamey, Lomé Cotonou, and Burkina Faso. During my fieldwork, Mossa's family home was chosen as a gathering place where several free-born Tuareg from northern Mali in Niger regularly met and socialized around the tea kettle. It was on one of these occasions that I met the second man, whom I call Mohamed Ag Irgimit.

Mohamed is also a free-born red or white Tuareg who originally comes from the same group as Mossa Ag Attaher and also has a vassal social background. He was born in the midst of the 1960s in Bamba near Bourem in the Gao region. He also came to the Lazaré refugee camp and later transferred to Hamdallaye in the 1970s at the age of 6. There, he was adopted by a French couple who were volunteering as humanitarian workers in the refugee camp at the time. Thus he went to school under the care of this couple until his graduation with a Degree in Law at the University Abdou Moumouny in Niamey. Since then, he has been working for several transnational structures in Niger. Mohamed is married with two wives and he has five children. The oldest of his children, Anna (now 30 years), was about to complete her Master's degree in sociology at the University Abdou Moumouni in Niamey in 2012. She was already married but had no kids at the time I met her in 2012. Anna's brother, whom I refer to as Noni, is now 27 years old. He is the

20 Bonnecase gives further details about the camp in Hamdallaye, established as a replacement for its predecessor in Lazaré. The main reason evoked for this was to satisfy the growing demand from the urban population of Niamey who viewed the refugees's presence in Lazaré as a threat to their security (Bonnecase 2008).

son of Mohamed Ag Irgimit's first wife, Annatou. At the time we met, Noni had been working for four years with the French company Areva, in northern Niger. Noni's three younger brothers, respectively 9, 7, and 4 years old, go to school in Niamey. Like Mossa, several free-born Tuareg visited Mohamed at his home after work. They sat on plastic mats around the tea kettle in the yard, which latter had been filled with sand and reminded them of "their past harmonious desert life" in Niamey.[21]

The pseudonym Alhabib Ag Sidi is used for the third man who I frequently interviewed. He is from the Tessalit area, in the Kidal region, where he was born in the 1950s. Originally, he is from *Iradianaten*'s fraction.[22] Alhabib left the region for Algeria in the aftermath of the Tuareg's first rebellion and the drought in 1973. From there, he moved on to Libya and ended up in Niamey where he has lived since 1983. Upon his arrival in Niamey, he began to work as a car driver for Belgian NGOs. There, he currently leads the Malian refugees' association in Niamey.[23] His wife is originally from the *Immakalkalen* group (near Bourem in the Gao region). Alhabib has four children, although his oldest daughter unfortunately passed away two years ago. His second oldest, Rabbi, is studying law at the university Abdou Moumouni in Niamey. Her brother Youssouf (29 years old) has completed his education in Niamey and is currently employed with the custom services in Niger. Like the other men introduced above, Alhabib's retiree status allowed him more free time to talk, and to visit and be visited by peers at home, and people constantly came to his home starting at breakfast time at 7 am and ending only at dinner time, around 8 pm. Moreover, Alhabib played a crucial role in helping newly arrived refugees with their registration and had turned his homestead into an important socializing space for many free white Tuareg. These visits gave him the opportunity to engage in conversations about Tuareg history.

Ibrahim Ag Mohamed**,** the fourth white Tuareg man, was born in 1978 in the area of Gossi. Originally, he comes from the vassal social background. He first arrived in Niamey with his parents from the area around Gossi due to the devastating drought of the 1980s. A year after their arrival Ibrahim's father passed away. In the early 1990s, they went back to Mali and returned again to Niamey in 1994 due to the civil war. Since then, Ibrahim has traveled to Lomé and Cotonou several times in search of seasonal employment. During these years, he learned and mastered the guitar and founded the group Inor meaning the light. Ibrahim works currently as a security guard and lives with his sister, mother, and a close friend Alhousseyni, another red Tuareg from around Gossi. Indeed, Alhousseyni and Ibrahim first met in Lomé where they have both worked as seasonal employees

21 Mohamed transported sand from the dunes around Niamey to cover the ground in his courtyard.

22 This fraction has been depicted as being politically allied with the dominant groups, called the Ifoghas, in the Adagh, but it is not considered to be a free noble warrior group. A fraction can be conceptualized as a socially organized herding unit (see Diallo 2008; elsewhere Bjørklund 1990; Bjørklund 2003).

23 There is an association called Comité des Réfugiés that deals with registrations issues in Niamey.

since the 1990s. After a first failed marriage, Ibrahim remarried in 2013. His new wife is also a white or red Tuareg woman originally from the vassal group in the Timbuktu region. Ibrahim's status as a musician along with his constant good humor was manifested in his use of anecdotes throughout conversations, and this made him relatively famous among his peers in Niamey. This explains partly why no matter the time of the day, there were constantly several young free-born Tuareg coming to pass the time with him at his shop along Tillabery road in southern Niamey.

In Abala, my exploration focused on the accounts and social practices of three men and how these men of Bellah-Iklan origin redefined the Bellah-Iklan as "a people." Unlike the free-born Tuareg in Niamey, who requested that I keep their names anonymous, I use the real names of the Bellah-Iklan men per their request. The first, Inawélène Aklinine, was born in 1956 in Anderboukane near Menaka. Originally, his father was a slave in the *Kel Agayok* fraction of the *Dawsahak*.[24] Since Inawélène went to school in his early years, he was able to escape domestic work with the *Dawsahak*. He dropped out of formal education just after elementary school, and has since then moved from one temporary job to another, including working at the community health center in Anderboukane for several years and working as a translator for NGOs near Anderboukane and Menaka at other times. Inawélène is married with two wives and nine children. He has, since its creation in 1992, been one of the leaders of the unfree-born pro-political party (UMADD). He moved from Anderboukane together with his family members to a refugee camp in Abala as a result of an outbreak of violence in 2012. Between 2012 and 2014, he worked as an assistant and translator for NGO workers in the camp. Besides his working hours, Inawélène spent most of the day between the hangar gathering and Ahiyou's place.

The second man, Assalim Ehatt, was born in the late 1950s near Menaka where he lived until his exile to Niger in 2012. He originally comes from the *Kel-Tabonant Bellah*'s fraction from Menaka and its surrounding area. Like Inawélène from Anderboukane, Assalim fled in 2012 and has been living in the Abala refugee camp ever since. There, he lives with his two wives, six children, and two sisters. Before their exile, Assalim worked as an independent artist, a musician, and as the host of a radio program at the pro-Bellah local radio station in Menaka. He has been

24 Some controversies exist about whether the *Dawsahak* belong to the Tuareg or not, and what their position is in the Tuareg social structure. In the literature, for example, there seems to be no consensus about their genealogy. According to French historian Charles Grémont, some of the *Dawsahak* trace their genealogy back to the ancestor of the Ifoghas, Aiitta, the ruling clans of the Kel Adagh in the Kidal region (see Grémont 2010, 117f.). Other references to them, based on linguistic characteristics, evoke a possible connection between the *Dawsahak* and the Songhay as their language, *tadagsahak*, has a similar vocabulary and syntax to the Songhay spoken in the Timbuktu region. During some of my own earlier stays in northern Mali between 2007 and 2011, I heard some oral accounts saying that the *Dawsahak* are of Israelite origin. However, Grémont presents them as an important social group in the Tuareg social and political constellation known as Ouillimeden Kel Ataram in Menaka.

a leading figure in the Bellah political party UMADD, founded in 1992. Assalim's status as an artist made him popular among the Bellah-Iklan and non-Bellah-Iklan refugees in Abala. After spending his mornings and afternoons with peer male adults at the hangar in the middle of the refugee camp, he spent his evenings rehearsing with his dance group comprised of young males and females. At night around 8 pm, several friends and neighbors came to his place for conversation and tea.

The third man, Ahiyou Intaougat**,** is the oldest man in the refugee camp in Abala and is the president of the refugee representative committee, which discusses concerns with the UNHCR and other NGOs operating in the refugee camp. Born in the 1930s near Menaka, he is originally from the *Ikarabassan* fraction. He began his professional career as a laundry man in the colonial administration of Gao, and ended up in the accounting department of the Rivoli Hotel in Niamey where he lived for several years. Ahiyou went back to Anderboukane to enjoy his retirement and has been regularly elected as a counselor at the local municipality office, first as a candidate of UMADD and later on, as a member of the UMADD-RPM.[25] He lived in Abala from 2012 to May 2015, until he requested that he be allowed to return to Anderboukane for his final days. Altogether, Ahiyou had nine children. He lived in Abala together with six of them and the other three lived and worked in Bamako in southern Mali. Ahiyou's old age and historical knowledge about the tensions between the Bellah-Iklan and the free white Tuareg in northern Mali gave him a peculiar status in Abala. This was evident in the ways he dominated conversations among peers. It was also frequent to hear Inawélène, Assalim, and other Bellah-Iklan men referring to him in conversations. For example, they often said "like Ahiyou said last time" or "we will ask Ahiyou for clarification or the truth."

1.2 Comparative relevance of the findings of the study

In order to understand contemporary dynamics of constructing collectivity within the two groups of refugees in Niger, my research focuses on the following three aspects: exile as a transformative social experience; the "interplay of narratives and moral projects";[26] and stereotyping as a reflexive social practice. In the following, I shall attempt to relate my empirical findings to various scholarly works. The results of the study will contribute to the scholarship on productive repercussions of the social conditions of exile; the theoretical spheres of studies of memory; and, finally, to the body of literature on stereotyping and ethnicity.

25 The Rassemblement pour le Mali (RPM) is the political party created by IBK, the current president of Mali. Since the early 2000s, UMADD has been affiliated with RPM in the area around Menaka.

26 I am using the notion of "moral projects" after Cole (2003, 99), which she uses to point to what is often at stake when people recollect particular past processes in particular ways, arguing that it is not for objective reasons separated from some specific goals. Rather, it is the specific goal or social order that the storytellers seek to achieve which determine the ways in which they tell stories.

1.2.1 Exile as a transformative social experience

As this book illustrates, clan structure no longer matters to the two groups of refugees in Niger in terms of reference points. Three questions guide my exploration of these claims: What prompts their claims? What do they mean? How do they situate themselves in relation to each other? To answer to these questions, I will examine the refugee's accounts that express their feelings of loss of (former) status and respectability. These accounts reveal how the informants understood their loss of former social status as a social consequence of their exile in Niamey and Abala. Concerning the free white Tuareg, these accounts focus on specific interactions between the informants and their family members. The town informants' narratives regarding the loss of their former status and respectability also included evaluations of the attitudes of police and the Hausa and Zarma ethnic residents toward the free white Tuareg refugees in Niamey. In Abala, the accounts from the Bellah-Iklan informants focused on their interactions with their family members and humanitarian workers in the refugee camp.

By showing how this dimension of the loss of former social status and respectability allows the refugees to imagine themselves as a collective in Niamey and Abala, I substantiate remarks by scholars who underscore the productive repercussions that could result from the social conditions of exile (Falge 1997; Hammar 2014; Malkki 1989; Malkki 1990; Malkki 1992; Malkki 1994; Malkki 1995a; Malkki 1995b; Malkki 1996; Samaddar 1999; Sommers 2001; Willems 2003). These authors depart from studies that strongly emphasize the disruptive effects of forced migration (Agier 2008; Agier 2011; Blavo 1999; Cohen/Deng 1998). For example, Agier argues that war-induced migration has serious effects on the social and cultural reproduction of entire populations, leading to the severing of social and cultural community ties, the dismantling of employment relationships, and the loss of formal education opportunities; it also deprives infants and other vulnerable segments of the population of the basic conditions for mental and physical health (Agier 2008; Agier 2011; also Blavo 1999; Cohen/Deng 1998). In a similar vein, historical literature on the Tuareg population in Mali details how, in response to the Tuareg uprisings in the early 1960s (under President Keita) and again in the 1970s (under President Traoré), the free-born Tuareg were repeatedly exposed to political repression and persecution along with the systematic destruction of their livestock (Boilley 1999; Lecocq 2002). Under such circumstances, many Tuareg moved to Algeria, Libya, Burkina Faso, and Niger where they led a life cut off from their kin and clan affiliations, placed into almost total isolation from the host society and severed from their cultural resources (Bourgeot 1990, 140f.). The living conditions in the refugee camps, in addition to a long history of displacement, also radically transformed gender and intergenerational relations, a development that resembles processes of forced displacement as a consequence of civil war in East Africa (e.g. Allen 2006; Dolan 2009; Hutchinson 1996; Lubkemann 2008).

In contrast to these authors' strong emphasis on the disruptive effects of forced migration, Malkki, for example, draws attention to the productive ways in which the Hutu refugees in the Mishamo refugee camp responded to the spatial isolation by creating "mythico-history" (Malkki 1989; Malkki 1995b). Malkki uses the notion of mythico-history to refer to Hutu refugees' narratives recorded in Mishamo, rural Tanzania, and defines the concept of mythico-history in the following way: the "Hutu history" that Mishamo refugees reconstituted did not simply record events but instead "was a subversive recasting and reinterpretations of Hutu history in fundamentally moral terms" (Malkki 1995b, 53f.). Malkki argues that the result "cannot be accurately described as either history or myth," and she therefore labels it mythico-history (1995b, 54). Characteristically, the Hutu mythico-history sheds light on how the refugees drew upon their cultural resources, most notably, cultural referents such as proverbs, to substantiate historical accounts that reinterpreted their history in a way that incorporated the experiences of exile into the group identity. This reveals how the Hutu refugees turned the Mishamo camp into a site enabling an elaboration of a self-consciousness of belonging, and is, therefore, productive. Malkki states that:

> Likewise, lists appeared very prominently in the narratives. There were lists of traits, lists of "symptoms", lists of faults, lists of numbered points to be made, lists that were like inventories, lists of many kinds. Proverbs were likewise deployed as rhetorical devices for persuasion and "proof." (Malkki 1995b, 53)

Malkki's approach to studying refugees draws on Foucault's influential work *Discipline and Punish* in which he discusses the disciplinary techniques of power and their productive effects (Foucault 1979). Malkki follows this perspective to approach the refugee camp as a kind of technology of power device that:

> produces its objects and domains of knowledge on two levels. On the one hand, it helps to constitute "the refugees" as an object of knowledge and control. On the other, the camp serves to produce "the refugees" as an historical subject empowered to create a mythico-history of a "People". Its local, particular pragmatics conspire to produce—independently of intentions—historical narratives, which re-order the lived-in world. Thus, as a technology of power, the refugee camp ends up being much more than a device of containment and enclosure. It becomes a locus of continual creative subversion and transformation. (Malkki 1989, 415)

According to her, Foucault's view of the prison in terms of disciplinary techniques can be extended to other institutions that have multiple systematic effects (Foucault 1979). For the example, Malkki argues that old-age institutions,

> serve to transform old age into a medicalized and therefore specialized "problem" or object on which documentation accumulates. Old age institutions make it possible for those on the outside to believe that suffering refers to arthritis, incontinence, or loss of memory, and not to any anguished fear of an

> old person that in the dark quiet of the night death is eating their body faster than it does in daylight. In short, such institutions have the effect of creating conditions for the invisibility of aging and death. All of these are transformative technologies of power in which collectivities of persons become fixed and objectified as "inmates", "the elderly", the "labour force", and "the refugees". But more than this, such technologies of power can become generative, productive sites for social and political invention and transformation--just as the refugee camp has become the privileged locus for the creation of a mythico-history. (Malkki 1989, 416f.)

She concludes that the conditions of exile altered the Hutu's perceptions of themselves. For instance, she argues that through the "mythico-history" they created in the Mishamo refugee camp, the Hutu refugees silenced their intra-group cleavages and presented themselves as a "people" in exile (Malkki 1989, chapter 2).

Ranabir Samaddar's book, *The Marginal Nation*: *Transborder migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal* (Samaddar 1999), echoes Malkki's insistence on the constructive implications of social conditions of exile. Focusing on the forced migrations produced by the formation of postcolonial states in South Asia, Samaddar argues that the people he studied in West Bengal developed new, stronger ties and a sense of community among themselves that did not exist prior to their exile. Samaddar maintains that the growing inter-refugee social networks[27] and solidarity among the refugees in West Bengal offered them an alternative to the state order they had fled in Bangladesh. For the refugees, Samaddar suggests, West Bengal has become a site that enabled them to articulate alternative memberships to the nation state they left behind (Bangladesh). Extending this to broader contexts in the southern Asia region, Samaddar argues that paying attention to the significance the refugees attached to their relocations allows for an understanding of how the forceful

> [m]igration has become the most emphatic question mark on the career of political nationhood in South Asia—for the nation which the moving population leaves as well as the nation which it enters. (Samaddar 1999, 45)

Both Samaddar and Malkki complement authors such as Connerton and Assmann who conclude that collective memories of persecution and genocide might serve as resources to imagine the future society (Assmann 1999; Connerton 1989). Malkki and Samaddar's accounts can also be taken as good examples of Marris' conceptualization of how people cope with loss generated by forced migration (or the death of relatives) (Marris 1974). In his book *Loss and Change*, the British sociologist Peter Marris conceptualizes the ways in which people respond to loss in terms of three elements: conservatism, bereavement, and innovation. At the center of his argument is the assumption that the impulse to defend the predictability of life is a fundamental and universal principle of human psychology. According to him, this

27 See works by Willems and Sommers on urban refugees in Dar Es Salam in Tanzania (Sommers 2001; Willems 2003).

predictability is related to control, and even people cannot control their physical world without discovering its laws; they can, however, control their social world by imposing laws upon it (1974, 16f.). Even when confronted with a situation of a loss, people tend to look for a continuity of life as they have known it so far, hence the deep-seated impulse to defend the validity of what they have learned; without it they would feel lost. For him, meanings are generated in the context of specific relationships and circumstances from early childhood onwards, and, for individuals, the continuity of the context represents their identity (1974, 5f.). Therefore, changes in people's relationships and living circumstances, such as how the results of losing a relative and exile affect their sense of identity, such that the continuity between past and present is threatened, lead, consequently, to life becoming unpredictable.

The second element identified by Marris, bereavement, points to results not from the loss of relatives and the socio-cultural environment, but from the loss of self, insofar as the relationships fundamental to a person's identity have been abruptly altered. Since the meaning of life is defined by the particular experiences of each individual, these experiences need to be treated with respect, whereby changes implying loss result in grief. Marris depicts grief as the expression of a profound conflict between contradictory impulses to consolidate all that is still valuable and important in the past, and to preserve it; at the same time, it also serves to re-establish a meaningful pattern of relationships in which loss is accepted (1974, 31). Accordingly, the contradictory impulses within the process of grieving, which seek to reconnect past and future, ask for a predictable set of "mourning behavior," as formulated in mourning customs and rituals, in order to protect the mourner from the complexity of the issues involved (1974, 92). Marris does not conceive the necessity of a mourning ritual only in situations where people have lost close relatives through death, but also when drastic changes occur in their lives. The third element, innovation, is not in itself incompatible with the first, namely the conservative impulse referred to by Marris. He maintains that people can readily adjust to changes, so long as these changes can first be assimilated into their existing structure of thoughts and attachments (1974, 104). What makes Malkki, Samaddar, and Marris' accounts similar is that they all trace how people approach the predicaments of exile by assimilating these to their existing patterns of thoughts and actions. As the "Hutu mythico-history" can be taken as a good example of this assimilation of the new experience into the existing, it might also entail modifications of the old structure of thoughts and actions. Following these authors, I will explore what alterations were made in the ways in which the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg were conventionally defined.

1.2.2 "Narrating (the past) as moral projects"

Narrating their groups' past experiences in Mali as reasons to become collectivities was one core aspect of the informants' everyday conversations in Niamey and

Abala. I argue that their narratives can be best understood by taking into account their distinctive aspirations for the future, as their aspirations to see themselves as collectivities in the future in northern Mali shaped the particular ways in which they recounted their memories of the past. Few studies have attempted to suggest systematic definitions of the notion of memory, two of which are Olick and Robbins (Olick/Robbins 1998) and Ricœur (Ricœur 2000). Olick and Robbins take "memory as the past we carry, how we are shaped by it and how this past is transmitted" (Olick/Robbins 1998, 129). For them, memory is the lasting traces of the past that persist within us in the present. It is the transmission and persistence of cultural elements throughout generations. Similarly, Ricoeur proposes that memory refers to history as it is lived by social agents in the present (Ricœur 2000, quoted in Berliner 2005, 199). These authors discuss memory as the way in which the history of past processes shapes social agents in present lives. This raises the question of how social actors may reshape these past processes according to their aspirations as anthropologist Jennifer Cole stresses, arguing that:

> In particular, scholars of memory may focus so exclusively on narratives and their dynamics that they lose sight of what is at stake in telling a particular narrative, of why it matters. In reducing the different generational narratives to different performative contexts, or to the specialized moment of visiting a museum, we do not gain a sufficient sense of what motivates actors, nor do we get a sense of the cultural politics in which these actors and their narratives are embedded. After all, our memories are part of a landscape of action, and the broader moral and political projects and historical circumstances in which narratives are inevitably situated. (Cole 2003, 98)

She introduces the notion of "moral projects" as a useful way to provide a fuller analysis of the complex interrelationships between narratives, agents, and historical contexts in the production of memory. According to her,

> the concept of moral projects, therefore, refers to local visions of what makes a good, just community, and the ways in which these conceptions of community reciprocally engage people's notions of what constitutes a good life, and their efforts to attain that life. In other words, moral projects link individual concerns and desires to wider sociopolitical formations. (Cole 2003, 99)

By using this approach, Cole argues that one gains a much more complex understanding of why people reconstruct their past in particular ways (Cole 2003, 122).

Cole's approach to memory is close to the one proposed by Jean Pierre Olivier de Sardan (Olivier de Sardan 1976). In his book *Quand nos pères étaient captifs,* Olivier de Sardan calls for attention to "ideological fields" within which social actors situate themselves while recounting the past. To him, the most important questions are the following: What past, told by who, and in which context? Are not those elders telling stories of the past socially situated actors? Do their social positions not influence the kind of witnesses they report? (1976, 21). Olivier de Sardan

argues that taking such concerns, seriously will prevent us from constructing a univocal past that is written from one perspective, mostly that of the dominant group. It will also enable us to probe what is at stake when our informants present versions of their past.[28] Olivier de Sardan's questions echo Jean Bazin's calls for a critical reflection on the production of narrative accounts of the past (Bazin 1979). Examining the oral accounts that reconstruct the Bamanan King Da's ascension to power in the Kingdom of Segu (in central Mali), Bazin discusses the generative processes of these oral accounts, memorization, and the circumstances of their enunciation. His conclusion suggests that far from being factual and objective reports of actual facts, the narrative accounts of Da's accession have political and ethical implications informed by the interests of those who recounted them and the expectations of the audience for which the narrations took place (1979, 450). In his historical analysis of oral accounts about the *Jaara* Kingdom (1440–1862) that existed in the Sahelian zone included partly in contemporary Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania, Mamadou Diawara follows Olivier de Sardan and Bazin to argue that the historical reconstruction of the past is always partial and selective. Moreover, he insists that the narratives of the past should be scrutinized according to the specific perspectives of those recounting it (Diawara 1990, 61). From this standing point, Diawara stresses that for a comprehensive account of the Jaara Kingdom's oral history, it is important, as he aptly did, to include the voices and the perspectives of the dominated groups such as women and, more generally, people of servile conditions. Taken together, Bazin, and Cole, Diawara, and Olivier de Sardan's insights help to draw attention to specific aspirations that are articulated through the reconstruction of the past.

In terms of this study of the refugees in Niamey and Abala, the perspective of these scholars sheds light on how the refugees' struggle to become collectivities for a better future informed the ways in which they recounted their pasts. My discussions will focus on accounts of the refugee groups' marginalization within the Malian nation-state over the past decades. I also examine the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg's competing claims to the first comership status, and their accounts that reconstruct the historical processes through which Islam came into northern Mali.

1.2.3 Stereotyping as reflexive social practice

Stereotyping as a signifying practice through which people construct social differences between categories of persons is one essential characteristic crucial for understanding the processes of group formation in Niamey and Abala. Each group of informants presented social order by referring to long-standing social structures

28 His book discusses the social history of the social groups living in the area around Ayorou and Tillabéry, south Niger, from the perspectives of subordinate groups.

and conflicts. In their everyday conversations they used derogatory terms for each other. One question guides my exploration of the relevance of these stereotyping accounts: what role do these derogatory terms play in the refugees' construction of a new social order? To answer this question, I relate the refugee narratives to works by scholars such as Brenner (Brenner 1993), Hall (Hall 1997), and Tambiah (Tambiah 1985). First, according to Stuart Hall, stereotypes reduce, essentialize, naturalize, and fix differences between categories of people (Hall 1997, 258f.). They hold fast the simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped, and widely recognized characteristics about a person or group of people. Stereotypes therefore reduce everything about this person or group to these traits, exaggerate and simplify them, fixing them without change or development for eternity (1997, 258). Second, Hall also maintains that stereotypes always imply dividing the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and unacceptable.

Hall's account of stereotyping is similar to what Stanley Tambiah has called "classification," by which he refers to a system of categories in the first place that describes the world (Tambiah 1985, 3f.). These descriptions usually also imply and entail evaluations and moral premises and emotional attitudes, translated into taboos, preferences, prescriptions, and proscriptions, which accept these preferences, prescriptions, and proscriptions as given in "nature," and as the "natural way the world is ordered" (1985, 4). While Hall and Tambiah respectively used the notions of stereotyping and classification, Brenner describes similar processes of exclusion and inclusion using the term "labeling" (Brenner 1993). Focusing on discursive constructions of Muslim identity in south-central Mali, Brenner's study draws on Amselle, who takes identity formation as a process of naming: naming of self, naming of others, and naming by others (Amselle 1990; see also Worby 1994). Brenner argues: "In its most restricted sense, such naming is associated with the attaching of labels such as Muslim/non-Muslim, Wahhabi/traditional […]" (Brenner 1993, 59). Brenner concludes that both Muslim and non-Muslim identities are formulated through appropriation and reassortment of various elements or building blocks, which may be religiously significant, but which are also socially and politically motivated.[29] What these terminologies have in common is that they depict social processes of closure and exclusion that symbolically fix boundaries and exclude everything that does not belong. It is precisely this closure and exclusion, and the formation of symbolic boundaries, that make Brenner, Hall, and Tambiah's works similar to Barth's insights into how social actors develop a range of options of collective identifications to achieve inclusion and exclusion in group membership in specific social situations (Barth 1969; see also Epple 2014; Geschiere 2009; Kopytoff 1987; Lentz 2006; Lentz 2013; Schlee 2002; Schlee 2008). For example, Barth stresses that ethnic boundaries are socially constructed and that ethnic boundaries can be strategically manipulated so that individuals can

29 Similar arguments about ethnic group formation have been suggested by Worby (Worby 1994) (also Lentz 2006; Lentz 2013).

be included and excluded according to group interests (Barth 1969, 9f.). Since the notion of boundary implies what separates one category from the other (Schlee 2002, 8), I would then argue that it can, perhaps, be seen as a classification in Tambiah's sense (Tambiah 1985). In my view, Brenner's study of labels among Muslims in southern Mali (Brenner 1993), Hall's work on stereotyping (Hall 1997), and Tambiah's on classification (Tambiah 1985), complement most of these anthropological analyses that conceive of identity formations mainly (or exclusively) as a matter of discourses on exclusion and inclusion (e.g. Barth 1969; Epple 2014; Geschiere 2009; Kopytoff 1987; Lentz 2006; Lentz 2013; Schlee 2002; Schlee 2008), by explicitly examining how people tend to construct themselves as an opposite group (morally superior to others) through depicting negatively the others that are said to be different.

This implies that "othering" practices entail the positing not only of social difference, but of moral hierarchies. Such moral hierarchies unveil the relationship between stereotyping accounts by Hall (Hall 1997), Tambah's insight on classification (Tambiah 1985), Brenner's on labelling (Brenner 1993), and the construction of power relations in the Foucauldian sense that attributes dynamic, partly contingent positionalities to social actors (Foucault 1980). For example, Hall stresses the establishment of normalcy through stereotyping as one aspect of the habit of ruling groups to attempt to fashion society as a whole according to their personal worldviews, value systems, sensibilities, and ideologies (Hall 1997). These dominants thus tend to make social order appear natural and inevitable (1997, 259). But while Hall looks at how dominant groups impose their own worldviews upon the subordinate groups through stereotyping, this book examines how the inferior social status groups questioned the definitional power of dominant clans by labeling them with derogatory terms. I follow Tambiah's insight into anthropological literature on classification that suggests an understanding of power that not only restricts the capacity to classify according to principles, evaluations, and moral premises to the ruling class. Drawing on Tambiah's insight (Tambiah 1985), Malkki's study points to how Hutu refugees in the Mishamo refugee camp redefined the hierarchical relations between them and the Tutsi rivals they had fled in Burundi (Malkki 1989). This makes insights from Malkki's and Tambiah's studies a good illustration of Foucault's analysis of power (Foucault 1979, 1980). Foucault breaks with the perception that power is always radiating in a single direction from top to bottom; coming from a specific and unique source such as the state or the ruling class (Foucault 1980, 49). For him, power induces pleasure, produces a form of knowledge, and is never monopolized by one center. It circulates through the social body and comes from the ruling class to the subordinate groups and vice versa. Following this argument, I will explore how the free white Tuareg stereotyping accounts imply the redefinition of power relations between nobles and non-noble free white Tuareg in Niamey. As for the Bellah-Iklan in Abala, I will discuss how their use of derogatory terms to refer to the free white Tuareg involve redefinitions of power relations between the Tuareg former slaves and their masters. My

discussions will focus on themes of racial stereotyping narratives through which both groups of informants redefined conventional social differences between the free-born Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan in a most radical manner.

Another insight from Foucault's analysis of power is relevant for understanding aspects of stereotyping or labeling accounts in Niamey and Abala. This comes to light in the relationship he establishes between discourse and power. For Foucault, discourses contain power: "Our speech is ordered through principles of classification that are socially formed through a myriad of past practices" (Popkewiz/Brennan 1998, 9). He also submits that it is in discourse in which power and knowledge are fused (1998, 86). Therefore, in his view, power relations are not external to the field of knowledge but immanent to it. This leads Foucault to what he called the "regime of truth." For him, each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth; that is, the types of discourse people accept and make function as truth (Foucault 1980, 131). Displacing Foucault's argument about the relationship between "discourses and power" from its original context into the ones of Tambiah and Brenner and Hall is helpful because it enables us to reflect on stereotyping or labeling accounts as a "regime of truth" for those who produced them. As we will see, both groups of informants drew some common physiological and moral characteristics, which, according to them, all members of their respective collectivity share. The informants also argued that these physiological characteristics, along with the moral characteristics they entailed, are given in "nature" and are the "natural" way in which the difference between the *peuple noir* and the "Tuareg collectivity" is ordered in Tambiah's sense of classification (Tambiah 1985). Thus, Brenner (1993), Hall (1997), and Tambiah (1985) can guide the discussion of how the informants reconstructed themselves as two internally homogeneous and hierarchical (opposite) moral groups through their use of negative conceptualizations of each other.

1.3 Structure of the dissertation

This book is organized in seven chapters. Chapter 2 presents the methods I used to collect data in Niamey and Abala. It also reflects on how my own southern Malian background informed my position in the field. The results of the discussions suggest that my background not only presented disadvantages in Niamey and Abala, but also positively affected my fieldwork by enriching the ethnography presented in this publication. As a road map for understanding contemporary ways in which the refugee informants engaged and subverted the former social status hierarchy and history of the Tuareg societies, chapter 3 offers a sketch of Tuareg social organizations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It also addresses the events that brought the two refugee groups into exile. Finally, the chapter offers an overview of the development of free white Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan relationships since the colonial era. Chapter 4 discusses how refugees talk about their

conditions of exile in Niamey and Abala. It begins with their narratives about the negative effects of exile in Niamey and Abala. The chapter further examines how the informants re-interpreted these negative effects of exile upon themselves as reasons to become collectives for their future. It also explores how the reconstructions of the group identities involve undoing the refugees' memberships of the Tuareg local clans and federation structures. Chapter 5 ethnographically focuses on the protagonists' recollections of their distinctive experiences of marginalization within the Malian nation-state since 1960. It reflects on how the town-based free-born Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan in Abala considered these experiences as reasons for them to become collectivities for the future. Thus, the chapter discusses how the two refugee collectivities stand in relation to Malian state order and to each other. Chapter 6 extends chapter 5 in that it traces how the two groups of informants reconstituted themselves as a group *vis-à-vis* each other through narrative accounts of racial stereotyping. The refugee accounts examined here define the distinctive physiological and moral characteristics of the members of "Tuareg collectivity" and of the *peuple noir*. The discussions offer some glimpse into the interplay between differences in physiological features and ethical differences in morality. The chapter argues that the two groups of refugee arguments about their group physiological and moral characteristics entail redefinitions of the former social status hierarchy in a new way; through this, the informants questioned the definitional power of the dominant free white Tuareg. While chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on the narratives that presented the free-born Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan as internally homogenous and distinctive racial groups, chapter 7 examines non-discursive practices. It focuses on the relevance of these practices to constructions of the Tuareg identity in Niamey and the Bellah-Iklan as *noirs* in Abala. It also investigates how these practices were expressions of the refugees' desire to return to their homelands in the future. Based on the refugees' interpretations of these specific social practices that kept their Tuareg identity in Niamey and *noirs* (blacks) in the refugee camp, chapter 7 underscores new lines of cleavage within the two groups. It discusses the extent to which these cleavages called into question the group homogeneities presented in the narratives in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

2. Fieldwork conditions and research methodology

This chapter introduces the methods used during my research in Niger between 2012 and 2014.[1] It also discusses how various interlocutors, among them my interlocutors "in the field" in Niamey and Abala, but also European and Malian scholars acquainted with Tuareg society in northern Mali, anticipated and judged my capacity to conduct research among the Tuareg as a "native" of "black" origin from southern Mali.

2.1 Coming to Niger and collecting data

The initial purpose of my research in Niger was to document narratives and musical performances in which Malian Tuareg refugees reflect on their decades-long experiences of displacement, politically induced hunger, persecution, and (temporary) return. The research targeted the refugee camps of Djibo and Gandafadou in Burkina Faso and that of Chinegodar in Niger, where major parts of the population have been forced to flee because of the recent humanitarian crisis in Mali's northern regions since January 2012. I intended to focus on the Tuareg from the region of Kidal. By creating a written and audio-taped record of the narratives and musical performances of the Kel Adagh (Tuareg) refugees who relocated to the surrounding countries (Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Algeria), I pursued two major aims. The first was to lend logistical and scientific support to a local archive founded and run by Ehya Ag Sidiyene, a well-known Kel Adagh native who had collaborated with several international scholars (e.g. Ag Sidiyene, Bernus and Le Floc'h 1996; Ag Sidiyene and Klute 1989; Ag Sidiyene and Bernus 1989) and whom I had met during an earlier research stay in Kidal in 2011. Until the recent conflict, the archive had been a center of documentation for local Kel Adagh (Tuareg) culture and knowledge and was frequented by members of the local population and by international researchers. The second goal of the research project was therefore to document and analyze how long-standing historical experiences of violence, displacement, forced resettlement, and political marginalization had affected the ways in which the Kel Adagh/Tuareg imagine and articulate national (or ethnic) belonging and identity and express their nostalgic longing for a unified Tuareg "nation", known as *temust* in *Tamasheq*, the language of the Tuareg (Lecocq 2002, 200f.).

After only a few conversations with Mossa Ag Attaher and Mohamed Ag Ibrahim on my arrival in Niamey, I decided to adjust the focus of my research. One reason for my decision was that fewer Kel Adagh Tuareg had gone to Niger,

1 My stay in Niger was preceded by preliminary research in Kidal in July, August, and September 2011. Altogether fieldwork lasted 12 months.

and to Niamey in particular, than I had anticipated. Instead, I learned that most Kel Adagh Tuareg I knew back home in Kidal had only transited to Niger from Bamako and continued to Tamanrasset, Djanet, and Bordj El Moctar in southern Algeria. A second reason for adjusting my research focus was that I had initially expected to meet only the Tuareg recently displaced to Niger. To meet men such as Mossa Ag Attaher, Alhabib Ag Sidi, Ibrahim Ag Mohamed, and Mohamed Ag Irgimit, who had lived in Niamey for decades yet still consider themselves refugees, surprised me at first. I even thought that these men lived here only because they sought to draw material benefits from NGOs that targeted newly arrived refugees. But the consistent and systematic nature of their claims and accounts of their shared experiences of suffering, and the persistent references to these experiences in their everyday lives (cf. chapter 7), convinced me that this could not be interpreted as merely a tactic to receive food donations. Rather, as I gradually realized, these narratives reconstructed collective histories that enabled my interlocutors in Niamey, and also in Abala, to give a sense and purpose to their actual life situation. A third reason for adjusting my research was that conversations with Mossa Ag Attaher and others made me aware of the fact that downplaying inter-refugee cleavages was a central preoccupation of the informants in Niamey. I therefore decided to focus on the Bellah-Iklan in Abala and on free-born Tuareg in Niamey.

2.1.1 Narrative and biographic interviews

Since my research sought to explore how the predicaments of exile reshaped the ways in which the refugee informants defined themselves and their histories as collectivities I have mainly used narrative interviews. Narrative interviews are a qualitative research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life. Atkinson has argued that the role of life history is primarily to pull together the central elements, events, and beliefs in a person's life, integrate them into a whole, make sense of them, learn from them, teach the younger generation, and remind the rest of one's community what is important in life (Atkinson 1998, 19). Over recent decades, this method has gained significance in anthropological studies of post-violence societies (Das 1995) and also in scholarly contributions that approached the wider processes of social and political transformation from both historical and personal perspectives (Dausien/Kelle 2009; Rosenthal 1995; Völter 2006). Speaking about her research in the context of post-violence memory in India, Veena Das has argued that collecting individual biographic material enabled her to grasp the many ways in which individual histories and the community history intersected with each other (Das 1995, chapters 3, 4, 5). Schulz has applied the narrative interview methods to understand the changes affecting women's self-understanding as practicing Muslims through their learning activities in urban Mali (Schulz 2011). Altogether these studies enable us to understand how particular processes have shaped people's lives in significant ways. With

regard to my research, I conducted narrative interviews to collect my informants' personal experiences of the past decades in Mali and in the social contexts of exile. Through these interviews, I have attempted to explore specific semantic domains that these events generated for individuals and groups. It has been a helpful research approach to gain insights not only into the informants' perspectives on contemporary exile and past events in Mali, but also the political uses to which they put their individual biographic histories together to interpret and articulate the history of the "Tuareg people" in Niamey and the *peuple noir* in Abala.

2.1.2 Focus group discussions

Another important research method that I used was focus group discussions. In Abala, I followed Inawélène, Assalim Ahiyou, and other Bellah-Iklan men's group conversations during their social gatherings under the hangar located in the middle of the refugee camp. The offices of staff working for UNHCR, ACTED, OXFAM, and Relief Islamic surrounded it. As I observed these men during my stays in 2012/2013 and 2014, they woke up around 4.30 am and started their days with morning prayers in the mosques built up in their respective quartiers. Before they came back from prayers, their wives had cleaned up the tea kettles and prepared the fire to make the morning tea. Once back from the mosques, the husbands sat next to the tea kettles and fire and started preparing the morning tea. Shortly before the first glass of tea was ready their wives brought them breakfast. Interestingly enough, while eating breakfast, followed by the first and second glass of tea, they listened to news on the radio in preparation for the social gatherings under the hangar.[2] Around 8.30 am, they left their tents in small groups of two to five neighbors or friends to meet up with the others under the hangar, where they stayed till 1.00 pm and returned to after lunch at 3.00, staying till 6.00 pm. Once there, their conversations began with greetings that included exchanging news about children's health conditions overnight in the refugee camp.[3] After exchanging news about their family members living in the refugee camp, they continued to update each other on new developments in the conflicts they fled in Mali. These exchanges of news always turned, later, into stories that articulated differences between themselves and the free-born Tuareg who, according to this group of men in Abala, were accused of having singled them out of the collective, destroyed their houses and other property, and having raped their daughters and wives in northern Mali in 2012, ultimately forcing them into exile in Niger.

When I arrived back in the refugee camp in August 2014, I found that the hangar had been removed and UNHCR had begun to build a sports hall where

2 They mostly listened to the Radio France Internationale (RFI).

3 My research took place at a time when children between 1 and 5 years old were in critical situations in the refugee camp of Abala due to undernourishment resulting in the deterioration of their health.

Figure 1: A group of male Bellah-Iklan under the tent of Ahiyou Intaougat on 14/09/2014 in Abala. Photograph S. Diallo.

it had been. Also, Ahiyou was recovering from a long sickness which proved fatal in the long run and he died on August 23, 2015. Ahiyou's sickness had restricted his capacity to move around. In this situation, Assalim, Inawélène, and other Bellah-Iklan men met at his place in the first quartier. Although the place where they met had changed, still the general topic and what impassioned their conversations remained focused on the relationship between the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg.

While I focused on a formal forum of male group discussions in the refugee camp in Niamey, there was no such established and formalized space in Abala. The circumstances that brought youths and adults together, except for social events, were not common in Niamey. Instead, I focused on conversations during regular visits Mossa Ag Attaher, Mohamed Ag Irgimit, Alhabib Ag Sidi, Ibrahim Ag Mohamed, and several other free-born Tuareg men paid to each other. On these occasions, they discussed the news from home but, more prominently, the development of the conflict in Mali. The young men met in the guise of mobile *fada*[4] and engaged in similar discussions with each other. Ibrahim's place was one focal point where youths met during the day and at night for rehearsals. Alongside the *al-guitara* music they performed, the young men embarked on discussions about

4 *Fada* is a youth socializing structure in Niger. *Fada* is called *Grin* in southern and central Mali (see Schulz 2002).

various topics of common interest. For example, since they had either been born or had grown up in Niamey, several of their conversations centered on issues of love (*tarha*). They discussed how their social conditions of being unemployed (*Ishumar*) made it impossible for them to attract female partners and to establish a family. Other themes dealt with their frustrations during everyday interactions involving Zarma and Hausa ethnic residents in urban Niamey.

2.1.3 Participant observation

Further methods of qualitative data generation on which I relied were participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and oral historical accounts. I used participant observation during special social events, such as naming and wedding ceremonies, which helped me gain insight into the social worlds of the two groups under study. Some visits turned into spontaneous focus group discussions that involved different perspectives and revealed complex details about past political processes in Mali. For example, as we will see in chapter 6 of this book, my informants in Abala and Niamey reconstructed the settlement history in the area covering the three northern regions of Mali. These themes allowed them to claim shared origins and to relate their life situations in exile to past historical processes and events (cf. chapters 4 and 6). Both groups of refugees sought to reconstruct themselves as victimized collectivities, and thus represented their past primarily in the light of their situation in exile. I collected several of these narratives during focus group discussions in the refugee camp in Abala and in Niamey town. To be able to place these individual and collective narratives socially, I collected additional, contextual information through semi-structured interviews with selected informants.

2.1.4 Language problems: transcription and translation of the narratives

I conducted several of my interviews in French and others in the *Tamasheq* language. As my *Tamasheq* language skills were insufficient to conduct interviews on my own, I worked with the help of two research assistants in both Niamey and Abala. The assistants also translated (from *Tamasheq* into French) the material that I had recorded during focus group discussions. I took care that each assistant translated the material relating to his group. I personally conducted all interviews in French with other relevant ethnic residents and members of NGOs, UNHCR working in Niger in the refugee camp, and officials in Niamey. These interviews helped me to contextualize particular decisions taken by those in charge of humanitarian aid programs, such as the relocation of the refugee camp from Lazaré in the Niamey suburb to Hamdallaye about sixty kilometers away from the capital town. Other discussions focused on the regime of Seyni Kountché in the 1970s and

1980s and contemporary contexts of war against growing terrorist networks across the Sahelian region.

2.2 Doing research as a "Bambara" among Tuareg refugees in Niger

Prior to and during my field research in Niger 2012/2013 and 2014, I was constantly confronted with the fact that senior colleagues in Germany and France, but also my main interlocutors among the free-born Tuareg in Niamey and the Bellah-Iklan in Abala, held preconceived ideas about why I, a "Bambara"[5] born in southern Mali, was doing research on the Tuareg. For the first time I realized the restrictive nature of these preconceived notions in Cologne, at a time when I was still in the preparatory stage. A funding application I had submitted to a German *Stiftung* funding research among nomadic peoples of the Sahara was rejected on the basis that, as a Malian from southern Mali, my attempts to do research among the Tuareg stood no chance of success, as argued by one German and one Malian reviewer. Even more so, both reviewers maintained that, as a "black southerner", I needed to be protected against resentful free-born Tuareg who considered me a representative of the central state. By arguing that it would be impossible for me to gain access to free-born Tuareg in northern Mali or in Nigerien exile, both reviewers disregarded the three research periods I had already spent in Kidal and its adjacent areas (in spring 2007 and 2009 and in summer and fall 2011) and in Gao, and that I had also made a documentary from the material collected during these stays. Nor did one of the reviewers, during a subsequent conversation with my supervisor, believe that the good contacts with host families that I had maintained since then could serve me as an entry point for my research among Tuareg refugees.[6]

A few weeks after my application for funding had been declined by the *Stiftung*, I met several prominent scholars of Tuareg society and politics at a conference held in Cologne. When I explained my research to one of them, his response was to question my plan and to suggest that I do research in southern Mali, rather than on the Tuareg of northern Mali. He, too, explained his reservations by expressing concern about my safety and success. Only after I had demonstrated my thorough acquaintance with the social context of Kidal and with important local figures, who had been interacting with many established researchers including himself,

5 Bambara or Bamanan is one of the largest ethnic groups in southern Mali (see Bazin 1979; Schulz 2007b). But many Tuareg or northerners use the term uncritically to refer to all southerners in Mali. For example, my informants in both Niamey and Abala referred to me as Bambara. Otherwise, my own ethnic background is Fulani.

6 I initially expected to visit and spend extended periods of time with these former host families in refugee camps in Niger, and was likely to employ these contacts as a sound basis for expanding my network of male and female informants.

did the researcher admit that I could continue doing research as I intended to do in Niger since I had earlier contacts.

Not only scholars confronted me with this kind of doubt. In 2007, I conducted four months field research with a video camera in a Tuareg settlement around Djebock situated in the north east of Gao town. Upon completion of my master's degree I became involved in a project team funded by Norwegian Church Aid in 2009 (NCA). Our task was to make documentaries in Gao and in Kidal to assess the impact of 25 years of Norwegian development aid on the living conditions in these locations. Whenever I presented these films, I was asked how I, as a Malian, could do research among the Tuareg in northern Mali given that relations between southerners and northerners were fraught with a history of violence and repression. I received several similar comments from my family, friends, and relatives in Bamako where people commonly portray the free-born white Tuareg as people who do not like or belong to "Mali." To most "southerners" in Bamako, the nation "Mali" is the historical product and continuation of the medieval states of Mali,[7] Ghana, and Segu. For my interlocutors in the south, the southern residents and the racially black segments of northern societies (Fulani, Songhay, and the Bellah-Iklan) are descendants of leading figures of these empires. These interlocutors among friends and relatives also pointed to the white Tuareg as those who constantly have sought to challenge the existence of the Malian nation-state, to which they do not belong historically. To illustrate their claim, my interlocutors in the south referred to the Tuareg uprisings of the 1960s and 1990s and to the on-going conflicts in the north since 2012 as indications of the constant threat to the Malian nation-state mounted by the nomads from the north. Some of my friends even considered my interest in Tuareg society as a sign of my lack of patriotic spirit, and of my siding with the enemies of "Mali."

These comments set the terms against which I needed to define my position as a researcher in Abala and Niamey between 2012 and 2014. The comments conflate being Malian with being a southerner, while excluding the Tuareg from the Malian political community. Bodies of literature on the "principle of reflexivity" inform my analysis of these relationships in the field (e.g. Hammersley/Atkinson 1995; Gubrium/Holstein 1997; Holliday 2003). The notion of reflexivity has emerged as a powerful analytical framework for reflections on the relationship between the researcher and other participants in the research setting over recent decades. Hammersley and Atkinson (Hammersley/Atkinson 1995, 16) and Gubrium and Holstein have argued that reflexivity responds to the realization that researchers and their methods are entangled with the politics of the social world they study (Gubrium/Holstein 1997, 9). For Holstein and Gubrium, it relates to both how researchers think and act, and to social phenomena themselves (Holstein/Gubrium 1994, 265). My thoughts on the issue of reflexivity follow Andrian Holliday who

7 For an overview on Mali empire, see for example, Niane (1975); also Cisse/Kamissoko (2000).

argues that researchers need to capitalize on the complexities of their presence in the research setting (Holliday 2003, 146).

2.2.1 Entering the field and setting up relations among the free-born Tuareg in Niamey

I entered the field in Niamey with contacts from families I had become friendly with over the past years. Some even visited me there and during their stays they tried to introduce me to others. Another point of access to the field has been the research institute LASDEL. There I met several doctoral candidates and postdoctoral and established international researchers, some of whom introduced me to Tuareg acquaintances from Mali. Mossa Ag Attaher has good relations with most staff members at this research institute. Many researchers introduced me to him as a Malian doctoral student coming from Germany. After my initial contact with him, I became a good friend of his first son, Iba. During my stays in 2012/13 and 2014 this family became essentially my host family. Although I did not stay with them overnight, I had my breakfast, lunch, and dinner with them every day. Familiar with the world of researchers due to their frequent contacts with the staff members at the LASDEL, Mossa and Iba took me into their worlds. While Mossa brought me into contact with the most adults in transit or living in Niamey, Iba made the world of the younger generations accessible to me. Taking me with them through the town gave me opportunities to share their everyday social experiences. The following examples will spell out the various ways in which the informants related to me in Niamey.

2.2.1.1 "Is he a Malian soldier in Niamey?"

This question emerged from interrogations that surrounded my presence among the free-born Tuareg in Niamey. It was on Sunday September 21, 2014, when Tuareg refugees in Niamey met at a wedding ceremony in the administrative area called plateau. It was the wedding of the former wife of one of my interlocutors between 2012 and 2013 who had passed away in November 2013.[8] She is a free-born Tuareg woman from the area of Menaka. She married another free-born Tuareg man from the same area on September 21, 2014. On this occasion I sat with several adult men playing cards for about seven hours. Although I knew many from my earlier stay in 2012/2013, some faces were still new to me as I, myself, was to them. Time and again, I heard people asking in a low voice: who is this man? The answer the people who knew me gave was:

8 The deceased husband was Badajan Ag Aiti, originally from the vassal group *Immakalkalen* in the area of Bourem.

> His name is Souleymane Diallo. He comes from Mali but he is studying in Germany. He is a friend of Mossa Ag Attaher with whom he came here. He is doing research on the Tuareg in Niamey.

After lunch, followed by midday prayer, I happened to sit next to someone (Ibrahim Ag Mossa) whom I had never met before. The man, born into a vassal group from Tidarmène (an area of Menaka), initiated a conversation:

Ibrahim: I heard that you come from Mali. Are you a military?
Me: I am not. I am currently a student in Germany.
Ibrahim: You never supported the Ganday koy or Mujao?
Me: No, never.
Ibrahim: Well, if you as a Malian decided to do research among us that is a good thing. Because this is the first time I have seen a Malian enquiring about us during my 56 years of life.[9] We have only seen Europeans coming and asking us, but no Malian has ever done this before. If there were several Malians coming to see us and seeking to know who we are like you do, we would not be where we are today.[10]

Ibrahim's statement above reinforced the widely shared assumption that it is difficult for a southern Malian to do research in the north, or at least among the white Tuareg. His questions in the opening sequence of our conversation above indicate some suspicion. He explicitly asked whether or not I was part of the military in Mali or affiliated to the Malian army. Since I answered with a "no," he then moved to the next question through which he assessed whether or not I supported the MUJAO (Mouvement pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest)[11] or Ganda Koy movement. As we will see in chapter 3, when retracing the history of Tuareg rebellions in the north of Mali, Ibrahim's evocation of the MUJAO and Ganda Koy was meaningful. He mentioned the term "Ganda Koy" in reference to the Songhay political and military structure during the Tuareg rebellion in the 1990s. Several sources have indicated that the Songhay soldiers in the regular Malian army created this structure with the tacit support of the Malian state against the white population in the north of Mali (cf. Keita 1999; Lecocq 2010). Ibrahim's in-

9 It should be noted that I am not the first Malian to have conducted research among the Tuareg in the north. Naffet Keita did his doctoral research in the area of Gao in the 1990s. His research resulted in a dissertation entitled: "Contribution à une anthropologie du pouvoir et de l'intégration nationale en Afrique: de la 'rébellion touareg' à une nouvelle nation au Mali", Thèse de doctorat en Anthropologie: Université Cheick Anta Diop de Dakar 1999 (see also Keita 2005).

10 As one could notice, his use of the notion "Malian" refers exclusively to people from southern Mali, excluding himself and the free Tuareg. The full implication of such statements collected in Niger will be examined at length in chapter 5.

11 MUJAO is one of the Islamist factions in northern Mali and has existed since 2012. As we will see in chapter 3, Olivier de Sardan has suggested that the Arabs, Songhay, and Fulani created this military structure in response to abuses committed by the white Tuareg (in the area of Gao) in 2012 (Olivier de Sardan 2012).

terrogation about the MUJAO was concerned with assessing whether I belonged to one of the Islamist factions created by the Arabs, Songhay, and Fulani. Both questions illustrate why it is difficult for a southern Malian like me to do research among the white Tuareg. Ibrahim did not trust me in the first place, and he was not the only one to do so.

Prior to my encounter with Ibrahim Ag Mossa I had already had similar experiences in 2012. In September 2012, when Mossa Ag Attaher introduced me to another old man who fled "the Songhay anti-Tuareg campaigns" in the 1990s, he had similar suspicions. It was on an evening after sundown that the slim old man appeared with his white beads in his right hand at Mossa's place. On his arrival, Mossa and I had started the ablutions for evening prayer. Therefore, after greetings, the three of us prayed together. Since I appeared an unfamiliar visitor at Mossa's place to him, he began to inquire into my presence. He asked Mossa where the man sitting with them came from. Mossa introduced me as a friend from Mali who was now studying in Germany and wanted to do research on the Tuareg. After some time, the old man asked Mossa if he could be sure that I was not, to use his own expression, a "secret agent" of the Malian state. Mossa Ag Attaher reassured him, maintaining that I was his friend and had nothing to do with the police. After this clarification I went with Mossa Ag Attaher's son to his domicile and his work place for several tea sessions. He recounted several episodes of his own experiences throughout the years of the conflict before he fled to Niger. Since he had been living in Niamey for several years, he became an interesting character to talk to about his own experiences in Mali and Niamey. To further understand the suspicion of both men about my presence among them, we need to pay attention to the longer history of nomadic Tuareg' persecution by the Malian army and to a regional context characterized by the growing influence of an international terrorist network and a US-led "war against terrorism" which has led to a closer collaboration between intelligence communities across the Sahel region. Both men's suspicions were reinforced by my use of a voice recorder during interviews. For instance, the second old man I met at Mossa's place once reminded me that the recording device made him think of me, at face value, as a spy working for the police.[12]

The reluctance of both men to talk to me as a Malian researcher substantiates observations by historian Mamadou Diawara who argued that, while African researchers working in their own national contexts face fewer problems with language and living conditions, they might encounter significant difficulties compared to their counterpart western scholars doing fieldwork in Africa (Diawara 1985). Speaking about his research (collection of oral history) among his own people in southern Mali, he notes that his being a descendent of the

12 Equally, in the refugee camp, knowing that I am in contact with the free-born Tuareg in Niamey and also back home in northern Mali, some of my Bellah-Iklan informants did not even accept that I recorded their narratives.

local nobility and politically dominant clan raised suspicion among the people of servile background whose oral accounts and perspectives he sought to investigate. Below, I will disagree with Diawara's argument, but for the moment I will stay with his account. For example, in Niamey, being a Malian made it difficult for some informants, at least at the beginning, to trust me and believe that I was doing my research only for academic purposes. The suspicion of both men also shows that they, first and foremost, associated me with their experiences of having been oppressed by southern Malians in Mali. Ultimately, the suspicion of both men substantiate remarks by researchers on the Tuareg, as outlined earlier, that as a Malian from southern Mali it would be difficult for me to do research among the Tuareg.

Ibrahim's statement also refutes the conventional assumption that as a Malian I cannot do research among the Tuareg. For example, he expressed some positive evaluation of my presence among them. He argued that I could contribute to creating a more mutual understanding between the north and the south. For this reason, after our conversation he invited me, together with my contact person Mossa Ag Attaher, to come for a tea at his domicile in the quartier of Dar Es Salam. As this first invitation went well, I went back to Ibrahim Ag Mossa's place for conversations about his experiences of exile two more times together with Mossa Ag Attaher. Both men expressed suspicion about my presence among them, but my closeness to Mossa Ag Attaher made them gradually accept me and participate in my project. I saw this relationship as a conventional way of gaining access as a friend of a friend, which enabled me to dispel the fears some had (Holliday 2003). To conclude my discussion of Ibrahim's statement, being Malian was not as such a negative fact in all respects. Since I am not a military but, instead, a student who decided to spend time with them and share their everyday life experiences, this enabled many free-born white Tuareg to understand that not all southerners are enemies of the Tuareg. He perceived my presence among them as evidence that some southern Malians could be friends with them too. This came to light especially when Mossa Ag Attaher highlighted to some of his fellows that I had done some research among the Tuareg in the area around Djebock and Kidal before and had also gone with him to visit his relatives in some of the refugee settlements in northern Burkina Faso.

2.2.1.2 "*Amidinin* Diallo (my friend Diallo) … *Ntada agna* (here is the brother)!"

Mohamed Ag Irgimit followed the above formulation with: "Amidinin Diallo. (Souleymane) tu es un de nous maintenant. Tu es devenu Tuareg. Tu vas partout où nous sommes" (literally, friend Diallo, Souleymane you are now one of us. You became a Tuareg. You go wherever we are). Both the terms *amidinin* and *agna* were covering terms used by informants in Niamey in order to express closeness in social ties. "Amidinin" means friend and "Agna" means brother or sibling. Agna expresses more closeness than does the term amidinin (friend).

These were taken from songs sung by the *Kel Tinariwen al-guitara* musical group. This group deployed these terms on purpose in order to call for unity and equality around the idea of the *tumast* (the people) in exile in the Magrheb (Klute 2013; Lecocq 2010). It was in these terms that Mohamed Ag Irgimit, one of my informants in Niamey introduced earlier, welcomed me into his courtyard in the afternoon of December 1, 2012. It was the day that followed my arrival in Niamey from northern Burkina Faso (in the area of Gram-Gram) where I had spent a week with Mossa Ag Attaher among his relatives who went into exile there in mid-March 2012. His statement shows that my status moved gradually from that of a friend to being considered as a sibling. As I said earlier, Mohamed and Mossa are originally from the same group called the *Immakalkalen* that belongs to the vassal groups. I also had the chance to meet up with several people he knows very well. On my arrival at his place on that afternoon, Mohamed was sitting next to his wife and three children left of the main entrance in his courtyard. When I opened the entrance door, he turned right toward me and exclaimed in the following terms:

> Hello the Tuareg, welcome back from Demsi (where I went to in Burkina Faso). Souleymane you are now one of us. You go everywhere to spend time with us. You really like the Tuareg. You know our problem with Mali is that the state does not consider us as human beings. They [read: the state] just think that we are just more than donkeys.

Mohamed's evaluation of my presence among them resembles that of Ibrahim's. Mohamed took my research as an action that could deepen my understanding of the Tuareg. In his interpretation, seeking to know the Tuareg goes hand in hand with respecting them and respecting the Tuareg facilitates greater understanding of their problems with the Malian state. Since "Mali" as a state, but more precisely its southern population, did not seek to know the Tuareg, they cannot be aware of the full complexity of nomads' problems. At the same time, Mohamed moved further than Ibrahim when arguing that I became a Tuareg through interacting and sharing time and space with them. The expressions such as "hello the Tuareg" or "you are now one of us" indicated the extent to which Mohamed accepted me as part of them because of my readiness to share time and experiences with the Tuareg in different social contexts. By accepting me as a Tuareg or, at least, as part of them, Mohamed's statement also substantiates the argument put forward by Crawford and Hastrup that the dichotomy of researcher versus informant may lose its relevance during field research as a result of social processes that undermine a researcher's attempt to keep up his/her distinctive status (Crawford 1992, 48; Hastrup 1995, 143). Hastrup has called this: "The process of becoming the other" (1995, 19). For her, "becoming" here is just a metaphor to point to the kind of participation that can never be completed and which is no immediate consequence of physical presence. It does not attempt to argue that the anthropologist becomes identical with the others among whom he or she is doing research. For

example, Hastrup herself recognizes that she did not become an Icelandic shepherdess though she participated in sheep farming and experienced the unreality of shepherdesses in misty mountains. To her, this implies that one is not completely absorbed into the other world, but one is also no longer the same. The relevance of Mohamed's statement to Hastrup and Crawford's discussion is that the researcher does become part of the community among whom he/she is doing research but not because he or she changes. Rather, the perceptions of the people among whom the researcher is doing research can change during fieldwork in such ways that they begin to relate to him/her in familiar terms. I did not become a white Tuareg by skin color or through my language skill in speaking *Tamasheq* in the meanwhile. Instead, Mohamed's argument drew specifically on the fact that I shared time and experiences with them in various contexts. Consequently, they began to consider me as one of their own. For example, they no longer hesitated to express openly their opinions about the Malian politics in the north since they knew that hearing bad stories about the southern Malian population would not have irritated me and turned me against them. Additionally, the ways in which some of my informants attempted to prevent me from interacting with other ethnic residents in Niamey illustrated their care for "one of them" which is what I had become in their own view.

2.2.1.3 "Souleymane, be careful with the Zarma!"

In Niamey, my research did not only involve the free white Tuareg. Instead I navigated between them and several other ethnic residents, the majority of whom were Hausa and Zarma people. Most interactions between the town refugee informants and their neighbors were not free of suspicion. On several occasions, Mossa Ag Attaher warned me to be careful whenever I interacted with the Zarma and Hausa because he insisted that one cannot build up a trustful relationship with the Hausa and Zarma people. According to him, the Hausa and Zarma people are against the free-born Tuareg. While several other aspects of why Mossa prevented me from interacting with the Hausa and Zarma people in Niamey will be explored at length in chapter 4, it is necessary to mention a few of them here. For Mossa, as the Hausa and Zarma are not on good terms with the Tuareg, they would not like me because I was friendly with the Tuareg. Through such portrayals of the Hausa and Zarma people as bad people for me, Mossa reflexively tried to present the free-born Tuareg as good and trustful people for me. One could argue here that his warnings appear as instances that express the extent to which his perceptions about my person changed over time. Mossa gradually started to consider me as part of them as well. Being a friend of his and several other white Tuareg made me, at least in Mossa's view, implicitly part of them, thus consequently subject to suspicion for the others.

In the same way in which my free-born Tuareg informants tried to prevent me from trusting their Hausa and Zarma neighbors, the latter also warned me to be

careful when spending time with "the Tuareg."[13] For example, on our way back to Niamey from northern Burkina Faso in late November 2012, where I had been together with Mossa Ag Attaher and his oldest son Iba, we reached the bus station of Tera, a south-west town in Niger, around 5.00 pm. Many people in our bus used the short break we had at the bus station to accomplish their prayers and eat some food. Sitting next to Mossa's son Iba around our tea kettle under the hangar at the right corner of the yard of the bus station, we suddenly saw one *gendarme*[14] in a car entering the station. He got out and asked for our bus driver. Most surprisingly, I saw the bus driver pointing his index finger at me while speaking to the *gendarme* who, in his turn, quickly came toward us. He came to me and asked whether I knew Mossa and his sons well. I replied yes. I therefore introduced Mossa Ag Attaher to him as a friend of mine and the others as his sons. I also made clear to the *gendarme* that Mossa and his family had been living in Niamey for more than two decades. He concluded his series of questions by warning me that I should be careful because my travel companions were dangerous people.[15] According to the *gendarme*, many white Tuareg have had strong connections to the international terrorist networks which have been flourishing across the Sahelian region since the early 2000s. Especially several free-born Tuareg had joined Islamist militant groups that had taken control of northern Mali. The best known of these is Ansar Eddine, led by a free-born Tuareg Iyad Ag Ghali from the region of Kidal.

The situation of this conversation at the bus station embarrassed me since all this happened in front of my travel companions. Mossa's son Iba told me that what had just happened with the *gendarme* was one of several mistreatments they are used to in Niger. The situation above showed how difficult it was for me to navigate between my informants and the other ethnic residents in Niamey. It reminded me of Marc Sommers's depiction of how he developed relationships with his informants within a politically sensitive environment in urban Tanzania (Sommers 2001). He notes that, having learned that refugees who lived and worked together may privately consider each other enemies, he had to develop separate relationships with each and every Burundi refugee from whom he sought information about their hidden society in urban Dar Es Salam (2001, 6). Whereas Marc Sommers considered the conflicting situation into which he was plunged as one of the most difficult challenges ahead of him in the field, I found mine to be a very productive experience that contributed to my understanding of the interconnected aspects of social and political dynamics shaping the refugees' social lives in Niger. Similar tensions existed between the Bellah-Iklan and humanitarian workers in the refugee camp at Abala too.

13 In this context, when they say Tuareg, they referred to the free-born white Tuareg.

14 The gendarmerie is a major component of the security apparatus in Niger. The members of this security force are called gendarmes (see Göpfert 2012).

15 For an overview of the Tuareg issue in Niger (see Salifou 1993).

2.2.2 A southern Malian student among the Bellah-Iklan in Abala

I accessed the refugee camp of Abala through Mariam Sidibé, a Malian doctoral candidate at the LASDEL. She is married to a Nigerien man who worked for some time as the human resources manager at the regional office of ACTED. This NGO was in charge of the refugee camp management. Mariam's husband introduced me to his colleagues at Abala who, in turn, took me to the UNHCR local office. There I was asked to submit a letter from my supervisor that spelled out the institutional setting of the research project I was conducting. Once this had been done, I was allowed to begin my research in the refugee camp. Inawélène Aklinine was the first person I was introduced to by humanitarian workers. He, and several other unfree-born Tuareg he introduced me to, also found it compelling that I was doing research among them. To use their own term, I was one of the rare Malians interested in them. Having Inawélène Aklinine as a point of access into the social life of Bellah-Iklan in Abala was helpful in many respects. For example, later on I hired him as a research assistant and language teacher. Beside the fact that our language training always turned into conversations about the political history of northern Mali and their present experiences in exile, many other interlocutors told me that they took me seriously since they assumed that Inawélène would not get along with someone he himself suspected. He accompanied me into the homesteads of several people I talked to. His presence definitely enriched the discussions. Furthermore, he is considered to be the nephew of Ahiyou Intagaout, the oldest man and president of the refugee central committee. Inawélène and Ahiyou shared the view that most people in southern Mali do not know about what is happening in the north. According to both of them, that is the reason why southern people in Mali give credit to what the free-born Tuareg claim that they are marginalized in the north. They viewed my research as a positive undertaking that could contribute to a better understanding of the Bellah-Iklan's situation in northern Mali. At the men's informal gatherings in the mornings, some discussions started with emphasis on "we forgot to tell Souleymane about this event." I understood my interlocutors' insistence to be a consequence of their struggles over the control of the results of my research. In both Abala and Niamey, my informants manifested their explicit expectations of seeing that this project contributes to the information, and ultimately to the formation of extra-local opinions, about their situations. When seen in a broader context, their struggles illustrated how the informants could have their own agendas while participating in the research process as well.

2.2.2.1 "The difference between Souleymane and European researchers in Menaka"

The following statement that Assalim Ehatt articulated on the day of my first contact with him reveals the complexity surrounding my own position in the field. He put it to me that:

> Before you, we saw Bajan[16] and other Tuareg with white people [read: Europeans] doing research in Menaka. As the Tuareg are clever and suspicious about themselves, they never gave those researchers any chance to talk to us. Because they know that many things they are telling them are untrue. For this reason, one precaution they took was to follow these Europeans closely in order to control everything they were doing. They slaughtered goats, sheep even camels for them, all that was done in order to keep their research agendas busy and under their close watch. Another thing is that the Tuareg followed these whites for the material benefits some of these researchers might have offered them. In the end, these researchers did not even respect us. But your case is different. You respect us because you came to spend time with us although the red Tuareg warned you not to come. Also, they see you just like a poor Malian student who cannot offer them any material benefit because as an African you need that money for your own parents, too. For this very reason, you are not attractive to them like Europeans researchers would be.[17]

Assalim pointed to how my informants in Abala situated themselves *vis-à-vis* other groups through their interactions with me in a way that challenged the conventional prestige hierarchy. As will be seen in chapter 3, this conventional prestige hierarchy divides the Tuareg society into three main groups. At the top of the society stand the free noble warriors and religious clans. These are followed by other free born, known as the vassals group. The unfree born, known as former slaves who are called the Bellah in the areas of Timbuktu and Gao, Iklan, in Kidal, stand at the bottom of the social structure. Assalim reduced the whole notion of being Tuareg to free-born Tuareg who, in his view, have been controlling the research done by European researchers (however, see Bouman 2010; Olivier de Sardan 1976). His account assumed that being a Malian and a poor African student made it possible for me to move across different social segments without encountering major obstacles. His understanding of being a poor African student implied that I do not have enough material means to distribute resources to the free-born white Tuareg. His argument also illustrates how the Bellah-Iklan speakers perceived themselves not only as marginal groups in the northern political processes since the colonial era, but also in the generative dynamics of academic knowledge. Here, his argument allows us to discuss Mamadou Diawara's insight outlined above (Diawara 1985). As mentioned earlier, Diawara has argued that he faced some methodological challenges when attempting to talk to people of a servile condition (1985, 12f.). He explained that these challenges were due to his noble background in his own society. What Assalim tried to show here, which I would argue adds a new aspect to Diawara's discussion, is that non-African scholars can also face the same dilemma that

16 Bajan is used to refer to Bajan Ag Hamatou, the political leader of the dominant clans in the area of Menaka. He is currently the deputy of Menaka at the national parliament of Mali.

17 Conversations with Assalim on 23/12/2012 in Abala.

their African counterpart, Diawara, experienced during his research. Assalim clearly associated the European researchers in the area of Menaka with the politically dominant social segment of the free-born white Tuareg. To him, the European researchers could not speak to the Bellah-Iklan because of the free white Tuareg who hosted them. Therefore, in Assalim's eyes, those researchers are no longer neutral when it comes to local tensions. This illustrates that since European researchers enter African societies through social contacts that consequently absorb them, they become part of the local struggles for power and legitimacy. This is what Diawara's account overlooks. It fixes non-African researchers and African societies in a rigid and static manner.

Concerning my own position, although I am Malian I am not originally from the free white Tuareg group or the Bellah-Iklan. In this regard, my status differs from Diawara's. He was originally part of one of the protagonists on which he was doing research. My status becomes closer to non-African researchers who are not initially members of given local groups. I would also argue that in the same way as that in which Assalim associated European researchers with the politically dominant free-born Tuareg groups in Menaka, he tended to associate me with their group in Abala. This was evident in how my Bellah-Iklan interlocutors often overtly insulted the few free-born families living there when these were passing by and interacting with me. As a result, whenever I tried to talk to the free white Tuareg, I felt that they did not want to interact beyond the standard exchange of greetings, especially when there were Bellah-Iklan men around me. It was because of the apparent tension, which informed the free-born Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan interactions in the refugee camp, that I could not follow the two groups in Abala. As I saw it, attempting to integrate simultaneously the few free-born families as research participants in the refugee camp would have resulted in apparent tensions that could bring me problems with NGO representatives. As such, my research would contribute further to transforming the social setting of exile into an open battleground. This was obviously not the goal that I was pursuing there. The male Bellah-Iklan's attempts to control my interactions with the free-born Tuareg indicate the challenges that I faced in the field. Though these challenges might have some limiting implications for the present study, I hope that my focus on a group of free-born Tuareg in Niamey enabled me to include the latter's perspective in this research.

2.2.2.2 The witness and the compatriot in Abala

My project also involved interviews with humanitarian workers in Abala. I particularly observed their interactions with my refugee informants under the hangar. The everyday relationships between humanitarian workers and refugees in Abala had the following characteristics. The humanitarian workers saw the refugees as people who were never satisfied and were ready to do whatever came to their minds in order to gain more profit. As a result, this disturbed all

the plans the humanitarian workers put into place.[18] For their part, the refugees viewed the former as disrespectful collaborators who did not consider them as "respectable persons." As will be shown in chapter 4, this tension itself appeared to me as a formative process of how my male interlocutors assessed the predicaments of exile. What seems to be relevant about this conflicting relationship for this chapter is the way in which both protagonists, meaning the NGO workers and the Bellah-Iklan refugees, approached me as a witness to this situation. I have already explained that I gained access to the camp through different contacts with people working for the NGOs.[19] For this reason, I was then offered the chance to stay with them at the Guesthouse in Abala village, located about one kilometer from the refugee camp. There, after dinner, I often sat with several of them around the tea kettle next to the main door. Sometimes our conversations lasted for hours. Although we had spoken about several topics of interest to us as young men, some aspects of our conversations focused exclusively on the refugees' behavior. One day Goudel,[20] working for the French NGO through which I accessed the camp, addressed me in the following manner:

> Souleymane, it is really, really difficult to work with your compatriots. They do not have any notion of order. Imagine, in the fifth quartier I surprised many male adults today who were eating the food we gave them for their children in order to diminish the consequences of their undernutrition.

By referring to me as a compatriot of the refugees, Goudel attempted to place me in a position to witness the constant efforts of humanitarian workers to satisfy them. The next day, he invited me to follow him during the child food checking sessions with the families when we returned to the refugee camp. We started from the third quartier, where we discovered that in many families the food quantity given for distribution to children had already been finished long before the set deadline. Goudel complained with an unusual tonal emphasis. He reminded me of what he had just been telling me the night before in order to substantiate the claim that my compatriots are difficult to deal with. I also had similar experiences with other humanitarian workers.

On their part, the refugee men, knowing that I am Malian, always talked about the humanitarian workers behind their backs, sometimes discretely and other times overtly. I remember that on the same day Goudel went with me to the third quartier, some of these men we met with their families told me that "he is really

18 For example, some refugees were accused of having inserted more people in their lists of food rations who were not actually their relatives or even living in the refugee camp. When these attempts were discovered, the refugees involved have been asked to pay back the extra rations they have been given for months back. This situation even culminated in greater pressure until some refugees left the camp prematurely.

19 On my arrival in Niger, several researchers I met at the LASDEL advised me to use my own personal contacts in order to gain access to the camp rather than going through uncertain bureaucratic procedures.

20 I use Goudel as a nickname here.

the unfriendliest NGO worker" at their afternoon informal social gathering. They complained that Goudel humiliated the heads of the families under their tents. Others went on to state that once something enters their houses, that thing should be placed under the control of the head of the family. Yet, at these social gatherings, several other stories about humanitarian workers with whom I was spending nights at the Guesthouse were explained to me. For one thing, my interlocutors stressed that as a Malian I should know about what they are experiencing in the refugee camp. In telling their stories, both protagonists expected me to give comments about what I thought of the situation they presented. I found their attempts revealing about the dynamics going on in the refugee camp. I formulated questions from what I heard to ask for further details about what I wanted to know, such as how both interpreted these confrontations.

2.3 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have first presented the methods that I used during my research in Abala and Niamey. The methods consisted of participant observations, focus group discussions, and narrative biographic interviews. The second part of the chapter has examined my relationships with the other research participants in the field. The body of literature on reflexivity informed the discussions of these interactions with my informants (Altern/Holtedahl 2000; Gubrium/Holstein 1997; Hammersley/Atkinson 1995; Holliday 2003). In discussing my situation in the field in Niamey and Abala, I engaged in some critical reflections on Diawara's argument that African researchers doing research in their social contexts are mostly absorbed by local social struggles in ways that make it difficult for them to move across different social segments compared to their non-African counterparts (Diawara 1985). I stressed that not only Africans are absorbed by local struggles, but the non-African scholars can also become gradually part of local struggles through the social contacts they access in the field. For example, the Bellah-Iklan informants affiliated European researchers with free-born Tuareg in Menaka. Their comments posited these researchers as active social actors partaking in local tensions between the free-born Tuareg and the unfree-born Tuareg in the area of Menaka. Consequently, the Bellah-Iklan's comments illustrated the loss of the researchers' outsider identities in Hastrup's and Crawford's sense of "othering processes" in anthropological fieldwork contexts (Crawford 1992, 48; Hastrup 1995, 19). I also illustrated my claim about Diawara's argument by discussing how both the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg related to me during my research in Niamey and Abala. Each protagonist group of the book tended to absorb me into his or her local struggles. In Niamey, the terms "friend" and "brother" were used to refer to me. The social closeness these terms imply brought the informants to protect me, in their own views, from the Hausa and Zarma ethnic urban residents who the informants depicted as against the Tuareg. I argued that my

interactions with the Bellah-Iklan men limited other possibilities to interact with free-born Tuareg in the refugee camp. Seeing that I followed the Bellah-Iklan men to the hangar every day made the free-born Tuareg suspicious about my attempts to speak with them. Ultimately, the discussions of these interactions with other participants in Niamey and Abala answered the interlocutors who anticipated and judged my capacity to conduct research among the Tuareg as a "native" of "black" origin from southern Mali.

3. Historical background

This study analyzes how the two groups of Tuareg refugees in Niger redefined their former social status hierarchy by reconstructing themselves as collectivities in the Nigerien diaspora. As a starting point for this analysis, this chapter offers an account of conventional Tuareg social organizations as they existed historically in different regions of northern Mali. Yet far from constituting an uncontested social order on which the noble free-born "masters," non-noble free-Tuareg and their Bellah-Iklan slaves agreed, I argue that since colonial times, the Bellah-Iklan and free-born Tuareg[1] were engaged in a very conflicted relationship with each other. In a second step, the chapter draws on, yet also critically engages with, works such as Boilley 1999; Bourgeot 1995; Grémont 2010; Hureiki 2003; Klute 1992a; Klute 2003; Klute 2012; Klute 2013; and Lecocq 2002; Lecocq 2005; Lecocq 2010 to offer an event history of the political processes that, in recent decades, have led to the refugees' relocation from their home base in northern Mali to neighboring countries.

3.1 Tuareg social and political organization

Bernus 1981; Boilley 1999; Bourgeot 1995; Grémont 2010; Hureiki 2003; Klute 1992a; Klute 2003; Klute 2013; and Lecocq 2010 address the social and political organization and situation of different Tuareg clans exclusively from the perspective of the "white," free-born masters. They show that the Tuareg inhabiting the north of the Republic of Mali were politically and socially organized around some rival federations that referred to themselves as Kel Adagh, Ouillimeden Kel Ataram, and Kel Tinguériguif and Kel Antsar in the regions of Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu, respectively. The term "federation" (in Tamasheq, *ettebel*) refers to a set of clans that form a political unit under the leadership of one dominant clan (Lecocq 2010, 13). The different clans that make up one *ettebel* stand in hierarchical relationship to each other. The leader of the *ettebel* is called *amenokal*, which means "the owner of the land" and is also the symbol of power. Several federations rose and fell during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[2]

Existing scholarship on the Tuareg is not only characterized by a focus on the free-born white Tuareg but also by an eclectic concentration on individual clans

1 As will be shown in this chapter, there was not only tension between the Bellah-Iklan and the white free Tuareg since the colonial era, but there existed also a constant conflicted relationship between the free-born noble and the non-noble free-born, in particular the *imghad* Tuareg, as well.

2 For example, Grémont 2010 and Lecocq 2010 argue that both contemporary Ouillimeden Kel Ataram and Kel Denneg formed one political entity earlier before splitting into two. A most recent history indicates that the Kel Adagh emerged as a federation of their own only under French rule (see Boilley 1999).

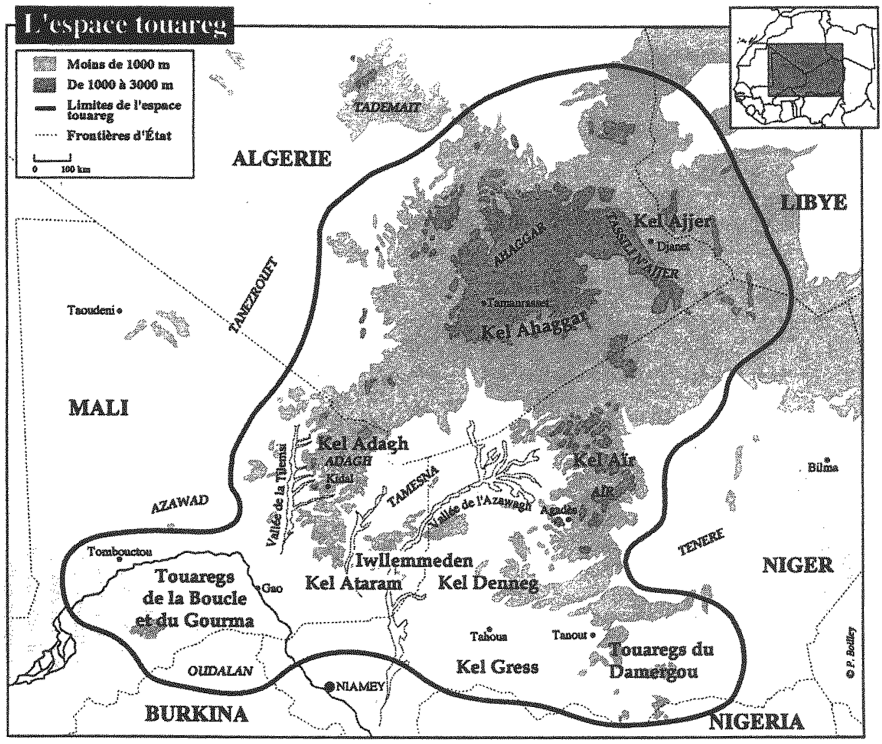

Figure 2: A map of the Tuareg's main living areas in the southern Sahara. Source: Boilley (1999, 6).

of free-born white Tuareg that live in different regions of Mali's north. Klute, Lecocq, and Boilley offered detailed studies of the Kel Adagh of the region of Kidal,[3] while Grémont's and Hureiki's historical studies concentrate on the Ouillimeden Kel Ataram (in the Gao region, notably the area around Menaka) and on the Kel Antsar and Tingueriguif in and around Timbuktu. All these authors portray the Tuareg social structure within the federations[4] as a vertically ordered society. At the top of the social structure are the "noble" warriors, who are perceived racially as "white" or "red" (Lecocq 2010, 5). According to Lecocq, the nobles distinguish themselves from the others by a culture of honor and shame. They referred to this culture as *temushagha*, "the way of the *imushagh*" (which connotes "the noble way of life"). Central to the noble way of life, he argues, was the knowledge of honor and shame and that of one's own lineage, called *temet*, and ancestry, which

3 They focused mainly on Kel Adagh but also did research on the Ouillimeden Kel Ataram around the area of Menaka.

4 See Boilley (Boilley 1999, also Grémont 2010; Hureiki 2003; Lecocq 2010), who offered historical accounts about the diversity and social stratifications of the Tuareg living in the regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal.

form the cornerstone of political organization. As main strategies of social reproduction, these clans (*tewsiten* in *Tamasheq*) practised intra-clan[5] marriages. Another group of nobles was distinguished in early French colonial reports from the warrior nobility: the *Ineslemen*, families of religious experts. This group stood directly under the noble warriors in the social structure. The vassal groups, *imghad,* formed a separate group, politically and physically considered as weaker and socially inferior to the other two groups. In the pre-colonial era, the *imghad*, who are considered as the clan of the vassal groups, were in charge of herding their own animals as well as these of the nobles (Boilley 1999).[6] They paid tribute (*tiwse*) to the politically dominant clans which, in return, offered them protection against external attacks.[7] Following Ag Litny (Ag Litny 1992), the French historian Pierre Boilley has argued that the social life of the *imghad* in the area around Kidal was shaped by material poverty, physical[8] weakness, and political inferiority (Boilley 1999, 30). Another social status group, called the *Inadan*, were craftmen and blacksmiths[9]; they were and are conceived as racially black. Finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy stand the *Iklan,* or slaves, who perform domestic work and cattle herding on behalf of their masters; they are of unfree birth and considered racially black (Hall 2011a; Hall 2011b).

Klute and Lecocq maintain that this hierarchical structure has undergone significant changes over recent decades (Klute 2003; Klute 2013; Lecocq 2010).[10] Lecocq even notes a shift in the terminology used in the self-ascriptions of certain social groups when, for example, some *imghad* began to refer to themselves as nobles, and consequently introduced the term *Timgheda* "the way of the imghad" (Lecocq 2010, 9). Although Lecocq speaks about these dynamics, his perspective on Tuareg society remains somewhat static, for instance, when he frames the differences between different social status groups in the Kidal area in terms of oppositions: between the free-born and the unfree, strong versus weak, and lineage versus non-lineage. According to Lecocq, the first opposition between free–unfree manifests itself in norms of social conduct and in a labor ethic that are rooted in collective understandings of the mentality and ways of thinking considered to be typical and innate to the free born and the unfree (Lecocq 2005, 55f.; Berge 2000, 204f.). The tandem

5 I mean here marriage between members within the same clan.

6 According to Lecocq, this was not necessarily true. He also argues that some imghad, *but* not all, have *temet* meaning a lineage to which they belong and which also kept them against impurity or political encroachments through marriage strategies that formed the basis of a policy to keep the social strata in place (Lecocq 2010, 5).

7 Both Grémont and Boilley recall that there were constant rivalry and conflicting relations between different social and political constellations prior to the French occupation of the desert (Boilley 1999; Grémont 2010).

8 According to Boilley, the notion of physical weakness was used to refer to the dependence of the imghad on noble warriors for protection. But the author also stresses that this issue remains controversial as well (Boilley 1999, 30).

9 Schmidt compares this group to the *Griots* in southern Mali. Concerning *Griots* (see Schulz 2001).

10 See Klute (2003) (also Lecocq 2010, chapters 5 and 6).

strong–weak similarly arranges the noble warriors and the politically weak *imghad* in a hierarchical relationship. The last opposition, i.e. the lineage–non-lineage, points to relations between "those who claim a lineage and know their genealogy, and those who do not claim a lineage or do not know their genealogy" (Lecocq 2010, 9). Having a lineage in the Tuareg society, according to Lecocq, is perceived to be the most fitting characteristic of noble origin and blood (2010, 9).

My account departs from this interpretation in the body of literature insofar as, firstly, this study examines the points of view of the free white non-noble-Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan, who are both of inferior social status. Secondly, the present study also does not focus on the specific regional group of Tuareg called the federation. In Niamey, my research focused on free white Tuareg from all the regions in northern Mali. I sought to understand how the informants negate the regional differences between different groups of free white Tuareg. Thirdly, while the authors mentioned above depict how the structure of local clans is ordered according to social status hierarchy, this study examines how the free white Tuareg informants in Niamey and Bellah-Iklan in Abala take apart this local clan hierarchy in the exile situation.

3.2 The social dynamics of Tuareg society under French colonial rule (1894 to 1960)

The arrival of the French in Timbuktu in 1894 marked the starting point of the colonial conquest of the western part of the Sahara (Boilley 1999, 62f.). From there, colonial French troops moved toward other Tuareg settlements. The Kel Intsar and Kel Tenguériguif in Timbuktu and the Ouillimeden Kel Ataram living in the Gao region resisted the French occupation violently, whereas the Kel Adagh, by contrast, opted for an alliance (Boilley 1999, chapter 2). The Tuareg of Timbuktu and Gao, who openly resisted colonial domination, were defeated by French troops and placed under extreme surveillance. The Kel Adagh of Kidal, in contrast, offered their submission in a letter written by Mohammed Illi Ag Khammadin, the chief of the Kel Adagh Tuareg, to captain Métois, the French representative of In Salah in southern Algeria (1999, 68).[11] In his answering letter, captain Métois accepted the offer of the Kel Adagh, recognized Illi Ag Khammadin as the single chief of the Ifoghas and groups affiliated with them, and offered the Kel Adagh protection against their enemies (1999, 69). In exchange, captain Métois requested Illi Ag Khammadin to update him on all important events involving the Adagh people. The letter exchange sheds light on the different options open to Tuareg clans on the eve of colonial occupation, and also on rivalries among Tuareg groups.[12]

11 The letter was written on October 20, 1903.

12 For instance, in his letter to Captain Métois, the chief of Kel Adagh manifested his desire to obtain in written form the French acceptance of their offer in order to dissuade the people around the

The rivalry between the Tuareg federations in northern Mali faded away during the colonial era through the creation of the short-lived Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariannes (OCRS) in 1957.[13] Although the French initiated the project of creating the OCRS, it was also positively received by some Tuareg groups.[14] Thus, on 30 October 1957, the Qadi of Timbuktu wrote a letter of petition addressed to President De Gaulle and signed by notables and merchants of Timbuktu. He mentioned in his letter that if there existed a right to self-determination for a people, the nomads would like to believe that they were allowed to make their aspirations known. The letter manifested the Qadi's formal opposition to the nomads' integration into Federalist Black or North Africa autonomous entities (Lecocq 2010, 55f.). Instead, the Qadi demanded their incorporation into the French Sahara of which they were part, historically, emotionally, and ethnically. Equally, the letter declared without restrictions that nomads already were, and wanted to remain, an integral part of the French Republic. The Qadi also traveled and campaigned extensively throughout the Sahara in order to promote his idea of nomads' particularism and unity versus the African sedentary people.[15] However, in spite of his effort, his project remained unsuccessful because not only African elites were opposed to the Qadi's project, but other Tuareg federations as well, in particular the Kel Adagh (Boilley 1999).

Under colonial rule, socio-political hierarchies within the federations were fundamentally altered, partly as a consequence of the French-led emancipation of the vassal groups and former slaves. A colonial measure with momentous consequences was the prohibition of the tribute payments that the vassal groups had owed the politically dominant noble warriors in exchange for the protection they received from their free-born masters (Lecocq 2010). As a result, the dominant clans lost much of their former political and economic power. The position of some warrior clans was further undermined as a consequence of the French-led manumission of slaves who belonged to the defeated federations and their subsequent settlement in newly created "liberty villages" (Bouche 1968). These

Niger river. I would assume he meant those Tuareg from the Timbuktu and Gao regions or just the Tuareg in the Niger Bend, as there is historical evidence that the Kel Adagh even stood on the side of the French troops against Ouillimeden in 1916. On their part, Boilley and Grémont submit that the Kel Adagh, until the colonial occupation, paid tribute to the Ouillimeden for protection. After the defeat of the latter by the French, the Kel Adagh tribes were promoted and granted the status of an independent federation. In contrast, the Ouillimeden Kel Ataram and Denneg federations were subject to severe measures by the French, such as more strict surveillance of the ruling clans.

13 This project consisted of separating the Saharan regions from both French Sudan and the French part of North Africa. It included northern regions of current Mali, Niger, and southern Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania.

14 François Mitterrand, Minister of Justice at that time, explained that he would nevertheless like a more structured Saharan territory, in conformity with its geographic realities, administratively more autonomous from Algeria and the black African Territories bordering to the south (Lecocq 2010, 52).

15 In this context, the notion of African sedentary population included farmers from both north and southern French Sudan.

measures consisted, first of all, in regrouping dispersed slave families and providing the household heads with a proper identity card (Lecocq 2005).[16] The reunited families were often registered then administratively separated from their masters and united with Bellah fractions, often taking the name of their masters' fractions. The new fractions were provided with a means of existence of their own (2005, 51).

Lecocq, following Winter (Winter 1984), summarizes the transformation of socio-political hierarchies prompted by colonial administrative regulations as follows:

> With the growth in local markets and the monetization of northern Mali in the 1940s and 1950s, these newly liberated communities found an outlet for their surplus production, with their former masters forcibly as new customers. Pastoral slaves were apportioned a minimal part of their former masters herds, fixed at three heads of cattle and thirty goats. For those *bellah* who remained with their former masters, labor contracts were drawn up with a relatively generous yearly remuneration in livestock: a three-year-old camel for herding thirty camels; a heifer for each twenty head of cattle; and ten sheep for every hundred herded. (Lecocq 2005, 51f.)

Although most liberty villages were created in the Timbuktu and Gao regions, among clans who had mounted resistance to the French colonial powers, the Kel Adagh warrior clans in the Kidal region were also affected by these measures (Boilley 1999). The leaders of *imghad* vassal groups were placed under the direct authority of colonial administrators. This deprived the politically dominant *Ifoghas* clans of any opportunity to assume a role as political brokers between formerly dependent clans and the colonial state; these clans of the Tuareg nobility lost much of their former political legitimacy. These transformations of established social hierarchies and dependencies within individual federations and also of relations between federations had long-term consequences and informed post-World War II Tuareg politics.

The Brazzaville declaration in 1944, followed by the creation of the French union in 1946, augured a new era of reformulated relations between France and its colonial subjects. The first legislative elections where African candidates could present themselves were held in 1946, but the Tuareg participated in these political processes to a considerably lesser degree than Mali's sedentary populations. The reasons for their limited participation were, firstly, that the Tuareg remained at a distance from the political centers of colonial politics, which were essentially located in the urban centers of the southern French Sudan. Also, because of logistical and political reasons, schooling opportunities, as the main route to political influence for the new African elite, remained severely limited in Mali's north.

16 For example, Lecocq emphasizes that the slaves were formerly registered on the identity cards of their masters as part of the family, congruent with local discourses and anthropological analysis, which stressed the use of family and kinship terminology between slaves and masters.

Other infrastructures introduced by the colonial state, such as schools and medical care were almost absent in nomad settlements (Lecocq 2010, 43).

While the overall participation of the nomadic population was low, the participation of the social groups within Tuareg society was again shaped by changes, even inversions, of the former hierarchies between the different social status groups. For many Bellah-Iklan:

> voting RDA equaled a vote against the master, it meant filing a freedom paper. On 17 June 1951, 712 bellahs in Gangaber, 59 at In Tillit, 26 at Chunkaye, and 203 at Indeliman voted against their master. The results at the ballot box at In Tillit are especially interesting: a particularly isolated post, people untouched by propaganda, and yet 59 freedom papers. (Lecocq 2005, 49)

The direct effect of the result of this vote, by which the slaves opposed their masters, was the exacerbation of tension between them. Many slaves left their masters even taking some of the animals along (Lecocq 2005, 49). Lecocq also explains that the results of the vote led the colonial administration and the US-RDA to give greater consideration to the social and economic emancipation of the unfree Tuareg (2005, 49f.). While the colonial administration debated the appropriate reforms that should be implemented in the Niger Bend after World War II, a number of Bellah-Iklan groups began to take matters into their own hands (Hall 2011b, 73f.). For instance, a revolt of some Bellah-Iklan in the area of Menaka in 1946 was decisive in ending the control of free-born Tuareg over their former slaves (cf. Klein 1998). After the 1916 revolt of the Ouillimeden Kel Ataram, the Iklan *n eguef* families under their command were separated and regrouped as a fraction under the name *Zamburuten* (Schmitt 1954, see footnote 9 Lecocq 2005, 65). This hastened the Bellah-Iklan migration to the south in order to find better pasture lands and to avoid their masters (Hall 2011b, 73f.). Throughout this post-World War II era, the US-RDA leaders steadily gained influence in local politics, drawing on the support of socially and politically subordinate groups. Their opponents from the Parti Soudanais Progressiste (PSP), in contrast, were supported by the free-born Tuareg.[17] The party competition and its intertwining with contestations among different Tuareg status groups, continued to inform Tuareg politics in postcolonial Mali.

3.3 The Tuareg threat to National Unity in Mali: 1960–2016

President Keita's socialist regime subscribed to the modernist belief in modern technologies, rational production schemes, African socialism, and, above all, the malleability of the human condition, and was determined to put the Sahara to

17 Extensive research done by Schulz in southern Mali illustrates similar dynamics around the area of Kita (Schulz 2001). While clan chiefs were supportive of PSP, the peoples of social and politically marginal positions were attracted to the US-RDA.

use and civilize its population (Lecocq 2010, chapter 3). As part of the US-RDA party's plan to modernize nomadic economies, in the early 1960s, socioeconomic measures were implemented that aimed to transform nomads into sedentary agriculturalists, to free the Bellah-Iklan from their master–slave relationships, and to tax pastoral economies.

To this end, the state created and distributed garden perimeters to nomads. Essentially, the Keita's regime had a "notion of work" that could be equated with sedentary farming. Thus converting pastoral nomadic peoples who, according to the view of the regime, wander around and count the heads of cattle, into sedentary farming was then equated with their conversion from a state of laziness into diligent workers. Historical works agree that the gardens created for this conversion were in the end held by the Bellah-Iklan because the former masters remained reluctant to commit themselves to such manual work. Men whose task had formerly been limited to watering the animals and fetching water were now forced to do manual work. Free-born Tuareg women, too, who traditionally were not expected to do manual work, were forced to make bricks under the new political order and were threatened with imprisonment or death in case of non-compliance (2010, 159). Keita's government also sought to put the nomads and their cattle into the channels of the national rationalized economy by putting taxes on the pastoral activities: the export of the cattle, for example, which until then had been in the hands of the nomads themselves. The latter usually sold their animals according to needs for consumption, and in the market of their choices. However, from early 1963 onwards, the nomads had to declare their activities.

The determination of the post-colonial state to emancipate the Bellah-Iklan and vassal groups further, processes that had begun gradually under colonial rule, was another source of tension between the free-born noble Tuareg and the Malian state. The state dissolved some nomadic tribes as administrative entities in 1960 and replaced them with the new political entities referred to as fractions. Furthermore, the Keita regime implemented a cultural policy that aimed at transforming the nomads' customs and habits. Ag Litny argues that under Modibo Keita's regime, the Troupe artistique of Kidal[18] was forbidden to sing in *Tamasheq* and had to learn, and perform, in *Bamanankan*[19] instead (Ag Litny 1992).

Looking at the state-making as a "cultural process" (Corrigan/Sayer 1985; Steinmetz 1999), Schulz divides post-colonial Mali into two cultural triangles by reflecting on the complex ethnic and cultural compositions on the one hand, and the imbalance between different triangles in terms of national cultural politics on the other (Schulz 2007b, 190f.). For example, when speaking about Modibo Keita's regime (1960–1968), she states that:

18 For a long period of time, a central axis of Malian state culture was the festival called Biennal held each two years. For this event each region sent a Troupe artistique (Schulz 2007b).

19 Bamanankan is the lingua franca in southern Mali.

> State administration of culture […] was effected partly through the creation of structures of state patronage that facilitated the incorporation of various cultural producers, among them *Jeli* musicians and oral traditionalists, into the nationalist project. Musical and artistic production, closely monitored by the Ministry of Culture, became central elements of an officially promoted national culture. Considerably less broadcasting time and attention during official celebrations were devoted to the oral arts of the peoples from the northern triangle. (Schulz 2007b, 190f.)

Before Schulz, Cutter (1968) had already remarked that each night at six, the radio broadcast a music program with folk music. More important in this policy was the broadcasting of the tales of Baba Sissoko which centered on the Sunjata epic and other tales of the Mande Kingdoms performed by "the national *griot* Banzoumana Sissoko" (Cutter 1968, quoted in Lecocq 2010, 73f.).

For Schulz, the consequence of the underrepresentation of northern people in the national media and the denial of the existence of differences and inequalities within the nation was in line with the persistent exclusion of northern people from positions of political influence, an exclusion effected primarily through the structure of single-party rule that was concentrated in the capital, leaving the northern population very little leverage in accessing the resources of the state through patronage relations (Schulz 2007b, 192). Along a similar line, Lecocq, describing processes of symbolic cultural formation of nationhood in Mali, points out that:

> the name of the new republic reflected the dominance of its core populations: the Mande and Bambara. Mali was explicitly presented as the rightful heir not only of the Mali Empire, but also, more broadly, of a Mande civilisation whose glory and dignity, robbed by colonialism, had to be restored. Malian schoolbooks presented the history of the new nation almost uniquely through the history of the Mali Empire and other Mande kingdoms, leaving some space to the Songhay Empire and largely leaving aside the complex histories of the many other communities in the republic. The imaginary glue holding the various peoples of the country together consisted of frequent reference to Sunjata empire-building, thus reflecting an 'official nationalism' in Anderson's meaning of the term. […] In this way, Mali national culture was Mande culture and Mali's national character was the Mande national character of industriousness and self-sacrifice. (Lecocq 2010, 73)

These various measures targeting Tuareg society resulted in the frustration culminating in a series of interlinked uprisings known as the Tuareg rebellions: 1963, 1990–1996, 2006, and since 2012 to the present day.

3.3.1 The Tuareg rebellion in 1963 and its aftermath

What is known as the Tuareg's first rebellion took place in the region of Kidal. One captured former rebel, Amouksou Ag Azandeher, explained the revolt against the Malian state as follows:

> The reasons are numerous, but the main ones are: 1) we, nomads of the white race, can neither conceive nor accept to be commanded by blacks whom we always had as servants and slaves. 2) We Ifoghas, do not accept or conceive of the equality between races and men Mali wants to impose on us, starting with taking our *imghad* and *bellah* away from us. 3) We gain nothing from Malian independence, but heavy taxes and customs duties to pay. 4) The Malian Government thinks it is superior to our Chief Zeyd and does not listen to him. 5) The Malian gendarmerie mistreats us irrespective of whether they are wrong or right. (Lecocq 2010, 188)[20]

Massacres and summary executions followed altercations between Tuareg "rebels" and the Malian army (Boilley 1999; Lecocq 2010). The rebels planned their operations at the rebel base in southern Algeria Takormiasse and most of their attacks consisted of raids on camel herds and fixed Malian army posts (Lecocq 2010). The rebel units mostly traveled from there by night, spending the day hidden while scouts gathered information. Their general tactic was to attack only small forces disadvantaged by the terrain (2010, 198). In order to suppress the rebels, the Malian army forces used heavy weapons against them during the first four months of the rebellion. For example, in October 1963, the state used an average of 2,200 men, 35 armored cars, two airplanes, and an assorted number of heavy arms against rebel forces numbering about 200 men at most (2010, 199).

The regime also replaced the civil administrator with Captain Dibi Syllas Diarra. The entire Adagh zone passed under military control and was divided into two: one part declared a "concentration zone" where civilians were advised to relocate and a second part declared a "combat zone." Many nomads resisted this arbitrary relocation and moved to Algeria. The Malian army capitalized on close diplomatic ties to Algeria and pursued the civil population into Algerian territory, considering the Kel Adagh who had fled from the violence as accomplices of the rebels. In November 1963, the Malian army forces massacred more than 400 cows and 250 camels together with their herdsmen at the wells of In Ouzzel, a few hundred kilometers into the Algerian border zone (2010, 209).

The rebels who were caught by the Malian army were subjected to scenes of humiliation before being executed. Amegha Ag Sherif, a former rebel, recalled in a conversation with Lecocq how the Malian army forces undressed two men, Zeyd and Mohamed Ali, exposing them throughout Goundam, Timbuktu, and the whole Tuareg country. Ag Sherif insisted that the soldiers spat on these men, who were the most respected men among the Tuareg population. He concluded his report by asserting that treating these men like that was equal to "killing someone's soul" (2010, 214f.). By August 15, 1964, the Malian government celebrated the end of the rebellion and their victory over the rebels. A great part of Adagh was

20 However, Klute underlines that the degrees to which these measures were implanted varied from one area to another. He argues that they affected the other Western Tuareg federations more than the Kel Adagh where the revolt broke out.

declared a "forbidden zone" and closed to foreigners. The bloody state repression of this rebellion produced many nomad refugees across the Magrheb and the West African diaspora. Lecocq reminds us that, in spite of the official end of the rebellion, the Malian army continued to commit a significant number of public and summary executions, even after the removal of Modibo Keita from power in 1968. For example, he explains that the Tuareg chiefs who did not collaborate with the army were also shot (2010, 218).[21]

3.3.2 The fall of Modibo Keita, the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, and continued state repression

In November 1968, a group of young soldiers under the leadership of Lieutenant Moussa Traoré removed the first president Modibo Keita from power. The news of the military coup was acclaimed and celebrated, at least among politically dominant clans within the Tuareg society. Yet the strong military hold on Tuareg regions, especially in Kidal, did not change. In addition, the nomads came to be confronted with two droughts that further affected them. During the first period of droughts in 1973–1974, the Tuareg lost many of their cattle and also many people. Lecocq following Kloth (Kloth 1974) writes:

> Survey data from 3,500 children emphasize the fact that undernutrition in the four country area is to be found more among nomads than sedentary persons, and more in the North than in the South. Children from nomad clusters ranged on the average ten to seventeen percent below the threshold while those from sedentary or Southern groups were approximately three to seven percent below. The existence of pockets of extreme undernutrition is supported by data from all countries but particularly from Mali where up to 80% of the children in one nomad cluster were acutely undernourished. The above statements on the nutritional status of children must be considered conservative. (Lecocq 2010, 236f.)

According to Ag Litny, as a consequence of malnutrition in this period there were days when people did not even leave the cemetery since there were so many bodies to be buried. Death became a common occurrence among the Kel Tamasheq (Ag Litny 1992, 163).

Before the nomads had been able to recover from the first drought, another one began (1983–1984). As before, the only option left to many Kel Tamasheq was to go into exile in Niger and in the Magrheb. Among the far-reaching consequences of these periods of forced exile was the alteration of norms of conduct regulating

21 The best known examples of these cases are Ayyouba Ag Mohamed Adargajouj, chief of the Daoussahak, and the father of Younes and Ilyas ag Ayyouba. According to Lecocq, Ayyouba's father, who lived in the area around Menaka, was arrested and sent to Kidal, where he was executed on the grounds that his sons were rebel leaders and he himself had furnished camels for them (Lecocq 2010, 218).

interactions between groups in the Kel Tamasheq society (Boilley 1999; Bourgeot 1995). The distinct working ethic and codes of behavior guiding interactions between Tuareg of free birth and the unfree slaves lost much of their validity and legitimacy when Tuareg of free birth started to beg for food and to eat in public. Also, slaves and masters had to compete for resources, such as when masters began to cultivate the gardens formerly considered the sole occupation of slaves. According to Boilley, among the Kel Adagh these years are still today remembered as "*les années d'égalité*" (literally, the years of equality). The dividing lines between the two status categories, the politically dominant free-born Tuareg and their former slaves, became blurred. This blurring of former status divisions manifested itself in cases where slaves succeeded in marrying the daughters of their former masters. The attitude of the Malian government toward the Tuareg confronted with this situation is highly indicative. Le Monde reporter Phillipe Decreane stressed that the Malian authorities refused to deliver aid to the Tuareg confronted with severe situations and that the refusal of humanitarian support severely exacerbated the negative consequences of the droughts for nomadic populations (Lecocq 2010, 237). Recalling antecedents such as pre-colonial relations between nomads and sedentary populations; the OCRS; and the rebellion in the Kidal region in 1963, Phillipe Decreane even went as far as to argue that the Malian authorities took the drought of 1973–1974 as an opportunity to get rid of nomads once and for all (2010, 237).[22]

3.3.3 The Tuareg second rebellion in the 1990s

The bloody repression of the rebellion in 1963–1964 by the Malian army, followed by two disastrous droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, fueled the formation of the Tuareg diaspora stretching across borders to the neighboring countries of the Maghreb and West Africa. This diaspora was largely composed of youths confronted with the common experience of exile, unemployment, and rigid security regulations in the Maghreb. These conditions of exile led the Tuareg youths to develop a revolutionary vision for the nomad society (Lecocq 2004). Calling themselves the *Ishumar* (meaning unemployees), these young Tuareg sought to promote the idea of the "*tumast*" which, similarly to social processes highlighted in this dissertation, tended to reconstruct the Tuareg society as a homogeneous community while downplaying rivalry and differences between and within the federations. In this sense, the rebellion was not only an armed uprising (the Tuareg second rebellion) against the Malian state, but also involved attempts to change the hierarchy and caste structure of Tuareg society itself. The rebellion started with the attack on

22 For Lecocq, even if Philippe Decreane's accusations against the Malian political authority in Bamako were incorrect, they very likely expressed the thoughts of those nomads who lost their children due to malnutrition and disease in the aid abandoned camps (Lecocq 2010, 238).

June 28, 1990, in Menaka, and lasted, at least officially, until March 1996 with the ceremony of the peace flame held in Timbuktu.

Lecocq divides the rebellion into four main phases. The first phase went from late June 1990 to January 1991 when the Tamanrasset peace agreement was signed. According to him, the Tuareg refer to this period as the real rebellion. The rebellion itself was precipitated after members of Gao and Kidal informal Tuareg battalions had been arrested and their arms stocks seized by the Malian army. Only Iyad Ag Ghali,[23] the leader of the rebellion, luckily managed to escape with a few (30 in number) men. Additionally, on June 27, 1990, a heavily armed rebel vehicle was intercepted by a border Malian army patrol looking for smugglers. After a short fight, the army seized the vehicle as well as the arms that it contained. The next day the rebels located in the area of Menaka attacked the military camp and administrative posts in Tidarmène, together with cars and the belongings of NGOs, in the area around the Tedjerert.

Between June and October 1990, the rebels constantly attacked military camps and administrative posts in various areas of the Adagh and parts of *Azawad*.[24] The army's response and attempt to contain this rebellion resembled that of 1963–1964. The army initiated what were known as "concentration zones" in the vicinity of the main northern cities and "free circulation zones" next to combat zones. Moreover, a state of emergency was declared under which many cases of army led civilian executions took place. According to Lecocq, most of these executions formed part of a deliberate terror campaign to undermine support for the rebellion and to discourage the fighters (Lecocq 2010).[25] Klute reports "around Tamasheq confirmed victims 2,374; Tamasheq unconfirmed victims 734; confirmed sedentary victims 178; sedentary unconfirmed victims 272 between June 1990 and October 1995" (Klute 2001, quoted in Lecocq 2010, 306). An important step in the Malian army's "cleansing operation" was taken at I-n-Abalan near Ti-n Essako in July 1990 where the soldiers killed an estimated 94 nomads (2010, 306).

The outcome of this first phase was the Tamanrasset peace agreement in January 1991 which, roughly speaking, consisted of a ceasefire, a gradual withdrawal of the Malian army from the area, and the granting of opportunities to the rebel fighters to join the Malian army. The peace agreement in Tamanrasset initialized the second phase of the conflict. It goes from this signing of the peace agreement in

23 Iyad Ag Ghali is known as the leading figure of the Tuareg second rebellion. He had created an Islamist militant group known as Ansar Eddine in northern Mali in 2012.

24 Examples are the attacks on the military post at Ti-n Essako on July 2, which left three soldiers and one rebel dead, on the Gendarmerie at Tarkint on 16 July, and on the military post at Abeibara on July 28. Throughout August and September 1990, the rebels attacked the military posts at Ti-n Zaouatène, Tadjoujemet, Telabit, I-n-Ekker, Abeibara, I-n Tedeyni, and I-n Ghar. Skirmishes between rebel and army units occurred also around the beginning of October at Tadjoujemet and Tadjinout in the Tighaghar mountains (Lecocq 2010, 300).

25 Lecocq reminds us that spokesmen for the Tamasheq and civil population accused the Malian armed forces of having started a campaign of ethnic cleansing in the region of Timbuktu (Lecocq 2010, 305).

1991 to early 1994. This period is characterized by what Lecocq termed the "confused rebellion." The confusion, here was manifested in the fragmentation of the Tuareg individual and all-encompassing military and political movements among the clans and the federations, in contrast to their commitment to the nation at the beginning of the conflict. This confusion illustrated historical rivalries between but also fundamental cleavages within different Tuareg clans and federations that made the formation of one homogeneous Tuareg society impossible (Bourgeot 1995; Hureiki 2003). According to Bourgeot, this primarily consists of transcending once and for all the internal differences rooted in the political organization based on lineages. He submits that any national consciousness necessarily transforms two identities, the individual and the social, into a national identity. The national sentiment implies the centralization of political power. He concludes that the notion of nation is not applicable to the Tuareg who never had a centralized state in the Sahara. The rebels did not give any fixed name to their movement due to their will to transcend these internal Kel Tamasheq differences highlighted by Bourgeot (Bourgeot 1995) and Hureiki (Hureiki 2003). This strategy also enabled easier integration of rebels of Moor and Arab ethnic origins into one comprehensive secular-oriented movement referred to as the MPLA (Mouvement Populaire pour la Libération de l'Azawad).

Shortly after the outbreak of the rebellion, the FIAA (Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad) was created to separate Arabs from the Tuareg. By January 1991, the FPLA (Front Populaire pour la Libération de l'Azawad), encompassing clans such as the Kel Antsar from the Timbuktu region and the Chamanamas, Ishidenharen, Dabakhar from Gao and Dawsahak, was contesting the Kel Adagh leadership with Iyad Ag Ghali established at the head of the movement. Consequently, the Tamanrasset peace agreement signed by Ag Ghali gave way to open conflict. After the creation of the FPLA, the original movement took the name MPA (Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad). In November 1991, former vassal groups founded a new movement called the ARLA (Armée Révolutionnaire pour la Libération de l'Azawad) on the grounds that supporting the MPA, led by Iyad Ag Ghali, a free man of noble origin, symbolized a legitimation of the former dominant clans politically. The founders of the ARLA, pleading for equality in Tuareg society, contested the peace agreement signed by Iyad Ag Ghali. These newly established Tuareg militant groups expanded the combat zones to all the three regions. They engaged in a fight with the central state and also among themselves.

In early 1994, the third phase of the rebellion began, prompted by controversies over the national pact (signed in April 1992) and the arrival of the Songhay vigilant brigade, Ganda Koy (created in April 1994), on the scene of violent confrontation.[26] The vigilant brigade can be seen as an effort on the part of the sedentary Songhay to counter what they considered a favoring of nomads to their own detriment. Arguing that they, too, had been suffering severely from rebel

26 MPGK (Mouvement Patriotique Ganda Koy).

attacks on sedentary populations, representatives of the Songhay vigilante group vowed to protect their own people against the rebels and to contain a situation of insecurity in the northern regions. The following pamphlet conveys the rationale for the creation of the group:

> Fellow citizens of the North, let us sweep away all nomads from our villages and cities, even from our barren land! Tomorrow the nomads will install themselves there as dominators. Black sedentary peoples, from Nioro to Ménaka, let us organise, let us take up arms for the great battle that waits. Let us send the nomads back to the sands of the Azawad. The existing social balance cannot be modified. The social economic problems of the North need to be solved for all citizens without discrimination. Why are there development projects for the nomads? Why are there army posts for the nomads? Why are there seats in parliament for armed rebel-bandits? Because they took up arms and killed? That is inadmissible. The Gandakoye movement is born. Signed without us, the [National] pact is against us. The realities in the North show this. We should create insecurity for the nomads as they have created it for the sedentary populations. (Lecocq 2010, 337)

Already in May 1994, Captain Abdoulaye Mahamahada Maiga and Lieutenants Lamine Diallo and Abdoulaye "Blo" Cissé, leading figures of the movement, deserted from the Malian army.[27] Throughout the following months, the group mounted several attacks on the Arabs and Tuareg living in the vicinity of the Niger River.[28]

The Bellah-Iklan also created a group of their own to support the Songhay against their former masters in the Gao and Timbuktu regions. For example, when the Army attacked the free-born Tuareg and Arab community in Léré in 1991, many Bellah-Iklan joined in, and even guarded the survivors outside the village for more than a year (Lecocq 2010, 350). Fati Wellet Hamomo, one former hostage in Léré between May 1991 and 1992, explained that:

> The *bellah* took our possessions, engaged in trade in our place, set up shops almost everywhere in the south, killed our cattle. Others lived with our herds in the bush. They also killed people in the bush and looted their camps. During the last dry season, we had neither access to the wells, nor to the market because of the problems [between the Malian Army Forces and the rebels]. The *bellah* were charged to survey us. Some we knew, others we didn't. At night, military vehicles patrolled to prevent our escape. They threw stones at us when we tried to leave. (Lecocq 2010, 350)

27 It was assumed that although these formally deserted from the national army, there was still considerable suspicion. This distrust was especially based on the fact that those who deserted were authorized by their superiors in the army, as it seemed that the military and the government did not have the same opinion on how to deal with the Tuareg (Lecocq 2010).

28 However, it has often been argued that it was even sometimes difficult to know whether the regular soldiers or the Ganday Koy or the two together committed the attacks on the Arabs and red Tuareg.

During the fourth and final phase of the rebellion, which lasted from late 1994 until March 1996, efforts were made to dissolve the army factions through inter-community dialogues. This culminated in the peace agreement ("*flamme de la Paix*") celebrated in Timbuktu in March 1996 with the symbolic destruction of guns. Yet regardless of this declaration of the end of the civil war, major parts of the Tuareg population that had fled to neighboring countries were reluctant to come back.[29]

3.3.4 Rebellion and ethnic conflict in the 2000s

On May 23, 2006, Tuareg fighters, under the leadership of Ibrahim Bahanga, targeted the Malian army garrison in Kidal, seized arms, and arrested the Governor of the region.[30] For Lecocq, this was a renewed version of rebellion, this time rooted in internal tensions within Tuareg society. One aspect of this tension has been explained by the fact that some Tuareg, especially educated cadres, had benefited more from the state and NGO resources than their uneducated counterparts. Another aspect of internal tension that led to the rebellion in 2006 was the long-standing tension between the vassal groups and the noble warriors' politically dominant groups.[31] A peace accord signed in Algeria in July 2006 was merely a prelude to further protracted fighting between separatist fighters and the Malian army units under the leadership of Tuareg of vassal origins. This conflict came to an end in early 2009.

Yet from early 2012 onwards (just about three years later), another violent conflict broke out once again. It first started with an attack by the free white Tuareg secession movement MNLA (Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad) against the Malian state in Menaka and later on turned into confused ethnic conflicts. The confusion was made even worse by the emergence of several Salafist Jihadist factions obsessed with implementing sharia law. After a short military campaign, these factions defeated the Malian army and subsequently occupied the northern regions where the Jihadi-Salafist imposed sharia law.[32] These conflicts were the consequence of the fall of Libyan President Gaddafi,[33] of the influence of the international terrorist networks, and long-standing ethnic conflicts in northern Mali (Klute 2012; Olivier de Sardan 2012). Thus, the Fulani, Songhay, Arabs, and Bellah-Iklan groups created MUJAO in order to contain the growing Tuareg

29 In the case of Niger, a significant number of free-born Tuareg among the refugees of the civil war in the 1990s did not go back to Mali.

30 Alhamoudou Ag Ilyène from Kidal, who is currently ambassador of Mali in Niger, was the governor at that time.

31 See Klute for the background dynamics of this conflict (Klute 2003).

32 The main Islamist factions were Mujao, Ansar Eddine, and AQMI (Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique).

33 The connection to Libyan conflicts was made through the facts that Gaddafi had been a key player in the Tuareg issue in Mali and Niger since the 1980s and also that many Tuareg soldiers fled Libya after Gaddafi's fall to join the battleground in northern Mali.

control over northern regions after the withdrawal of the Malian army (2012).[34] In addition, existing conflicts between vassals and free-born noble Tuareg clans partly informed the groups' attitudes toward the sharia order in 2012 (Klute 2003; Klute 2012; Lecocq/Mann/Whitehouse et al. 2013). Altogether, these conflicts have produced over 400,000 refugees and internally displaced people and led to a military putsch in March 2012 followed by the near collapse of the state institutions in southern Mali (2013, 9).

Drawing on the work of Lecocq, Grémont, Bourgeot, Boilley, Hureiki, Hall, and Klute, this chapter sketched out the historical Tuareg social structure and political organizations and accounted for transformations in Tuareg society since the colonial era, as well as for the political and ecological developments that gradually forced many of them into exile. The following chapter takes up this account of historical antecedents to present-day tensions between the free-born and unfree Tuareg since the colonial era and explores how male refugees in the Nigerien Tuareg diaspora make sense of these tensions in relation to their current situation in exile.

34 Olivier de Sardan wrote that during the months that followed the withdrawal of the Malian army from the north, the MNLA members were held accountable for several cases of abductions and cattle raiding among other sorts of abuses upon the Bellah-Iklan, Songhay, and Fulani. Thus, in order to counterbalance the MNLA, many Falani, Songhay, and Arabs joined, or even created, their own Islamist factions (Olivier de Sardan 2012).

4. Refugee reflections on the social conditions of exile in Niamey and Abala

> *To humanitarian workers the refugees have no dignity and do not even deserve respect […] But, Aghamad said this will come to an end one day.*
>
> —Inawélène Aklinine, Abala, 01/11/2013.

> *You know for the Hausa and Zarma in Niamey, we Tuareg are just like dogs, we are not normal persons […], but all this because we are Tuareg, we have red skin color.*
>
> —Ibrahim Ag Mohamed, 17/01/2013.

When I arrived in Niamey and Abala in 2012, I was struck by one pervasive feature of the male refugees' everyday discourses: their persistent comments on their living conditions in exile. They portrayed themselves as those whose living conditions had turned them into "nothing," *aytedim* or *adinat n bànan,*[1] or "*zéro*" in French. This term is a commonly used insult indicating someone's loss or lack of status, whether age related or linked to birth. The fact that refugees used this term so profusely to characterize their own situation in Niamey and Abala reflects upon their sense of crisis, as well as a widespread perception that the exile came with a loss in respectability and social status. Many interviewees deplored that their respect (*semghar*) as husbands and fathers have been undermined as they could no longer live up to cultural expectations of "providing" for their families within their adopted role as head of a household. However, typically the man of household, the father, would expect obedience while the mother as well as their children would adhere to his demands in return for his "providing" for the family. Nowadays, the respect and honor that derive from a family father's role as sole provider can no longer be achieved under conditions of exile. Accordingly, they feel that they have become "useless" people or "nothing." In Niamey, my informants' feeling that they had become "nothing" stemmed also from the fact that they felt mistreated by other urban residents. In Abala, my Bellah-Iklan informants similarly argued that humanitarian workers treated refugees poorly, or rather as "nothing." These Bellah-Iklan thus employed the expression *adinat n bànan* or *aytedim* to express their feelings of being treated without "dignity," as Assalim put it in the statement above. Simultaneously, however, both groups of informants speak in proverbs, prophecies, as well as conventional cultural idioms to interpret their predicament in Niamey and Abala, and this is a driving force for them to imagine themselves as a collective. The informants called their collectivity *tumast* and the *peuple noir* respectively. The social collectivities they envisioned in this manner were based on

1 *Adinat n bànan* can be translated both as "useless persons" or "nothing" in plural, and in *awadim n bànan* in the singular.

their feelings of "being together and feeling equal," a sentiment that grew partly in response to their predicaments in Niger. They thus maintained that the experience of being reduced to "nothing" enabled them to move beyond an identification with local clan structures. To them, the social conditions of exile provided alternative reference points for constructing themselves as a homogenous group. However, as I realized, my refugee informants reimagining of their collective identity in exile implied a construction of group identities that silenced significant internal cleavages within the refugee communities, both in Niamey and in Abala.

This chapter examines the ways in which refugees in Niamey and Abala imagine and reconstruct their group identities by reflecting on their living conditions in exile. The first part of the chapter focuses on the free-born white Tuareg in Niamey, tracing how the town informants interpret their situation of loss and thereby reimagine themselves as a "Tuareg people" in exile in Niamey. I begin by introducing the multi-ethnic composition of Niamey and its changing dynamics of urban economy as a result of changes in global economic processes. I focus on socioeconomic and political factors that have affected the self-esteem and parental patriarchal authority of men over their family members. For Abala, I similarly show how the Bellah-Iklan capitalize on their experiences of loss and undignified treatment as the basis for claiming a collective identity as the "*peuple noir*" in exile. Here, I examine how NGOs' regulations in the refugee camp undermine male respect in their families and throughout society. My key concern is to demonstrate how, in each setting, my interlocutors turned their experiences and predicaments into an asset that allowed them to deny their membership of former Tuareg clan structures. My analysis is informed by Malkki's argument that the social conditions of exile may reshape refugees' consciousness of themselves and allow them to develop new forms of collective identification (Malkki 1989; Malkki 1996). I also apply Marris' conceptualization of how people cope with loss, which centers on the claim that people respond to loss by making the unfamiliar familiar, reducing the new to the old (Marris 1974, 9). Marris also suggests that the process of assimilation may lead to modifications to the existing structure of thoughts and actions. Accordingly, I account for how the Tuareg in Niamey, as well as the Bellah-Iklan in Abala, assimilate their experiences of (losing or having lost) patriarchal control over their families with their existing patterns of thoughts and actions. Moreover, I also seek to understand what modifications this assimilation entails and how these alterations reshape the refugees' perceptions of their group identities.

4.1 The socioeconomic setting of Niamey

Many scholars of Niger depict Niamey as a multi-ethnic setting (Bernus 1962; Motcho 2004; Youngstedt 2013). According to Youngstedt, the settlement of Niamey evolved from a collection of small villages in the 1800s to 600 residents in 1900 (2013, 32f.). In 1926, it was declared the capital of the French colony of Niger

and then that of the independent Niger republic in 1960. By 1988, it had mushroomed into a city of 400,000 inhabitants (2013, 32). While the Zarma, Songhay, Mawri, and Fulani ethnic groups are held to be the founders of the town of Niamey, its demographic growth over time has been made possible by rural–urban migration. Gado argues that earlier migrants arrived during the colonial period to take up jobs for colonial administrators or as traders (Gado 1997). The successive droughts and famines of 1901–1903, 1913–1915, 1931–1932, 1954 provoked a massive exodus of rural population toward Niamey (1997, 35), and Niamey became a last resort for new rural migrants to begin a new life (Youngstedt 2013, 36). The establishment of a postcolonial state infrastructure from the 1960s on was also a driving force behind Niamey's spectacular growth, as its population grew from 33,816 inhabitants in 1960 to 56,997 in 1967 to 137,388 in 1975 and from 242,873 to 399,846 in 1977 and 1988, respectively (2013, 37).

This intense in-migration has transformed Niamey into a multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan setting that manifests itself in the formation of diasporic communities. Hence, focusing on the Hausa people, Youngstedt argues:

> Hausa migrants played a central role in the rapid growth of Niamey from a small city of 30,000—of whom only 3,600, or 12 percent, were Hausa in 1960 […]—to a bustling West African capital of 400,000 in 1988 where Hausa were a slight majority […] and have maintained that position up to the present as the city has grown to 1,222066. (Youngstedt 2013, 38f.)

Situating Niamey recently within global economic processes from the late 1980s to the present, Youngstedt maintains that the town underwent rapid changes:

> [T] he sweeping changes in Niamey over the past 22 years can only be understood in the context of contemporary globalization, involving the accelerating transnational movement of people, money, goods and technologies, mass media, and ideas. Specific global trends, policies, and technologies have played key roles in the four crucial changes that Niamey has experienced over the last two decades, namely, urban growth, deepening poverty, democratization, and information and communication revolutions. (Youngstedt 2013, 41)

Alidou further explains:

> By the mid-1980s, the collapse of the uranium market, followed by the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), and shortly after by the devaluation of the currency of francophone Africa, the CFA [by 100% in 1994], plunged the country into a devastating economic depression with severe sociopolitical and other consequences. (Alidou 2005, quoted in Youngstedt 2013, 43)

In this situation, poverty has become a pervasive threat for the majority of Niamey's inhabitants over the last two decades (Youngstedt 2013, 8). For example, the SAPs launched in the midst of the 1980s had terrible consequences on Nigériens in general and on Niamey's inhabitants in particular: characteristically, skyrocketing

prices for Western biomedical pharmaceuticals and hospital admissions and the elimination of scholarships and increased school fees (2013, 43). This resulted in frequent school closures over the years, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, as well as a higher unemployment rate. Moreover, present-day marriage predicaments, typical for inhabitants of Niamey, are a result of these broader social developments. Many young men, frustrated by their inability to secure the funds necessary to get married, are forced to postpone becoming a husband until their late twenties and thirties. This is compounded by the inflated costs of—particularly staple—foods, which has caused a decline in the standard of living and in spending power (2013, 43f.). Domestic relations for free-born Tuareg have also been reshaped by these changes.

4.1.1 "The *adinat n bànan* in Niamey"

My informants in Niamey refer to themselves as *adinat n bànan* or *aytedim* to address their areas of concern: first, their limited spending power in Niamey and how this has undermined their capacity to respond to expectations placed on them as husbands and fathers; and, second, the ways in which urban residents of different ethnic origins such as the Hausa and Zarma and political authorities and police personnel in Niamey have treated them over the past decades.

4.1.1.1 "No money, no respect" (*azuruf wartila, wartila semghar*)

In trying to understand how Mossa and his cousin Hamza relate their limited spending power to their loss in power and control over wives and other family members,[2] I follow studies that explore how changing economic conditions can affect domestic relations (Bouman 2010; Schulz 2012; Youngstedt 2013). For instance, focusing on the self-settled Kel Essuk group from Mali in Niamey, Bouman maintains that changes in the political economy resulting from their relocation in Niger affected gender relations in two particular ways (Bouman 2010). First, women who had always occupied their territory in the form of their tent, the symbol of their lineage and womb, now primarily live in huts and apartments that belong to their fathers, brothers, or husbands in Niamey.[3] For women, this process implies a loss in social respectability that this symbol of their lineage could offer in their marital compound. Second, whereas Kel Essuk women had previously had access to their own cattle in Mali, which gave them a certain measure of autonomy, the new life situation in Niamey has stripped women of these earlier areas of relative autonomy. Furthermore, they no longer keep cattle as money is used for

2 My specific focus on these families is explained by Mossa and Hamza's stronger emphasis on the financial crisis when compared to Mohamed Ag Irgimit and Alhabib Ag Sidi, who have regular and relatively high income levels (at least seen in a Nigerien context).

3 It needs to be understood here that families in general give a leather tent to their daughters in the event of marriage. This tent is taken as a symbol of her lineage.

most property transfers. Changes in the nature of bride wealth as well has weakened women's social status in the family. In Niamey, for example, parents formerly provided cupboards, beds, and household utensils to their daughters upon their marriage. Although these objects might still be symbols of their lineage and status, unlike cattle, these objects cannot be used as capital. Accordingly, women became dependent on their husbands, fathers, and brothers, especially in cases of divorce in recent decades (Bouman 2010, 109). Moreover, while Bouman's study focuses on men's loss of respect for women, I explore how men have lost their control over family members (Schulz 2012; Youngstedt 2013).

Mossa and Iba's conflicting relationship within the family

During my stays in 2012/2013 and 2014, in Niamey, I witnessed constant conversations focused on mutual blame between Mossa and his first son, Iba. For example, Mossa blamed Iba for his habits, such as borrowing money from other people on his father's behalf, and constantly accused him of using that money solely to purchase alcohol. For Mossa, it was considered shameful that other Tuareg in Niamey could hear and see that his son consumes alcohol, insisting that Iba's habits have affected his noble honor (*illulu n ahalis*) among his peers. In his defense, Iba argued that his father has not done anything to stop him from doing what he was doing, going so far as forcing him to leave his education without completing elementary school, despite the fact that it is difficult to get a decent job in Niamey without a proper education. Iba has resigned himself to his fate, asserting: "I will just die like I was born, without achieving anything."[4]

While father and son made these mutual allegations behind each other's back, they also complained about each other in their face-to-face interactions. One such confrontation took place on October 18, 2012 around 5.00 pm when I was chatting with Mossa in his courtyard and Iba arrived smelling strongly of alcohol. After greeting me, his father asked him whether he was drinking again. He replied with pronounced tonal emphasis "*iya*" (meaning *yes*). His father went on to say that he should know that this does not bring honor to the family. Looking down at the ground for a while, Iba turned his eyes toward his father and posed the following question: "What have you done for me to keep me from ending up in this situation?" Mossa looked at Iba, remaining silent for a moment, only to later state that his son had become a "useless person" (*awadim n bànan*). As I observed, Mossa did not speak with Iba over the course of the next few days after this conversation, and whenever I asked him about Iba, Mossa just replied laconically by saying w*artisenagh* (I do not know). Sometimes he would extend his answers by stating:

> I have nothing to do with him. I cannot talk to him. You saw yourself the other day. When he arrived here with an alcohol smell, I tried to reason with him, but you saw that he yelled at me. Iba does not listen to me. He does not

4 In French: "Je vais mourir comme je suis né sans rien réussir."

> listen to me! If he listened to me, if he would not even start drinking alcohol […] I never spoke to my parents like Iba does to me.[5]

I interpret Mossa and Iba's conflicted relationship as the result of severely altered material conditions and their mutual attempts to rework the predicament in which they find themselves. Mossa expressed his dislike of his son's excessive alcohol consumption, which in his eyes rendered Iba "a useless person" (*awadim n bànan*). Iba, in turn, challenged Mossa by arguing that it was his responsibility as a father to ensure that his son would be able to move forward, thus blaming him for his inability to provide for his son. Iba therefore voiced a common perception that fathers should ameliorate their children's life situation, by, for instance, providing them with goats, sheep, and cows. In this narrative, a father's capacity to protect his sons from becoming useless persons (*adinat n bànan* or *aytedim*) is placed as a central pillar of parental patriarchal authority.

As a case in point, in other conversations Iba explained that his own failure was partly caused by two droughts that had devastated his father's animals in the 1970s and 1980s, and that his father's salary in Niamey is not enough to afford animals. His father makes about 80, 000 FCFA,[6] which is not enough to even cover his family's basic needs in Niamey.[7] As I mentioned in the introduction, Mossa and his wife have three sons (aged 27, 24, and 18) and one daughter (aged 13). For his family of six, Mossa needed 100 kg of rice per month. This alone costs him 41,000 FCFA,[8] slightly more than half his salary. He used his remaining income to purchase tea, sugar, and condiments each month. For him, the high cost of food, sugar, and tea in Niamey has made it difficult to save some money for animals over the past decades. His economic situation also forced him to remove three sons (but not his daughter) from their educations before they had completed elementary school. He lamented that he had to take them out of school because he did not have the financial means to cover their school fees despite the fact they were good students. In Mossa's understanding, his inability to cover the costs for his children also escalated the situation Iba finds himself in today. For Iba, he feels that he cannot be held fully accountable for his own situation, and he largely places the blame for his situation on his father. Mossa, conversely, places the blame solely on the changes caused by his family's economic situations since they relocated to Niamey.

In terms of social repercussions, the conversations reveal that Mossa feels that Iba is challenging the conventional expectation that he is to be respected as a father no matter the situation. This is evident in how Mossa's mood was affected by Iba's behavior and how his relationship with Iba changed in the days that followed their altercation on October 18, 2012. Mossa reiterates that while he has pressed

5 Conversation with Mossa Ag Attaher, 05/10/2012 in Niamey.
6 About €123 in 2016.
7 See Youngstedt's classification of prices for basic needs in Niamey (Youngstedt 2013, 44).
8 About €62 in 2016.

Iba multiple times to stop consuming alcohol, Iba has not stopped or limited his drinking. For Mossa, this underscores that Iba is not willing to listen or respect him as a father figure. More than he expected Iba to stop consuming alcohol, Mossa also wanted Iba to listen to his father when he is talking to him. As such, Mossa took Iba's reaction to him as a demonstration that he was no longer respected by his son. This allows us to understand that respect manifests itself in how Iba should ideally submit to his father's advice as another central aspect of a father's authority over his son.

The conversations between Mossa and Iba further underscore that their family's economic situation has also limited Iba's chance for "socially becoming" an adult man (Vigh 2006). Iba once explained that: "If I say I will die like I was born, I mean that I will never become someone: a father and grandfather. I was born poor, will remain poor."[9] Iba's statement emphasizes that becoming a father or grandfather would imply a change in his situation from the status with which he was born. To understand the further implications of his claim, it is important to recall Iba's initial failure to establish a family a few years ago.

In 2010, Mossa went back to home to find a wife for his son Iba. He brought her to Niamey. After six months, Iba's wife went back to her parents in Mali, thereby effectively putting an end to the marriage. Iba explained that:

> the marriage ended because she did not want to stay with my parents. She asked me to rent a place where the two of us could stay. I told her that I did not have money to rent a house for us since I had no work. Imagine, if I had moved out with her. This meant that I would have to pay for the rent, food, and all other things she would like to have. As I was unable to do so, she went home and the marriage was over.[10]

Iba's statement evokes how material conditions mediate transformations "of social temporalities" (Meiu 2009; Meiu 2015; Schulz 2002). Meiu deploys the notion of "social temporalities" to describe social aging from the passage from "boyhood" to "adulthood" among Samburu men from northern Kenya. His study suggests that for the Samburu men involved in sexual economies with European tourists, social aging and ideal masculinity are closely connected to, and mediated by, material achievement of status related to prestige or wealth Meiu (Meiu 2009, 122f.). Meiu's work also emphasizes that social age is mediated through age-related social practices (Meiu 2015, 474f.). To conclude, Mossa and Iba's conflicting relations within the family illustrate tensions between two social expectations, tensions which result from the alteration of family economies in exile: Mossa's expectation to be respected as father and Iba's expectation of what his father should have done so that he could respect him as such.

9 Conversation with Iba on 18/10/2012 in Niamey.
10 Conversation with Iba on 20/10/2012 in Niamey.

"A father who is never at home is not a father"

> *My daughter does not know me because I come at night and go at night.*
> —Hamza, 49 year-old man, Niamey, 02/10/2012.

I met Hamza through his cousin Mossa Ag Attaher on October 2, 2012 in Niamey plateau. That day, Hamza had paid a casual visit to his cousin Mossa and his family. Like Mossa, he has a vassal social background. Hamza fled his home near Gossi in May 1992 after the Malian army targeted several civilians, including him.[11] Before fleeing, he was a successful tailor in Gossi. He stressed that he owned over one hundred sheep as well as a few cows. He had always milk, tea, and a sufficient food supply for his family at home. On his arrival in Niamey in June 1992, however, he took up a job as guard of a private house. Like Mossa, he does not pay any rent. Instead, he set up a tent in the courtyard of the house he was taking care of, where he lives with his two five-year-old daughters and his 18 year-old son. Hamza explained that since his youngest daughter was born, she has not had the chance to get to know him as he has always entered his home at night while she sleeps and leaves in the morning before she wakes. He further explained this situation, stating that:

> […] How could I stay at home and see my children crying for one meal a day or they are ill and I cannot provide them with any medicine? […] I know that this situation is not without consequences for me. My children have started to speak better Hausa, Zarma than *Tamasheq,* their own language.[12]

This reveals some relationship between Hamza's material and physical absences at home. Hamza explained this situation by the fact that his low wage limits him from meeting the high expectations that society has placed on him. His job pays him a monthly salary of 15,000 FCFA.[13] With this amount alone, he argued that it is not possible for him to provide his family with food for the whole month. For instance, he explained that for him to provide his family with food for an entire month, he would need at least 50 kg of rice, which costs 28,000 FCFA[14] in Niamey. Since he cannot afford to buy this amount, he is only able to buy rice for ten days at a time,[15] after which his wife is forced to rely on support from neighbors or other people she asks for help so that she can feed their kids. Hamza also expressed concern about the fact that his repeated absences from home had undermined his ability to supervise his children's daily behavior, as evidenced by his children's tendency to talk to each other in Hausa and Zarma, rather than in their mother tongue *Tamasheq.* Hamza deplored the thought that this might lead

11 This is mostly remembered as, in French, "l'attaque de Gossi."
12 Interview with Hamza on 02/10/2012 in Niamey.
13 About €30 in 2016.
14 About €43 in 2016.
15 Interview with Hamza on 02/10/2012 in Niamey.

his children to lose their Tuareg identity in the long run, and he feels responsible for this situation.

"I also cannot stay at home without food and tea for visitors"

> *Azuruf wartila, takaraket dja: There is no money there is (only) shame.*
> —Hamza, 49 year-old man, Niamey, 02/10/2012.

Hamza and Mossa not only complained about how their current economic situation had affected their social role and status as fathers in Niamey, they also maintained that their situation has also undermined their capacity to reciprocate the kindness of their peers. For example, when Hamza arrived at Mossa's place on October 2, 2012 at around 5 pm, he found us in conversation. Mossa was telling me a story about how one day when he had no money or food left, three of his relatives arrived from Burkina Faso. As he had nothing to cook for them and could not offer to buy them food, the only thing that was left for him was, as he put it, *takaraket* (shame). Connecting his own story to our discussion, Hamza stressed that he had also been confronted with a similar situation:

> […] when I stay home, visitors might come to visit. For us Tuareg, when someone visits you, the first thing to do is to provide him or her with some tea followed by food if they are hungry. Since I am not able to provide people with these things, I prefer to be away from home. If I stay at home without being able to do these, people will laugh at me even if I go to *Boughessa.* And this will bring shame on me.[16]

As such, Hamza would rather leave his home in order to avoid what had happened to Mossa. Otherwise, he might receive visitors for whom he will not able to provide food or tea, which would affect his reputation. When he mentioned *Boughessa,* a sub-prefecture situated in the north of Kidal region near the Algerian border, he evoked his home region as a metaphor to reflect on the extent to which his reputation might be affected for generations. He maintained that this situation would not only create *takaraket* (shame) for him, but also for his children and relatives. For Hamza, therefore, shame is conceptualized as being closely related to his reputation. For example, when people laugh at him in *Boughessa*, he will be shamed for his poverty. His interpretation of the social connectedness of shame and reputation substantiate remarks by scholar who closely relate shame and reputation along the spectrum of social evaluations (cf. Olivier de Sardan 1984; Ouattara 1999; Peristiany 1966). For example, in his discussions of the notion of shame (*Haawi*) among the Songhay-Zarma groups along the Mali–Niger border zone, Olivier de Sardan shows that his informants with a noble social background refrain from behaving in certain ways because they fear how others will evaluate and speak uncomfortably about them

16 Interview with Hamza on 02/10/2012 in Niamey.

(Olivier de Sardan 1984, 35f.). This attitude of Olivier de Sardan's informants substantiates Peristiany's interpretations of shame (Peristiany 1966). Peristiany considers shame as a form of social evaluation as it reflects the nature of social sanctions (1966, 9), as shame can be understood as a standard of measurement for the type of personality considered as representative and exemplary of a certain society (1966, 9f.). Similarly, both Hamza and Mossa's evocation of shame (*takaraket*) reflected their social personalities in the mirror of social ideals that expect them to provide visitors with tea and food. As I illustrate below, their evaluations of their relationships with other urban ethnic residents further reinforced their sense of having then become "useless people" (*adinat n bànan*) due to the economic situations examined throughout this section.

4.1.1.2 "We are always insulted here in Niamey"

This section introduces white male free-born Tuareg refugees' accounts of their ill treatment by the Hausa and Zarma ethnic groups and the police personnel in Niamey. It also reflects on how this undermines the informants' sense of being "men" and "women" in Niamey. These discussions focus on specific accounts by Ibrahim Ag Mohamed, Mohamed Ag Irgimit, and Mossa's cousin, who I refer to here as Alassane.[17]

"When the nobles are called bellah-izo"

> *Look Diallo! We are called the nobles in Mali but here, we are […] Bellah Izo.*
> —Ibrahim Ag Mohamed, Niamey, 07/10/2012.

After only a few weeks in Niamey, one question that I had already derived from my causal observations was why I had not yet witnessed the informants visiting and being visited by other ethnic residents. In answering my question, Ibrahim Ag Mohamed, who grew up in Niamey, stated that:

> […] I do not dare to go and see them. If I go there, they would call me *Bellah izo*. I do not like this term. We are nobles in Mali, but Bellah in Niamey. Also, I cannot laugh at them. If I laugh at them, they would tell each other this: Look at this guy who came here because of hunger years ago. But now he is happy in Niamey. If I talk to a girl, they would say to that girl: Do you not know that this *Bellah Izo* came [here] because of hunger? This would all be degrading for me.[18]

17 Though I focus on accounts from those informants, Mossa and Hamza also made similar arguments and were present and took part in many of these conversations.

18 Conversation with Ibrahim Ag Mohamed on 07/10/2012.

Ibrahim's answer above underscores how being called *Bellah Izo*[19] by other ethnic residents in Niamey threatens the refugees' former noble social status and identity. For instance, the quoted passage shows that being called *Bellah Izo* implies a redefinition and subversion of Ibrahim's noble social status as it lowers him to the level of Bellah-Iklan (sing: *akli*). In further conversations, Ibrahim even demonstrated that calling the nobles *Bellah Izo* had more implications for them, explaining that referring to the free-born Tuareg with that term is an insult because it simply resonates with calling a "noble" a "bastard,"[20] which he defines as a term used locally for those who have been lost for generations because they cannot trace back their origins to their ancestors. For Ibrahim, this constitutes an insult as all free-born Tuareg value their lineage. Equally, Ibrahim also found Zarma and Hausa's referral to him as someone who fled Mali because of hunger irritating as this undermines his male honor (*ashak n ahalis*). To Ibrahim, by representing him as someone who was "or still is" hungry, the Zarma and Hausa ethnic residents attempt to show that he is not "a normal man" and is therefore not equal with other men in Niamey. As I explain below, police attitudes toward the free-born Tuareg generated similar feelings among the informants I met in Niamey.

The refugees' narratives about the police in Niger

Beek and Göpfert's works on the use of violence by police in Niger and Ghana influence how I interpret the refugees' accounts of how they have been affected by the police over the course of recent decades (Beek/Göpfert 2012; Göpfert 2012). Following local perceptions of violence, both scholars interpret this as being related to intentionally perpetrated bodily harm, identifying that each time the police resort to violence they face a major dilemma. For Beek and Göpfert, while legally and morally justified violence can be a source of long-term legitimacy; the very same action has potentially delegitimizing effects due to the possibility that the same situation can result in multiple interpretations (according to different, conflicting moral and legal discourses) (Beek/Göpfert 2012, 17f.).

"The police considered us thieves and terrorists here"

The day that followed my arrival in Niamey in August 2014, Ibrahim picked me up on his motorbike so that I could pay a visit to Mossa Ag Attaher in the quartier plateau near the presidential palace. On our way from Mossa's place at around 2 pm we took the road passing before the presidential palace. When we arrived at the military barracks around the palace, a soldier stood and pointed

19 This term is used as a nickname by other ethnic residents to refer to the free white Tuareg in Niamey. For further overview on Songhay-Zarma's terms depicting the Tuareg (see Olivier de Sardan 1982, 99).

20 Ibrahim's understanding of the notion of bastard is an adaptation of the meaning of the term in French: a child born not in a formalized marital relationship. The Tuareg used it as an insult in Niamey and in northern Mali.

directly at us despite the fact we were surrounded by a group of other people passing by. He instructed us to return. However, to our surprise, the soldier paradoxically allowed others to continue on their way. Ibrahim turned his motorbike and we looked for another road to go home. As I remarked, Ibrahim remained quiet on the way until we reached his home. Once we reached home and sat for tea, he began to smoke a cigarette and asked me about what I understood from the scene that had just occurred by the presidential palace. Before I even began to speak, he told me:

> You see! This is how we have been living here in Niamey. Everybody else passing by is normal except me. Even you, Souleymane, could have passed by like the others. But since you were with a red man, a Tuareg driving a motorbike around the presidential palace, one cannot trust you anymore. The reason for this is that I am only a Tuareg. They present us as threats to the well-being and the security of the people whereas daily the TV shows thieves who are Zarma or Hausa.[21]

Three days later, Ibrahim's "frustration" about this scene was reinforced by another reaction by the security forces. That day I went with him to withdraw some cash from the Bank of Africa near the CG8.[22] While he waited for me outside, the policeman sitting in the bank's courtyard saw Ibrahim outside. He stood up and moved closer to Ibrahim, and when he got within a few meters of him, he held his right hand on his gun. By the time I made it back to him, the police officer had already gotten close to him. At the same time, several other people had passed by the police officer but had not attracted his attention. Ibrahim therefore concluded that the police officer's reaction was typical of the way the Hausa and Zarma treat the "Tuareg." For him, this was no different than what had happened in front of the presidential palace a few days before.[23] In further conversations, he also emphasized that this was not a new experience for the free-born Tuareg refugees in Niamey. Ibrahim recalled that since he was a child, the police personnel have targeted the free white Tuareg from Mali whenever something abnormal occurred in Niamey.[24] For Ibrahim, such practices always revealed that Zarma and Hausa, as well as police personnel, only associated the white Tuareg with negative, and never positive, behavior.[25]

21 Conversation with Ibrahim on 06/08/2014 in Niamey.

22 It is the name of primary school. The number of schools are commonly used for indications by urban taxi drivers.

23 Conversation with Ibrahim on 23/09/2014. Ibrahim's insistence on arguing that the policeman was a Zarma or Hausa due to the way in which he reacted to his presence at the Bank, demonstrates how the free-born Tuareg refugees took for granted that all attitudes that stigmatized them stemmed from these two ethnic groups.

24 Ibrahim referred specifically to police control in the paracentral quartier, Bobiel, in Niamey where he had spent most of his childhood.

25 Conversation with Ibrahim on 02/10/2014 in Niamey.

Like Ibrahim, many other free white Tuareg who arrived in Niamey in 2012 complained that the security forces have classified them as not being "normal people"[26] during their trips to Niger. Some even argued that they were singled out and set apart as dangerous persons for meticulous control at the military barracks. For instance, a young man of about 35 years of age, who I refer to as Mohamed Ag Mohamed, here recollected his personal experiences in the following account. He stated that:

> We left Demsi[27] the day before yesterday. Yesterday we slept at the bus station in Dori where we got a bus to Tera early in the morning. But once we crossed the border to Niger, we ran into trouble. At the first police checkpoint, the police and *gendarmerie* set us—the Tuareg—apart from the others. We were told to sit aside. When they finished checking the others, they allowed the bus to continue without us. Then they came to us […]. They recorded our names, ages, and marital status. Afterward they took us to the police station where they put us in prison. The next day, there was a young police officer who came to question us. We explained everything to him that we were in Burkina Faso to visit our parents in the refugee settlement at Demsi. After a while, he finally released us around 7.00 pm. Then, we had to find another bus to come to Niamey in the night. All this showed us that we are only Tuareg.[28]

What bothered Mohamed and his four other travel companions was not being put in prison for nothing *per se*; instead, they complained about how the police personnel presented them as potential terrorists as well as thieves.

Ibrahim and Mohamed's accounts of police attitudes toward them evoke Goffman's work on "social stigma." Goffman defines stigma as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" and any "attribute that is deeply discrediting" (Goffman 1963, 57). He distinguishes three typologies of stigma: abominations of the body (physical disabilities); blemishes of individual character (moral failings); and tribal stigma (race, religion, ethnicity). The informants' accounts presented above show us that it is this latter type of "social stigma" that corresponds to the ways in which the police personnel act toward free white Tuareg from Mali in Niamey. Seen in relation to Beek and Göpfert's work on the police in Niger and Ghana, Ibrahim and Mohamed were not subjected to bodily violence (Beek/Göpfert 2012). Instead, the refugee informants felt harmed by the ways in which the police personnel stigmatized them in Goffman's sense of the term. This leads us to consider such stigmatizations as a form of violence as well (Hall 1997, 244f.). The informants' claims that the police personnel associated them with not being "normal people" underscores their widespread sense of loss in self-esteem as "normal persons" who could be equal to, and respected by, others.

26 In French: "pas normales comme les autres."
27 Demsi is a locality around Gram-Gram in northern Burkina Faso.
28 Conversation with Mohamed Ag Mohamed at Mossas's place on 03/10/2012.

The consequences of the police's actions on men respectability within families

> *They ill-treated us until our wives did not even respect us. There was nothing we could be proud of anymore. I remembered several times when I quarreled with my wife that she always told me this: if you were man, you should have shown that at the central police […].*
>
> —Alassane, Niamey, 02/11/ 2012.

Several themes of male conversations centered on how the polices' action directly affected their social status and respectability within their families. For example, Mossa Ag Attaher's cousin, Alassane, recalled his decision to divorce his wife some ago.[29] He explained that before the divorce, whenever he quarreled with his wife, she would remind him of a period of time that was particularly difficult for the Tuareg men living in Niamey during the presidency of the Nigerien authoritarian, Seyny Koutché (1974–1987). During those years, President Koutché instructed the police to keep regular patrols in the quartier Plateau in search of Tuareg.[30] Accordingly, Tuareg people were arrested by 24-hour patrols that saw them detained at Niamey's central police station (in French *commissariat central*). There, Alassane maintained, the police threw them from the police cars like they were stones. They unveiled the men; beat them in the presence of their relatives. For Alassane, the most shocking scenes was to witness pregnant women deliver their children in public after days of hunger while being exposed to all sorts of insects. Alassane further explained his family dispute in the following terms:

> If I had reacted against the police at the central police station, my wife would not say what she said, but she would have also respected me […]. The respect that a man can expect from his wife is nothing else than she listens to him and does what he tells her to do. But if I say one word, she says thousands is not good. I remember that she did not cook every day. Sometimes, she went to the Bobiel to her friends. She stayed the entire day and returned in the evening. When I complained about this, she started saying who are you? You only know how to yell at me, but we saw you at the *commissariat central* [central police station]. Finally, I divorced before I found the wife I have now.[31]

Connell's notion of "hegemonic masculinity" provides a useful interpretative framework for understanding Alassane's dispute with his wife (Connell 1995, 77f.). Connell argues that "hegemonic masculinity" can be defined as the configuration of gender that embodies the accepted answer to the problem of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (1995).

29 After this divorce, he remarried another free-born woman from northern Mali.

30 Göpfert shows that the police patrols under Kountché were part of a wider mechanism for political control that targeted other groups as well (Göpfert 2012). However, according to my informants, the failed military coup attempt by some Nigérien Arabs and Tuareg in 1976 against Kountché's regime turned him against the free white Tuareg.

31 Interview with Alassne on 29/11/2012 in Niamey.

The author stresses that "when the conditions for the defense of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded" (1995, 77). Alassane's insistence that "what a man can expect from his wife is nothing more than that she listens to him and does what the man tells her to do" implies a power relation that guarantees a man's "position of dominance" in Connell's expression. However, when Alassane said one word, his wife responded with a thousand more showing that his dominant position has been challenged. In order to understand Alassane's status as a man *vis-à-vis* his wife, it is important to first understand the social significance ascribed to a man's veil (the turban) as well as what it means for a man to be unveiled in public.

Alassane explained that the veil (or turban) is the most sacred thing for Tuareg men who are more than eighteen years of age, and men must wear the turban whenever they are in public in order to signify self-respect as well as respect for other people. Alassane also emphasized that the strictest rule is that a man must always be veiled when meeting his father-in-law or mother-in-law. Alassane's account of the social significance of the veil was reminiscent of remarks by Robert Murphy (Murphy 1964) and Susan Rasmussen (Rasmussen 2004). Murphy takes the veil as a medium of social distance and shame that regulates social interactions in Tuareg societies. He states that:

> It is, then all the more interesting to observe that the Tuareg men are most strict with their veils when in the presence of the father-in-law or the mother-in-law, for, in addition to other signs of respect and avoidance, is the son-in-law is careful to adjust the veil so that only a very narrow aperture is left open, and the eyes are hooded and left in shadow. (Murphy 1964, 128)

In a similar vein, Rasmussen argues that "it is Tuareg men who wear a face-veil, a sign of modesty, reserve, and respect" (Rasmussen 2004, 325). Thus, it was this symbolic function of the veil to preserve social distance and prevent shame that police undermined, thus leading to humiliation for the men in front of their family members. For example, Mohamed Ag Irgimit further emphasized this, stressing that: "The police attitude at the commissariat central was painful for them because if one wants to kill a Tuareg man, one just unveils him in public."[32] Mohamed's word choice here evoke a state of being ashamed, which would cause an individual to lose self-esteem.

The second aspect, which is also important for our analysis in order to understand why Alassane's wife reminded him of these events at the *commissariat central*, is what women expect men to do when they are confronted by other people. According to Alassane, Tuareg women expect men to avenge their wives and children or themselves when they are accosted by others. In this case, however, the men did not react appropriately (*egha*[33]) in order to restore their male honor when they

32 Interview with Mohamed Ag Irgimit on 25/11/2012 in Niamey.
33 Here, I also follow Lecocq's translation of the term *egha* (Lecocq 2002, 202).

were beaten up by the police personnel at the *commissariat central*. This points to the men's capacity to "riposte" in order to avenge themselves (and their wives) as one central pillar of adult masculinity in the Tuareg culture in its Niamey form. A pillar of adult masculinity that has been undermined under circumstances of police ill treatment of men at the central police station. It was thus precisely because this pillar has been undermined in Niamey that Alassane lost his social status as a man *vis-à-vis* his wife. As such, Alassane's situation substantiates Connell's observation evoked earlier that when the configuration of social practices that underpin male dominance is undermined, this affects the patriarchy (Connell 1995, 77f.).

4.1.2 "Because of all these, we Tuareg have to understand that we are a people"

The informants either began or concluded most of their accounts examined in the foregoing sections with two particular remarks, which will be examined in this section. In what follows, these remarks will be used to shed light on the ways in which the informants transformed the negative effects of exile into constructive social processes to redefine their identity as a community.

4.1.2.1 "One Tuareg old man said all this before"

One notable remark at the beginning and end of most accounts was the refugees' constant evocation of a prophecy by an old free-born Tuareg man who lived and died in Djebock (near Gao town) in northern Mali. According to the informants in Niamey, he was able to predict future events. Concerning the future of the free white Tuareg in Mali, the informants recalled that the old man had said: "All this suffering will come to an end one day. It has been said before that we Tuareg were going to go through all these situations." On several other occasions, the informants became more explicit when voicing at length that:

> Our suffering will continue until the day at which we will have our independence from Mali. That day will come and our suffering will come to an end. It will come when people in southern Mali would be against each other. There will be great confusion there, and the Tuareg will then have their independence.[34]

By referring to this prophecy, the informants related their individual life situations in Niamey to the Tuareg's long experience of suffering as "a group." The prophecy

34 This text was excerpted from conversations with Mossa Ag Atther, Ibrahim Ag Mohamed, and Alhabib Ag Sidi on January 29, 2013 in Niamey. Examined in the context of 2012–2013, this prophecy, in the first place, provided the town informants with an interpretative lens for understanding the military putsch by a group of young soldiers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo and the subsequent events that led to the near collapse of the Malian state. They considered these events in 2012 as manifest signs that indicated the coming of Tuareg independence due to the confusion created by these in southern Mali (see Lecocq/Mann/Whitehouse et al. 2013).

has permitted the Tuareg to live their lives situations in exile as a collective and temporary phenomenon. For example, during several conversations between the young men at Ibrahim's place, Mossa Ag Attaher's son Iba often argued:

> I live today without love (*tarha*) because I am Tuareg. If I was not a Tuareg, I would not be where I am here today in Niamey. I would be someone else and living somewhere else but not in Niamey. We Tuareg are a people that suffer.[35]

Such interpretations served as a driving force for the creation of the "Tuareg collectivity." For instance, Iba defined himself as "a character of the Tuareg people" by interpreting his personal situation (discussed earlier in this chapter) as a result of his membership of the Tuareg group. The "Tuareg people" to which he claimed to belong, will, according to the old man's prophecy, achieve its independence and will return to the *tenere* (bush), the term the informants used to refer to northern Mali. They thus took their (future) return back to Mali as the end of suffering for them.

4.1.2.2 "The Hausa, Zarma, Songhay, and Bellah-Iklan are the same"

The second remark consisted of locating the attitudes of the Hausa, Zarma, and the police toward the free-born Tuareg refugees in the context of conflicts between the Bellah-Iklan, Songhay, and the Tuareg in northern Mali (cf. chapter 3). For example, the informants insisted that the Hausa, Zarma, and the police are hostile toward the Tuareg refugees in Niamey due to the fact that these groups supported the Songhay and Bellah-Iklan in their fight against the free-born Tuareg. Thus, by relating their specific hostile experiences of long-standing conflicts between the Songhay and the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg in northern Mali, the informants attempted to present their individual experiences in Niamey as a continuation of their persecution in Mali. They therefore presented the "Tuareg" as "a restless group." For example, Ibrahim asked the following question several times:

> Why does the Hausa and Zarma do this to all of us? They do it because they support the Songhay and the Bellah we left behind in Mali. You see that there are many Songhay currently living in Niamey as refugees. But did you see them complaining about the Hausa and Zarma? Never! Quite the contrary! When you meet them in town, they feel at home here that is why they even insult us […].[36]

Echoing Ibrahim, Alhabib Ag Sidi also explained their fear of the "complicity" between the Zarma, Hausa, and police personnel in Niamey and the Songhay and Bellah-Iklan in Mali, which prompted most Tuareg refugees to refrain from developing closer contacts with these other ethnic groups. Alhabib recounted a story about a Zarma man he had met when he arrived in Niamey in 1983. According

35 Conversation with Iba in Niamey, on 29/09/2012.
36 Selected from conversations with Ibrahim Ag Mohamed on 17/01/2013 in Niamey.

to Alhabib, this man was a "kind enough person," who expressed his kindness by buying meat, milk, and tea for Alhabib Ag Sidi when he visited. One day, however, the man asked Alhabib whether he has been to Libya or had friends there.[37] Later on Alhabib Ag Sidi discovered that his visitor was a police officer. Upon this discovery, Alhabib then asked the policeman to abstain from visiting him again, as, in his mind, the ultimate goal of a policeman is to harm him because he is Tuareg. Mossa Ag Attaher also considered that "all Hausa and Zarma residents" in Niamey potentially sought to harm the free-born Tuareg from Mali. He explained that:

> I refrained from having Hausa or Zarma friends because they want to know about me and tell it to the police. Since I am here, the Zarma that I know are many. But I never let them come to see my family. I also do not go to theirs. I worked with many of them at IRD but our relationships never moved beyond the work place.[38]

As I have come to understand, representing themselves as such "a restless group in exile," victims of the Hausa, Zarma, Songhay, and Bellah-Iklan, provided the informants with a fertile ground to call for change in their mode of self-identification and to establish unity among the free-born Tuareg.

4.1.2.3 "Nak utamachek" (I am Tamasheq, Targi)—"Nak in tumast" (I am part of the people)

> *If the Tuareg do not stop their internal conflicts and stand up together here like one, they will disappear from the Earth.*
>
> *—Mossa's son Iba, Niamey, 29/01/2013.*

When I began my research in Niamey in August 2012, one difficulty that I encountered was collecting information about the original clans and federations from which the informants originated in northern Mali. Whenever I asked them about their original clans and federations, many told me: *Nak utamachek* (I am a Tuareg) and *Nak in Tumast* (I am part of the "people"). Others chose not to reply to my questions or politely tended to ignore them. I realized later that not answering questions about the details regarding their original clans was a way to express how they began to accommodate their society to the ways in which other people, such as the Zarma and the Hausa people, perceive them. For instance, after a few weeks, Mossa Ag Attaher explained to me that:

> It is a mistake for many Tuareg to believe that we are different from each other because someone is from the Kel Antsar and the other is from the Immakalkalen.

37 Indeed, some interlocutors told me that Kountché's regime strongly suspected and watched the Tuareg as the hidden hands of Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi who was against the government of the Niger Republic at time.

38 Conversation with Mossa Ag Attaher on 29/01/2013 in Niamey.

> This is a big mistake. Look, the Hausa and Zarma people do not consider us to be different. Once one has this skin color (pointing his index finger at his body), the person is a Tuareg, a danger, a terrorist and thief. We should now be aware of this and stand up together for the *Tumast.*

Mossa's call on the promotion of the idea that the Tuareg form one "people" (*tumast)* is straightforward in this account. He presented the (*tumast*) "people" as an alternative framework of belonging that does not admit any internal differences between the free-born Tuareg. A 38-year-old man, whom I call Agissa Ag Attaher, told me another story about a noteworthy change in the refugees' self-perceptions of themselves that the informants presented as *sine qua non* for their "becoming a collective." Agissa explained:

> You know, I was born in Niger. When my father arrived here in 1966, he married our mother, a Songhay from Tera. I went to school with other Hausa and Zarma children near the *Merygarage*. I did not know that I was different from them until one day when we were playing with logs by the river. A man just came to us and said to me. Hey! Tuareg leave this wood. It was on that day that I became aware of who I am. It is only about the white or red skin color and not about the clans.[39]

Altogether, the refugees' accounts about the old man's prophecy, their perceived complicity between the police, the Zarma, the Hausa, the Bellah-Iklan, and the Songhay correspond to Marris' conceptualization of how people cope with loss (Marris 1974). Initially, the refugee informants assimilated the negative effects of exile with their existing experiences of conflicts between the free white Tuareg and the Songhay as well as the Bellah-Iklan in Mali. Furthermore, I argue that this has led the informants to perceive their contemporary life situations as one episode of a longer history of Tuareg persecution. In a second step, their self-definitions as *Nak utamachek* (I am a Tuareg) and *Nak in Tumast* (I am part of the people), consequently revealed that the assimilation of their predicaments of exile into their existing experiences has led to modifications in how they present themselves, their history, and, ultimately, the future Tuareg society (*tumas*t). Similar processes of changes in collective identifications in response to their predicament also took place among the Bellah-Iklan in the refugee camp in Abala.

4.2 The Bellah-Iklan in Abala and their historical connection with Menaka

Abala, where the Bellah-Iklan refugees have lived since 2012, is situated in the northeast in the prefecture of Filingué, around 70 km from the Malian border. It is the head village of a rural *commune* in the Niger Republic. According to Rivières,

39 Selected from conversation with Agissa, Mossa and Ibrahim Ag Mohamed on 29/01/2013 in Niamey.

Abala received the status of administrative post for the first time in 1964 (Rivières 1965). Nowadays, the municipality comprises thirty-five villages with a total population estimated to be around 60,000 inhabitants. These inhabitants are essentially Hausa, Fulani, Tuareg, and Arab ethnic groups, who are engaged in farming, small-scale trading, and pastoral activities. Historically, Abala's inhabitants, particularly the Hausa and Fulani, were known as farmers, small-scale traders, and pastoral nomadic people who have had long-term exchanges with the Tuareg, Songhay, and Fulani inhabiting the area surrounding Menaka. Some interlocutors from Abala village related that for a long time, after the rainy season, Hausa men crossed the border to Mali to sell veils, tobacco, and related products throughout the Gao region. The Fulani from Abala have also had a long history of seasonal migration to northern Mali. Conversely, the Tuareg in the village and area surrounding Menaka not only crossed the border into Niger seasonally, but also went to the country regularly to purchase tea and tobacco among other related products in the weekly market held in Abala.

4.2.1 The organization of the refugee camp

Humanitarian workers in Niamey maintained that the Abala refugee camp was the best-structured camp in Niger. They made such claims based on the number of NGOs supporting activities, the existing infrastructure, and the ways in which they had organized the refugee population in the refugee camp. In terms of infrastructure, some prominent aspects which attracted my attention between 2012 and 2014 can be listed here. In the middle of the camp, the offices for the humanitarian agencies are located. Behind these offices stand 32 classrooms, a space for sports and exercise, and three conference rooms for social and cultural activities and one room for children's recreational activities. There is a consistent number of NGOs delivering different services for different sectors of the refugees' social life.[40] The camp is divided into five quartiers. Each section is placed under the leadership of a *chef de quartier.* The *chef de quartier* plays a brokerage role between humanitarian agencies and the quartier's inhabitants. Each quartier comprises several tents, established according to household. A household is held to be the lowest social unit in the camp and its number of persons varies from one to another. For example, in a given household, there might be only a wife, children, and husband, whereas in others, unmarried siblings of the husband and wife or a father with his one to three wives as well as their children may live there. The social composition of the quartier is based on the order of arrival. For example, the Bellah-Iklan who arrived first to the refugee camp inhabit the three first established quartiers.[41]Yet per order

40 A number estimated to be around thirteen between 2012 and 2013.

41 Before this last quartier was established, the previous ones were extended, and at their arrival they were requested to inhabit the already well-structured quartiers aside the Black Tuareg. According to

of arrival, the Fulani, Hausa, and Songhay inhabit the fourth quartier as they arrived later. The latecomers, the free-born Tuareg, inhabit the fifth quartier. There is one central committee of refugees, which was led by the late Ahiyou Intagaout between 2012 and 2015 and acts as the representative of all the refugees in Abala. Weekly meetings are held under the UNCHR's leadership every Wednesday from 10 am to ca. 3 pm. This also offers opportunities to humanitarian organizations to give instructions about expected social conduct. Women and youth committees help the central committee with this task. The camp's security is ensured by a vigilant committee composed of fifty-one refugees, which works closely with the soldiers at the checkpoints and inside the quartier.

As I illustrate below, my Bellah-Iklan informants offer a contradictory view of life in the camp to those given by the humanitarian administrators in Niamey. The informants often used the sentence: "*We are zero here*" to express their feelings of having become *adinat n bànan* (useless people or nothing). This interpretation echoes arguments by free-born Tuareg residing in Niamey that exile that came with a loss in status and respectability. In the first section, I focus on the informants' accounts of the registration process as refugees in Abala, and the policies pertaining to food ration distributions. In the second section, I will focus on the refugees' accounts of their interactions with NGO workers.

4.2.1.1 "The useless people" and the NGO regulations

My analysis of the refugees' accounts of NGO regulations draws on studies that examine how the living conditions in the IDPs camps in northern Uganda have affected the configuration of social practices underpinning men's power within the domestic realms (Dolan 2002, 2009; Van Soest 2014).[42] Dolan argues that:

> the northern Uganda civilian men's ability to achieve key elements in the normative model of masculinity into which they had been socialized went into protracted crisis. With their capacity to create a family and then provide for and protect it much reduced, they experienced a loss of domestic and political power. (Dolan 2009, 205)

Dolan emphasizes that creating a family, together with the ability to provide for it and protect it, are central pillars of men's power in the domestic realm. This echoes the statement that one Acholi man told Van Soest during his research in northern Uganda:

the humanitarian workers in charge of the housing and accommodation sections, the latter refused to inhabit the same quartiers with the former. Thus the fifth quartier was then established in the camp for the newly arrived red Tuareg where they live with a few Hausa and Songhay households.

42 See also Refugee Law Project (2007): "Giving their daughters away for their survival: Self-reliance, vulnerability, and the paradox of early marriage" (Refugee Law Project Working paper, 20), Uganda: Makerere University.

> You become a man when you're married and when you can provide for your family. A man has to prove to his community that he is respectable, that he is independent and that he can provide guidance to his family. (Van Soest 2014, 32f.)

"The cavalry of the refugee registration"

> *Même le simple enregistrement est un calvaire (Even the simple registration is a cavalry).*
>
> *—Assalim, Abala, 29/12/2012.*

In the UNHCR camp in Abala, all refugees have to register upon arrival, which ensures that UNHCR has a count of the exact number of refugees and is able to provide them with food and healthcare. The registration comprises three steps. First, registration at the International Office of Immigration requires that refugees declare themselves as displaced people fleeing war in Mali. In cases in where those declaring their refugee status do not have identity documents, knowledgeable, educated refugees such as Inawélène and Assalim act as witnesses. At the end of this step, the refugee applicants receive the official documents they need for the second step. This takes place at the CNE[43], the representative of the Government of Niger as the host country. The document issued there bears witness to and acceptance of the refugees' legal status in Niger. At the final step, the refugees are required to present the records they receive earlier at the International Office for Migration and the CNE to the UNHCR. It is at this final stage that food ration cards are delivered to them.

Assalim and several other Bellah-Iklan men I met in Abala explained that this registration was in itself a cavalry. For instance, Assalim put his own experience with his daughter's case in the following terms:

> […] my daughter was ill. As we were queuing several days here, I went to ask if she could stay in the tent, and that I could provide her details at the registration desk; they refused as if I am not her father. I am wondering what she could tell them about herself that I, as her father, cannot say. I could not register her until she recovered. Four months later, there was a second registration campaign, and then I succeeded in registering her. But before, we did not receive anything from NGOs on her behalf.[44]

There is evident tension between Assalims' self-perception as a father and the NGOs' regulations at the camp. Assalim viewed his suggestion to stand at the desk instead of his daughter as just a way to allow her to get some rest since she was ill. As a father, he perceived doing so as a parental role. The way in which he felt his status as a father was threatened echoes the observation by Malkki that humanitarian interventions rest on a perception that depersonalizes the refugees (Malkki 1996, 378; see also Feldman 1994; Stein 1981). Humanitarian workers

43 Commission Nationale d'éligibilté au Statut des Réfugiés.
44 Interview with Assalim Ehatt on 22/11/2012 in Abala.

with whom I engaged in nightly conversations justified their measures regarding the registration, maintaining that they operated in the context of international law. Accordingly, women and children should be considered refugees in need of protection as they have rights that should be promoted independently before situating them within a web of affiliation in the family. Assalim called this NGO interference "with family affairs."[45] For him, anything between a father, a mother, and a child should be primarily considered family affair. It is only the head of the family who is responsible for such matters. He stated this more explicitly in the following terms:

> Since I am no longer able to lead matters concerning my family, this means that I am no longer the one leading my family. It is UNHCR that does everything concerning our families here. This is our cavalry here.[46]

The UNHCR's campaign against domestic violence

Sattopima defines domestic violence as a form of discrimination against women that denies them the enjoyment of their basic human rights (Sattopima 2004; see also Moore 1994). Dolan (2002, 2009), Foreman (1999), and Zur (1998) have sought to understand the relationship between the decline of patriarchal authority and domestic violence in situations of forced exile. Dolan explains the pervasiveness of domestic violence in the IPD camps in northern Uganda to men's impoverishment and experiences of powerlessness and loss in family authority (Dolan 2009, 205). Discussing domestic violence in Palestinian context, Khawaja et al. maintain that men who beat their wives generally have negative views about women's autonomy (Khawaja/Linos/El-Roueiheb 2007, 215). Between 2012 and 2013, I witnessed almost daily recurrent reports of cases of domestic violence against women and children at the ACTED office. These cases were brought to the attention of the camp administration and sometimes even ended up in court. Whenever a husband did not comply with the advice given by the humanitarian administrators, an independent tent was provided for his wife and children. In response to repeated cases of domestic violence in the refugee camp, the UNHCR local office launched a week-long sensitization campaign on December 16, 2012. In his opening speech, the UNHCR representative, Algassymou Bah, addressed men as a primary object of concern:

> […] I am concerned with the camp men. We heard about several cases of domestic violence. That, you, men beat up your wives in your families. This should stop. That is why we organized this week to be, of course, full of joy, but also to sensitize you […]. You should know that women deserve respect. We urge you to cease violence toward them. We want to reason with you to

45 In French: "les affaires de famille".
46 Interview with Assalim Ehatt on 22/11/2012 in Abala.

Figure 3: As part of the sensitization campaign launched in December 2012, the UNHCR had put this picture in every quartier to remind men that domestic violence is forbidden in the camp. Photograph by S. Diallo on 13/09/2014 in Abala.

> give up such practices, at least in this camp. We will not let you violate your wives in this camp here.[47]

The speech was followed by a series of activities that were to inform refugees about new regulations aiming to contain domestic violence and related forms of male aggression (see below).

Whereas humanitarian aid workers presented their mission in the refugee camp as a matter of protecting all refugees, that is children, women, and men, my male adult informants viewed these measures as being directed against them as men. They took this as an indication of the propensity of NGOs to interfere in domestic politics and for threatening men's authority over women, their offspring, and other dependents. For instance, in reaction to Algassymou Bah, Inawélène found the statement, "you should know that women deserve respect," very provocative. To Inawélène, the suggestion by NGOs that men should stop beating their wives and children was all the more upsetting because he felt that the aid workers themselves had few skills in terms of dealing with their women and keeping them under control. He, as well as other interlocutors, did not consider beating up their

47 Recorded speech on 16/12/2012 in Abala.

children or wives as genuinely bad behavior. Rather, they portrayed the infliction of corporal punishment as a core pillar of parental patriarchal authority and respect within the family. As Inawélène maintained:

> […] I really do not understand the laws in Niger, you cannot even move within your own household. Even your wife does not obey; you can no longer do anything. Your children disobey what you tell them, same, you cannot touch them. Since we have been here, our daughters have escaped our control. They go out with young men before they are married. If you touch them, the UNHCR and the *Gendarmes* take you to court. They have done this many times now […].[48]

Inawélène contrasts the UNHCR regulations and their social repercussions to the refugees' pre-exile situation in Mali. He explains his loss in patriarchal authority and control over his daughters and wives as a consequence of UNHCR's and the security forces' interference. Inawélène thus perceives domestic violence as a form of control capable of countering the libertarian lifestyle adopted by women and children under the conditions of exile in Abala.

"Our wives have become men": Male discourses about the distribution of rations

Simon Turner explores how the relief operations' policy of equality driven by the UNHCR challenges older hierarchies of authority among Burundian refugees of Lukole in Tanzania (Turner 1999). Turner argues that:

> A recurring subject would be the men lamenting that the women no longer respect them. The reason allegedly being that the men no longer can provide for their wives and children. It is the UNHCR-or merely […] that provides food, medicine and plastic sheeting for building *blindés* (huts). And UNHCR provides the same amount to men, women and children alike. "The UNHCR is a better husband" the women say, according to the men at least. (Turner 1999, 1)

Turner's account offers a useful interpretative framework for understanding the conflicted relations between Inawélène and his second wife in Abala. When I arrived in the refugee camp in Abala in August 2014, Inawélène had ceased to stay overnight with his second wife living in the second quartier. For him, this was the only option because it had become difficult to speak to her. Inawélène complained that whenever he attempted to make conversation with her, she vehemently reacted to him. He disliked this:

> Whenever I speak to her since we arrived in this camp, she always reminds me that I am not the one who feeds her. She said that it is rather *Sarmaji*[49]

48 Conversation with Inawélène on 25/12/2012 in Abala.

49 Sarmaji is the camp manager in Abala. Thus, by saying that it is Sarmaji who feeds them, the women want to mention that they are fed by NGOs and not by their husbands.

> who feeds her who could to talk to her but not me […]. In reality we men just became "*nothings*" in this camp. Look for example, you cannot even raise your voice to your family anymore.[50]

Similar to the experience of those men in Turner's account (Turner 1999), Inawélène interpreted his wife's reaction as a result of the food distribution regulations introduced by UNHCR in Abala. He explained that the UNHCR set the individual food ration to 12 kg of rice per person per month and also held women responsible for their children's food ration. In Inawélène's family, every wife cooked for herself and her children. As a result, whenever he went to see his second wife, he has to purchase extra food provisions and bring this over to her. The days he did not have money to purchase extra food, she did not cook for him. Alternatively, she suggested sometimes that he cook using the food that she had received from the UNHCR but Inawélène would have to pay it back whenever he gets some money. Moreover, she insisted that it is Inawélène's duty to feed his family at all costs.

For Inawélène, the UNHCR's policies contradicted the Bellah-Iklan conventional gender relations within families:

> our […] women are made for home where they cook, take care of children and old parents. […] in contrast, we, men, go and search for food, money, and cultivate and take care of animals. In the case of danger, we stood for our wives, fought for them; and they respected us. This gave sense to our existence as men.[51]

This quoted passage enables us to understand that it was precisely their submission to Inawélène's demands prior to exile that explained their changing attitudes toward him in Abala. Inawélène therefore interpreted the change in his wives' attitudes as evidence of their loss of respect for him. To conclude, Inawélène's account reveals that men felt like *nothing* because they lost their status, identity, and respectability as heads of families in Abala partly due to the NGOs' inversion of domestic roles. As the account shows, initially men controlled family resources; in Niger, however, women were in control.

4.2.1.2 "The nothings versus the arrogant humanitarian workers"

The male Bellah-Iklan refugees not only complained about the changes in their domestic power relations after the NGOs imposed regulations upon them, they also felt belittled by the treatment they received from humanitarian aid workers. In what follows I focus on three kinds of interactions between male adult refugees and humanitarian aid workers to illustrate how the refugees felt their pride

50 Selected from conversation with Inawélène on 10/09/2014 in Abala.
51 Selected from conversation with Inawélène and Assalim on 12/12/2012 in Abala.

had been hurt, as well as their sense of respectability and dignity as seniors and family fathers.

"ACTED made me a digger in Abala"

Assalim is a renowned musician from Menaka. He depicted himself as someone respected by women and everybody else among the Bellah-Iklan in northern Mali partly due to his successful musical career. To him, his "identity" as a successful, proud, and respected man among his peers and by women was undermined in the refugee camp in Abala. He explained this by pointing out the fact that humanitarian workers had no respect for refugees:

> To many humanitarian workers, the refugees have no dignity and do not need to be respected as persons. Imagine, once the ACTED said that they needed people for some days. We were supposed to help them running a cultural awareness program targeting women about sanitation […]. To do this, they needed some teams. I had applied on behalf of my music group because we are used to taking such jobs in Menaka too. They said to me that my group was selected to do the job. But unexpectedly, they asked me to do a digging job in the fifth quartier […]. I did this digging job for one to two days. Then I went to their office to say that I could not do this job again. I explained them that they did not respect me. Since, they first told me that I had been selected to do something totally different from this digging job. You see I am a musician, highly respected by women in Menaka. But as I am a refugee here, they want to damage this image by turning me into a manual worker wearing dirty clothes in front of women because they only think that the refugees are only after food but not dignity.[52]

Assalim reflected on his combined loss of former social identity, status, and respectability, depicting Menaka as a place where the older correct order of things, as well as people, still prevailed and found respect. While the women with whom he dealt in daily life were still the same as those who had surrounded him "back home" in Menaka, he presented them as belonging to a distinct moral universe.

"Waiting for the UNHCR before doing anything"

> *They consider us children whom they can tell what to do.*
>
> *—Inawélène, Abala, 18/10/2012.*

My male refugee informants also complained about NGOs' restrictions pertaining to travelling to and from the refugee settlement in Abala. For example, they argued that when a refugee wants to visit relatives in Niamey or Bamako, or just attend a workshop or any similar event, they were not allowed to go if they did not receive

52 Interview with Assalim on 11/01/2013 in Abala.

prior approval from the NGOs. When travelling to a workshop, refugees had to submit a letter of invitation from the workshop organizer to the UNCHR and the CNE offices for review. They assessed the nature of the organizations involved, and paid particular attention to their political orientations before giving the refugee permission to attend the event. If the UNHCR and CNE were not convinced of the non-political nature of the organization inviting the refugees under their protection, the answer to the application would be negative. When it came to simple visits with relatives, the applicant was verbally questioned in order to assess whether her or his security in the indicated destination is not in danger before a decision was made to allow the departure. Another obstructive factor was the length of the journey, which should not exceed three weeks in total. To this end, the date of departure and return were identified on an official travel document, "*titre de voyage*", which was used to as documentation to show security forces at every checkpoint throughout Niger.

Inawélène once clashed with security forces, ACTED and UNHCR, when he made a short visit back to Mali to vote during the past presidential elections that saw the election of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in September 2013. His decision to go back was informed by the great importance attached to these elections, which the non-free-born Tuareg in the camp expected would be a turning point crucial to the peace-building process in northern Mali. However, since he left the refugee camp without permission, he was asked to explain himself to the UNHCR and ACTED staff upon his return to Abala. They gave him serious warnings, forbidding him from doing something similar again. He recalled:

> When I arrived at the UNHCR office. There were Bah the chief, Barma, Sarmaji and Amadou, and another called Bachir. Bah started with the question: Who allowed you to go to Mali? I replied no one else than myself. I told them that I am responsible person who can decide things for himself. Bah told me that if I do the same thing again, I would not be allowed to re-enter the camp again. You see Souleymane this is like you are really talking to a child. That was all. They told me to go. Where is the respect here?[53]

This passage reveals what George Paul Meiu has in another context called "queer moments"—moments of contradiction and subversion—through which new forms of age and time emerge (Meiu 2015, 474f.). Inawélène deplored the way in which the local UNHCR representative, Bah, addressed him. To him, Bah's attitude toward him had been disrespectful since it reduced him to a child. For Inawélène, telling him that if he takes another trip in the future without first receiving permission from the UNHCR would have consequence, such as not being permitted to re-enter the camp, came off as being how a person would talk to a child. As adults usually use a stronger tonal emphasis with a child who is not aware of the complexity of their actions. For this reason, a child has to

53 Selected from conversation with Inawélène on 19/08/2014 in Abala.

wait for approval before acting, thereby making the child dependent on adults. Similarly, he found that waiting for approval lessened the adult's abilities to decide for themselves, which placed them in a permanent position of dependence on NGOs in the refugee camp. These evaluations of the regulations pertaining to permission to leave and enter the refugee settlement, in addition to the tonal emphasis Bah used when speaking to Inawélène, enables us to reflect on the refugee camp in Abala as consisting of moments of contradiction and subversion—through which male adults have come to inhabit the social time of childhood they had already lived some decades back (Meiu 2015, 474). To conclude, it was precisely this situation that made my Bellah-Iklan informants feel that they had lost their former status of respectability and their identity in Abala, as I argue further below.

"They insulted me because of a piece of sandwich"

On Friday afternoon January 11, 2013, I joined Inawélène, Assalim, and seven other Bellah-Iklan men gathered around their tea kettle under the hangar near the UNHCR office in Abala. That day, Inawélène appeared very unfamiliar to me. He had expanded his turban to his nose leaving only his eyes visible. His mood was unusual and seemingly affected. The anger was manifest through his laconic contributions to his discussions with peers; his inspiration to connect desperation to hope by evoking different anecdotes during the conversations was gone. When I confronted him the next morning at his place during our tea session around 8 am, he told that a humanitarian worker had insulted him the previous day:

> […] the reason is that there was a meeting and they [read: the humanitarian workers] had ordered some sandwiches. I needed to talk to Assalim. When I went to talk to him, there was an ACTED agent who said to another to watch me so that I do not profit from talking to Assalim and get a piece of sandwich. This person followed me when I went to talk to Assalim and said there are people who like to take advantage. I was shocked to hear this about myself. In Anderboukane, I am a highly respected man. That day they treated me as an undesirable person.[54]

Like Assalim, this account shows how Inawélène put himself into a retrospective mood in order to reflect on his feeling of having lost his social status as a respectable man in Abala in contrast to how he had been perceived in Anderboukane. In other conversations, he stressed that people respected him in Anderboukane as he is not someone who does everything for material gain; he never lied to anyone. Also, he argued that people respected him because he respects himself. He could measure people's respect through how they listened to him when he spoke. Unfortunately, the humanitarian worker who asked his fellow employee to keep an eye on him for a piece of sandwich was degrading him. He degraded him by

54 Interview with Inawélène on 11/01/2013 in Abala.

depicting him as a child who would run after food, which stood in stark contrast to his former image as an individual who was well respected in Anderboukane. He maintained that only a child would chase food in public because the child's sense of self had not yet been developed, while an adult would have enough self-control to keep from doing the same.

4.2.2 "What we live here is the suffering of the *peuple noir*"

In what follows, I shall present and discuss the refugees' accounts that interpret their predicaments in Abala as one reason to become a homogenous collectivity called the *peuple noir*.

4.2.2.1 "ACTED wants to exterminate us for the sake of the Tuareg"

Inawélène, Assalim, and Ahiyou interpreted their lives in exile in Abala by situating them in the context of a long-standing struggle between them and the free-born Tuareg in northern Mali. They attributed a significance to their life situations that extended beyond their individual experiences, presenting their current experiences as only one episode in a longer history of oppression and marginalization. In this fashion, my informants not only recollected the history of the Bellah-Iklan to me, but also actively (re)created this history. Ahiyou, who was born in the middle of the 1930s, presented himself as the reliable source for reconstructing historical connections between their past and present day situations in Abala. According to him, the French NGO ACTED treated Bellah-Iklan in the refugee camp in ways reminiscent of French colonial administration, which had empowered the free-born Tuareg to the detriment of the unfree Bellah-Iklan.[55] This prompted him to establish an alliance between ACTED in Abala and the free-born white Tuareg. For Ahiyou the extermination of the Bellah-Iklan is the ultimate goal. As the account below illustrates, ACTED had only employed free-born Tuareg in the refugee camp:

> When we arrived here in Abala, ACTED only employed the Tuareg. Some of them were from Mauritania and the others were from Niger. I remembered one day when one of them came to my place here, under this tent. He started to ask me about the conflict in Mali. I told him to leave this tent immediately. He left. I asked Inawélène, Assalim to gather people for a meeting. When they gathered people I told them about the story with the Tuareg working for ACTED. I clearly told people that if we do not take action, ACTED is working for the Tuareg. We protested and they were all transferred to Niamey.[56]

55 This thought will be further elaborated on in chapter 5.
56 Selected from conversation at Ahiyou's hangar on 13/09/2014 in Abala.

Based on this assessment of the parallels between the situation of Bellah-Iklan, past and present, Ahiyou called for action to withdraw Tuareg employees. Ahiyou's account echoes Sommers's argument that Hutu refugees in urban Tanzania depicted the Tutsi as fundamentally evil, claiming that the Tutsi or their accomplices were observing them from everywhere and plotting their destruction (Sommers 2001, 30).

As I realized during my research, life in the refugee camp changed radically between 2012 and 2014. In 2012, camp life was characterized by the dynamic investment of several transnational agencies. School infrastructure, public toilets, a healthcare center, new tents were built everywhere in the refugee camp. In 2014, some of this infrastructure was still not finished, while others had been completed but had never been put into use. Women who had earned a modest income from cooking for others in the childcare nutrition program now had nothing to pass the time or to even make a living. Similarly, men who formerly had made some additional cash from manual work, such as brick making for the construction of the toilets and classrooms, were no longer employed. Employees of NGOs and the UNHCR explained to me that most of these programs had been terminated due to a lack of funding.[57] For Ahiyou, in contrast, the lost employment opportunities were proof of the hostile attitude of the international community toward the *peuple noir*. To him, even the intervention by the French and UN coalition forces were an attempt to support the free-born white Tuareg against their former serfs.

> Look before French troop's intervention, MUJAO had neutralized MNLA several months ago. One could spend days and weeks without hearing from MNLA leaders on radios. They had lost the ground and hide themselves at the Algerian and Mauritanian borders. But French came to fight against MUJAO and let MNLA occupied the ground as those speaking on behalf of the northern population. Thus the French did not care about what MNLA did, the crime they perpetrated in the area of Menaka. Or this is the clear message from the French: the red have souls, are humans whose rights need protection. However, when it comes to us they [the French] do not consider us humans who have rights and need protection. The Minusma [the United Nations military forces in the northern regions] is also following the footsteps of French troops. They are in Kidal and Menaka where they see MNLA people daily but don't question what they are doing. Instead, they only target MUJAO people who punish MNLA for the crimes they perpetrated. It is clear to us that the French people and the international troops are not neutral forces. They supported the red against us.[58]

57 Algassymou Bah, the representative of the UNHCR office in the refugee camp at Abala, stressed that UNHCR only got 20% of the money for which they had applied for the Malian refugees in Niger. This was due to the growing number of the refugees resulting from the conflicts in the Central African Republic and ongoing peace talks in Algeria. The ongoing peace talks for the peace agreement in Algeria brought several donor organizations to prioritize the recent refugees from the Central African Republic.

58 Selected from conversation at Ahiyou's hangar on 13/09/2014 in Abala. Elsewhere I have argued in chapter 2 that my unfree Tuareg informants in Abala viewed French intervention as a divine

Ahiyou also questioned the alleged neutrality of the international coalition forces, during, for instance, the peace negotiation processes in Algeria.

> Now when they neutralized MUJAO and brought the MNLA to the fore, France and the USA asked for people negotiations in Algeria. But at the time MNLA was defeated, they did not say anything, no peace negotiation was proposed by them. The thing is that they have no interest in knowing about MNLA's role in the conflicts in northern Mali. If it was not for MNLA, MUJAO would not have been created. They are interrelated. Why do they not want to question the role of MNLA in the conflict? As long as they do not want to do this, it is clear that they are supporting the red [read free-born Tuareg] to the detriment of the others.[59]

Ahiyou developed these arguments about ACTED and the international community in order to make the Bellah-Iklan aware of the common danger they face as a group. Thus, during his narrations of what ACTED, the French, and the international community have done to the Bellah-Iklan, some of those who listened to him in their turn punctuated Ahiyou's passage from one example to another, exclaiming: *Ntada* (*that's it*)! *Ntada* (*that's it*)! *Ntada* (*that's it*)! *Ntada* (*that is it*)! These exclamations revealed what listeners found adequate explanations of their predicament in Abala. The exclamations also expressed how Ahiyou's explanation prompted those who listened to him to see themselves as a single (homogenous) group in relation to the free-born Tuareg.

4.2.2.2 "The Bellah's pathway to Exile"

One important figure whose prophecies are widely listened to and commented upon is Aghamad Ag Azam Zim.[60] For example, according to the informants, Aghamad Ag Azam Zim had predicted that the Bellah-Iklan would migrate to Abala. He stated that:

> There will an unprecedented war in *Azawagh* in the course of which the true inhabitants will be expelled, and they will cross the border toward the East […]. The enemies will control the whole region. But their mistake will be to cross the *Wabaria* river and move toward the south. If they do so, they will be defeated upon their return. They will flee the region in all directions. When they left *Azawagh*, the true inhabitants will return to their home to live in absence of any threat to them […].[61]

operation in their favor, especially in connection with Aghamad Ag Zam-Zim's prediction. Here, Ahiyou drew the opposite picture. This is not a contradiction in itself, rather, it displays how the meanings they give to events have constantly changed according to situations and needs. The situation and need here, I argue, is succeeding in creating common feelings of togetherness out of a common experience of suffering in exile.

59 Selected from conversations at the male gathering at Ahyiou's hangar on 14/09/2014 in Abala.

60 He passed away in 2013.

61 Selected from conversations at the male gathering at Ahyiou's hangar on 14/09/2014 in Abala.

Inawélène, Assalim, and Ahiyou were positive that Aghamad Ag Azam Zim's account matched their own path of migration and experiences because they, too, had left (the area of) Menaka and moved eastwards across the Nigerien border. The statement from the former deputy also depicts those who migrated toward east Niger as the true inhabitants of the desert. Even though there was a considerable number of free white Tuareg who migrated to from the area around Menaka, Assalim, Inawélène, and Ahiyou's interpretations of Aghamad's prophecy did not include those free-born Tuareg.[62] Quite the contrary; the prophecy points at the free white Tuareg as historical rivals of the Bellah-Iklan. After expelling the Bellah-Iklan, the free-born Tuareg took total control over northern Mali. They also crossed the river via the *Wabaria* bridge near Gao to move toward central-southern Mali in 2012.

According to Inawélène, Assalim, Ahiyou, and several other Bellah-Iklan, another of Aghamad Ag Azam Zim's prophecies had equally come true. When French military intervention began in January 2013, the informants, gathering under the hangar in Abala, argued that the time has arrived for the defeat of their enemies. In the following weeks and months, the free-born Tuareg MNLA political and military structure, as well as other Islamist militants, lost control over major parts of the northern regions. For the Bellah-Iklan in Abala, the retreat of free-born Tuareg forces would then allow their return to live in peace in Menaka in the following months and years as Aghamad had predicted. The arguments put forward here by Inawélène, Assalim, Ahiyou, and several other Bellah-Iklan men are important for their conceptualization of the French intervention as a form of punishment for free-born Tuareg. This punishment came from God, as the "Almighty" punished the free white Tuareg for having expelled and attacked the Bellah–Iklan whose suffering would come to an end once the free-born Tuareg withdrew from northern Mali.

Another prophecy from Aghamad, through the lens of which the Bellah-Iklan interpreted their contemporary situations in Abala, was the caravan of turtles, in which he predicted that a group of turtles would pass through the desert from the east toward the northwest as a sign that prosperity would return to the Bellah-Iklan after exile. According to my informants' interpretations, the turtle is the symbol of patience and endurance. They interpreted its hard shell as its natural shield, while the turtle's slow movement metaphorically corresponds to the Bellah-Iklan's longer experiences of suffering in northern Mali. The interlocutors also suggested that God would always protect them from damages that the free white Tuareg caused to them. In 2012, many refugees began to regain hope that God is still with them as it always protects turtles from threat when news spread in the refugee camp that turtles had been seen in the area between Menaka and

62 As chapter 6 illustrates, the Bellah-Iklan's referral to themselves as true inhabitants imply their claims to the first comership in the desert as opposed to the free-born Tuareg.

Anderboukane. More importantly, the news about the turtles led the informants to believe that Aghamad's prophecy was coming true.

By referring to these prophecies, my male Bellah-Iklan interlocutors framed their life in Abala as a temporary episode in a longer trajectory that would ultimately lead them back home. The prophecies also provided my informants with some historical basis for reconstructing themselves as the *peuple noir* in exile. Thus, identifying themselves as the *peuple noir* implied the Bellah-Iklan men's call for unity among the former slaves. They sought to articulate this unity around Aghamad's prophecies. For example, Inawélène expressed this concern more explicitly:

> The *noirs*' problem [*le problème des noirs*] is that they think they are different from each other. For example, the black from the *Dawsahak* think that they are more noble and better than the others from the *imghad*. Even my first wife does so. She is from the Zamburuten. In Menaka, the Zamburuten think that they are different from other *noirs* since they constitute one independent fraction. Since we are all suffering here, we should admit that we are the same, we are the *peuple noir*.[63]

This statement recalls an observation by Lotte Pelckmans that the former slaves of pastoral Fulbe in the area around Douentza in central Mali tend to reproduce the hierarchical structure of their masters (Pelckmans 2011, 61). Moreover, while Pelckmans' observation illustrates how the Fulbe slaves reproduced the hierarchical order of their masters, Inawélène's account demonstrates that the Bellah-Iklan refugees sought to undermine their inter-Bellah cleavages. For Inawèlène, their conditions in Abala should prompt the Bellah-Iklan to admit that there were no underlying differences between them, which underscores that the *peuple noir*'s identity formation goes hand in hand with undermining the Bellah-Iklan membership in the Tuareg local clan structures.

4.3 Concluding remarks

This chapter discusses how refugees in Niamey and Abala have transformed the negative effects of exile into processes that were creative insofar as they helped reconstitute collective identities under conditions of extreme stress and deprivation (cf. Malkki 1989; Marris 1974). The refugees' discussions evoke a well-known scholarly debate on how structural conditions can lead to a sense of community among people of heterogeneous social background (Das 1995; Hansen 1997; Malkki 1989; Turner 1998). As this chapter has shown, the socio-political conditions under which the free-born Tuareg and the unfree Bellah-Iklan mobilized themselves as groups in response to their life situations in exile are somewhat different. In Niamey, the informants' narratives focused on changes in the free-born

63 Selected from conversations with Inawélène, Assalim and other Bellah-men on 11/01/2013 in Abala.

Tuareg political economy; and changing urban economic processes (Youngstedt 2013). Additionally, the informants interpreted the attitudes of the police, Zarma, and Hausa ethnic groups toward them as insults to their noble social status and identity. Since men failed to respond to the expectations put on them, they lost legitimacy *vis-à-vis* women as well as their own self-confidence as men within the family and beyond. I also argued that men's inability to support their children and to live up to expectations not only affected their sense of being the head of a family but also of being nobles and Tuareg men. This situation caused men to feel that they have become "useless persons" among adult men, and reinforced feelings that they were mistreated as thieves and terrorists.

In Abala, a myriad of regulations imposed by UNHCR have come to undermine Inawélène, Assalim, and several other Bellah-Iklan's capacity to respond to the parental and social expectations that have been put on them. These regulations ranged from the registration to food distribution and permission to leave and re-enter the settlement in Abala. While men felt reduced to "useless persons" by these regulations, they also felt they had become "nothing" by the insults NGO workers' hurl at them. For the refugees, these insults degrade their social age, reducing them from adult men to children in the name of humanitarian efforts. These interpretations translated the refugees' feelings of having lost their former status identity and respectability as husbands and adult men.

Apart from these differences in socio-political conditions in Niamey and Abala, the ways in which the two groups of refugees responded to their life situations in exile are similar. In Niamey, the informants drew on familiar categories for explanations such as the prophecies made by the free-born Tuareg old man from Djebock; their antecedents since the creation of Malian nation-state in order to reflect on these negative effects of exile as shared experiences that rendered them "a people." Therefore, one common point of reference for this people was the shared experiences of having been reduced to lesser persons in (*adinat n bànan* or *aytedim*) Niamey. This, according to them, was followed by previous experiences of suffering since the creation of the Malian nation-state. Similarly, in response to their situations, the Bellah-Iklan interlocutors also drew upon prophecies by Aghamad and antecedents with the free-born Tuareg as well as colonial forces in order to interpret their contemporary situations in Abala as a follow up to a longer history of collective suffering. They called it "the suffering of the *peuple noir,*" a formulation that presented them as one homogenous collectivity. However, as I argue, for refugees in Niamey and Abala, the reconstitution of collective identities and the articulation of a sense of communal belonging was predicated on their own undoing of, or detachment from, local Tuareg clan structures and affiliations. Implied in the informants' decisions to detach themselves from local structures in Niamey was to silence the existing conflicted relationship between the vassal social groups and the noble groups since the colonial era (as discussed in chapter 3). In a similar way, the detachment from local clan structures enabled the Bellah-Iklan to silence intra-social status category cleavages in Abala. This shows that the terms

"*tumast*" (the people of the Tuareg) and "*peuple noir*" became instrumental to the ways in which the informants imagined themselves as homogenous communities in Niger. The following chapter discusses how refugees' new community formations define and position themselves *vis-à-vis* the state and the Malian national community.

5. The refugees in retrospect in Mali

On December 2, 2012, the Malian transitional president Dioncounda Traoré arrived in Niamey for a two-day visit. The local press commented on this visit, acknowledging the role that the Niger authorities had played by hosting several thousand Malian refugees. These articles also described this visit as a thank you to Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou for his diplomatic support for the Malian government while it sought out solutions to the unprecedented multi-dimensional problems that had existed in its country since March 2012. During the visit, President Traoré decided to meet the Malian refugees living in Niamey. The meeting took place at the Malian embassy at the *boulevard des Ambassades* on December 3, 2012 from 3 to 6 pm. Curiously, none of the four informants I had documented in Niamey attended the meeting. They stressed that they were not Malians, and that they therefore should refrain from attending the meeting. Some explained, "tout ce que le Mali a fait depuis 1960" (after all Mali has done since 1960) to begin or end their personal accounts of the state's presence in northern Mali and how this had gradually affected their group's socioeconomic situation, culminating with their exile in Niger. According to these informants, the country of Mali's treatment of the Tuareg excuses them from attending the meeting. Similarly, some Bellah-Iklan men had reacted to a Malian ministerial delegation that paid a visit to them in the refugee camp of Abala in November 2012. On this occasion, Ahiyou publically addressed the former Commandant of the Menaka circle, Colonel Adama Kamissoko, who was part of the delegation in the following terms: "Whom did you come to visit here? You did not visit us because we are not Malians. We are *noirs*. If we were Malians, the state would have protected us from the Tuareg. It would have given us some rights. These are the reasons why we are in this refugee camp nowadays." The two narratives about the two official visits to the refugees in Niger illustrate how both groups of informants reconstructed their relationships to the Malian state through the lens of their contemporary situations in exile.

In this chapter, I examine these central themes from the refugees' narratives about the Malian state in Niamey and Abala. I approach these accounts as a "moral matrix" that assesses the Malian state's politics toward the Tuareg since independence. Schatzberg uses the notion of a "moral matrix" to refer to implicit cultural biases and dispositions that inform people's evaluations of political legitimacy (Schatzberg 2001). To understand the informants' criticisms of the Malian state, I pay attention to their "political imageries" of ideal state–citizen relations. I have two primary goals here. The first is to show how the Malian state as a "third party" intervenes in the tensions between the Bellah-Iklan and the free white Tuareg. Second, I want to trace how the two groups in Niger see themselves in retrospect within the Malian nation-state in order to reconstruct their group identities in relation to the state and each other. My interpretations of the refugees' narratives

follow Assmann (Assmann 1999; as well as Cole 2003; Connerton 1989; Samaddar 1999) who stress that a collective memory of persecution or genocide may serve as a resource to imagine and construct an alternative future society. The chapter is organized in three parts: The first focuses on the narratives recollected in Niamey, while the second details the narratives I heard in Abala. The third and final part will relate the two perspectives to each other.

5.1 The free-born Tuareg relationships to the Malian State since 1960

Several central themes from the free-born Tuareg's daily conversations in Niamey focused on the beginning of the state's presence in the north, its "aggression to the Tuareg culture," the droughts, the free-born Tuareg migrations toward Algeria, Libya, and Niger, state repressions of the rebellions in 1963, 1990, and 2012, and, finally, how these events reshaped the refugees' notions of themselves as a collectivity.

5.1.1 "The beginning of Mali's presence"

The reconstruction of the beginning of the state's presence in northern Mali was particularly important to free-born Tuareg in Niamey. First, it allowed them to trace the roots of what they called "the Tuareg problems with Mali." Second, through the narratives recounting the beginning of the state's presence, the informants tended to define themselves as a homogenous social group and in opposition to "Mali." For example, an old refugee man in his seventies, Acherif Ag Mossa, argued that:

> Before 1960, Mali was new to us. To persuade you that Mali was new to us, let me tell you a story. In 1960, I was the headmaster of the primary school in Boughessa in the Kidal region. There was an old man called Abelessa. Abelessa was too old [he laughs]. He was about 110 years old at that time. After classes in the mornings, I used to sit with him in the afternoons. He did not know about Mali. One day when Abelessa learned that Modibo Keita [first president of Mali] arrived in Kidal, he asked if Modibo had brought Mali with him to the Adagh [laugh]. You see this Abelessa thought that Mali was a person or a material object one could eat or purchase but not the name of a country of which he himself was part.[1]

This account allowed Acherif to point to the fact that the nomads were ill prepared to be part of Mali in 1960, and, therefore, many nomads, like Abelessa, even had little knowledge about the southern counterpart they called the *Kel Adjous* (the people of the south). Substantiating Acherif's remarks, his friend Alhabib Ag Sidi also stated that:

1 Conversation with Acherif Ag Mossa on 27/09/2012 in Niamey.

> I was a small boy in Tessalit in 1960 when the Malian soldiers began to come and the French soldiers left. We stood along the road to applaud the Malian soldiers arriving in the Adagh. I still remembered that the Bambara got out of their cars to greet people. But our parents were not happy about them. You know, in our culture young people do not shake older people's hands first. As a younger person, you wait until the older person shakes your hand, otherwise he would think that you had no respect for him or her. This was what the Bambara did. Another thing that is important in our culture is that younger persons do not look older people straight in their eyes. The Bambara did this though. I remembered that when they got out of their cars, the soldiers shook our parents' hands first and looked them in the eye, although they were younger. We did not like this. They did not respect our culture and us.[2]

Alhabib Ag Sidi conceived "Mali" as Bambara, the people from the south and *vice versa*. Like Acherif's account, Alhabib Ag Sidi also conceived the Tuareg as not belonging to "Mali." Speaking about the nomads' resentments in the area around Tessalit where he was born and had grown up in the same period, Alhabib Ag Sidi emphasized that the Tuareg just felt that Bambara had no respect for them. In further conversations, he maintained that:

> To show you that Mali did not respect us, I will tell you two things. First, Mali imposed new rules upon us. To marry, you have to go to the military. They took the place of the Kel Essuk who are our *marabouts* [Islamic teachers]. They did everything. Marriage is a religious affair above all. Second, I was at school in Tessalit. Our Bambara teachers forced us to speak only French and Bambara and at the same time, they considered speaking *Tamasheq* a crime to be punished: You see this. This was to change us. We the Tuareg![3]

According to Alhabib, the Malian authorities introduced laws and "the Tuareg" had to adopt the new regulations. Henceforth, to marry a woman the nomads needed to go to the administrators before Kel Essuk, otherwise the marriage celebrated by the *marabouts* alone had no validity. The account also shows that according to nomads, the schoolteachers' insistence on the Tuareg pupils' speaking Bambara was an offense. Alhabib's concluding assertion, "this was to change us", reflected on how this offense still affected the free born presented in Niamey. This was also evident in Albabib's recollections of the first Tuareg rebellion against "Mali," as I present below.

5.1.2 "The soldiers' love affairs and their humiliation of the Tuareg"

The first Tuareg rebellion that took place in 1963 was another central theme that the town refugees used to comment on what "Mali," as an external force, had done

2 Conversation with Alhabib Ag Sidi on 27/09/2012 in Niamey.
3 Conversation with Alhabib Ag Sidi on 27/09/2012 in Niamey.

to them. Boilley and Lecocq have argued that the first and bloodiest repressed Tuareg rebellion in 1963 resulted from the frustrations that Modibo Keita generated among the Tuareg (Boilley 1999; Lecocq 2010). For Acherif and Alhabib it was precisely the love affairs (*tarha*) of Malian soldiers that led to conflict between Mali and the Tuareg. For example, Alhabib described that:

> At that time, the soldiers replaced God Almighty in the north. When the Malian soldiers paid visits to our girls at night, they did not like to meet other Tuareg young men there. In cases in which they met some Tuareg youth there, stories were made up in the following days that denounced these people. Most commonly, it was said that they have done something against Mali, and for this reason, they were arrested, unveiled, and forced to do manual work in the presence of women, wives, and children.[4]

The metaphorical use of "God almighty" to refer to the attitudes of Malian soldiers reflects the extreme effects their authority had upon the nomads as the soldiers did whatever they wanted to the "Tuareg." For example, in terms of their personal love affairs, Malian soldiers arrested, unveiled, and forced men to complete manual labor in the presence of women and children, which was humiliating and degrading for the Tuareg.

To understand Alhabib's claim here, it is important to remember the social significance of the veil and the implication of unveiling a Tuareg man in public. As chapter 4 illustrates, unveiling a free white Tuareg man and forcing him to do manual labor in the presence of women, wives, and children undermines his noble honor (*illulu n ahalis*). For Alhabib, this marked the loss of the young Tuareg's sense honor, and this frustrated them, encouraging them to turn against the Malian soldiers, and led to the first rebellion. He recollected the story of this rebellion in the following terms:

> It was just a small problem that occurred between Elladi Ag Alla and a Malian administrator that turned into the disaster known as the Tuareg Rebellion. The administrator in question was responsible for a post at Boughessa. One day, he paid a visit to a girl at night where he met Elladi and his friends. As the nomads' girls were not used to southerners, she was speaking with Elladi and his friends in *Tamasheq*, and they were laughing. The administrator thought they were laughing at him since he did not understand *Tamasheq*. He insulted Elladi and his companions. He said to Elladi that he deserved to be killed like his father.[5] Elladi and his friends profited from the administrator's inattention to bring his weapon with him […]. It was reported to Modibo Keita that the Tuareg had seized the administrator's weapons whereas this man was doing something else. Without investigating the incident,

4 The passage has been selected from a conversation with Alhabib Ag Sidi on 28/09/2012 in Niamey.

5 The father of Elladi was called Alla Ag Albachar. Alla was killed by French troops in 1957 after a series of attacks he undertook against the colonial occupation (cf. Boilley 1999).

> Modibo Keita took this information as a declaration of war and launched the massacres of 1963.[6]

This way of reconstructing the rebellion presents the Tuareg as victims of soldiers' abuse. According to Alhabib Ag Sidi, the precipitation of the Malian authorities to start with "killing the Tuareg" showed that "Mali" had had its own plan long before the encounter between Elladi Ag Alla and a Malian administrator. This view is clearly rendered in his recollection of the events during this conflict. He stated that:

> Once the rebellion broke out, all the civil servants, apart from the school-teachers, were systematically replaced by soldiers. This shows that the plan was already set. The entire northern part was declared a forbidden zone. Not only for human beings, even the animals met in this area were considered rebels and for this reason, were fired on by the soldiers. Between 1963 and 1964, it was difficult to breathe natural air in the north because of an omnipresent smell of death: of entire herds of cattle and their owners. The wells were poisoned, which caused the death of several people and animals. Deaths ceased to be exceptional events for the Tuareg, they became part of the daily life. It was not even considered extraordinary to see women throwing children away while fleeing the army. Colonel Muskanani[7] is an example of this; all of his family members were killed in Menaka. It was someone else passing by who found him alone jumping on the immobile body of his mother already killed by the soldiers. This person stopped and took him along to Djanet […] and then later to Libya. The soldiers occupied every corner of the *Azawad*. Another tactic of the army was to torture people until they told of things they had not seen or heard. And, based on such information, people were arrested, tortured, and then executed. For example, one day in Tessalit, Mamadou Cissoko[8] was informed that some people were rebel supporters. He invited the whole village to a meeting. He had a list of these nine people. Among those people, there were three old women about whom I am sure that they had not done anything against Mali. These nine persons on the list were asked to join the soldiers in the car. They drove them to the mountain behind the military camp situated seven kilometers from the village. Suddenly, we heard gun shots [the narrator repeating the sound] and this was the end of the day for these people. In other cases, while executing these persons, the army forcefully brought family members and relatives to applaud the event. These persons were undressed and shot dead in public.[9]

Here, Alhabib pointed to the far-reaching social consequences of the state's reactions to Elladi Ag Alla. The narrative form was punctuated with reference to fine details such as the names of the people involved, for example, Colonel Muskanani, and the children who died under such conditions, and this rendered his account

6 Selected from conversation with Alhabib Ag Sidi on 28/09/2012 in Niamey.
7 Colonel Muskanani is a member of MNLA.
8 During the rebellion 1963, Lieutenant Mamadou Cissoko was appointed *chef d'arrondissement* in Tessalit.
9 Taken from a conversation with Alhabib Ag Sidi and Acherif on 28/09/2012 in Niamey.

much more poignant. That was manifested in exclamations: *Bissimilahi!* or *La ilahu Mahamadara suru lahi*! These assertions were from other people in the courtyard. The exclamations expressed how they subscribed to these recollections of past suffering, with consequences ranging from loss of property and relatives to humiliation resulting from the nomad's loss of honor. Alhabib began by arguing that Malian soldiers killed many Tuareg and animals between 1963 and 1964. Several others also fled. More importantly for Alhabib, this illustrated their state of tiredness. Mothers had no more strength to carry their children. It also expressed the extent of sorrow that the migration implied for women. In Alhabib's terms, these women could never be happy again, forever mourning their children who had died under such circumstances.

Alhabib found that unveiling these nine people who, in his view, were innocent represented an unveiling of the "public itself" because people who witnessed the execution shared the social experience of humiliation their relatives went through before their executions. For example, from his personal position, Alhabib felt humiliated by how the soldiers degraded these people before executing them. To understand the humiliation of both those who witnessed and those who were executed, it is important to relate their claims to the socio-cultural context within which the event took place. As my informants explained it, the Tuareg's conception of humiliation is closely linked to their notion of being ashamed; it is a feeling of being in conflict with social expectations or ideals closely connected to an individual's social status. This interpretation makes humiliation appear like shame as an instance of social evaluation, measurement of the personalities of the actors according to the ideal standards of their societies (cf. Olivier de Sardan 1984; Ouattara 1999; Peristiany 1966). The humiliation that both those who witnessed the execution and those who were executed felt is due to socio-cultural traditional practices: they did not expect to confront each other unveiled. As I mentioned before, the veil is the symbol of social distance; it regulates conventional interactions between generations and in-laws (Murphy 1964; Rasmussen 2004).

In further conversations, Alhabib and his friend Acherif further stressed that at the end of the war in 1964, an atmosphere of fear reigned in the Kidal region. The country had become poorer because "Mali" had shot both the animals and people dead. All this was coupled with intensive surveillance that the Malian state had introduced in the region, exacerbated by the continued pollution of water in the wells resulting in multiple Tuareg deaths in the years that followed 1964 until the military putsch, led by Lieutenant Traoré against Modibo Keita. Alhabib Ag Sidi and Acherif also understood Moussa Traoré's regime as a continuation of his predecessor's northern politics. They explained that on his arrival, Moussa Traoré removed some leading figures such as Diby Sillas Diarra from the north, and suspended the activities of the US-RDA, including, for example, the dissolution of the militia. However, with these exceptions, no substantial change took place, especially in the Malian policy toward the Tuareg. The stronghold of the soldiers

over regions inhabited by the Tuareg remained intact. According to them, this was evident in the way in which Moussa Traoré dealt with the droughts in the 1970s.[10]

5.1.3 "Mali's strategy against the Tuareg, 1973–1974"

My free white Tuareg interlocutors referred to 1973–1974 as the "year of hunger" (*awatay n laz*[11]). This year of hunger reminded them of the lack of everything: food for people as well as animals and material poverty. Their narratives focused on the attitudes of the Malian authorities throughout this particular year, which they considered a critical moment in their collective history. As the account below reflects, some maintained that "Mali" wanted "to finish the Tuareg."[12] Mohamed Ag Irgimit recalled:

> In fact, toward the end of the 1960s, Keita's regime had left a very weakened and impoverished Tuareg society. Between 1970 and 1973, the remaining animals died because of a lack of grass and water. People had nothing left to eat. They died day after day of hunger and measles. The measles came with the drought. Under this situation, Tuareg were left to themselves, did not get any help from the state. Worse, since the northern regions were isolated, humanitarian aid delivered to the state in order to overcome the disaster was blocked in the south. People who were not primarily in need of them used the donations. In this situation, the only option left to the nomads was to move to other countries; thus, like they had during the rebellion, the survivors formed small groups of five people for the journey. They had no financial means left to travel in vehicles. Also, since their ancestral travel logistics, camels, and donkeys were almost inexistent, they walked to Niamey, Djanet, and Bordji. Many did not even reach these places. They simply died along the roads due to the fact that they were too tired and weak not only because of the length of the journey but also because of hunger and sickness. After months and years in these countries, the refugees in Niger and Algeria were expelled to Mali. For example, I remember that several people were actually collected from Hamdallaye and Niamey and sent back to Mali.[13]

To understand Mohamed's criticisms toward the Malian state, it is important to note his conceptualization of ideal state–citizen relations. These relations, Mohamed suggested in conversations, are made up of mutual obligations and rights. In the same way that the citizens have obligations toward the state they also have rights, which they could expect from the state. In Mohamed's view, however, being

10 In the months that followed Keita's removal from power, Schatzberg undertook an analysis to determine whether there had been more continuity than change among the Malian elite since independence. His conclusions suggest that most of the changes were matters of style rather than substance in the political thought of Keita and Traoré (see Schatzberg 1972, 11f).

11 Here, I follow Boilley in translating the term *awata n laz* (1999, 558).

12 They used the French expression, "finir les Tuareg."

13 Conversation with Mohamed Ag Irgimit, Mossa Ag attaher on 20/09/2012 in Niamey.

Tuareg people in Mali just means being someone who does not have any fundamental rights such as freedom of movement and property rights to protect. For example, he stated:

> If the state recognized us as its citizens, the humanitarian aid given for the Tuareg during the droughts of 1970s and 1980s would not have been confiscated in Bamako where people were not in need of anything. I am telling you that in Gao and Timbuktu the aid stores were closed. The government refused to give us food when we were starving. It was their strategy to exterminate the Tuareg [*finir les Touareg*].[14]

Mohamed's interpretation echoes the view of French reporter Philippe Decreane who submitted that the Malian authorities attempted to take the drought as an opportunity to settle the nomad question once and for all (Lecocq 2010, 237).

5.1.4 "My brothers died on the road (*ayitemanin abaten dah zabo*)"

The stories of the people who died on the road to Algeria and Libya were also central topics of Mohamed Ag Irgimit, Alhabib, and his friend Acherif's discourses. They used these stories to substantiate their claims about their past sufferings at the hands of "Mali." Often punctuated by interruptions caused by tears upon the narrator's faces, these stories offered insights into understanding the impact of the discourses upon those producing them. For example, Alhabib recounted on several occasions that:

> I left in a small group of eight brothers. We took the roads from Tessalit to Bordji, Djanet in southern Algeria where we stayed with Zeyd and other combatants who had fled during the rebellion in 1963–1964. After some days with those combatants, we took the road to the Algerian and Libyan borders. But since some of us did not have ID cards, we asked the bus driver to stop and we got off before we reached the border checkpoint. Once we crossed the Libyan border, there were intensive police stops and army patrols, we moved from one dune to another at night. We slept during the day and walked overnight so that we could arrive safely in Tripoli, the Libyan capital. Parts of the trip were difficult at times. We only had some biscuits and other minor things for nutrition. The difficulty of getting water and food weakened us, culminating in the death of three of us [interruption with tears on the narrator's face]; before these three men passed away we found two or three dead bodies of other Tuareg from groups ahead of us. Following the death of our three brothers, five of us reached Fezzan, a Libyan town where several Tuareg lived.[15]

14 Conversation with Mohamed Ag Irgimit, Mossa Ag attaher on 20/09/2012 in Niamey.
15 Conversation with Alhabib on 20/09/2012 in Niamey.

This story was crucial to Alhabib's assessment of "Mali." Alhabib argued, "If I think of Mali since I have left, I just see my brothers who died on the road to Libya. Nothing other than this. Mali killed us. That is all." The notion of "brothers," which underscores the closeness of the group, served as a catchall phrase for Alhabib to point to the extent to which he felt the deaths of those who passed away on the way to Libya as personal social experiences.

5.1.5 "Blocking the Tuareg from state institutions"

> *A Tuareg can never become Malian. This is to tell you that a Tuareg remains Tuareg in Mali.*
>
> —Mohamed Ag Zeyd, Niamey, 29/09/2012.

After listening to my conversations with Alhabib Ag Sidi and Acherif, their friend, who I refer to as Mohamed Ag Zeyd, a fifty-five year old man also argued that for the first three decades after independence, a central aspect of Malian politics was to prevent the nomads' access to the national army. He explained that even if a few Tuareg were recruited by the army, they were always kept at very low ranks. He recollected his own experience as a Tuareg in the national army under Moussa Traoré in the following:

> I was a soldier in the ground forces from 1979 to 1992. I attended the training school of subaltern officers in Banankoro near Segu town. Therefore, I served at the center for civic training. Each year, our chief who is the current Defense Minister, Yamoussa Camara, sent a list for promotions. But since I am Tuareg, he never mentioned my name. Even students I trained were given the chance and then became my superiors. Whenever I asked, no explanation was given. I knew that the reason behind it was not an issue of discipline. I was docile enough and fulfilled all my duties well. At some point I realized that the unofficial explanation was that I am Tuareg. I decided then to quit the army and Mali. I went to Senegal, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and the Maghreb before I settled in Niger.[16]

For Mohamed Ag Zeyd, leaving the army was his only option, and this has catalyzed his long-standing resentment against the power structure that the military hierarchy of Mali had established. It was also the result of his growing awareness that there is no room for the Tuareg in the Malian nation-state, just exclusion. When he was transferred to the military Base A of Bamako situated in the center of the capital, Mohamed tried to learn *Bamanankan*, the lingua Franca in central and southern Mali. He had established good relationships with several "Bambara" families in the Bolibana, Ouolofobugu, and Bamako-Coura quartiers surrounding military Bases A and B. Despite his knowledge of *Bamanankan* and his good

16 Selected from conversations with Acherif, Alhabib, and Mohamed Ag Zeyd on 29/09/2012 in Niamey.

relationships with neighboring families, the army nevertheless would not trust him as a Malian like the others. Mohamed's anger resulted from the fact he was not promoted to the rank of an officer, although he would have been formally eligible to this rank after completing his training at the *école des sous-officiers* in Banankoro. While other, non-Tuareg soldiers were given the opportunity to become officers, Mohamed spent almost a decade without a promotion. This made him realize that the reason for his slow advancement was to prevent his later access to the officer training school, École Militaire Interarmes (EMIA) at Koulikoro, because once he went to EMIA, he would end up in the closed circle of senior officers. In a similar conversation, Mohamed Ag Irgimit put that:

> In Mali, the Tuareg are not considered human beings yet. They are considered like something very similar to a donkey. They have not yet reached the level of citizenship because a citizen is someone who has some obligations but also the rights that should be guaranteed by the constitution. However, if I as a Tuareg enter an office in Bamako today and evoke the Malian constitution, I am sure that I would be asked the following question: who are you to evoke the Malian constitution? It is so, simply, because I am not considered as someone who could become Malian, therefore, a normal Malian. If I say that I have the right to be protected by this constitution. They [read: the Malians] would say why should I be protected by the constitutional dispositions of Mali? If I keep on saying this, I think my only chance would be to have some relatives around. Otherwise I would be severely beaten. As such, I believe that a minimum right needs to be given to Tuareg. These basics rights are the right to go and come back, I mean the freedom of movement, that of property, and presumption of innocence. A Tuareg has to be considered as innocent like everybody else in Mali until he commits a crime. But this is not the case; it suffices that Tuareg in Mali are refused the status of normal citizenship and all other rights.[17]

Taken together, the ways in which informants presented their experiences of "Mali" show that being Tuareg and at the same time Malian are contradictory categories. One cannot be both at the same time. This illustrates that the refugees' self-perceptions as "Tuareg" in Niamey town implied that they questioned their membership as citizens of the Malian nation. Other conversations that dealt with how the Malian state treated free-born Tuareg, Songhay and the Bellah-Iklan people differently further substantiated this argument.

5.1.6 The State, Songhay, and Bellah-Iklan relationships

A significant part of the refugees' conversations reconstructing the relations between free-born Tuareg and the Malian state focused on the civil war in the 1990s

17 Selected from a conversation with Mohamed Ag Irgimit, his wife, Mossa Ag attaher and Abdine on 29/01/2013 in Niamey.

and since 2012 when several other white Tuareg fled. Their conversations centered on the argument that the Malian state had created the Songhay and Bellah militia to fight against the free white Tuareg. They maintained that "Mali's support" to the Bellah-Iklan and the Songhay vigilant groups against the Tuareg illustrates the fact that "Mali" considers these two groups as its Malian citizens rather than its "nomads."

5.1.6.1 "The anti-Tuareg campaign between 1994 and 1996"

For informants in Niamey, the civil war between 1994 and 1996 revealed the "hidden face of Mali,"[18] that is, its role in mobilizing the Songhay vigilante groups. To render the role played by the Malian state, especially its military apparatus, against the nomads more intelligible, Mohamed Ag Irgimit explained:

> When the second rebellion began in late June 1990, the Malian army tried to use the same strategies they had used during previous years. These consisted of isolating the Tuareg, cutting them off from the rest of the world, and then moving on in a violent manner to exterminate them as had been done over the past three decades. But, very quickly the Malian state ran into difficulties already at the beginning of the rebellion. This was due to the fact that the international community was watching the region closely. Several journalists sought to illustrate and denounce the crimes perpetrated by the Malian army. In the face of such pressure, the Malian authorities changed their tactics. The security forces organized vigilante groups composed of the Fulani, Songhay, and former Bellah against the Tuareg. In 1994, in the midst of the conflict, these groups were armed with heavy weapons from the army to put targeted violence against the Tuareg into practice. In between 1994 and 1996, several systematic attacks took place against the Tuareg. In Gao, the entire quartier inhabited by the *marabouts* [Islamic teachers] was burned. They lost everything they had there. There was no action from the army to protect them or to prevent the event. Left to themselves, the Kel Essuk took the road to Niger. While some settled in the area of Tillabery at the Niger border, several others came to Niamey.[19]

Similarly, another old man in his late sixties still remembered his experience with this military campaign in the 1990s against Tuareg in the following terms:

> In Gao, I was employed as a guard by soldiers. In addition to this, I mastered the Qur'an. I even did some consultations for many soldiers. In 1991, the Songhay and the soldiers began to kill any Tuareg they found in the town and around Gao. One day, I went to the market. On my way back, the Ganda Koy people arrested me. They brought me to a place where they used to shoot the Tuareg dead. I thought then that my life had come to an end because obviously they wanted to kill me in one way or another. Meanwhile,

18 In French: "la face cachée de l'État Malien."
19 Selected from a conversation with Mohamed Ag Irgimit on 28/01/2013 in Niamey.

> one of my customers, a soldier for whom I did consultations intervened. He spoke with them. They did not kill me. This soldier even drove me outside the town to where I could get buses to Niger. That was how I came to Niamey. From this scene, I clearly understood that Songhay collaborated with the soldiers.[20]

The informants also presented similar accounts about their escape in 2012.

5.1.6.2 "The anti-Tuareg campaign in 2012"

On February 6, 2012, violent events took place in several southern Malian towns. Many young people from other ethnic groups carried out systematic attacks on the free white Tuareg residing in these towns. For example, in Bamako and the surrounding areas such as Kati, many groups of people launched attacks on houses, shops, and all other free white Tuareg properties. These attacks resulted in the massive displacement of free white Tuareg students and cadres working and living in Bamako and Kati toward Niger, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Mauritania, and Senegal. The southerners justified these attacks as a response to assassinations of over ninety soldiers from the regular army in the garrison of Adiel-hoc in the Kidal region. Most of those soldiers were from the south. According to a widespread assumption in the south, the secessionist movement MNLA and Ansar Eddine led by Iyad Ag Ghaly carried out the assassinations. Focusing on the violence in the south, the informants called it the "anti-Tuareg campaign" (in French, *la campagne anti-Touareg*).[21] Mossa Ag Attaher's cousin, Alou, stressed that the reluctance of the authorities to punish those who had singled out Tuareg for collective violence proved to him that the state was supportive of these actions. As Alou put it:

> When the conflict began in January 2012, we were still in our village Ebank Malen in the neighborhood of Gao town. On March 7, 2012, a group of heavily armed men came to us. They entered the village and went from house to house with their guns. In my house, they forced me and other members of my family to sit down on the ground. Three men pointed their guns at us. After some minutes, one of them called someone, and I guess that was their chief, to ask whether they could shoot us. Thank God the person did not let them open fire on us. They did the same in all the houses in our village. Those who did this were Songhay and Bellah. It was just something against us. They told us to leave this country within a week. The Malian government did not say anything about this whereas on March 7, 2012, the Malian army had not yet been attacked by the rebels. Additionally, the military coup that later led to a near collapse of the state, had not yet happened. If the state wanted to

20 Selected from a conversation with Mossa Ag Attaher, his son, Iba, and the old man who considered me to be a policeman from Mali and was introduced in chapter 2.

21 Mossa Ag Atthaher's son Iba mentioned the example of the Kel Antsar Tuareg who settled near a military garrison in Kati-Bamako.

> intervene and even to arrest those who attacked us, they could have done it. Since, the Malian authorities did not take action against those who did this, we concluded that the state even supported them.[22]

For my interlocutors, all these experiences are consequences of how the French colonial administration dealt with the Tuareg during colonial time as the following section explains.

5.1.7 "If we are in this situation today, it is the fault of French people"

For the interlocutors the late introduction of school, the medical service, and the army ultimately led to Tuareg' marginalization in the postcolonial state. Most prominently, they evoked the role played by the first-educated African elite in the struggle for independence, among whom there was no influential free-born Tuareg political figure. For them, the absence of an educated elite among the Tuareg over time led to a systematic inequality between the northern and southern regions, and to the socioeconomic predicaments affecting the nomads in particular. Mossa Ag Attaher's cousin Alassane, for instance, described the free-born Tuareg contemporary predicaments in Niger in the following terms:

> I consider French people responsible for all that is happening to us today. They treated people differently. They gave others the chance to go to school but denied us the opportunity. People said that we Tuareg refused to go to school. But this was not only us. All the others in the south also refused to go to school but the French forced them to go to school. They did not force us like the others. If they had given us the chance to go to school, we would not be where we are today. We were born and have grown up like this. As young people, we were struggling to make ends meet. Yet, as adults, we are struggling. Our children have no education; this is why there is no chance for them to get decent jobs. Still, it is us who have to provide our families with everything: milk, sugar, and food even though we have grown sons.[23]

Alassane's statement substantiates the argument by Crawford Young that to understand contemporary crises in the African states, we need to pay attention to the complex legacy of colonial rule (Young 1988, 26). It questions the colonial schooling policy's treatment of the Tuareg people and how this led to their marginalization in the postcolonial Malian nation-state. Speaking about the history of western education among Tuareg in northern Mali, Ag Litny notes that, in contrast to southern Mali, where a western school system was introduced soon after its occupation by French conquerors, it took some time before this reached the Tuareg country (Ag Litny 1993, 257f.). He states that the first nomad schools

22 Selected from a conversation with Alou, Mossa Ag Attaher and his son Iba on 23/11/2012 in Niamey.
23 Conversation with Alassane on 03/12/2012 in Niamey.

were opened in and around Goundam in 1917 for two main groups: the Kel Intsar and Tinguereguifs (1993, 258). According to his account, these schools were soon closed due to low enrolment, and again reopened in the middle of 1930s and early 1940s, respectively. As for the Kel Adagh, Ag Litny indicates that the first school was opened in 1947 (1993, 258), almost half a century after the establishment of the first school in the Kayes region in 1886 (Boilley 1999, 219). Following Ag Litny (Ag Litny 1992), Boilley contends that the introduction of western education resulted in tensions among the Tuareg (Boilley 1999, chapter 6). He referred to the nomads' reluctance to send their children to school as one of the reasons for lower rate of schooling in the north. The nomads perceived western education as a channel through which impious values of the "infidels" were transmitted to their children (1999, 222f.). To avoid this path, Ag Litny maintains that all kind of tricks were used to hide the children, such as avoiding leaving children alone during the recruitment period, or even going as far as to hide children in various places: mountains, wells, trees, and tent corners. Instead of sending their children to school, the noble Tuareg preferred to send lower clan members or former slaves (Ag Litny 1993, 261). The main discrepancy between Alassane and Ag Litny's accounts consists in the responsibility assigned by Ag Litny and by Alassane to the nomads for not attending French colonial schools. Alassane puts emphasis on the passivity of the colonial administrators. In a similar way, Inawélène, Assalim, and Ahiyou related their contemporary exile in Abala to colonial policy.

5.2 "We are just those left behind in Mali": the Bellah-Iklan in retrospect in Mali

In their everyday discourse, the Bellah-Iklan informants presented the former Tuareg slaves as "a people" left behind within the Malian nation-state. The expression, "we are just those left behind," points to their marginal socioeconomic conditions within the nation-state over the past decades. It also translates how they posited themselves as external social group to and in opposition to Mali. Their statements assert that these marginal conditions rendered the Bellah-Iklan vulnerable, a situation that culminated in their exile in Abala. The informants illustrated these claims by reconstructing their political trajectory from the colonial era to the recent conflicts in 2012 when they fled northern Mali.

5.2.1 "What the French did before independence"

Several of the Bellah-Iklan conversations focused on education. Unlike the town refugees, in Abala, the informants maintained that a substantial number of the Bellah-Iklan had acquired school qualifications under colonial rule. Nevertheless,

they complained that although the free-born Tuareg were not educated at all, they still held political power, to the detriment of the educated Bellah-Iklan.[24]

> We were the first and are still the most educated in the north. Despite this, the French only offered positions like teachers whereas the others with the same level in the south were given more responsibility in the colonial administration and later in the Government of Mali. Despite their skills, the educated *noirs* [read: Bellah-Iklan] were ignored as inhabitants of northern Mali. Meanwhile the Tuareg, who had no education, remained powerful in the colonial administration. We remained dependent on them. It seemed to us that the outside world took the Tuareg as those who have crafted the "black people," given us our souls, and in consequence we have to depend on them forever.[25]

According to this statement, the French colonial authorities only employed the Bellah-Iklan as schoolteachers. Yet, this, unlike the situation in the south, did not allow Bellah-Iklan to gain political influence in the local administration in ways that could lead to a weakening of the former ranking system and the rise of new status credentials (cf. Schachter Morgenthau 1964; Schulz 2001, 91). This was due to the fact that the French still kept the free-born Tuareg in influential political positions; thus, the Bellah-Iklan remained in dependent positions until the early decades following post-independence Mali.

5.2.2 "Modibo Keita did not do enough"

The informants used the expression, "Modibo Keita did not do enough," [26] to point to their dissatisfaction with Mali's first postcolonial president in Mali. They criticized Modibo Keita, who, in their view, had not promoted the western educated Bellah-Iklan, such as appointing them to influential political positions (in the northern regions), which could have enabled the Bellah-Iklan to invert the vectors of power relations in the north. Instead, as is reflected in the following passage, Keita preferred sending southern administrators to rule the north. Assalim once stated that:

> What we just saw with Modibo Keita was that the Bambara were at the heart of everything. They were sent to the north whereas these southern civil servants were no more competent than our black educated. Madeira Keita, Bakara Diallo, Diby Syllas Diarra could not properly rule the north because they did not know who is who and who does what. Such mistakes led to the rebellion in 1963. In reality, the Malian authorities were at fault for the rebellion.[27]

24 They began their arguments by saying: "Ce que les Français ont fait avant l'indépendance."
25 This passage has been selected from a joint conversation with Ahiyou, Inawélène, Assalim and other men on 12/12/2012 in Abala.
26 "Modibo Keita n'a pas assez fait."
27 Conversation with Assalim on 18/12/2012 in Abala.

Assalim's discussions about Keita's regime offered some insight into debates about the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg relationships during the late colonial era. As I explained earlier, exploring the socio-political dynamics of the Tuareg society in the late colonial rule (1940–1960), Lecocq notes that party competition in the post-colonial era resulted in significant transformations in the relationships between the former Bellah-Iklan and their former masters (Lecocq 2005). He recalled that a significant number of Bellah-Iklan, especially those belonging to the rebellious federations, were freed and settled in the liberty villages (cf. Bouche 1968). Consequently, they acquired the right to vote. In 1946, for instance, during the first elections during which Africans were allowed to vote, the former Bellah supported the US-RDA, which had made the emancipation of the slaves the cornerstone of the nomads' policy. In this context, voting for US-RDA was accordingly equated with voting against the former masters in the Bellah settlements. As I understood Assalim, he was not satisfied with the Modibo Keita regime. He criticized the US-RDA because, in spite of former Bellah-Iklan support of the party, its leaders did not seek to promote the educated unfree Tuareg, a situation that became more pronounced after Keita's fall.

5.2.3 "It was worse under Moussa Traoré between 1968 and 1991"

The informants emphasized that the Bellah-Iklan situation in the nation-state deteriorated under Moussa Traoré who came to office after the military putsch in 1968.[28] Their narratives focused on how, under the functioning system of UDPM,[29] the Bellah-Iklan had to withdraw from school.

5.2.3.1 UDPM-free Tuareg relationships in Menaka

> When Moussa created his UDPM in 1978, he only worked with the Tuareg in Menaka. The Tuareg were members of the section. This gave them privilege to work with the commandant of the circle who was always the commandant of the garrison. For example, the Tuareg partook in the meetings with the circle commandant, schoolteachers, and, in brief, all state representatives. Everything that the schools, the commandant of circle and soldiers did was approved by Hamatou Ag Firhun and later Bajan.[30]

Assalim's depiction of UDPM politics echoes Schatzberg's argument that the UDPM was just one state political party like Modibo Keita's US-RDA (Schatzberg 1972). The young military officers who removed Keita from power in 1968

28 They stated in French: "Le pire a commencé avec Moussa Traoré en 1968 et 1991."
29 L'Union Démocratique du Peuple Malien (UDPM).
30 Conversation with Assalim on 10/11/2012 in Abala.

put their local party structures at the heart of the decision making in order to gain legitimacy. At the national level, the central executive committee, presided over by Moussa Traoré himself, was an integral part of the country's ruling structures. Furthermore, the UDPM selectively empowered a specific social group to the detriment of others as, according to Assalim, the state representatives needed the Bajan's (already introduced as the current political leader of the Ouillimeden federation in Menaka) approval before taking action.

> Under Moussa Traoré, the Tuareg did whatever they wanted to do to us in Menaka because they were all UDPM members. The Bambara commandant's military in Menaka also became friends and relatives of the Tuareg: they married their daughters. In addition to their daughters, the Tuareg also gave animals and money to them. You know the Tuareg knew about the Bambara's problem, which was to find women and money. Once they got these, they did not care about the rest at all. So, the Tuareg could do whatever they wanted to do to people.[31]

The collaboration between the free-born Tuareg and the representatives in Menaka under Moussa Traoré's rule is evident here. The free-born white Tuareg also deployed other strategies to co-opt state representatives coming from the south, such as offering them animals and money and giving them their daughters in marriage. As a result of this alliance between state representatives and free-born white Tuareg, the Bellah-Iklan continued to find themselves in a very vulnerable and precarious situation.

5.2.3.2 "We were excluded from school"

According to Inawélène and Assalim, the free-born Tuareg influence on the state institutions in Menaka manifested itself in "the arbitrary expulsion" of Bellah-Iklan children from school. Assalim recalled his own expulsion as follows:

> I was one of the best children at school. I never repeated a class from the first class up to the DEF. When we were preparing for DEF one day I was sitting in the classroom when the headmaster came in to ask me to go home. He did not give any explanation but just told me that I should never set foot in this schoolyard again. I was afraid to ask him why. I went home […] I did not know what to do anymore. We did not know anybody else who could intervene to ask the headmaster for an explanation. I just stayed at home like this. After weeks, since I was good at drawing and art at school, I started to do some painting. I developed the idea of choreography. I created my musical group later, and the rest is now *attaregh* [history].[32]

31 Conversation with Assalim on 10/11/2012 in Abala.
32 Conversation with Assalim and Inawélène on 29/12/2012 in Abala.

He further argued that:

> […] It was several years after that I learned that there were some Tuareg who came to tell our school headmaster to exclude me from the school. Because I was good at school, somebody told them this. You know that the Tuareg do not like us.[33]

While Assalim allegedly performed very well as a pupil at school in Menaka, this did not protect him against his headmaster's arbitrary treatment. The last two sentences of his account explain his expulsion as a result of the convergence of interests between free-born white Tuareg and state officials. Bereft of relatives who could help him to continue his education, Assalim stayed at home, and subsequently embarked on a career as an artist specializing in drawing as well as composing songs that recollect the suffering of the Bellah-Iklan.

Like Assalim, Inawélène believed that the free white Tuareg had him expelled from school in spite of his good performance as a pupil. He claimed that:

> From my first to eighth grades, I never repeated a year. I always had the best marks at school. But since the Tuareg were against us, the schoolteachers threw me out. They did not have any other reason. The only thing they had, which they did not dare tell me, was that I am black.[34]

Perhaps, one might tend to take these statements as easy explanations provided by both interlocutors. However, when they are examined in context, Assalim and Inawélène did not blame their schoolteachers who expelled them from school. Instead, they saw this as evidence of the free-born Tuareg's broader political strategies to block their personal futures and, accordingly, the future of the Bellah-Iklan that the informants now called the *peuple noir*. For both informants, the free white Tuareg were aware of the fact that in the long run, education might become one axis through which the unfree Tuareg could invert the vectors of local power relations in the north. Thus, in order to prevent such a situation, they began to identify all good Bellah-Iklan school children and excluded them from school. This emphasis reveals that Assalim and Inawélène sought to articulate their group history through their particular experiences of school in Menaka.

5.2.3.3 "The Tuareg were highway robbers in Menaka at that time"

Both men explained that another consequence of the alliance between the state and the free-born Tuareg was evident in the frequency of highway robbery that primarily targeted the Bellah-Iklan. Inawélène recollected his own experiences in the following passage:

33 Conversation with Assalim and Inawélène on 29/12/2012 in Abala.
34 Conversation with Inawélène on 01/01/2013 in Abala.

> Once in 1986, I went to a local market. On our way back, we were in a bus, we encountered the Tuareg in the forest. They stopped us. They first asked the red people like them to sit aside before proceeding to take everything, such as tea and sugar, from us. When we returned home, we denounced these persons to the authorities in Anderboukane. But no action was taken against them.[35]

For Inawélène, even though the bandits had covered their faces with turbans, the fact that they asked other free white Tuareg to sit aside showed that they were Tuareg themselves. Inawélène's suspicion was further reinforced when they (read: the victims) informed the authorities in Menaka upon their arrival and no action was taken in order to identify and arrest the bandits. His explanation for this was that those who were in a position to take such action were influenced by the UDPM local section members who knew that the bandits were their relatives. Similarly, Anawélène also stated that:

> My father had left some animals with a *Dawsahak* for whom he was working. I went to collect these animals from the *Dawsahak* near Anderboukane. My father left three cows and a few goats and sheep with him. I collected them from the *Dawsahak* man. But since I was alone on the way back to Menaka, the same *Dawsahak* came to take the animals from me by force between Anderboukane and Menaka. I could not do anything otherwise he would have killed me. Once I reached Menaka, I went to inform the *gendarmerie* the same day about what had happened. But nothing happened to the *Dawsahak* man.[36]

Here again he pointed to the passivity of the *gendarmes* who did not take action against the *Dawsahak*. Considering these accounts, coupled with those above, highlights how both Assalim and Inawélène understood the conditions under which they were thrown out of school and experienced highway robbery as being indicative of political processes that empowered the free-born Tuareg. They understood these as results of collaboration between Malian authorities and the free white Tuareg, a process that further marginalized the unfree-born Tuareg in the area around Menaka. According to this perspective, the free-born Tuareg were not marginalized by "Mali" as they claimed, quite the opposite. They were empowered to the detriment of the Bellah-Iklan. Both informants argued that the empowerment of the free-born Tuareg in the decision-making spheres has even become more pronounced under the contemporary processes of multi-party democracy launched after the fall of Moussa Traoré in March 1991.

5.2.4 "Since 1990, the State has handed us over to the Tuareg"

Recent scholarly debates have called into question the master narratives that multi-party democracy introduced in tandem with decentralization would improve

35 Selected conversations with Inawélène and Assalim on 28/12/2012 in Abala.
36 Selected conversations with Inawélène and Assalim on 28/12/2012 in Abala.

African governance (see Bierschenk/Olivier de Sardan 1998; Ferguson 2006; Klute/Trotha 2004). It was expected that the decentralization would result in increasing political participation among grassroots people by both facilitating their access to national resources and making their voices heard in the decision-making processes. However, according to Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, these political reforms became characteristic of the expansion of the clientship and corruption to the local arenas (Bierschenk/Olivier de Sardan 1998, 4). Klute and Trotha also submitted that these political processes have led to the establishment of the para-sovereignty of the former masters among the Tuareg in northern Mali (Klute/Trotha 2004). For Assalim, Inawélène, and Ahiyou, the political reforms in the 1990s generated processes that further empowered the former masters.Their comments centered specifically on the "militarization" and the economic reinforcement of the free white Tuareg and how these factors led to a situation which Assalim and Inawélène called "the total domination of the Tuareg" over the north.[37]

5.2.4.1 "The State militarization of the Tuareg in the army since 1996"

In the refugee camp in Abala, the informants used the expression "militarization of the Tuareg" to point at the massive integration of the Tuareg ex-combatants into the national army after their second rebellion. This integration increased the political influence of the free-born Tuareg in the north. Assalim reconstructed this process in the Menaka area in the followings terms:

> After the fall of Moussa Traoré, around 1993, Mali came to recruit many young Tuareg for the army in the Menaka area. I still remember how they did it. They went from family to family to write the names of people even if they were absent. For example, Papa and his brother were both in Tamanrasset. But their names were written down. They wrote the names of several even inept people, for example, those who did not know how to write their names. This is how they became soldiers officially in the Malian army. They refused to include us in this process. Even if you look at the list of the soldiers in the Malian army today, there is no one from our side […] whereas we have the most robust men who would never go against the Malian state. They are really the most suitable men for the army. But these men were and are still refused by the government.[38]

A further problem that Assalim and several other Bellah-Iklan men seemed to have with this integration was the following: The state transferred all the new Tuareg soldiers to where they originally came from. For example,

> Assalat was in Menaka, Bamoussa was in Anefis and Gamou was somewhere in the north. All these three figures are Tuareg. Additionally, most of the

37 In French, they stated: "Depuis 1990, l'État nous a livré aux Touareg."

38 Selected from conversations with Assalim, Ahiyou, Inawélène and four other men together on 24/12/2012 in Abala.

> subalterns and soldiers in these garrisons were members of their clans, and the rest a few soldiers from the south who did not know anything in the north.[39]

For the Bellah-Iklan, the consequence of the free-born Tuareg integration into the army has been the generalization of insecurity in the north. For example, in further conversations, Assalim stressed that, in the area around Menaka, these free-born Tuareg soldiers did not even go to their military garrisons. Instead, they joined their relatives in the bush with their arms and bullets. With these arms in the bush, they regularly ambushed buses transporting the Bellah-Iklan merchants. Or they even went to villages where the Bellah-Iklan lived to kill "some of them" and take their belongings in some other cases. Assalim recollected some acts perpetrated by the free-born Tuareg below:

> One day last year [read: 2011], I was on my way to Essailal. On my arrival near Agadaw, I found seven young men—all black people—freshly shot dead by the Tuareg. After killing them, they took their animals to Menaka. Everybody knows about this event in Menaka and those who did it. In the same manner, Mahmoud was killed in Anderboukane. Nothing happened. The Tuareg have put a regime of terror in place.[40]

For Assalim, the Tuareg soldiers were the perpetrators of this attack. However, as Assalat was the military chief in Menaka and Bajan the deputy, and both closely collaborated with the commandant of the circle from the south, no actions were taken against the perpetrators.

5.2.4.2 "The NGOs also worked for the Tuareg"

Inawélene also argued that the NGOs and other state structures that invaded the northern regions in the 1990s only privileged the free-born Tuareg. For example, he maintained that in the area surrounding Menaka, whether qualified or not, all young free-born Tuareg were given positions in the NGOs. He stated:

> Despite the fact that we are 85% of the population in Menaka, we have nothing, no position with the NGOs. We have several intellectuals without work, teachers, graduated executives. With all these qualifications, we were left behind. It was always the Tuareg who did not reach even the fourth grade at the elementary school who were appointed by NGOs and the state administration.[41]

In another conversation he added that, for example,

39 Selected from conversations with Assalim, Ahiyou, Inawélène and four other men together on 24/12/2012 in Abala.

40 Selected from conversations with Assalim, Ahiyou, Inawélène, and four other men together on 24/12/2012 in Abala.

41 Conversation with Ahiyou and Inawélène on 08/01/2013 at Abala.

> Whenever there have been food distributions in Menaka, they have always targeted the Tuareg. We only saw our neighbors with millet, rice, and sometimes clothes. Even if we go, we won't get anything and you cannot complain about it. Complaining will put your life in danger. Because Mali have armed the Tuareg in such a way that they are able to kill people and not face any consequences.[42]

The two accounts together point to how NGOs have contributed to further marginalize the Bellah-Iklan. They express the Bellah-Iklan informants' perception of the state and NGOs as complementary forces that supported the free-born white Tuareg against them. Substantiating this claim, Ahiyou argued:

> Mali took our freedom from us and gave it to the Tuareg. To tell you the truth, we are not even refugees. Because where we left we did not have a country. That is all. We are those left to ourselves. No one cares about us. It is the Malian government that took our rights from us to give them to the Tuareg. This is the result of everything because we did not have any rights. We were not Malians because we had no rights in Mali.[43]

To understand Ahiyou's claim here requires us to look into his "political imagery" of the state. Ahiyou further claimed that a state should treat all citizens equally, as once it fails to do so, "it ceases to be what it claims to be, that is, a political apparatus for the interest of all." Through similar statements, the refugees challenged the legitimacy of the Malian state below.

5.2.5 "Our expulsion from Mali in 2012"

For the informants in Abala, the longer process of the Bellah-Iklan marginalization that began following the colonial era culminated in their humiliation and expulsion from "Mali" by the free-born Tuareg. Ahyiou emphasized that, in the area around Menaka, the Malian soldiers left without shooting one bullet, leaving several vehicles and equipping them with everything else. According to him, the attitude of the Malian soldiers should be seen in the light of the subsequent development of cooperation and collaboration between the Malian government and the Tuareg dating from the creation of UDPM. What substantiates this claim, for Ahiyou, is the commemoration of the fifty years of independence in 2010 to which he referred. He recalled that during this commemoration, the then president of Mali, ATT, was sitting next to many other officials at the military parade for more than three hours. Since Ahiyou followed this event on TV, he emphasized that that day there were all sorts of heavy equipment for the ground forces as well as the air forces that were shown to the people in Bamako. But what puzzled him in 2012

42 Conversation with Ahiyou and Inawélène on 08/01/2013 at Abala.
43 Conversation with Ahiyou and Inawélène on 08/01/2013 at Abala.

was that the Malian army then made no use of these weapons in the north in order to protect the Bellah-Iklan who were attacked by the free-born Tuareg. Ahiyou interpreted this—the state being without these weapons—as a conspiracy between the Malian army and the Tuareg against the Bellah-Iklan. He took this argument further in the following:

> The reason why the soldiers left without using one bullet was simple, because they were just told to leave us in the hands of the Tuareg. It was the president, ATT, himself who left us at the hands of the Tuareg. Everything was ready. Once the soldiers left, those who had been given the job to kill us began their actions. They were ready in the mountains surrounding Anderboukane. They opened fire on us [the narrator repeating the omnipresent gun sound]. Over an entire day, bullets rained in Anderboukane. There was great confusion in all these things that happened outside of Menaka. It was even difficult for us to know exactly whether or not the soldiers had partaken in this violence against us. For example, they left their garrisons to join the Tuareg. It was very difficult for us to know exactly what was happening. However, one can be sure about one thing: someone gave the order to fire at us.[44]

Accordingly, this statement expresses Ahiyou's strong conviction that the Malian state had made a deal with the Tuareg to kill the Bellah-Iklan. This arrangement between the Malian soldiers and the free-born Tuareg, according to Ahiyou, becomes more evident to anyone who wants to comprehend the events surrounding the way that the former abandoned their garrisons without any resistance.

Supporting Ahiyou's view, Assalim stressed that if there was nothing concluded between the Tuareg and the Malian state as such, rebels could not have taken Menaka and the garrison of Gao so easily. For Assalim, in Menaka, the soldiers knew that there would be an imminent attack and for this reason they left their garrison in the morning before the rebels had arrived. Assalim and Ahiyou's comments on the violent events in 2012 denied that there was even a war between the Malian soldiers and the Tuareg rebels in the north. They considered that there were only assassinations and expulsion of Bellah-Iklan by Tuareg supported by the Malian state. Assalim recalled the assassinations and expulsion in the area around Menaka as follows:

> The Tuareg had intimate knowledge of the houses where we lived and where our belongings were. They entered house after house to expel us. Our neighbors were among those who entered our houses. When they entered a house, they first targeted the men. They captured the men, beat them up, and tied them down in front of their family members. They took the women and daughters to Tahabanate where these were raped by several Tuareg for days. They also looked for everything else like motorbikes, clothes, and money. They took all the valuable objects seen in these houses. They then asked that we leave within minutes.[45]

44 Selected from conversations with Ahiyou, Aghaly and Assalim on 08/01/2013 in Abala.
45 Selected from conversations with Ahiyou, Aghaly and Assalim on 08/01/2013 in Abala.

Assalim's cousin Aghaly, about sixty years old, related another scene revealing the ways in which the Tuareg treated them as follows:

> After the army left, we were degraded in the north, treated like dogs. I saw two young boys of around 16 years old passing by in the street in Menaka. In front of them there was a group of armed Tuareg on the street corner. Among them, there was a young *Dawsahak* man who claimed to his companions that he was the most skillful at shooting […] then he just looked at these two boys and opened fire on them. One fell down and died a few minutes later on their side, I saw the young *Dawsahak* man and companions celebrating his successful act in killing the boy. This happened in the town of Menaka. Several cases similar to this happened in the bush where no witnesses were around. They did the same to Mohamed, a shop owner. The young *Dawsahak* man entered his shop to tie up and strangle him to death. Then they took everything they wanted from this shop to their homes.[46]

According to Assalim, though there are many reasons for these assassinations, particularly the following: the demographic number of the Bellah-Iklan. As mentioned earlier, the Bellah-Iklan refugees in Abala believed that they were numerically the majority in the north. To them, if democracy meant power of the majority, they should have been given the legitimacy to govern the north, especially in Menaka. Since the free-born Tuareg were aware that a day would come when there would be a reliable government in Mali, which would do a proper census of the population and implement democracy, the Bellah-Iklan would rule these regions. To avoid such situations in the future, it was argued in Abala, that the free-born Tuareg had expelled the Bellah-Iklan from their homeland.

5.2.6 "Men humiliated during their expulsion from Mali"

My Bellah-Iklan informants also argued that their expulsion entailed humiliation for many men. Here, their notion of humiliation referred to situations in which they felt degraded and ashamed *vis-à-vis* women and children since they failed to act as heads of the families. For example, Inawélène said:

> When I was leaving Anderboukane with my family, we did not have anything but a donkey cart. As you might know, you cannot take all your belongings in such a situation. We took what we could from our home. But on the way to Chinagodrar I met some Tuareg in a car. The car stopped and they proceeded to check what we had in our cart. Thus, they took my chairs, blankets and everything that they fancied from us. I knew the persons who did this to me. They humiliated me in front of my wives and children.[47]

46 Selected from conversations with Ahiyou, Aghaly and Assalim on 08/01/2013 in Abala.
47 Conversation with Inawélène on 03/01/2013 in Abala.

Inawélène established that stopping his cart followed by taking their chairs, blankets, and other belongings in front of his wives and children had humiliated him. He further explained:

> As the head of the family, my wives and children count on me. When people take our belongings, and I am unable to do anything to get these things back, they will stop counting on me. And this is what I am not happy about; it has degraded me in the family.[48]

As a result, Inawélène and several other men at the hangar believed that their inability to take action against the free-born Tuareg when fleeing Mali partially contributed to their loss of respect as the family' provider. On several occasions, the informants in Abala argued that their wives constantly reminded them that if they were men, they should have taken action against the MNLA militants. Such comments from women further reinforced male Bellah-Iklan resentment toward their living situation in the refugee settlement in Abala. The comments also enabled male refugees to interpret their situations in Abala as the result of fallout from political processes rooted in Malian state politics around Menaka.

5.3 How the two perspectives relate to each other?

The two groups of refugees' accounts of their respective marginal situation within the Malian nation-state correspond to what Schatzberg has called the cultural logic of legitimacy in middle Africa (Schatzberg 2001). He argues that:

> Political legitimacy in this corner of the globe rests on the tacit normative idea that government stands in the same relationship to its citizens that a father does to his children. In turn, this normative idea ultimately derives from a pervasive, yet largely unarticulated, conceptual understanding of the distribution of rights and responsibilities within a highly idealized family. (Schatzberg 2001, 1)

Schatzberg's argument is helpful here because it enables us to grasp how both groups of refugees reconstruct their trajectories within the nation-state in contrast to each other. The refugees relied on the specific social dynamic of marginalization/integration, which is interdependent for them. The informants in Niamey deplored the fact that the colonial and postcolonial states did not treat the Bellah-Iklan and the free white equally. They compared their marginal situations within the nation-state to the Bellah-Iklan who, as it was argued in Niamey, have had privileged positions since the colonial period. The informants for example, took the recent Bellah-Iklan and the Songhay attacks on the free white Tuareg as evidence that substantiates their claims. In these situations, the free white Tuareg

48 Conversation with Inawélène on 03/01/2013 in Abala.

informants found that the Bellah-Iklans' privileged position readily manifests itself through the fact that the state did not punish them for their actions against the free white Tuareg around Gossi. The town informants also insisted that there had been attacks against the free white Tuareg in southern Mali in 2012. They argued that, as had happened in Gossi, the state did not seek to punish the Bellah-Iklan for their wrongdoings. For the free-born Tuareg informants in Niamey, this illustrates the imbalance in the state politics between the Bellah-Iklan and the free white Tuareg. For the Bellah-Iklan, the proof that they were the ones "left behind" in Abala was evidenced by the privileged positions that the colonial and postcolonial states gave to the free white Tuareg. They thus measured their social and political marginal positions of being left behind to the easy situations faced by the free white Tuareg. According to the Bellah-Iklan, the free white Tuareg's privileged position was underscored in the influence the Tuareg had on the state apparatus since the Modibo Keita and Moussa Traoré eras. The Bellah-Iklan also argued that while the state massively integrated the free white Tuareg into the army, it refused to recruit the former Tuareg slaves.

To use Schatzberg's logic, these comments together suggest an analogy of the two refugee groups as two children of one father (the state), who treated his children unequally. As a result, each child questioned the father's legitimacy. Schatzberg argues that when the state acts as a political father

> care for, nurture, and provide wealth for their children, their political legitimacy is enhanced. When, on the other hand, economic conditions deteriorate and they are no longer able to nurture the population in this way, their political legitimacy will decline markedly. (Schatzberg 2001, 24)

As seen in the refugees' reactions to the Malian governmental delegations described earlier in this chapter, both groups of informants claimed that they are not Malians. They considered their experiences of being marginalized within the Malian state as their shared history and the reason for redefining themselves as collectivities. For example, in Niamey, after listening to some recent stories from free-born Tuareg who had recently fled Mali, earlier refugees such as Mossa Ag Attaher and Mohamed Ag Irgimit maintained that "this only happened to you because you are Tuareg." In some other cases, the narrator added: "My conclusion was that I am only a Tuareg but not a Malian like the others. Being a Tuareg brought me where I am today." Some others vehemently responded to people who called them Tuareg from Mali or Malian: "I am not Malian, I am Tuareg." Instead of Malians, they referred to themselves as coming from *tenere*, therefore *Kel Tenere* (bush people), or they would refer to themselves as members of the *tumast tan Kel Tamasheq* (the Tuareg people). These answers illustrate that the town refugees to whom I spoke articulated their Tuareg identity in response to their experiences of marginalization. Similarly, the reconstruction of the Bellah-Iklan' past in Mali was strongly correlated to the construction of a concrete identity: that of the black people (*peuple noir*) as a distinct and homogenous social group. The informants saw

themselves as a victimized group, "those abandoned to themselves" or "left behind by the state and international donors." Their interpretations of their situations as victims of Tuareg and extra-local actors illustrate that political processes within the Malian state over the past decades have become the common reference point for the redefinition of Bellah-Iklan history and identity. Taken together, therefore, the refugees' narratives substantiate some scholars' arguments (Cole 2003; Connerton 1989; Samaddar 1999) that people can turn their experiences of persecution into processes of imagining their future societies.

5.4 Concluding remarks

Throughout this chapter, Schatzberg's notion of the "moral matrix" has proven to be a helpful heuristic to understand what "political imageries" informed the narratives by which different groups of refugees posited themselves as being external to the Malian state (Schatzberg 1986; Schatzberg 2001). The refugees' narratives, in turn, depicted the Malian state as "a third party" in the conflicting relations between the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg since the colonial era. Due to this crucial role, each group of informants pointed to the fact that the colonial and postcolonial state institutions have meant that "Mali" has failed to become an inclusive political order that grants equal rights to all citizens. As a result, both groups of informants conceived themselves as groups outside the Malian nation-state national community. While similar narratives have already been examined for the free white Tuareg in other contexts (e.g. Boilley 1999; Claudot-Hawad 1990; Klute 2013; Lecocq 2010), the accounts from Bellah-Iklan informants about the state politics provide insights into debates about Tuareg marginalization in northern Mali. Their arguments invite careful consideration of how national political processes shaped local power relations, particularly the relationships between the free-born Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan in recent decades. This implies that when we speak about the marginalization of the Tuareg in the north, we would then need to clarify which social segment we are dealing with. Earnestly taking local cleavages into account provides a good starting point for a complex analysis of the state presence in the north over the past decades. Such analysis would include both Bellah-Iklan and the free white Tuareg voices, thus complementing a tradition of mono-vocal discourses about the marginalization in northern Mali mostly based on the perspective of the free white Tuareg (Boilley 1999; Claudot-Hawad 1990; Klute 2013; Lecocq 2010).

6. "The true history of *Azawagh*" (tarekhg wan tidit n Azawagh)

Speaking the Tamasheq language does not make someone a Tuareg.
—Assalim Ehatt, Abala on 01/01/2013.

This chapter focuses on the central themes of the arguments refugees with whom I interacted regularly used to define the physical and moral characteristics of the two collectivities to which they expressed attachment. In their everyday conversations, refugees in Niamey and Abala maintained that these arguments offered "the true history of the desert" (*tarekhg wan tidit n Azawagh*).[1] This "truth" consists of stereotypes by which the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg set themselves apart as two separate racial and moral categories. Characteristically, these accounts redefine the criteria of who belongs and does not belong to the Tuareg group. The accounts involved detailed descriptions of free-born Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan's physical features, arguments about as the first comers to northern Mali, and about the historical processes by which "Islam" spread across the Sahel and led to the emergence of a Muslim majority. A guiding concern of the chapter is to demonstrate how the Bellah-Iklan in Abala and the free-born Tuareg in Niamey used derogatory terms to reconstruct and imagine themselves as internally homogenous and morally opposite social groups. The chapter will also assess how talking about each other negatively enables the two groups of informants to redefine their inferior social status in Tuareg society back home in northern Mali. My analysis of refugees' labeling draws on Brenner's discussion of how Muslim identities are constructed in southern Mali (Brenner 1993), Hall's insights into stereotyping (Hall 1997), and work on classification by Tambiah (Tambiah 1985).

As I mentioned in chapter 3, scholarly research on the Tuareg society tends to frame differences between the free-born Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan in terms of racial features,[2] different tasks performed in a hierarchical division of labor, and genealogical origins. Scholars have also divided the Tuareg into two major groups, depending on their free or unfree status. Many scholars note further differences, such as restrictions on the obligatory social conduct for nobles and that Lecocq understood under the term "*temushagha*" (meaning the way of the noble) (Lecocq 2010). For example, drawing on the free-born Tuareg's notion of intelligence (*tayite* in Tamasheq), Gunvor Berge argues that free Tuareg view the mind frames of free persons and slaves as naturally given and not as culturally constructed in the following terms:

1 They are alternatively called the desert *Azawad*, or A*zawagh*. These were used as terms in Niamey and Abala to refer to the territory covering the three northern regions of what is currently Mali (Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu).

2 The authors conceived the free-born Tuareg as "red" or "white," and the unfree Bellah-Iklan as "black" (Hall 2011a; Hall 2011b; Hall 2005;Klute 1992b; Lecocq 2005; Lecocq 2010).

> […] Both free persons and slaves have intelligence, but of a different nature […]. Furthermore, a free or noble person knows shame and honour, which restrains his or her conduct. Slaves, by contrast, do not know shame or honour and behave, by nature, in an unrestrained way. This becomes apparent in a person's bearing, for example, in the way in which one dances or sits. Free persons dance rather stiffly and slowly, while slaves dance unrestrainedly with more movements. Slaves, male and female, sit on their heels (a shameless posture as it is associated with defecation), whereas free men proudly sit upright and cross-legged, and free women lie elegantly on their sides. But free persons also believe that slaves are unable to understand religious duties, (being by nature thievish and deceitful), lack endurance, and cannot fend for themselves. Hence, slaves need to be cared for and protected. (Berge 2000, 204f. quoted in Lecocq 2005, 55f.)

Lecocq has argued that for many free-born Tuareg hard manual labor is unbefitting and that instead,

> a free man should occupy himself only with pastoral affairs, trade, religion, or warfare. Depending on region and caste, free women should not work at all or engage only in pastoral activities, religion, or the household. (Lecocq 2005, 56)

For Klute, the preferred present-day professions stem from this labor ethic (Klute 1992a; Klute 1992b). For example, exploring contemporary labor divisions in post-droughts and rebellious societies among the Tuareg in northern Mali, Lecocq following Klute argues that:

> being a car driver or mechanic is seen as a modern equivalent to being involved in pastoral affairs. Commerce, especially transnational smuggling, is seen as a logical follow-up to the caravan trade, and the 1990–1996 rebellion gave young men ample chance to prove their warrior skills. (Lecocq 2005, 56)

These ways of framing the differences between the free-born Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan were not only scholarly schemes of classifications of the Tuareg society. Instead, they were also local conventionalized ways in which the free-born Tuareg, until now, presented their relationship with the Bellah-Iklan.[3] In the following, I shall show how the arguments of the two groups of refugees in Niger redefined these local conventionalized ways in which the relations between the free-born Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan were expressed throughout everyday social interactions. I argue that both groups of informants redefined these conventional categorizations of the free-born Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan in consideration of their long-standing conflicted relationship. While the first part of the chapter discusses the arguments of free-born Tuareg in Niamey, the second part explores the perspectives of my Bellah-Iklan interlocutors in Abala. In the concluding part, I will relate the perspectives adopted by the two groups of Tuareg refugees towards each other.

3 The Bellah-Iklan informants's arguments show that there are long-standing inter-Bellah-Iklan conversations that contest this social order.

6.1 "The true history of the desert" according to the free-born Tuareg in Niamey

On Friday, September 14, 2012, at the very beginning of my research in Niamey, Ibrahim Ag Mohamed picked me up so we could visit Mossa Ag Attaher at Plateau. After we had exchanged the common greeting and sat down next to the kettle, Mossa started inquiring about my research: how long was I going to stay in Niamey and was I interested only in Tuareg refugees? When I explained to him that I was interested in Tuareg refugees who lived in Niamey as well as those staying at refugee camps on the southern Nigerian/Malian border, Mossa Ag Attaher maintained that if I was interested in Tuareg refugees in Niger, then I should stay in Niamey. After all, he pointed out, Tuareg refugees were to be found exclusively in Niamey and in Tellia, near Tahoua in central Niger.

I found this statement remarkable; clearly, it was not motivated by concerns about my personal safety in a context fraught by the presence of transnational terrorist networks since the early 2000s (cf. Keenan 2013; Klute 2012; Olivier de Sardan 2012; Schulz 2016). Rather, his remark implied that people in the refugee camps of Mangaize, Ouallam, and Ayorou were Bellah-Iklan, the "black" (*koual*, *amikwal or takawalt*) but not "*Tamasheq*" (read: Tuareg). When I replied that I had read newspaper and internet reports about the many Tuareg living in refugee camps in Niger, Mossa Ag Attaher candidly explained to me that many people mistakenly considered "the black" (*takawalt*) that is, the Bellah-Iklan, as being "Tuareg," while there were not; for the Tuareg, the Bellah-Iklan are "*Gawboro*" (an alternative term used by free-born Tuareg to refer to the Songhay),[4] he insisted. To support this view, Ibrahim Ag Mohamed argued that the Bellah-Iklan themselves were well aware that they are not Tuareg, adding that during the civil war in the early 1990s, when he himself had fled the country, the Bellah-Iklan had joined the Malian army and the Songhay vigilante groups to fight against the Tuareg.

I found this conversation noteworthy for several reasons. It upset my understanding of Tuareg society as comprising free-born Tuareg and unfree Bellah-Iklan, who also counted as Tuareg (see chapter 3). Mossa and Ibrahim restricted the label "Tuareg" (*Tamasheq*) to the former group and argued that although the Bellah-Iklan speak the *Tamasheq* language, they are not part of Tuareg society (the *Kel Tamasheq*) but are Songhay. The conversation also revealed that the civil war in the 1990s, which had forced free-born Tuareg to flee, cast a shadow on Ibrahim's classification of the Bellah-Iklan, prompting him to argue that their support of the Songhay vigilante groups proved that they were not Tuareg. In the weeks that followed this initial conversation, Mossa, Ibrahim, and other free-born Tuareg informants in Niamey listed various reasons that spoke against the Tuareg identity of the Bellah-Iklan. The following discussion takes a closer look at these arguments, exploring how they allowed free-born Tuareg in Niamey to depict the Bellah-Iklan

4 See also Olivier de Sardan (1984).

as racial "others" as well as "non-Tuareg." I argue that by labeling the Bellah-Iklan in this way, free-born Tuareg imagine themselves as a homogenous social category (i.e. deny status differences among themselves), and, accordingly, redefined social status hierarchies that exist among "white" Tuareg, that is, between white Tuareg of noble and non-noble birth.

6.1.1 "How did the Bellah come to speak Tamasheq?"

To further illustrate differences between the Bellah-Iklan and the Tuareg, informants in Niamey considered skin color and social origins as additional criteria of distinction. As Mohamed Ag Irgimit explained:

> When the Tuareg and the Arabs came from the Maghreb, there were no Bellah in this the part of the Sahara […]. The Bellah are nothing more than descendants of the Bambara, Fulani, Gourmatché, Songhay, Mossi, and Zarma that the Arabs kidnapped […] and sold to Tuareg […]. Those who were bought by the Tuareg were transformed into slaves and ended up speaking *Tamasheq*. But they are not Tuareg. They are black.[5]

This account constructs free-born Tuareg as a social category, whose "white" skin color distinguishes them from the Bellah-Iklan. The arrival of the Tuareg and the Arabs in the Sahara is presented as the foundational moment for this social category to emerge. According to this account, Bellah-Iklan were not part of the Tuareg initially, but came to co-reside with them after they had been kidnapped by the Arabs and sold into slavery. Even if the Bellah-Iklan slaves learned to speak the *Tamasheq* language, this did not make them Tuareg. Instead, Mohamed classified the Bellah-Iklan as being akin to the Songhay, Mossi, Zarma, Fulani, and Bambara. My informants complemented this historical argument about the essential distinctiveness of Tuareg on one side, and Bellah-Iklan, Songhay, Mossi, Zarma, Fulani, and Bambara on the other, by referring to physiological features as additional criteria of difference.

6.1.2 "The Iklan have short necks, like the Songhay"

The free-born Tuareg in Niamey were preoccupied with the Bellah-Iklan's neck shape. According to them, it was easy to tell the difference between the Bellah-Iklan and the Tuareg simply by looking at their neck. As Mossa Ag Attaher and Ibrahim put it:

> The Iklan have shorter necks like the Gawboro. They have round faces with bigger noses and they are not tall. The Iklan's shorter necks indicate that one can trust them. Although, this is never the case. Their necks actually indicate

5 Conversation with Mohamed Ag Irgimit on 14/10/2012 in Niamey.

> how hypocritical they are towards other people. They act as if they are ready to help you out, but you should never trust them.[6]

This physiological–racial account of fundamental differences between Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan clearly reaches beyond the earlier historical argument regarding the Bellah-Iklan's origins and the reasons why they began to speak *Tamasheq*. The contours of the face, nose, and neck are considered key criteria in identifying similarities with the Songhay and thus mark all those who bear these features as belonging to the same social group. Furthermore, this account also associates physiognomic features with certain social and moral qualities: the "shorter neck" of a Bellah-Iklan indicates a hypocritical disposition.

In other conversations, Mossa and Ibrahim equated hypocrisy with betrayal. They illustrated their claims by recalling specific historical events, such as when, in 1994, free-born Tuareg could no longer visit local markets in northern Mali for fear of attacks by the Malian army as well as the Ganda Koy Songhay vigilant group. In this situation, many free-born Tuareg asked their former Bellah-Iklan slaves to go and purchase tea and sugar for them. In other cases, the Bellah-Iklan themselves offered their services to their former masters. However, according to Mossa and Ibrahim, most often the Bellah-Iklan went to the market, looked out for soldiers from the Malian army or the Songhay, and relayed information to the free-born Tuareg hiding in the bush. Therefore, rather than coming to the rescue of free-born, white Tuareg who fended for their lives, the Bellah-Iklan instigated their murder. Ibrahim recollected his personal experience in the following terms:

> At that time, we saw the army and the Ganda Koy movement arresting Tuareg on a daily basis. They slaughtered many of them. The soldiers also put several Tuareg into the wells or other instances into the bags containing heavy stones, and proceeded to throw them into the river while they were still alive. Worse, no Tuareg could travel in northern Mali any longer. In 1994, I left for Niamey, together with my mother and Tanti, my sister. We went to Gossi where we knew someone, an *akli* [sing. Iklan]. Upon our arrival, he slaughtered a goat for us, but then he suddenly disappeared. […]. He went out to look for the Ganda Koy people or the army, in order to inform them that we were at his home [Ibrahim paused and looked down]. Meanwhile, his wife, who understood what was going on, came and told us to leave because soon the Ganda Koy were going to arrive. She told us to go to the military barracks before they come […] because, once we reached there, they would not be able to attack us. We took our bags to move away with our donkeys. Soon after our arrival at the military barracks, a Ganda Koy car stopped near us. But the opportunity had already passed, as we had already arrived at the security forces base, and they could not do anything else—at least publically. This situation frustrated some of them because they missed the opportunity to kill us. We did not trust the soldiers and were afraid of spending the night at their place because we feared that they would hand us over to the Bellah-Iklan and Ganda

6 Selected from conversations with Mossa Ag Attaher on 07/08/2014 in Niamey.

> Koy […]. We could see that they were making plans. We therefore chose to continue with our journey to Gao on that same day […].[7]

For Ibrahim, the hypocritical character of the Bellah-Iklan man showed in the *akli*'s dishonest welcome gesture to Ibrahim and his family, followed by his treacherous betrayal of his visitors to the Songhay vigilante group. Regarding Ibrahim's account, it is important to note that he does not give any consideration to the fact that they had also been saved because of the intervention of another Bellah-Iklan, their host's wife. This strategic focus on one Bellah-Iklan's reason is characteristic of the labelling account used by my free-born Tuareg interlocutors in Niamey. That is, similar to the narratives of Hutu refugees in Mishamo, Tanzania as Malkki discusses, the accounts of my free-born Tuareg informants focused on the faulty character and reprehensible behavior of the other group that allowed them to depict members of this group in purely negative and condescending terms (Malkki 1995b). As Malkki argues, such association of the rival social group with negative terms posited a hierarchy between "good" Hutu, who occupy the top of the social hierarchy, and "bad" Tutsi (Malkki 1989, chapter 2). Along similar lines, according to my free-born Tuareg interlocutors, their honest attitude makes them "good" persons who are thus morally and socially superior to their hypocritical former slaves.

Mossa Ag Attaher recounted a similar anecdote that also took place in around Gossi in the 1990s: A free-born Tuareg chief had fled the village and hid in the mountains, behind a big stone. Only his Bellah-Iklan slave (*akli*) knew his whereabouts because he brought him food and water. According to Mossa Ag Attaher, this *akli* informed the Malian soldiers about the chief's hiding place and was thus instrumental in his killing, and the slave therefore had betrayed his master, in spite of his family's long-standing relationship with the chief. This provided proof of the essentially treacherous nature of the Bellah-Iklan. Mossa's and Ibrahim's accounts not only invoke a moral hierarchy between honest free-born Tuareg and dishonest, hypocritical Bellah-Iklan. The accounts also relate these discrepancies in moral disposition and social conduct to physiognomic and physiological differences.

6.1.3 "We Tuareg are honest, elegant, and tall"

Ibrahim and Mossa's narrative constructions of the Bellah-Iklan as one homogenous social category defined by common physical features imply a parallel construction of free-born Tuareg as a homogenous group similarly characterized by physiological commonalities. As Mossa maintained:

7 Conversation with Ibrahim Ag Mohamed in Niamey on 29/11/2012 in Niamey.

> […] we Tuareg are thinner with longer noses and faces. We are honest, elegant, and straightforward. […] we do not beat women. A great warrior should not weigh too much.[8]

In this portrayal, physiological features, such as a slim body build and long-shaped faces and noses, are again taken as indicators of a particular moral and social disposition. A slim body physique gives *all* free-born white Tuareg the potential to be "great warriors" and signals self-restraint (refraining from beating a woman) as well as honesty.

Mossa and Ibrahim's assertion that the physical condition of the free-born Tuareg show that they are warriors by nature. The account calls into question scholarly depictions of Tuareg social status hierarchies. Scholars of Tuareg society in northern Mali describe the noble clans, *Ifoghas,* in the region of Kidal and *Imushagh* in Menaka as warriors and politically ruling groups (cf. Boilley 1999; Grémont 2010; Hureiki 2003), and argue that the warrior status is inherited through descent from particular clans. Such scholarly classifications reiterate local discourses about social status differences back home in Mali. For example, a free-born informant of inferior social status from Kidal whom I met in Bamako in 2016 explained to me that the difference between Ifoghas and vassal status groups are visible in their body shapes. For him, warrior Ifoghas men are taller, about two meters tall and strongly constituted. At social events in daily life, they wear preferably white color *boubou ensembles* and white color turbans eight meters long. In contrast, vassal groups' men are shorter, slimmer. They may wear all color *boubou ensembles* and four meter long green, black, and other color turbans. Whereas this interpretation attributes warrior status to specific white, noble groups of Tuareg, and expresses significant differences between the two social status groups. Mossa's and Ibrahim's accounts in Niamey make the warrior status a matter of racial classification, thereby extending it to vassal clans and other "white" groups, such as the Idnan and the Kel Essuk, Taghat Mallat, which are of free birth, who supported warriors in circumstances of war but yet have not been primarily classified as "warriors" by scholars (Boilley 1999; Grémont 2010). This shows that my free-born Tuareg interlocutors not only sought to re-order the *Tamasheq* society in ways that excluded the Bellah-Iklan, but also depicted "white" Tuareg as a homogenous group without social status differences between non-noble free-born and noble clans. As such, one could, therefore, see the making of a free-born Tuareg'social collective in Niamey as a further development of the vassal groups' long-standing contestation of the social status difference between the non-noble free-born and the noble Tuareg since the colonial era (see chapter 3). It is precisely (again) this long-standing history of conflicted relationship that informs the ongoing opened war (since 2012) between the vassal social status groups and the noble clans in the area of Kidal and Menaka in northern Mali. However, unlike their counterparts engaged in war against the noble clans in northern Mali, the refugee informants in

8 Conversation with Mossa on 24/10/2012 in Niamey.

Niamey took their conditions in exile and the free-Tuareg's longer history of political persecution in Mali as a reason to settle the long-standing conflicted relation between them and the noble refugees (see chapter 4 of this book). Though the refugee informants claimed this homogeneity over free-born diversity, one could still maintain that their "good will" to settle the inter-noble and non-noble conflicted relationship since the colonial era does not undermine their aspirations to become equal to the nobles.

6.1.4 "We Tuareg brought Islam to northern Mali"

The historical process by which Islam arrived in northern Mali was another central theme through which the free-born Tuareg presented themselves as a racially defined social group, in contradistinction to the Bellah-Iklan. Alhabib Ag Sidi from the Kidal region made this argument in the following manner:

> It is well known that our ancestor, Mohammed El Moktar Aitta, was an Arab and a descendant of Fatoumata, the daughter of the Prophet […]. This means that we were those who brought Islam to northern Mali.[9]

This account speaks against arguments (by others such as the Bellah-Iklan) that present the free-born Tuareg as people who converted to Islam more recently.[10] Mohammed El Moktar Aiita is considered the ancestor of the *Ifogha*s, the politically dominant clan of the Kidal of region (cf. Boilley 1999; Klute 2003). But Alhabib Ag Sidi portrays him as the ancestor of all free-born Tuareg, including his own clan, which conventionally does not form part of the politically dominant clans of the Kidal region.

Alhabib Ag Sidi was not the only one to offer this kind of account of what he and other informants in Niamey referred to as "the true history of the desert." They all narrated "Tuareg history" from the point of view of their own clan or federation. They downplayed or silenced aspects of that history that would have hinted at hierarchies or divisions within the clans and federations. In this way, my informants told a "true history of the desert" that supported their claims that all free-born white Tuareg share the same historical origins, which implies the existence of one ancestry[11] for all free-born Tuareg. For example, Alhabib's account traces the origins of the free-born Tuareg back to the Prophet through his daughter Fatoumata, and takes this genealogical link as the basis for the claim that

9 Selected from conversation with Alhabib Ag Sidi, Acherif and Mossa Ag Attaher on 11/10/2012 in Niamey.

10 As I illustrate below, the Bellah-Iklan in Abala argued that the free-born Tuareg converted to Islam after they had met the Songhay, Hausa, and Fulani in northern Mali. This chapter also shows that the struggle over the first converted status to Islam implies a struggle over moral hierarchy.

11 The informants chose the name of this common ancestor according to the region they are originally from.

free-born white Tuareg were instrumental to the spread of Islam. Claiming historical roots to the early days of Islam was particularly important to my free-born informants in Niamey because it allowed them to assert their difference from, and superiority to, other groups.

For example, in several conversations Mohamed Ag Irgimit, together with his cousins Abdine and Mossa Ag Attaher, argued that when black fishermen, farmers, and Fulani arrived in the desert, especially in the Bourem area in the Gao region, they knew nothing about Islam, but believed instead in animate matter, such as trees or rivers. It was only when they encountered the Tuareg, who were already Muslims that these Songhay, Mossi, and Hausa farmers converted to Islam. As Mohamed Ag Irgimit put it,

> [i]t was when these black farmers, fishermen, and traders met our ancestors that they began to abandon their tree, air, or water spirits and became Muslims. But before that, they did not know about Islam.[12]

For Mohamed, the black farmers, fishermen, and traders he mentioned in his account were the ancestors of today's Bellah-Iklan who had been kidnapped by Arabs and sold to the Tuareg. Mohamed depicted belief in animate nature and being Muslim as two stages of "human evolution," and that black farmers and fishermen moved from one stage to the other, while the Tuareg were already at the more advanced stage of human evolution. In this way, Mohamed posited a hierarchy in terms of civilizational achievement, religious orientation, and forms of livelihood between the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg, a hierarchy that justified the social as well as political order they had left behind in Mali.

6.1.5 "We were the first to occupy the duns"

Mohamed Ag Irgimit used the term "dunes" to refer to northern Mali's desert area, and, in conversations with Mossa Ag Attaher and their cousins (Hamouden and Abdine), recounted how northern Mali had been settled:

> The Tuareg are a pastoral nomadic people who lived in the desert. They have no other country than the Sahara desert where they are the autochthons. Traditionally, their lifestyle adapted to seasonal changes and pastoral resources […]. When they [read: Tuareg] arrived in the Sahara desert […], there were no other people living there. They occupied some dunes for grazing but not for farming. Each family occupied some dunes, and no one else could access these without their permission. Later on, there were some people who […] came mostly from the regions of Bourem and Gao […], and, upon their arrival, they […] obtained permission to settle down in the region from the owners of the dunes who were pastoral nomadic people not interested in

12 Conversation with Mohamed Ag Irgimit on 12/12/2012 in Niamey.

> farming […]. They understood that they [read: Tuareg] would use the land to let their animals graze, while the others would use it for agriculture. This was how the Songhay and Zarma, mobile merchants who came to sell tobacco to nomadic Tuareg or to work as fishermen, ended up settling in this area. Initially, the exchange of relations between the first comers and the newcomers worked as follows: The Songhay and Zarma gave part of their harvest to the Tuareg who in return provided them with protection. But over time, they came to complement each other so that the farmers exchanged their millet against animals. The farmers who arrived later settled down in villages […]. But our common memory is that their ancestors came as fishermen and merchants and then, ended up to settling down as farmers. Their children, who were born there, became like the real owners of these places where they lived and practiced farming for a long time […].
>
> When the Tuareg endured devastating droughts[13] that destroyed their animals, they started to farm. Surprisingly, it was at this moment that the problem started because according to our memory and oral traditions, we are the owners of the desert. Meanwhile the descendants of the foreigners whom we had allowed to settle also claimed ownership of the land […]. Among them were Songhay people […], followed by the Fulani […]. There were also Arabs but they were brigands from Morocco, Mauritania, and the western Sahara. They engaged in trade across the Sahara and brought all sorts things from the Maghreb to sell them in the south. Then, on their way back, they took gold, kidnapped children, and then sold them into slavery in the Maghreb. […]. It was the Tuareg chiefs who protected other populations from the Arabs.[14]

This account begins with a straightforward definition of the Tuareg as an occupational social category who have no other home other than the Sahara desert. This historical account again glosses over differences and hierarchies among the various Tuareg clans. To appreciate how this depiction of white Tuareg as one uniform group silences actual status differences that exist among them, it is necessary to keep in mind the social background of Tuareg refugees who live in Niamey.

As I mentioned earlier, the free-born Tuareg refugees in Niamey are mainly from the Idnan, Idiaroussouwane, Chamanamas, Kel Essuk, Taghat Mallat, Ifergoumoussen, Ishadenharen, Kel Amdiliste, Immakalkalen, Iradianaten, and Dawsahak groups. According to scholars such as Boilley (Boilley 1999; Grémont 2010; Hureiki 2003; Klute 2003), historical dissimilarities exist between these groups. One historical difference in particular refers to the notion that some groups are depicted as the descendants of Arabs while others are considered to have come from Berbers (Hureiki 2003; Klute 2003). For example, speaking about the Kel Essuk, French historian Charles Grémont maintains that "Kel Essuk" is a generic term for various people who came to live in the area called Essuk in the Adagh area (region of

13 The droughts referred to here took place in the pre-colonial era implying that they are different than the recent ones that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s.

14 This account is extracted from a conversation in Mohamed Ag Irgimit's courtyard on 10/24/2012 in Niamey.

Kidal) (Grémont 2010, 95f.). They are in charge of religious affairs and are said to have descended from an Arab conqueror who arrived in the Adagh region in the seventh century. Some *Ifogha*s groups in Kidal considered themselves as originally descended from Arabs. To consolidate their political domination over free-born vassals and Bellah, they claim to *shorfa*, genealogical ties to Arab religious figures including the prophet's family (see Lecocq 2010, iii, also Hall 2011b, chapter 1). Whereas the *imghad* (vassals) are said to have descended from Berbers (Klute 2003). These contrasting historical origins imply social status differences between local clan hierarchies (2003). It happened to be these historical differences between free white Tuareg clans that Mohamed Ag Irgimit and his cousins sought to downplay.

For instance, Mohamed Ag Irgimit did not mention the mythical Tuareg ancestor by name; he also did not refer to the hierarchical order that existed between the vassal groups and the politically dominant, noble clans of Tuareg society. Implied in Mohamed's account is therefore an emancipatory claim, one that posits vassals to be of equal status with the dominant, noble Tuareg groups. The accounts offered by Mohamed, Mossa, Abdine, and Hamounden also claim autochthony as well as first comership for the Tuareg in Bourem region, and presents them as generous hosts who offered newcomers protection in addition to a place to live and thrive. Like many other mythical settlement accounts, this one presents that the desert had been uninhabited prior to the arrival of the Tuareg (cf. Kopytoff 1987; Lentz 2006; Lentz 2013; Malkki 1989). The latter point came out clearly in Mohamed Ag Irgimit's references to French colonial records.

6.1.6 "Even the French recognized that we were inhabitants of this desert"

According to Mohamed:

> At the arrival of the colonial occupants, the Tuareg were the masters of the desert. They protected the black sedentary populations from the Arabs. The French conquerors had a certain vision for developing the land. […] as they did elsewhere, at their arrival, they first asked who […] had come first to settle in the area. They were told that the Tuareg were the owners and first settlers of the desert. […] The colonial officials wrote their first report based on that information […] and sent it to the "national archive"[15] in France and to the General Governor in Dakar. We could still find and authenticate details such as dates and names in these reports.[16]

Like the statements I cited above, this statement is vague and does not provide any precise references to the dates or locations where the French had arrived, and,

15 Though Mohamed Ag Irgimit used the "national archive," I still doubt whether earlier reports were sent to the General governor—and I doubt this was in Dakar.

16 Quoted from a conversation among men at Mohamed Ag Irgimit's place on 14/01/2013 in Niamey.

furthermore, did not identify what specific Tuareg groups they encountered. The account lists three social groups that French administrators found in northern Mali: first, the sedentary groups that needed protection; second, the free-born Tuareg who offered them protection; and third, their common enemies, the so-called Arabs. This portrayal of relations between the three groups in the pre-colonial era stresses the crucial role of free-born and noble Tuareg in offering the black population security and protection against "Arabs." The stress on protection served to justify the power hierarchy between the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg groups. Simultaneously, Mohamed posits non-noble free-born Tuareg groups to be of equal standing with the noble warrior clans. As I illustrate below, my Bellah-Iklan informants offered a different account of "the true history of the desert" that similarly implied a redefinition of how social hierarchies existed and "functioned" in Tuareg society back home in northern Mali.

6.2 "The true history of the desert" according to the Bellah-Iklan in Abala

ACTED staff members first introduced me to Inawélène after I had arrived in the Abala refugee camp on Thursday November 8, 2012. When I told Inawélène my name and, as part of the formal greeting, asked for his name, he replied: "My name is Inawélène Aklinine." His response startled me because I had assumed that all male Tuareg names in northern Mali include "Ag."[17] In his case, I had expected to hear "Inawélène Ag Aklinine" which means Inawélène, son of Aklinine. Puzzled by his answer, I asked him whether he was Songhay, since "Inawélène Aklinine" sounded like a Songhay name to me. His response was that although he spoke *Tamasheq*, he was not a Tuareg but was instead a member of the "black people of Azawagh (*tumast ta kawalet n Azawagh*) who have Songhay ancestors." He maintained that most people in the Abala refugee camp had Songhay ancestors as well and should therefore not be considered Tuareg even if they spoke *Tamasheq*. Inawélène concluded by suggesting that I should not look for Tuareg in the refugee camps in southern Niger. He stressed that since the Tuareg had burned "Bellah-Iklan" homes, looted their shops, and raped their daughters and wives, forcing them to flee Mali, if I wanted to meet the Tuareg I should have gone to northern Mali or stayed in Niamey instead. Noticing my dismay, Inawélène smiled, placed his right hand on my shoulder, and then asked me whether what I had just heard was new to me. Before I could even answer, he argued, "This is the true history of the desert. We are not Tuareg, even if we speak *Tamasheq.*"

Inawélène's argument about the *peuple noir* implies a redefinition of free-born Tuareg as the (racially defined) "other" that resembles the accounts by free-born, white Tuareg refugees in Niamey insofar as it similarly places himself and other

17 In contrast to the Tuareg from northern Mali, those from northern Niger used Songhay-Zarma naming patterns which require that the father's name is included as the son's family name.

Bellah-Iklan outside of Tuareg society. At the same time, Inawélène's account offers a nuance to the argument offered by my free-born informants in Niamey. While Mossa, Ibrahim, as well as other town free Tuareg informants considered the Bellah-Iklan Songhay, Fulani, Bambara, and Mossi *tout court*, Inawélène depicted them as members of the *peuple noir.* Inawélène argued that the members of the *peuple noir* speak *Tamasheq* but are not Tuareg. According to him, the people of the *peuple noir* are racially black and are historical descendants of Songhay and other sedentary groups in northern Mali and speak *Tamasheq*. What is crucial to understand here is that Inawélène does not claim Songhay origin in order to be considered Songhay; instead, the claim to his and the Bellah-Iklan-Songhay origin allowed him to reconstruct and set the *peuple noir* as a distinctive group apart from the Tuareg and the other social groups in the north including the Songhay as well. During the weeks that followed this conversation, Inawélène, Assalim, Ahiyou, and other Bellah-Iklan men meeting under the hangar took this argument further, focusing on the sizes of the free-born Tuareg heads, their weak bodies, and female and male infidelity, and the historical status of the Bellah-Iklan as autochthons in the desert in contrast to the free-born Tuareg.

6.2.1 "The Tuareg have bigger heads…"

"The Tuareg have bigger heads" was one of the most prominent themes of male Bellah-Iklan conversations in Abala. It was also a formulation that they mostly stated to answer humanitarian workers who referred to the Bellah-Iklan as "Tuareg or *Tamasheq noirs*." From my casual observations, the male refugee informants in Abala always replied succinctly: "We are not Tuareg, we are the *noirs.* The Tuareg are white (and) red and have bigger heads." Also, on many other occasions, longer explanations were given and often took the shape of a "formal lecture"; with a narrator providing thick descriptive details about the physical traits particular to the free-born Tuareg whom they called the Tuareg *tout court.* For example, Assalim once argued that in general

> when one looks at the *Kel Talatayt* around Menaka, like Bajan, they always have large heads which make them talented manipulators in politics and in all sorts of acts of trickery. The size of their heads reveals how selfish and criminal they are. Killing somebody makes them laugh. Imagine, the blood makes them laugh. After the *Kel Talatayt* come the *Dawsahak*.The *Dawsahak* are ugly with small eyes like the Chinese. Their hairs are solid like horsehair with the color of Brazilian descendants. This makes them fundamentally racists, brutal, greedy, and warlike.[18]

Assalim's depiction focuses on specific physiological traits of the Kel *Talatayt*, and most precisely on Bajan Ag Hamatou, the Ouillimeden federation's current

18 Selected from conversations with the male informants under the hangar on 20/12/2012 in Abala.

political leader, and the *Dawsahak*. In Assalim's view, these traits of these specifics groups can be extended to all free white Tuareg and manifest significant contrasts between them and the Bellah-Iklan.

Similar to the accounts of my free-born interlocutors in Niamey, Assalim, argued about the homology between physical features and the character and moral attitudes of different groups of free-born Tuareg. To substantiate the claim that the Tuareg are criminals who laugh when they see blood from another person, Assalim told me the following story:

> […] a slave woman in Tidarmène had two children. […] Her husband, a black slave, lived far away from his wife and children because he worked for another master family. Since their children were small they had to stay with their mother. The oldest son was about five years old while the smallest was less than two and could not even walk when the scene happened. The head of the family where their mother worked had one big dog. This dog only ate meat. Every day, he used to bring the dog with him into the desert, far away from the tent in search of some non-domesticated animals. On days when he didn't find any animals, he alternatively looked for isolated black people, especially women and children. […] One day, he was sick and stayed in his tent home. He could not go anywhere to find something for his dog. In the afternoon, the children were playing in front of the tent while their mother was occupied with preparing the evening meal. Meanwhile, her master called her to assert that the dog had not eaten since the morning, […] as she knew the habits of her master, she stopped cooking […] to look down at the earth. She knew what he wanted to do. She did not say anything. He insistently repeated once again that the dog did not eat yet. Still, she kept silent. The third time, he just stood up in time to catch one foot of the smallest child and then threw him to the dog. The boy did not reach the earth before the dog caught him in his mouth and took the boy away from the people […] The dog ate the son in front of his helpless mother […].[19]

Other Bellah-Iklan men who listened to this story attentively followed Assalim's tonal modulation of the events he recounted and his way of highlighting certain scenes through gestures and body movements. Their emotionally charged exclamations, such as *Allahu Akbar* (literally, God is great), further underlined Assalim's main argument about the heartless disposition of Tuareg who did not deserve to be considered "human beings." After all, the bystanders argued, a human being does not feed a dog with another human being. For these men, the discrepancy between the Bellah-Iklan and the free white Tuareg resides in their different hearts and morals. Whereas the Bellah-Iklan had a heart with a capacity for compassion (*Tahanint*),[20] the heart of the free-born Tuareg was incapable feeling. For my Bellah-Iklan informants, this difference related to distinct religious dispositions:

19 Assalim's narration under the hangar on 18/12/2012 in Abala.
20 My informants used the French term: "la pitié."

Muslims who fear God have a heart with the capacity for compassion, whereas a heart without these feelings shows that someone is not a true God-fearing Muslim.

Substantiating their claims here, Inawélène referred back to the hangar men's emotional reactions to Assalim's story. For him, these emotional reactions manifested in formulations such as *Allahu Akbar* illustrate how they as "black people" have the capacity to feel compassion (for the woman who lost her son), in contrast to the free-born Tuareg who lack these feelings. He explained to me that their compassion for the woman as a victim of her master indeed offers some illustrative instances and gestures that reveal them as being Muslims, as for Inawélène, only Muslims have feelings for others people. As I understood it, these arguments altogether point to the construction of two particular moral identities that come together in the social expression of racial differences between the Bellah-Iklan and the free white Tuareg. One of these identities deals with the portrayal of Bellah-Iklan themselves as people who have a heart for compassion (*la pitié, tahanint*) and are, therefore, Muslims. The second is concerned with the articulation of free white Tuareg as a moral category of people who have no heart for compassion and that potentially makes them non-Muslims.

6.2.2 "The Tuareg are lazy and physically weak people"

Yet another illustration of the parallels between physical features and character focused on the division of labor between the black people and the free white Tuareg, which positions the Tuareg as lacking a strong work ethic. As I noted earlier in this chapter, scholars have taken the division of labor to explain the hierarchical social order in Tuareg society, arguing, for instance, that hard manual labor is unbefitting for a free person who would normally be engaged in pastoralist activities, trade, religion, or warfare (Lecocq 2005, 5). In contrast to the preoccupation of these scholarly accounts with the free-born Tuareg's perspective, my Bellah-Iklan informants offered a very different account of the conventional division of labor between them and their former masters, calling into question their former masters' talent for cattle raiding and military skills by pointing to their inferior physical constitution.

To illustrate his claim, the informants underscored the fundamental differences by showing that while the body constitution of the "black people" predisposes them to be morally strength, the free-born Tuareg's weakness leads them down the road of immorality. Inawélène explicitly stated that:

> We the *noirs* [read: black people] are what we are because we sow the earth, which is good for us physically and mentally. Physically, we are strong like we would be if we were exercising every day. But only God knows that we don't exercise daily. Mentally, work is good for us because we don't steal and raid like the Tuareg do.[21]

21 This passage is selected from conversations under the hangar on 29/12/2012 in Abala.

In Inawélène's view, work is placed as the key element of the physical body and the moral rectitude of the Bellah-Iklan. The black people are not only physically stronger than the free white Tuareg but also morally superior to their former masters. As Assalim put it,

> because they [i.e. the former masters] are lazy and physically weak people who rely on the black people for everything such as herding, milking, and everything.They cannot do anything other than stealing, raiding cattle, and trafficking drugs. Whenever there were acts of banditry in the desert, it was always them. They don't work.[22]

In this example, Assalim again links physiology, character features, and a moral disposition. The "laziness" of the free white Tuareg is depicted as a direct consequence of their weak bodily constitution, which, in turn, makes them rely on others such as their former slaves for herding, milking, and other physical tasks. As Assalim's following statement illustrates, the Bellah-Iklan in Abala ascribed "work" a moral meaning, equating it with manual effort such as farming and making bricks: "We work the land and have gardens. We don't steal and are not involved in drug trafficking like they are […]." In this way, the capacity to engage in menial labor became a marker of difference, one that supported the claim that a strong physical disposition goes hand in hand with moral righteousness and an identity as a proper Muslim.

This depiction by my male Bellah-Iklan interlocutors substantiates insights from scholarship on "work." Studies conducted by scholars from the University of Bayreuth on peasants, herdsmen, artisans, and factory workers, service employees in various parts of Africa (e.g. Dougnon 2007; Klute 1992a; Klute 1992b; Spittler 2012a; Spittler 2012b and see also Spittler 1990; Spittler 2010) dispel understandings of "work" formulated by nineteenth-century German social scientists and philosophers.[23] Instead, according to Spittler, "work" should be seen as a "practice" the performance of which requires physical strength, manual skills, knowledge, perseverance, and motivation. For Spittler, work conveys satisfaction and frustration, and workers can also ascribe an ethical meaning to it, which takes work beyond its immediate benefit (2010, 37). This conception is useful for understanding Assalim's and Inawélène's arguments, particularly in their tendency to place work, and the capacity to work, in an ethical framework.

For instance, Assalim argued that the northern territory of the current Mali Republic did not witness raiding, pillaging, and adultery before the free-born Tuareg arrived. He portrayed this past era as an epoch in which people led a life of tranquility, peace, and noble conduct, in line with Islamic prescripts and law. As he argued, tranquility was disturbed when the free white Tuareg arrived in the

22 This passage is selected from conversations under the hangar on 29/12/2012 in Abala.

23 According to Spittler, the nineteenth-century authors considered work as part of technical, ecological systems. See Spittler (2010, 37) where he referred to the Marxist conception of work.

desert to hide themselves from the Arabs. They introduced cattle raiding, stealing, and other practices that went against Islamic precepts and norms.[24] Assalim also maintained that the free white Tuareg disturbed the tranquilly and security of the desert because they were unable to work. All of this suggests that my Bellah-Iklan informants in Abala were preoccupied with demonstrating the morally inferior conduct of white Tuareg as a way to prove their radical difference from and superiority to their former masters.

6.2.3 "The infidelity of Tuareg women and men"

"Infidelity" figured prominently in the Bellah-Iklan men's discussions under the hangar. References to the alleged infidelity of free-born Tuareg, and various anecdotes about extramarital affairs of both married women and men, helped construct these different individuals as belonging to one homogenous social category. For instance, Assalim asserted: "The Tuareg women are always fatter and cannot move easily. This explains their laziness. They spend their time gossiping and engaging in extra-marital relations." Assalim reported an incident, involving a free-born Tuareg woman from the Menaka area:

> I once travelled from Essailal[25] to the Tahabanant.[26] I did not plan to stay overnight there, but I wasn't able to finish what I was there for before nightfall. Therefore, I decided to sleep over and go back the next day. One Idnan[27] family that I knew a long time ago offered to let me stay with them. They provided me with a mattress and blanket. Later on, when we all fell asleep, a woman in the family whose husband was absent came to me under the blanket.[28]

Because Assalim was intent on labeling free-born Tuareg as immoral, he once again drew a close link between bodily constitution, moral disposition, and social conduct, while drawing on examples of Tuareg women. According to Assalim, Tuareg women's fatness explains their reticence to work and why they gossip and engage in extramarital affairs.

Assalim, by reporting on his refusal to have a sexual relationship with his host's wife, places the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg in two contrasting moral universes. On another occasion, Assalim underlined his claim that "the Tuareg have no morality" by maintaining that free-born Tuareg men cheat on their wives and keep their sexual relations with Bellah-Iklan women a secret.

24 This passage is selected from conversations under the hangar on 15/11/2012 in Abala.
25 This is the name for the Tuareg settlement in the Menaka district.
26 This is the name of the Tuareg settlement in Menaka.
27 Idnan is the name of the Tuareg clan.
28 According to Assalim, the husband who talked about traveling to Tamanrasset in Algeria.

> […] when they enslave women, they send them into the bush with animals. Then, later, in the middle of the day, they pretend to go look after the animals. This is not true. They just go and sexually abuse the black woman, and she has no ability to tell people about it because if she does, she will be killed the next day in the bush. When looking at children that come from these interactions, it is clear that they are "authentic copies" of their mother's master.[29]

In sharp contrasts to free-born Tuareg the unfree-born in Abala proudly said "we are soft and honest with normal eyes and heads. Our wives are beautiful women, tall, and loyal to us."

6.2.4 "The Tuareg are originally Christian and therefore not true Muslims"

According to Assalim, the reason the free white Tuareg are "immoral" is that they are originally descendants from Christians and are therefore non-Muslims. This explanation assumes that being a Christian or a Muslims have fixed characteristics, and hence, even if Christians converted to Islam, they will still behave in a non-Muslim way as it is ingrained in their nature. Assalim's depiction of what makes a proper Muslim does not refer to specific Muslim social practices and rituals. Rather, he explains the true Muslim identity of the Bellah-Iklan using a historical argument, that is, by arguing that the history of Islam in the area is intimately tied to the history of the Bellah-Iklan.

> […] this was several hundred years before the nomads arrived that we had Islam in Timbuktu. Kankou Moussa, Ahmed Baba, and all the holy names of the 333 figures in the history of Timbuktu introduced it. At their arrival in the desert, the Tuareg [read: former masters] were Christians[30]. Yet, when one looks closely at the cultural objects proper to nomad culture, it goes without saying that they were not Muslims. The sword is for them, and it has the form of the sign of the cross of Jesus Christ. Also the "wood fork" is for them. It is similar to Jesus's cross, so to say a sign of Christianity. They [read: Tuareg] converted to Islam upon their arrival in the desert.[31]

This argument was important for my unfree-born interlocutors in two respects. First, it allowed them to trace the genealogy of all slaves to Kankou Moussa and Ahmed Baba, two prominent figures in the early history of Islam in Mali. Born in 1280 and died in 1337, Kankou Moussa was an emperor who ruled territory including large parts of west Africa. As Abala argued, he had won several holy wars. The second figure, Ahmed Baba, known as "Ahmed Baba the Black", was a well-known west African scholar who died in 1627 and after whom the Institut des

29 Conversation with Assalim on 02/01/2013 in Abala.
30 My informants view Christianity as a vague category of non-Muslims believers.
31 This passage is extracted from hangar conversations on 11/11/2012.

Hautes Études et de Recherches Islamiques[32] in Timbuktu is named. My informants referred to these two figures to indicate that it was black Muslim erudites who brought Islam from the sedentary populations of the south to the northern regions of Mali. This account reversed the direction of the spread of Islam as it is usually described as a southward movement that started from northern Africa.

The second related aspect of importance for the Bellah-Iklan was to explain the Tuareg's specific social conduct by referring to their "Christian origin." Hence, he elaborated that it was:

> When the Tuareg [read: former masters] arrived in the desert to hide themselves from the Arabs, they converted to Islam. Also, this era was the age of tranquility and nobility. There was no fear of danger. Everybody was in line with Islamic law. This tranquility was disturbed with the Tuareg's arrival [read: former masters]. They brought along raiding, pillaging, and adultery.[33]

The immoral behavior of the free-born Tuareg is described as a Christian behavior. To Assalim, this difference between the racial categories stemmed from the historical fact that the Bellah-Iklan are descendants of the first Muslims erudites in northern Mali. This implicit assumption was also pervasive in the Bellah-Iklan' accounts of slavery in northern Mali.

6.2.5 "Under Islam there were no slaves in northern Mali"

In his book, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, *1600–1960*, Hall argues that free-born Tuareg drew on the Qur'an to justify the institution of slavery in the Sahel (Hall 2011a, part 3). In this section, I will discuss the male Bellah-Iklans' arguments that drew on "Islam" to criticize the institution of slavery in the Sahelian region. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to clarify that the Bellah-Iklan's references to the Qur'an remained vague and, furthermore, that they did not point to specific passages in order to substantiate their claims. This was evident in the following argument by Assalim:

> We asked the *marabout* [Muslim teacher] about slavery in northern Mali. He told us that according to the holy Qur'an, there is no slavery in Mali or even in Africa as a whole. He said to us that in the Qur'an the notion of "slavery" applies only to non-believers who were arrested during holy wars. Although, to our knowledge there were no holy wars in Africa. The *marabout* also told us that all these wars during which the slaves were arrested took place elsewhere, not in Africa. The *marabout* went on to suggest that these arrests took place in Arab countries, and it is in these countries where we could still find slaves and former slaves. All slaves captured during the holy wars were Arab; there were no Africans among them. The Qur'an says that when the non-believer

32 The institute is succinctly referred to as the Institut Ahmed Baba.

33 This passage is selected from conversations under the hangar on 15/11/2012 at Abala.

> Arabs were arrested during the holy wars; they were used for some time before they converted to Islam. But once they converted to Islam, they ceased to be treated and referred to as slaves; a Muslim cannot be called slave. What happened in northern Mali can only be explained as raiding and kidnapping […] which are well-known acts of banditry, condemned by Islam.[34]

This account evaluates and condemns the free white Tuareg by redefining them as bandits who kidnapped people and enslaved them. Other informants mentioned personal experiences of individuals whom they knew. For example, Inawélène argued that:

> In 1985, when there was a drought in northern Mali, many nomads came to Niger. Among them there was an old slave woman who came with her masters red skin Tuareg around Abala here […]. When she saw the earth of the farms around Abala, she recognized […] where she had been kidnapped.[35]

The example of this woman reminds Inawélène of Amingo, an elderly former male slave living in the refugee camp, who told us,

> I have no idea about my parents. I grew up among the Kel Essuk in Timbuktu. But later on, I was transferred to another fraction in the Timétrine where I spent 25 years among the *imghad* […]. They put a rope around my feet and tied the other end to a tree, leaving me the ability to move only between the well and the tent. Every morning I started my day around 5 am. I started with giving water to the animals and later I would continue with pounding the millet. One day, I was lucky enough to cut the rope and disappear. Although I did not know where I was, I started to walk along the road. After some time, I saw someone coming towards me. I was thirsty and needed some water. I stopped walking and waited for the person. He was a soldier on his way to Anderboukane. He gave me water and took me along. When we reached Anderboukane, I stayed with him […] this was how I became free from the *imghad*.[36]

In the first place, Amingo's life story was not important to Inawélène because of the ways in which the Kel Essuk in Timbuktou and *imghad* in Timétrine treated him poorly over the years. For him, instead, like the story of the old slave woman mentioned above, Amingo's personal experience reveals a historical truth about how those referred to as former Tuareg slaves in northern Mali became enslaved in the first place. Implicit in this account is the argument that the Bellah-Iklan are essentially not slaves. In contrast to scholarly studies that focus on the relations between slaves and their masters (e.g. Hall 2011a; Hall 2011b; Klein 1998; Klute 1995; Lecocq 2005), Assalim's account examines how the Bellah-Iklan became slaves in the first place, stressing that the deeply violent and criminal nature of this historical process. Assalim insisted that the Bellah-Iklan are wrongly referred to

34 Assalim narrated this quoted passage on 11/11/2012 in Abala.
35 Following up Assalim's arguments in a discussion, Inawélène Aklinine added this quoted passage.
36 Extracted from a life-story interview with Amingo on 11/11/2012 in Abala.

as slaves, a claim that allows him as well as Inawélène to rehabilitate the image of Bellah-Iklan as non-servile people. This is further manifested in the Bellah-Iklan's claim to autochthon status and role as warriors past in northern Mali.

6.2.6 "Our ancestors were the first to occupy this desert"

> *Life is like the march of donkeys. While it sometimes brings you to the forefront, ahead of the others, it may leave you behind the others at other times.*
>
> —Ahiyou Intagaout Abala, 1/1/2013.

Ahiyou made this observation to begin and end his reflections on the status of Bellah-Iklan as autochthones who arrived in Mali prior to white Tuareg. According to him, the march of the donkey is a good illustration of the Bellah-Iklan's social trajectory in northern Mali. Comparing the Bellah-Iklan to donkeys, animals that sometimes march alone and other times in a group, he argues that one cannot always be ahead of the others, by which he refers to free white Tuareg. As Ahiyou implies, initially, the Bellah-Iklan were ahead of the free-born Tuareg, but historical circumstances took away their power and put them in the hands of the Tuareg masters. With this argument, Ahiyou and other Bellah-Iklan emphasized that they are not actually what they are taken for (i.e. passive historical actors), but that they should be seen as those at the heart of the history of the desert, along with the Songhay, Fulani, Mossi, and Hausa, people who lived in northern Mali prior to the arrival of the free white Tuareg and from whom they descend. Consider the following statement by Assalim:

> Once in Menaka we discussed this issue about who first inhabited the desert. There were some people who argued that Azawagh was first inhabited by the pastoral nomadic people, the Tuareg [read: free-born] and the Fulani. During the raining season, they moved to the forest and came back to the wells during the dry seasons. Their life was routinized according to seasons. For example, when water and grass was available for animals in the area of Tahabannante, they all moved there. Similarly, when they heard that there was sufficient water and grass in Niger, they all moved there as well. They had an animal-like instinct, which made them different from the other sedentary populations. They were also Songhay people. After a weeklong discussion, we reached the conclusion that the first communities' founders who first inhabited Azawagh were respectively the Zamburuten, Dawsahak Idoguiriten, and […] Ishadenharen from Tidarmène. Since the Zamburuten are descendants of the Songhay this shows that the sedentary groups have inhabited the desert several years before it even became a desert. At that time, the stones were not yet solid; one could even write on them, or give them any form one wanted them to take […].[37]

37 This conversation took place at the forum in the camp (in Abala) on 11/11/2012.

To Assalim, the Bellah-Iklan first-comership status can be further proved by looking at old cultural objects such as old women ornaments, old kitchen utensils that one could still find in the desert. For the informants, these are not cultural objects of the pastoral nomadic people. Instead, sedentary people like the Songhay, Zarma, and Mossi among others used these objects. In addition, the informant also maintained that during the raining seasons, it is also possible to still find herbs like the *savage paddy* (or *riz sauvage*) throughout the Menaka area. These savage paddies grew up in the former farms of these sedentary people. Second, Assalim drew on the ruins of houses built up with bricks or stones, which are found throughout northern Mali, to substantiate his claims. According to him, these ruins illustrate that sedentary farming communities—the Bellah-Iklan's ancestors—had first inhabited northern regions of Mali. Claiming the historical status of autochthons and first comers for the Bellah-Iklan is justified by reference to their hospitable culture, a claim that, in turn, is justified with reference to the long-standing rootedness of hospitality culture in Bellah-Iklan history.

6.2.7 "When the Tuareg arrived, we black were there to protect them"

My Bellah-Iklan informants depicted their ancestral hospitality using three specific events: the arrival of Karidena[38] in Timbuktu, the battle against the Kel Hoggar, and that against French troops in Dodia near Anderboukane.

6.2.7.1 "When Karidena arrived in Timbuktu"

Ahiyou recounted Karidena's arrival as follows:

> When the Tuareg fled northern Africa where they had been persecuted by Arabs who were merchants and thieves, our ancestors welcomed them. They gave them a place to live, food, and everything else in Bourem, Timbuktu. For example, in Timbuktu, my grandfather, Osiwène Irchy, welcomed Karidena, the ancestor of the *Kel Talatayt*. Karidena arrived from Morocco, accompanied by only a woman. They stayed with Osiwène Irchy, a farmer, near Timbuktu. Osiwène and Karidena became and remained good friends till Karidena died. When he died, Osiwène took his son Firhun, the descendant of Karidena who would later become the *amenokal* of the Ouillimeden, and his mother to the Menaka. When they arrived there, this old woman was tired and asked *Mi nika* [meaning literally where are we going]? This is how Osiwène kept them there. It was in this way that Menaka is now called Menaka. The name stems from the question.[39]

38 Karidena is the mythical ancestor of the ruling clans of the Ouillimeden federation (see Grémont 2010).

39 This conversation took place at the hangar in the refugee camp on 11/01/2013 in Abala.

Ahiyou presented the man he called Osiwène as his grandfather, and by extension, all Bellah-Iklan.[40] The depiction of Karidena's social trajectory implies a certain reconfiguration of power relations between the free white Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan in the Menaka area. It dismantles and pulls apart the strength of Karidena's descendants conventionally portrayed as warriors (Grémont 2010). At the same, the account simultaneously gave social credit to the Bellah-Iklan, resulting from their ancestor, Osiwène Irchy, offering a place to stay to Karidena upon his arrival in Timbuktu. A similar argument runs through the second account that focuses on the battle against the Kel Hoggar.

6.2.7.2 "The Battle against the Kel Hoggar"

According to Assalim, not only had the Bellah-Iklan's ancestors helped the free-born Tuareg escape from the Arabs in Menaka, but they had also protected them from other Tuareg from southern Algeria. He stated that:

> When our ancestors, the "black" felt that the Kel Hoggar were arriving to attack the Tuareg in Menaka, they built a park where they gathered women and children. This park had two doors. The black took the control over the main door and asked the red Tuareg to take care of the secondary door. When the Kel Hoggar arrived, they first tried to enter through the main door guarded by the black people. They fought… fought… fought… until they were defeated. Then, they left that door and went to the one guarded by the red, the Tuareg. It was from there that they penetrated the park. When they entered inside the park the black came over to defeat them once again. Since then, the Kel Hoggar never tried to attack the Ouillimeden Tuareg again […].[41]

This account inverts the social status hierarchy between the free white Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan. The strength of the Bellah-Iklan that manifested itself in the context of the battle against Kel Hoggar as recounted by Assalim recounts the prominent role played by the Bellah-Iklan. A role that goes beyond the traditional tasks discussed in the literature that considered the Bellah-Iklan vulnerable people who needed to be taken care of. For example, the account shows that it was the Bellah-Iklan's ancestors who protected the free white Tuareg. This is taken further in the following account.

6.2.7.3 "The battle of Dodia"

According to Ahiyou, the battle of Dodia took place in 1916–1917. It marked a continuation of the resistance launched by Firhun. At times, the political leader

40 However, Ahiyou's account does not reveal how one could trace the Bellah-Iklan' social origin from Osiwène to Ahmed Baba (1556–1627) and Kankou (1280–1337) presented in other accounts above as the ancestors of the noirs.

41 This conversation took place at the hangar in the refugee camp on 11/01/2013 in Abala.

of the Ouillimeden Tuareg in the region during the colonial conquest who, as chapter 3 depicts, had opposed the (violent) resistance to the French occupation since 1911–1914. French troops arrested and placed Firhun under house arrest in Gao. Ahiyou recalled Firhun's political trajectory as follows:

> French administrators have transformed the true version of the history of the desert. They have written that Firhun was a hero, a courageous warrior. How could he be a hero? What they do not write is that whenever Firhun fought, he always helped by blacks allies, whom he never dared call his slaves […]. When he was arrested and brought to Gao, Osiwène helped him. They helped him escape and come to Dodia in Anderboukane where only the *noirs* protected him. […]. These people fought against the French troops and their allies Kel Adagh and Hoggar in Dodia. They accompanied Firhun from Anderboukane to an area located not very far from Agadaw where he died and was buried by Osiwène Irchy. Nowadays, when I hear that he was hero, I just laugh. He was only a boy who feared a lot.[42]

Ahiyou's account contradicts the official version of Firhun's history as documented by the colonial archive and historians (Boilley 1999; Grémont 2010). It shows the tension between the Bellah-Ikan's version of history and that of historians stemmed from the fact that scholars focused on the perspective of the free-born Tuareg. As such, Ahiyou's account substantiates the insights found in studies (Comaroff/Comaroff 1991; Comaroff/Comaroff 1992; Comaroff/Comaroff 1997; Hanretta 2009; Olivier de Sardan 1976) that have sought to address the narratives on which researchers, as well as colonial and postcolonial administrators, rely are not part of an objective historical analysis. Such analysis should, instead, be taken, as scholars suggest, as the working memory of a process of domination to the benefit of specific social segments.

To Ahiyou in Abala, the written sources on the Tuareg owe their general form to the broad strategies of free white informants who collaborate with most researchers and colonial administrators. Accordingly, he argued that these colonial accounts and the scholarship the free-born Tuareg influenced have reinforced a certain hierarchical order that maintained the Bellah-Iklan in marginal social, economic, and political positions.[43] Ahiyou hopes that the Bellah-Iklan voices from the refugee camp in Abala that are taken up throughout this publication would contribute to redressing the imbalance generated by processes of historical knowledge production in northern Mali.

42 This conversation took place at the hangar in the refugee camp on 11/01/2013 in Abala. Speaking other forms of free-born Tuareg's dependence Assalim also argued that even the grandson of Firhun, the current amenokal Bajan Ag Hamatou, still relies heavily on the mystical power of the black Kel Essuk family in the Menaka district. For example, wherever, Bajan goes, Assalim insisted, the members of this family still always accompany him.

43 Earlier discussions in chapter 2 of this book show that the unfree in Abala see the written textbooks on the Tuareg history in northern Mali as being highly informed by the free-born perspective.

6.3 How are the accounts related to each other?

On the one hand, the narratives discussed throughout these two foregoing parts describe the order of events, persons, and relationships. On the other hand, the accounts also reconstruct in detail how and for what reasons differences between groups' physiological and moral characters exist. These differences are said to be fundamental and essential because they are inscribed in the "natural order of things" (Malkki 1989). For example, part of the Bellah-Iklan's accounts focused on the free white Tuareg's bigger heads, weak bodies, and non-Muslim hearts in order to shed light on how these body traits imply specific social conducts proper to the former masters. As for the free white Tuareg, the physical features, and other characteristics, come altogether in the formation of the moral quality and identity of the Bellah-Iklan. The narratives on the settlement history and coming of Islam in northern Mali further emphasized the differences between the two social categories. The discussions of these themes enable us to understand crucial values the refugees' narratives associated with their claims of autochthony. One of these values comes into light in narratives that establish a relationship between the social status of autochthons and the power relations between the weaker and the stronger. For example, while depicting their respective groups' historical status as first inhabitants in northern Mali, both the free-born Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan conceived themselves as good hosts who welcomed and protected the latecomer groups. The informants' competing emphasis on protection that the first comers provided the latecomers is revealing. It points at the protection that highlights the strength of the first comers as one major component of the refugees' claims to the social status of autochthony. In this regard, on the Bellah-Iklan's side, the strength is taken as the physical capacity that derives from the stronger constitution of the descendants of the former slaves in contrast to the weaker free white Tuareg. As for the free-born Tuareg in Niamey, their strength results from the Tuareg's warrior culture. Another aspect of the refugees' claims of autochthony is that the accounts allowed the informants to create a "unitary genealogy" for their group in Niamey and Abala. This view takes all free white Tuareg as historical descendants of a single ancestor that was chosen according to the initial groups to which the narrators belong. Similarly, the Bellah-Iklan who are originally considered as people without genealogy, *temet* in the *Tamasheq* language (Lecocq 2010, 7f.) have now created a lineage in Abala. Osiwène Irchy was this historical figure around which the informants articulated their claims of autochthony and the Bellah-Iklan's common origin.

Furthermore, both groups of informants strongly associated their claims of autochthony with the coming of Islam. For example, while the Bellah-Iklan depicted themselves as descendants of Kankou and Ahmed Baba who, for the informants in Abala, brought Islam to northern Mali; they portrayed the free white Tuareg as Christian believers. According to this view, the former masters converted to Islam later on compared to the Bellah-Iklan. For the town interlocutors, their ancestors brought Islam along with them. Their version argues that the ancestors

of the Bellah-Iklan who were farmers, fishermen, and merchants who worshiped the trees, air, and water. Here, trees, air, and water are associated with the primitiveness of the Bellah-Iklan's ancestors. In both cases, the informants took Islam as a higher value as opposed to worshipping the elements for both the informants in Niamey and Christian culture in Abala. Such interpretations substantiate scholarly arguments that people always articulate their claims of autochthony with some concrete preoccupations. Peter Geschiere argues that the claims of autochthony, "born from soil", seek to establish an irrefutable, primordial right to belong to the first-comer groups (Geschiere 2009). He also stresses that these claims are often used in politically motivated attempts to exclude the outsiders. Lentz notes that autochthony became a powerful political slogan, particularly in the 1990s, in the competition for posts, but even more so in struggles over access to land (Lentz 2003).[44] For Malkki, the Hutu historical claim for autochthony was essential for their desire to be liberated from Tutsi domination with the latters (false) pretense of superiority (Malkki 1996).

Similar to Malkki's argument, by claiming to autochthony social status in Niamey and Abala, the refugee informants reconstructed the genesis of the two collectivities to historically justify the difference between the free white and the Bellah-Iklan. Their narratives involve the redefinition of social status hierarchy on two levels: on the one hand, between the free white nobles and non-noble free white Tuareg, and, on the other, between the former Tuareg masters and slaves. For the first level, I argue that by articulating the moral and physical characteristics of the free white Tuareg, the town informants blurred differences in power relations between the white noble Tuareg and the non-noble free-born Tuareg. These arguments place them historically as part of the powerful groups *vis-à-vis* the Bellah-Iklan.[45] As for the Bellah-Iklan, the informants in the refugee camp redefined themselves as the powerful group in relation to the free white Tuareg. This implies a significant inversion of power vectors between the former Tuareg masters and the Bellah-Iklan. In my view, the refugees' arguments redefined the existing scholarly debates on the difference between the free white Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan called the black Tuareg. However, while such differentiations are not novel, the Bellah-Iklan perspective included here suggests a reversal in the argument often discussed in the literature that focused on the free white Tuareg's points of view. Therefore, this perspective provides new insight for scholarship on the subject, that, although they may be aware of the differences between the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg, little time has been spent understanding the Bellah-Iklan's daily lives, social relations, and real life struggles.[46]

44 See also Lentz (2013).

45 As mentioned above, scholars often argue that the powerful clans protected the others prior to the colonial occupation.

46 But see Bouman (2010), who studied the effects of globalization on Iklan marriages in Burkina Faso. However, she unfortunately argues that the Iklan have neither a communal past (consciousness) nor a territory to refer to, an argument that this book challenges in all respects.

My informants fixed the social order through accounts that recall Tambiah's distinction between "cosmology" and "cosmogony":

> Cosmologies […] are the classifications of the most encompassing scope. They are frameworks of concepts and relations which treat the universe or cosmos as an ordered system, describing it in terms of space, time, animals, spirits, demons, and the like. Cosmogonies consist usually of accounts of the creation and generation of the existing order of phenomena, explaining their character and their place and function in the scheme. (Tambiah 1985, 3f.)

Displacing Tambiah's distinction between "cosmology" and "cosmogony" from its original context into the refugees' ones in Abala and Niamey is helpful because it enables to reflect on stereotyping or labeling account as a "cosmology" and "cosmogony" and a "regime of truth" (in the Foucauldian sense) for those who produced them. Both groups of informants drew some common physiological and moral characteristics, which, according to them, are inscribed in the "nature" of all members of their respective collectivity share.

Drawing on Brenner (Brenner 1993; Hall 1997; Tambiah 1985), this chapter has traced how Bellah-Iklan refugees in Abala and free-born Tuareg residents of Niamey constructed their respective groups as radically distinct and homogenous collectivities by employing racial labeling discourses. The chapter also demonstrates that both groups of refugee actors redefined their respective inferior social status by describing each other in derogatory terms. The discussion pointed to significant redefinitions of the criteria for group membership, and thus of inclusion in as well as exclusion from the category of "Tuareg." Establishing connections between bodily features, skin color, moral character, and social conduct, informants from both groups called into question the key role that scholars have attributed to the Tamasheq language in defining the Tuareg identity (Bourgeot 1990, 131f.; Lecocq 2010, 4f.). Informants in Abala and in Niamey alike maintained that although Bellah-Iklan speak Tamasheq, this does not make them part of the Tuareg society. To be a Tuareg implies having certain social origins, bodily features, and a particular character.

The Bellah-Iklan's accounts of social and moral differences between themselves and the free-born and noble Tuareg also provide a counterpoint to scholarly portrayals that have exclusively adopted the perspective of the former masters and, accordingly, tended to reproduce the negative stereotyping of the Bellah-Iklan (e.g. Berge 2000; Klute 1992b). Ahiyou, Assalim, and Inawélène depicted the Bellah-Iklan as a group whose stronger bodily constitution makes them both physically and morally more resistant than the free-born Tuareg. The three men's stress on the close link between bodily constitution and one's ethically superior disposition as a proper, God-fearing Muslim contrasts starkly with Berge's positive portrayal of the white Tuareg and their work ethic. All these claims suggest that the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg engage in an ideological struggle over legitimacy and the power to define each other as social group (Bazin 1979;

Diawara 1990; Olivier de Sardan 1976). The claims of both groups need to be put into perspective; that is, they need to be interpreted in consideration of the group's respective position in a social status hierarchy that, in itself, is open to redefinition and change.

7. Adinat wi ataf nen atarekh (those who hold the culture, history, or tradition)

French anthropologist André Bourgeot portrays Tuareg refugees in the Maghreb as people disconnected from their social and cultural roots, left behind in northern Mali (Bourgeot 1990, 140f.). He distinctively interconnects culture, social identity, and territory. Therefore the social fact of exile, which always implies relocations outside ordinary sites of living, *de facto* leads to the collapse of culture and identity (1990, 141). This chapter will offer a contrasting account to Bourgeot's argument. The first part will examine specific social practices through which the free white Tuareg informants assert and maintain their "Tuareg identity" in Niamey. Similarly, the second part will present and discuss practices that enabled the Bellah-Iklan informants to stay *noirs* in the refugee camp in Abala. The interpretations both groups of informants drew from these social practices are condensed in the Tamasheq expression *adinat wi ataf nen atarekh* (those who hold the culture, history, or tradition[1]). At one level, the expression reveals how the free white Tuareg set themselves apart as a group from others such as Hausa and Zarma in Niamey. In Abala, it shows how the Bellah-Iklan informants distinguished themselves from free white Tuareg, Fulani, and Songhay in the refugee camp. At another level, the expression also provides a glimpse into ways in which the informants demarcated themselves from other members of their own group in Niamey and Abala. While they called themselves "those who hold their history or culture" (*adinat wi ataf nen atarekh),* the informants labeled the others (who did otherwise) as those who did not hold the culture, history, or the tradition (*adinat wi oya nen atarekh*). My analysis of these refugees' everyday social practices is informed by Ferguson (Ferguson 1999). He uses the term *cultural style* to refer to practices that signify differences between social categories (1999, 95). Using this notion of *cultural style* as an analytical perspective, my analysis proceeds in three steps. First, I discuss the relevance of the specific practices through which the informants kept their history or culture to constructions of the Tuareg identity in Niamey and Bellah-Iklan in Abala. Second, I show that the informants' demarcations from other members of their own groups, whom they considered as those who did not hold the culture, emphasized "new" lines of intra-group cleavages. These cleavages necessarily challenge the refugees' classifications and reconstructions of themselves as internally homogenous collectivities in Niamey and Abala, as seen in chapters 4, 5, and 6. Third, I will assess how these specific signifying practices, through which the informants claimed to hold their identity

1 The expression *adinat wi ataf nen atarekh* can be translated as those who hold the culture, history, or the tradition.

distinct and intact in exile, were preparations for the return to Mali in an imagined near future.

7.1 Staying Tuareg in Niamey

The town informants depicting themselves as those who did hold the culture was closely connected to another notion. That was that of *Kel alassal*. The term *Kel Alassal* means the "authentic people." It refers to a specific mode of living (or social practices) within the framework of their culture or history (*atarekh*) from Niamey. In what follows, I will explore these interrelated notions by focusing on the informants' interpretations of social practices that, in their own view, rendered them *Kel alassal*, and therefore those who hold their culture. These social practices range from the regular visits they paid each other to listening to guitar songs sung by a free-born Tuareg musical group called *Kel Tinariwen*, speaking the *Tamasheq* dialect spoken in northern Mali, dressing up in *Jalabia* and turbans, and discussing their desire to return and to live in an independent Tuareg country (*akal*).

7.1.1 "A Tuareg has to talk about Tuareg matters"

When I arrived in Niamey in August 2012, one immediate characteristic feature of Mossa Ag Attaher's, Alhabib Ag Sidi's, Mohamed Ag Irgimit's, and Ibrahim Ag Mohamed's social lives that piqued my curiosity was the regular visits they paid to each other. When someone visited someone's homestead, the first thing to do was to prepare the tea. If present, the youngest son mostly did this, otherwise other sons or daughters took over the task. In cases in which all children were absent, the wife herself or the husband himself took on the task of first cleaning the tea kettle and then preparing the tea for the visitor. During these preparations, the visitors and hosts continued to exchange greetings. Their exchanges unfolded as follows: after asking about the well-being of the visitor, the host husband or wife extended greetings, in the first place, to family members living in Niamey. Later, the conversations included relatives left behind in Mali or living as migrants in the Maghreb, for example, those in Tamanrranset in southern Algeria or Tripoli in Libya. In return, the visitor would follow similar exchanges of greetings, asking about the members of the host family. Later, the greetings were extended to those who were absent, and finally to relatives living in Mali and in the Maghreb. Very often these exchanges extended into conversations about the development of conflicts in Mali and other "themes" of communal preoccupations, such as accommodation problems in Niamey (especially for newly arrived refugees) to the issue of youth unemployment.

I should note that, in spite of details specifically relevant to the refugees' contemporary context in Niamey, these exchanges did not differ from conventional forms

of greeting I observed during earlier stays among the Tuareg in northern Mali. What captured my attention was how they gradually moved to the events and processes that brought them into exile (cf. chapters 3 and 5). Such moves from greetings to historical narratives were prompted by guitar songs my informants listened to from mobile phones, radios or any other particular news from the battlegrounds in northern Mali. Mostly from the *Kel Tinariwen* musical group, the guitar songs reconstructed, or at least attempted to make claims to, practices, events, personal biographies, and accounts of eyewitnesses of particular events the Tuareg have experienced over the recent decades in Mali (cf. Klute 2013; Lecocq 2002). The ways in which the informants reconstituted events and processes from listening to guitar songs remind me of Das's account of the Sikh Militant discourse in post-partition Pakistan and India, and the Bhopal tragedy era (Das 1995, chapter 4). She argues that:

> One of the important characteristics of Sikh oral discourse is its use of detailed local knowledge through which people are recognized, named, and their individual misery transformed into misfortunes of the community. In every meeting addressed by Bhindranwale there was detailed use of local examples. For instance, he would say, 'Ajaib Singh from Village Todda, who is present here—the police came one night and dragged his son away and the whole night they tortured him with hot iron rods. Is this not a sign of the *gulami* [slavery] of the Sikhs in India.' (Das 1995, 131)

She goes on to add that:

> Sometimes expression is given to the most tabooed subjects, if these relate to police excesses. For example, in one meeting Bhinbranwale pointed to an old man who has been dragged to the police station in Ferozepur along with his daughter and has been forced to have sex with her (…they made the father and the daughter have a relation). It would seem from these examples that local knowledge of atrocities and their reiteration in narratives of the community are very important. (Das 1995, 131)

It was the informants' apt ways to connect sequences of their own life stories to the Tuareg past in Mali (cf. chapter 5) that made their conversations similar to Das's observations in India. Such narratives were not only generated through regular visits paid to each other's families but were also ubiquitous among young men like Mossa Ag Attaher's son, Iba, and his friend, Ibrahim Ag Mohamed. The two would meet somewhere for tea in a homestead, informing the others through mobile phones. Several times, they stayed overnight in the yard where Ibrahim Ag Mohamed, his mother, and unmarried sisters live.

I gradually came to understand that the guiding ethic of these visits was not only about social reciprocity, but that a certain obsession to engage in Tuareg history informed them. For example, in answering my question about why young Tuareg did not visit the Hausa and Zarma social gatherings (*fada*), Mohamed Ag Irgimit once argued that:

> Well you should note that there exists a problem of cultural difference. In principle it meant here two different cultures in its very fundamental sense. There exists a problem of cultural specificity of the Tuareg people *vis à vis* the Zarma and Hausa. Despite the fact that these Zarma-Songhay and Tuareg have very long experience of living together for centuries, a real integration never took place. For example, it is rare to see a case of marriage between Tuareg and Songhay—Zarma and Tuareg. This is even quasi inexistent. The reason why the Tuareg young men […] don't go the *fada* […] with their Zarma and Hausa fellows is simple one but also fundamental. It is fundamental because they don't have the same concerns and don't enjoy the same things. When the young Tuareg meet among themselves what do they talk about? They talk about rebellions in Mali, tea, and problems encountered here in Niamey. Or they want to hear about Firhun, about the desert and their ancestors. The young Zarma and Hausa don't appreciate these. If a young Zarma comes among them [Tuareg], he will feel bored because they don't have a common interest, don't attach the same meanings to things. The difference is so huge […] if you bring a Tuareg to Zarma among the Zarma. These will talk about ECOWAS, Mali, and Chad.[2] And, obviously a young Tuareg will not appreciate these themes. If he [Tuareg young] goes to Hausa and Zarma *fada* he will feel bored too.[3]

This answer condenses the social significance Mohamed drew from the regular visits they paid to each other. In the first place, the statement shows that the white Tuareg informants demarcated themselves from other urban residents in Niamey through themes they were interested in discussing. But a close scrutiny of the account implicitly reveals that it was not the themes per se that explained the opposition between them and the Hausa and Zarma. Whereas the Hausa and Zarma discussions focus on the joint intervention of soldiers from ECOWAS countries, including Niger, against the Islamist factions in northern Mali, the young free white Tuareg found interest in talking about rebellions in Mali, tea, and problems they faced in Niamey. Or the free-born Tuareg urban residents wanted to hear about Firhun, the desert, and their ancestors. At face value, there were not many contradictions between the topics discussed by both free Tuareg and Hausa and Zarma groups. All topics discussed dealt with northern Mali. However, the discrepancy between the free-born Tuareg and the Hausa-Zarma *fada* resulted from their different perspectives on issues. To Mohamed, and other free-born white Tuareg informants, when the Hausa, and Zarma, residents in Niamey talked about northern Mali, they supported the ECOWAS's military intervention in Mali that allowed the national army and the Bellah-Iklan–Songhay people to regain some control over northern Mali. In Mohamed's view, the Zarma and Hausa residents in Niamey manifested their hostility toward the free-born Tuareg through this

2 Here, Mohamed is referring to debates about the joined military operation launched in northern Mali in January 2013 by countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the French, Chad, and UN militaries.

3 Selected from conversations with Mohamed Ag Irgimit on 29/09/2012 in Niamey.

support to the Malian army, allied with Bellah-Iklan. It was precisely this perspective that the free-born Tuareg in Niamey did not like.

Mohamed's answer implicitly also shows that the particular way in which the free-born Tuareg approached themes of interest to them during their social encounters in Niamey had some constitutive effects on young Tuareg. To him, when the young free white Tuareg talked about rebellions in Mali, tea, and problems encountered in Niamey, Firhun, about the desert and their ancestors, they learned about their history and, therefore, about themselves as Tuareg. In his view, this was important particularly for young people who were born and grew up in the social context of exile. The statement opens up one theoretical concern of central relevance to this chapter, which is an examination of social practices that constituted and maintained the informants "Tuareg" despite their decades-long experiences of exile in Niamey. Virtanen used the notion of self-reflection to reflect on instances in which her informants through particular practices and ways of doing social practices defined themselves as the Fulbe subjects in northern Cameroon (Virtanen 2003, chapter 2). She demonstrates this through an apt analysis of the *Pulaaku* (understood as Fulani's moral code) as the central structuring device of the Fulbe identity, arguing that it is what one does and the way one does it that consequently expresses, and asserts, therefore validate one's membership of pastoral Fulbe community.[4] Virtanen's interpretation of Fulbe social practices in the light of the notion of self-reflection is helpful for understanding the complex meanings underlying Mohamed's claim above. Implicit in his account is to emphasize that the ways in which talking about themes related to Tuareg rebellions, tea, and the ancestors such as Firhun among themselves were not simply commentaries on or representations of the past. Rather, they were also assertive of young free-born Tuareg social identity as Tuareg *vis-à-vis* other ethnic residents in Niamey.

Finally, the social significances Mohamed Ag Irgimit attributed to their regular visits to each other shows that these visits did not only signify the difference between the free-born Tuareg and the Hausa–Zarma residents in Niamey. They also generated difference between those free-born Tuareg who did hold the culture, the tradition, or history and those who did not. For instance, when I arrived in Niamey in the summer of 2014, I asked Mossa Ag Attaher about another free-born Tuareg renamed here Mohamed Ag Houssey. He is in his early fifties and I first met him through Mossa Ag Attaher in 2012. At that time, both men and their family members regularly paid visits to each other. But surprisingly, in answering my question about Mohamed Ag Houssey, Mossa Ag Attaher stated:

> Who? Mohamed Ag Houssey I haven't seen him since you left Niamey. He didn't come visit me that is why I also didn't go to him. You see Diallo, many Tuareg have abandoned their culture. They even don't visit us anymore. I see them with Zarma people.[5]

4 For similar arguments on Pulaaku among the Fulbe in Niger (see Oumarou 2012; Schareika 2010).
5 From conversation on 06/08/2014 in Niamey.

Mossa Ag Attaher's answer points at the social implications of not visiting fellow free-born Tuareg. He interpreted this as manifest of the abandonment of one's Tuareg culture, establishing a contrast between Mossa and Mohamed Ag Houssey. While it depicts Mohamed Ag Houssey as a good example of those who abandoned their culture, it also reflexively portrays Mossa Ag Attaher as an illustration of those who did not do so. Not doing social practices Tuareg are expected to do, can affect the ways in which one is perceived. To put this in another way, Mossa's comments on Mohamed Ag Houssey by implication show that the ways in which one is perceived by others, through the lens of social practices, concerns the "validation" of whether one is a member of the Tuareg group or not. The comments show that the criteria of being member of the Tuareg group do not necessarily mean that one is Tuareg forever. As will be shown below, Ibrahim's interpretations of the social implications of going or not going to the studio of Tuareg culture on Sundays further substantiate this argument.

7.1.2 "The hangar of our culture"

Between 2012 and 2013 I followed Ibrahim Ag Mohamed, Iba, and several of their friends to the studio, where many young free-born Tuareg met up to discuss and learn about Tuareg culture. The studio is situated in the quartier of Koira kano in the center of Niamey. A free Tuareg artist called Rhissa Ag Issa, originally from the area of Menaka, has established it. What is referred to here as a studio is actually a hangar in the middle of Rhissa Ag Issa's homestead.

They normally gather at Rhissa's place on Sundays. They put money together in order to purchase tea, sugar, meat, and rice. There, they learn Tuareg songs, and stories about the Tuareg rebellions in northern Mali. Those who arrive enthusiastically greet those who arrived earlier, who in response ask them: *Matikknam et tumast* (what did you do for the "people")? The latecomers often reply *tumast tile*: (the "people" or the "nation" is present), emphasizing that one feels part of the Tuareg collectivity. It refers to what people do in their daily lives in terms of social practices that assert their social belonging to the Tuareg group.

However, in 2014, I noticed that many young men did not come to visit the old artist any longer. I asked Ibrahim who explained that:

> You know, it is not easy. You can tell that we were many here last year. People sat everywhere here under this hangar. But today, we are only few who come here now. We want to keep our culture, we are Tuareg and this is our hangar, our place to be. I want to follow my ancestors. When you look at people like Hama, they have become Zarma. They are not Tuareg anymore. They only go to *fada*. They are the ones who are lost [*ceux qui sont perdus*]. They are influenced by the life of the town.[6]

6 Selected from conversation on 18/08/2014 in Niamey.

Figure 4: The board with descriptions of Rissa Ag Issa's activities on 24/09/2014. Photograph by S. Diallo.

Figure 5: A young free-born Tuareg sitting next to Rhissa Ag Issa on 24/09/2014. Photograph by S. Diallo.

Ibrahim's account establishes a contrast between the hangar at Rhissa Ag Issa's place and visiting the Hausa or Zarma *fada*. It equates the social practice of going to the studio with holding the Tuareg culture. The social importance he attributed to going to the studio was linked to what they talked about. For example, they learned about their past. He interpreted learning the past as an exercise in learning to become Tuareg. Thus, the account equates not going to Rhissa Ag Issa's place with being those who did not hold their culture (*adinat wi oya nen atarekh*). According to Ibrahim, being part of those who did not hold their culture implies that one is in a process to lose ties to one's social and cultural roots. Those, like Hama, who spent time with the Hausa and Zarma, are influenced by the life of town, which implies reflexive construction of himself as the opposite. He considered himself as part of white Tuareg refugees who remained tied to their rural origins in northern Mali. Seen in this perspective, Ibrahim's interpretations illustrate James Ferguson's discussion of *cultural dualism* (cf. Ferguson 1999, chapter 3). He introduced the notion of cultural dualism as (an alternative) theoretical approach to explore urban culture in Africa via an elaboration of what he terms "cultural styles": localist and cosmopolitan. Examining his material from the Copperbelt in Zambia, he remarked that:

> The extremes of these two contrasting modes were immediately visible and obvious. On the one hand were the cosmopolitan workers, relaxing in bars and clubs, drinking bottled beer or liquor, listening to Western or "international" music, speaking English and mixing languages with ease, dressing smartly (and even ostentatiously), and adopting an air of easy familiarity with whites like me. On the other hand were the localists, drinking in private homes or taverns, preferring "African" or home-brewed beer, speaking the local languages of their home region, dressing in drab or even ragged clothes, listening to "local" music, and presenting to a white foreigner like me an impression of intimidation and sometimes even servility. Localist stylistic markers seemed to distinguish those who had a strong sense of continuing allegiance to a rural "home" community—those who visited often, adhered to "custom", and displayed a strong ethnic or regional identity. Cosmopolitan style, on the other hand, marked the distance a worker maintained from "home"; it signified a shrugging off of localist cultural traits, and often a rejection of rural ties, along with an embracing of Western dominated transnational mass culture. (Ferguson 1999, 91f.)

According to Ferguson, since the notion of style points to practices that signify differences between social categories, localism and cosmopolitanism should be viewed as signifying practices (Ferguson 1999, 94). He further wrote that:

> Localism is in this sense a stylistic package, in which some elements function as signs for others. Localist gestures are thus at once a repudiation of cosmopolitanism and an affirmation of loyalty to rural allies. The rural relatives' interest is not immediately in the gesture itself but in the alliance for which it stands. But the gesture itself helps to cement that alliance, as well as to

> signal it, by disqualifying and devaluing the worker in more cosmopolitan contexts. Just as committed "punks" who dye their hair purple or cover their skins with tattoos not only signal their repudiation of the corporate ladder but also effectively bar themselves from it, so localist gestures not only signal rejection of urban futures, they also help to make them impossible. (Ferguson 1999, 112)

In Ferguson's sense, Ibrahim's account referred to Hama, and other free white Tuareg, as cosmopolitans. In Ibrahim's view, going to the Hausa and Zarma *fada* implies talking about other topics and listening to music by people disconnected from their rural cultural ties.

7.1.3 "We Tuareg listen to *al-guitara* songs, the Hausa and Zarma listen to *Mali Yaro*"

Like visiting other fellow free white Tuareg from Mali, and going to Rhissa Ag Issa's place, the informants considered listening to *al-guitara* songs as social expressions of their Tuareg identity in Niamey. The *al-guitara* musical genre has gained significant importance in studies of the Tuareg in northern Mali. Most studies focus either on its role in the 1990s rebellions in Mali and in Niger (Belalimat 2003, 2008; Klute 2013; Lecocq 2010; Rasmussen 2006) or on its nature, specifically assessing whether it can be viewed as traditional or a global musical style (Borel 2006; Fischer/Kohl 2010; Schmidt 2009). Probing whether the *al-guitara* musical genre is traditional or modern, most conclude that it is not traditional at all. This is because of electric acoustic material used by performers made it "inauthentic" (Borel 2006). Many authors argue that most performers are men, which makes contemporary *al-guitara* different from other authentic or Tuareg traditional musical genres: *anzad* or *tahardent* and *tende* examined by Brandes (1989) and Card (1982). Rasmussen examines how the popularization of a musical genre previously associated with political protest and resistance resonates with cultural memory once the rebellion is over (Rasmussen 2006). Her study suggests that:

> Memories of rebel composers and performers of earlier Tuareg ichumar music articulate with popular memories of many performers and listeners today, who are keenly aware of the origins of this musical genre and continue to identify it with heroic elements in their culture. (Rasmussen 2006, 634)

The free white Tuareg informants in Niamey also identified *al-guitara* with their culture. Explaining why the Tuareg should only visit Tuareg in urban Niamey due to matters they have in common to discuss, Mohamed Ag Irgimit extended his argument to the *al-guitara* genre. When young Tuareg meet, they listen to *al-guitara* songs sung by *Kel Tinariwen*, a musical group created in the 1980s by Kel Adagh Tuareg in exile in the Maghreb (Belalimat 2003; Belalimat 2008; Klute 2013; Lecocq 2010). The songs focus on the free-born Tuareg experiences of marginalization, forced migration, and longing for home which they called *tenere* (literally

the bush). For Mohamed, whereas the Tuareg are interested in this genre, the Zarma and Hausa do not listen with the same attention. Instead, when they meet in their *fada*, they prefer to listen to American rap music and *Mali yaro* (a famous musician in Niger). The distinction Mohamed tended to draw here, between the *al-guitara* songs and *Mali yaro* and American rap music, illustrates the relevance of music to the construction and expression of free-born Tuareg social differences to other ethnic groups in Niamey. He even further argued:

> When one says *al-guitara*, one just says Tuareg. Because, the aesthetics of this music and its lyrics of the songs make that it is just for us the Tuareg. When young Tuareg listen to it, they learn and get inspiration for their future there. *Mali yaro* and American rap music are for the others but not us.[7]

Mohamed considered *al-guitara* songs as a medium of knowledge communication and dissemination among free white Tuareg. He argued young Tuareg learned about their past and inspiration for their future from listening to these particular songs. He also points to the generative power that the aesthetics and lyrics of *al-guitara* convey. *Al-guitara* generates social difference between the free-born Tuareg and the Zarma and Hausa in Niamey.

Alhabib Ag Sidi, to whom I paid regular visits in the quartier called Ryad, held similar points of view. Whenever I visited, *al-guitara* songs accompanied our conversations around the tea kettle either in his living room or in the courtyard, played from either his mobile phone or tapes. He has two memory sticks on which he stores his collections of songs. I once asked him why the *al-guitara* music was so common. He answered:

> As a Tuareg I can only listen to *al-guitara* songs. One reason is that *al-guitara* is our music, something now cultural among us the Tuareg. Even if you [read: Souleymane] go to a Tuareg family and only observe small children playing among themselves. After few minutes, you will hear them singing a guitar song. They do this even if they don't have guitar. They will use a wood or any other thing at their disposals and use these to imitate the *al-guitara*. It is natural for them to like and play *al-guitara* in opposition to others as they only hear *al-guitara* at home and notice that it is about their history.[8]

The identification of *al-guitara* with Tuareg culture is straightforward in this account. According to Alhabib Ag Sidi, children identify themselves with this genre from their early childhood. Alhabib emphasizes that as a Tuareg, he could only listen to *al-guitara,* implicitly referring to the consequences for free-born Tuareg who listened to other musical genres. For example, on several occasions, he criticized his daughter (student at the University of Niamey) listening to other songs sung by non-Tuareg musicians, especially when she used these songs as ring tones

7 From conversation on 22/09/2012 in Niamey.
8 From conversation with Alhabib Ag Sidi on 07/12/2012 in Niamey.

on her mobile phone. Her father would criticize practices that take her away from the legacy of the ancestors, referring to the Tuareg proverb: *tanfust tarha alghak net* (literally everything needs its heritage/own value).[9]

Alhabib's referral to this proverb condenses and, at the same time expresses, his feeling of frustration. Alhabib tended to stress that listening to other musical genres than *al-guitara* distanced his daughter from her cultural roots. The proverb also identifies listening to *al-guitara* with following the footsteps of the ancestors. Ultimately, Alhabib's criticism of his daughter reveals that listening to *al-guitara* or not has become an axis for the assertion and contestation of Tuareg identity in Niamey. It expresses the difference between free-born Tuareg, who followed their culture, and those who did not. Gonzales reached similar conclusions when speaking about the social significance of *al-guitara* music for the free white refugees Tuareg in Ouagadougou and Sag-Nioniogo (Burkina Faso) (Gonzales 2015). She wrote that:

> Every informant recognised Tuareg music to be an important symbol of their culture. It is also an instrument for recollection and connection their home. Listening to music is for many a necessary practice. With its power, music heals the pain of being displaced. […] Children and adolescents learn how to play guitar music on self-made instruments […]. (Gonzales 2015, 93)

Like the *al-guitara* musical genre, the urban free white Tuareg informants also tended to signify their allegiances to their ancestral culture *vis-à-vis* other ethnic groups in Niamey through speaking their *Tamasheq* dialects from northern Mali at home.

7.1.4 "I never let my family members speak Zarma at home"

Mohamed Ag Irgimit and Mossa Ag Attaher used this sentence to explain me how they tried to protect their domestic realms from the influence of Zarma culture. Both informants took Zarma language as the main channel through which a foreign culture could enter into their families. For example, Mohamed Ag Irgimit explained:

> Though all my children are born and go to school here in Niamey, I prevent them using other languages than *Tamasheq* once home. I even told them do not bring any friends who are Zarma and Hausa into this house. My reasons are the following. My duty as a father is to orient these children born here in Niamey towards their land of origin. They are Tuareg above all. They have to speak their ancestral language. It is in this language that I explain to them several things of the past. Also, they listen to *al-guitara* songs and sometime

9 Some informants also framed the same proverb saying: *tanfust tarha etari:* everything needs its heritage.

> ask me about things they hear. This is how they grow in their understanding of themselves as Tuareg.[10]

This illustrates the relevance of the Tamasheq language to the construction of free Tuareg identity. He feared that by bringing their Zarma and Hausa schoolmates home, his children might end up mastering other languages. Forbidding his children from speaking other languages was a strategy that enabled him to establish ties between his family members and their home country (*akal*). Doing so, he maintained, will contribute to consolidate his children self-understanding as Tuareg.

Mossa Ag Attaher attributed a similar role to speaking *Tamasheq* in his family. He argued that:

> Since you come here you always saw me speaking my *Tamasheq* language. I don't allow any of my children to speak Zarma or Hausa at home. I am not like Hamza,[11] my cousin whose children speak other languages at home.[12]

While Mossa regarded himself as someone whose family members spoke *Tamasheq,* and therefore stayed Tuareg, he viewed his cousin Hamza as someone who had been incapable of keeping his family members Tuareg, because began to speak other languages.

The insistence on language went beyond domestic realms. During my stays in Niamey, I used to visit an adult refugee man (already introduced in chapter 5 as Mohamed Ag Zeyd) at the *Grand marché* of Niamey. Mohamed Ag Zeyd arrived in the early 1990s. Although he did not have his own shop at the *Grand marché*, he always went there to spend time with other free white Tuareg from Mali. People often came to ask about shops or looking for someone in the surroundings. When they spoke Zarma or Hausa, Mohamed refused to reply, or spoke Tamasheq to them. Mohamed explained why

> I lived in Niamey more than fifteen years now. I do speak the language. But these Zarma people think that everybody should speak their language and becomes Zarma. No, we [read: Tuareg] want to show them that we exist too. I always do this in order to show them that I am proud of what I am […]. Through these reactions, I show to them we are not all Hausa and Zarma.[13]

The reasons why Mohamed did not reply to those who sought information from him in the *Grand marché* are similar to Mossa Ag Attaher's and Mohamed Ag Irgimit's arguments discussed above. All three informants tended to construct themselves as Tuareg through rejecting Hausa and Zarma languages.

10 Selected from conversation with Mohamed Ag Irgimit on 28/11/2012 in Niamey.
11 Hamza is Mossa's cousin introduced in chapter 4.
12 From conversation with Mohamed Ag Irgimit on 28/11/2012 in Niamey.
13 From conversation on 24/09/2012 in Niamey.

7.1.5 "I can never abandon the turban and the *jalabia*"

Like the language, clothing was another way to express one's Tuareg identity. When I first met Mohamed Ag Irgimit in September 2012, he began by asking me who else among the free-born Tuareg from Mali I had been in contact with. I informed him that I had been spending most of my time with Mossa Ag Attaher. Mohamed responded

> Souleymane, you don't need to talk to other people anymore. Mossa is and remains the most prototype of authentic Tuareg I have ever seen. Just spend your time with him, you will know all about our culture and us. Even though he lived several decades now, but he still stayed Tuareg in all aspects of his life. He wears always the *jalabia* and never goes outdoors without a turban. He is really different from many other Tuareg who abandon their culture. They wear jeans, T-shirts everywhere, even in the *Grand marché*.[14]

When I pleasantly reported this conversation with Mohamed to Mossa Ag Attaher the next day he put forward that:

> You see Diallo since I am in Niamey I never wore anything else than my *jalabia* though I worked for France for long time. For example, I remembered long time ago, our patrons at the IRD [a French institute for development research] instructed us [the guards] to wear the uniform they had given us. This was a way to tell me that I should abandon my turban and my *jalabia*. I clearly told them that I preferred to lose my job than changing the way in which I dress, that is, the Tuareg way. I want to keep my culture and what I am: a Tuareg. I can never abandon the *jalabia* and the turban.[15]

Both Mohamed and Mossa point to wearing *jalabia* and turban as a non-verbal form of social practice through which authentic Tuareg identity is embodied and asserted in everyday life. The *jalabia ensemble*, called nowadays *deux pièces*, is composed of short trousers and a *boubou* (cf. photograph below).[16] Mossa described this as a manifest signal of his allegiance to Tuareg dressing customs. He stressed that over the past centuries, all Tuareg men wore the *jalabia ensemble* in their everyday life. He explained to me that in the past, youths would meet socially around the musical genre called *tende* (see also Ag Doho 2011). The regular performance of *tende* took place, mostly in winter. When it rained, the youths frequently met at the *ahal* (evening youth gathering) around the *tende*, and performed *Iswat*, the traditional dance steps of youths surrounding the girls singing. On these occasions the young women appreciated and selected their male partners not only according

14 Selected from conversation on 24/09/2012 in Niamey.
15 Selected from conversation with Mossa Ag Attaher on 24/08/2014 in Niamey.
16 The *jalabia* can be of varying qualities. But most highily appreciated quality is made out of *Bazin riche*.

Figure 6: A Tuareg wearing a *jalabia ensemble* and the turban in Niamey on 18/09/2014. Photograph S. Diallo.

to their dance and camel racing skills, but also their *jalabia ensemble*. Dressed in the *jalabia* and the turban, the youths smoothly moved with their camels toward the girls gathered around the *tende*. Men targeted the girl singing surrounded by several others applauding. The goal of the men was to profit from the inattention of the others in order to steal the headscarf of the girl singing, called the *tamazagh* (or *tamawayt*). The one who succeeded in stealing this headscarf, called the *alacho,* was followed by other competitors. Succeeding and not succeeding in collecting back this *alacho* had equal symbolic value. They all contributed to creating a sense of honor as a true man (*ahalis wan tidit*) among peers. This distinction could increase one's social charm in peoples' eyes. The *jalabia* and the turban illustrated Mohamed's and Mossa's interpretations of what makes up an "authentic Tuareg": the capacity to embody past dressing habits in the present. This marks a difference between Mossa and other free-born Tuareg, who wear jeans and T-shirts.

This leads to another important aspect, crucial in understanding the social significance of the jalabia and turban. The *Grand marché* symbolizes an immense sea of people where it should be shameful for "a Tuareg" to appear there without the *jalabia*, and more importantly the turban, the symbol of social distance among the Tuareg (cf. Murphy 1964). This interpretation makes the difference between Mossa and other free-born Tuareg going to the Grand marché in T-shirts. This shows that the notion of shame, here related to dress, is another central and form of expression of "authentic Tuaregness" (cf. chapter 4 of this book).

Mohamed Ag Irgimit sometimes stressed similar social significances of the veil for female Tuareg. He stated that:

> Nothing else than entering my homestead you [read: Souleymane] notice that you are among the Tuareg. You saw my daughter sitting with her veil even though she is born and went to university here. She even graduated recently in Sociology. But you could not know all these information if I did not tell them to you. You are used to Tuareg now, since you saw her sitting you immediately recognized her as a Tuareg. She wears her veil and did not tell anything since you entered this house.[17]

To understand Mohamed's argument here, let me describe the context of the conversation. That day, when I entered Mohamed Ag Irgimit's yard, he was sitting on the left side, together with his wife, two sons of nine and two years old, and his daughter in her mid-twenties. His daughter wore a white-and-red veil. When she saw me entering their home, she quickly expanded her veil to cover her head and moved closer to her mother. Her mother also slightly adjusted her veil. Mohamed Ag Irgimit himself did not have a turban. However, focusing on his daughter's appearance, Mohamed's statement reveals how the body postures (way of sitting) and the veil of his daughter came together in the expression of her Tuareg identity. As an ideal Tuareg woman, in Mohamed's sense, she wore a veil and did not talk to her father or me during the hours I spent with them. Mossa's and Mohamed's accounts reveal the relationships between body, *jalabia*, turban, female veil, and assertions of authentic Tuareg identity. Ultimately, the accounts invite us to approach these traits as both symbolic and material processes that come together in dress as embodied practice (Hansen 2004; Schulz 2007a).

7.1.6 "A Tuareg man should have a sword"

Mossa Ag Attaher also interpreted his possession of a sword as related to his Tuareg identity. One day he invited me to share a meal with his family in Niamey Plateau. He had slaughtered his last goat to welcome me. Sitting next to him around the tea kettle, I highly appreciated his hospitality and started a conversation about the changes in his life situation since leaving Niger in February 2013. He first smiled, then stood up and went to his room to bring a sword. Upon his return from his room he put the sword aside me and stated that:

> I can tell you that I have become now *un Touareg complet* [literally full Tuareg]. I have gotten a sword. This was what I lacked until now. I saved money little by little until I could get this sword with which I protect my family. I bought it for 80,000 CFA.[18] You know that there are many bandits in Niamey

17 From conversation with Mohamed Ag Irgimit on 28/11/2012 in Niamey.
18 About €123 in 2016.

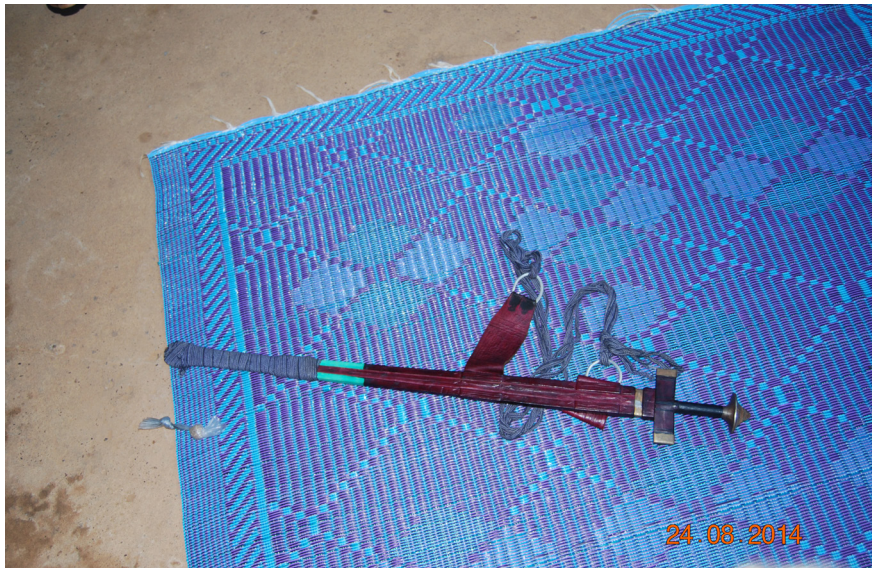

Figure 7: Mossa's sword on 24/08/2014. Photograph S. Diallo.

> who regularly attack people during nights. Before I got this sword, I did not have anything to protect my family members with. This is what makes me a man (the narrator showing the sword).[19]

This account exhibits various social significances attributed to owning a sword. Owning a sword makes him feel a Tuareg man. The sword enables him to provide his family members with security. Providing his family with security stands out here as a performative practice of Tuareg masculinity. It is precisely Mossa's capacity as head of the family to provide his family with security that explains his sensation of pride for having become a *Touareg complet* (full Tuareg), as the smile indicated. Being fully Tuareg can, therefore, be interpreted here as social achievement resulting from Mossa's capacity to provide security to his family. The crucial role that the sword plays in this process reveals its power to mediate Mossa's relationship to his culture and Tuareg social identity.

7.1.7 "A Tuareg has to marry another Tuareg"

Another key aspect of Mossa Ag Attaher's explanation of what makes him an "authentic Tuareg" focused on marriage. He took marriage as a social form of assertion of one's identity. He argued that:

19 Conversation with Mossa Ag Attaher on 18/08/2014 in Niamey.

> You see people like Didjenne. He married his daughter to a rich Zarma man. He made the man pay one villa in Niamey, one motorbike, a car, and lot of money. You see this Souleymane. He is only interested in money but not our tradition, our culture. This is not how a Tuareg behaves. I will never let my daughter marry with someone who is not a Tuareg. A Tuareg has to marry a Tuareg. You see, Alassane, Alhabib, Mohamed Ag Irgimit we all married women from home. We all came here in Niamey since our childhood as refugees. We lived in Lazaré before and later on, we came to Niamey. But we all married women from home. If I married with a Hausa and Zarma woman, you, Souleymane would not ask me since I would have changed and will no longer be a Tuareg.[20]

Mossa establishes a contrast between two categories of free white Tuareg. One consists of those like himself, Mohamed Ag Irgimit, and Alhabib Ag Sidi, who claim their culture is manifested in their choices of marital partners. Though they left northern Mali a long time ago, they still demonstrated their allegiance to home through marrying free-born Tuareg women. Mossa's argument points to how marrying women from the Hausa and Zarma ethnic groups would have led to changes in his self-perception. The man called Dedienne is the illustrative example of a second category of Tuareg, whose choices of marital partners demonstrated that they have abandoned their culture. People of this second category do not care about the implications of marrying non-Tuareg partners, instead caring about material benefits such as having a motorbike, a villa in Niamey, and a lot of money.

Mossa's criticism of Dedienne was also pragmatic. By opting for lot of money, a villa, and motorbike as bridewealth, Dedienne made it impossible for young free Tuareg with a refugee background to marry his daughter even if these wished to have her. Mossa interpreted this as preferring the money to fellow Tuareg. In contrast, Mossa said: "I feel better when donating my daughter to one of us rather than accepting the big money (*grande somme d'argent*) from the others." This contrast is fundamental. While the former gives some satisfaction to help other fellow Tuareg, the latter is just a material benefit for personal interest. He attributed more value to donating than having money. One could conclude from the above comments that what makes marriage a decisive social practice conducive to authentic *Tuaregness* in Mossa's view is not marriage itself. Rather, it is both the choice of the marital partner and the preference a father gives either to material benefit in his own personal/family interest or to donating one's daughter to a fellow Tuareg, even if they do not have enough spending power. Mossa's interpretation of donation seems similar to Alhabib and Ibrahim's arguments about solidarity that I now discuss below.

20 Selected from conversation on 07/10/2012 in Niamey.

7.1.8 "The Tuareg have to help each other"

Inter-refugee solidarity was one central aspect through which informants assessed whether one stayed Tuareg or not in Niamey. The term used for solidarity initially called (*anmataf, an milil, tasaght*) in Mali was *an marh* (to love each other). It covers and expresses itself through a range of social practices, such as regularly visiting fellow free-born Tuareg, sharing what one has with others, and, more importantly, supporting each other with financial means. For example, after spending a morning transporting rice his fellows got at the distribution center, Alhabib Ag Sidi put to me that although

> I spent several hours this morning at the consulate for the distribution. It was not for myself that I was there. It was by solidarity. Thank God that I have my retirement monthly payment, house, and car. My son is now working at custom services and is now the one taking care of the family. He does support the family with everything these days. I go there because I think my place is there to care for other people. When people see us there, they just think that we are begging for food. We are those committed to the common interest. Thanks God, this is not what we are there for. I fueled my car to help people, especially old women living here without means. Even if they get food, they cannot take it home. I helped those. If a Tuareg does not help out the other Tuareg, no one else will do so. I helped them because I am Tuareg like them. We have all suffered through time and should hold together.[21]

To understand Alhabib's solidarity toward other free-born Tuareg, let us first outline the social context within which it took place. As explained earlier (cf. chapter 4), the authorities in Niger refused to create a refugee camp in the neighborhood of Niamey in 2012.[22] Consequently, as is the case with urban refugees across East Africa (Malkki 1989; Peterson/Hovil 2003; Sommers 2001), UNHCR did not establish a clear strategy of support for the refugees living in Niamey town. This situation brought the Songhay and free-born Tuareg refugees to create, on their own initiative, a structure known as the *commission de crise* in French. The committee worked in the following manner throughout 2012 and 2013: the free-born Tuareg members of the committee were in charge of identifying and recording their fellow free-born Tuareg in Niamey. In their part, the Songhay members of the committee dealt with Songhay, Bellah-Iklan slaves, and Fulani. Since its creation the main task of this committee was to persuade NGOs that existed there an urgent need for humanitarian assistance for several displaced groups in urban settings. Whenever the committee received donations its members immediately set the days for distributions.[23] The distributions took place in the courtyard of the former Mali consulate in the quartier of Koira Kano. It was during one of

21 Selected from conversation with Alhabib Ag Sidi on 17/01/2013 in Niamey.
22 Instead, the refugee settlements camps were located in Abala, Mangaizé, Ayorou, and Tilia.
23 The main donors were countries such as Qatar, Turkey, and South Africa.

these distributions that Alhabib transported the rice and oil received by other free Tuareg, who did not have means to bring what they received home. As Alhabid Ag Sidi says in his account, many people suspected that he was primarily concerned with his own benefit from the support the NGOs gave for refugees in Niamey town.

Against this view, Alhabib took the notion of *an marh* (to love each other, now understood as solidarity) to describe his action. He paid for the fuel from his own pocket. He later argued that he did not target close relatives. He considered all free white Tuareg the same and equal. This made his actions differ from the other free-born Tuareg, who visited and materially supported with food and money just their close relatives. He called those who did so the "greedy people" (*imiwila* or *imarhan in tissatenasen*) because, to him, the exclusive help of these toward specific relatives simultaneously excluded other free-born white Tuareg. The discrepancy Alhabib established between himself and the *imiwila* helps us to understand to what extent the former's conception of inter-free Tuareg solidarity (*an marh*) was informed by aspirations for unity among free-born Tuareg from northern Mali in Niamey.

Ibrahim's understanding was similar to Alhabib's. Ibrahim once reported that he and his age mates had established a mechanism of support to their parents over the past years in Niamey. This mechanism consisted of putting together 500 CFA[24] per week per person for a certain period. They did so since they knew that their parents had serious problems to make ends meet. After they had gathered enough money they began to purchase millet, sugar, rice, milk, and tea, informing their mothers and fathers that they had established something to support them. Their parents could borrow cash or borrow rice, sugar, and tea, and then pay back at the end of each month. According to him this functioned well and was much appreciated. Ibrahim interpreted the support for their parents as a material form of expressing solidarity, their commitment to a free Tuareg communal interest, and building up the *tumast tan Kel Tamasheq* (the Tuareg collectivity). Both Alhabib and Ibrahim showed that the social practices of solidarity expressed allegiance to the Tuareg culture. This illustrates that they did not only seek to reproduce a culture that existed in the past but attempted to reshape this past culture according to their aspirations for unity emerging in response to their predicament of exile in Niamey.

7.1.9 "We want to return and live in our country (*akal*)"

For the informants in Niamey, the efforts to maintain their culture through e.g. language, clothing styles, and Tuareg musical culture, which tied them to northern Mali, must ultimately be understood as a desire and hope to return home one day.

24 Less than €1 in 2016.

They repeatedly stressed this guiding principle of their everyday life. Mossa Ag Attaher once argued that:

> the desert is our country [*akal*]. It is where we lived, and we will live in the future. We came from there and we will return there. This is why we can't neglect our culture. Because, if we neglect it now what will we do once we return back home?[25]

This refers not only to past customs but also more importantly to preparation for a future life back home. It indicates a cultural repertoire with specific aspirations, regarding, for example, Mossa's usage of the notion *akal* (country). Etymologically, the notion of *akal* can mean land, settlement, and a country. In the nomad culture in northern Mali, *akal* (land) is always placed under the authority of the *amenokal* (the chief). Hence, Mossa's use of the term refers to an exclusively "Tuareg imaginary" of a future country in current northern Mali placed under the authority of an *amenokal* (Tuareg chief) instead of the Malian state. As hinted at in chapter 4, it was through this lens that my informants interpreted the military *coup d'ětat* and the near collapse of the state institutions in 2012. To them, the political unrest in southern Mali indicated that the time for their return to home was near. This opinion was an interpretation of the prediction of the old free-born Tuareg man who lived around Djebock in the region of Gao. This old man had said that the free-born Tuareg exile would end up with the collapse of the Malian state institutions due to internal conflicts between people in southern Mali.

The way in which Mossa's account situates the future at the center of his conception of everyday day cultural practices in Niamey illustrates a recent claim by Appadurai (Appadurai 2013). In his attempt to conceptualize a more productive relationship between economics, culture, and development in Mumbai in India, Appadurai suggests that anthropologists should change their approaches to culture, arguing that the future remains a stranger to many anthropological models, conceptualizing it as a matter of "pastness." The key words are habit, custom, heritage, and tradition (2013, 180). According to Appadurai, culture is not only about the past but also entails a capacity to aspire. This implies seeing culture as a dialogue between aspirations and sedimented traditions (2013, 195). Mossa's account illustrates that it precisely through the lens of their aspirations for future life at home that the free white Tuareg informants live their contemporary life in Niamey.

The term *niameize* is taken from the Zarma language to refer to people living in Niamey. In ordinary languages or everyday usages, some Hausa and Zarma researchers with whom I shared time over lunch, dinner, and coffee, tended to use the term *niameize* in order to interpret the connectedness of people residing in Niamey with the world beyond, through TV, musical education, life style. Refugee informants used the notion as a derogatory term to pejoratively label other residents living in Niamey as people cut off from their social and cultural

25 Selected from conversations on 13/01/2013 in Niamey.

roots. Mossa viewed free white Tuareg, who tended to resemble the Hausa and Zarma through socializing with these at *fada*, and listening to *mali yaro* music, as people who have become *niameized*. For Mossa, doing so implies that they have no longer any hope or desire to return back home one day. Similar perspectives informed ways in which the Bellah-Iklan informants discussed their intra-group relations in Abala.

7.2 Staying *noirs* in Abala

In what follows, I examine Assalim's, Inawélène's, and Ahiyou's interpretations of themselves as being part of Bellah-Iklan who focused on their history in the context of exile in Abala. My analysis will center on social significance of male Bellah-Iklan social gatherings and their choice to not listening to *al-guitara* music of free white Tuareg and their desire to return and change the political balance between the free white Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan in the area of Menaka. I argue that these social practices did not only signify the social difference between the Bellah-Iklan and others, such as Fulani, free-born Tuareg, and Songhay, in the refugee camp. They also generated a line of social difference between the Bellah-Iklan, who held their history, and others.

7.2.1 "This hangar is where we *noirs* should come"

On Sunday September 14, 2014, I was invited to stay overnight at Inawélène's place. We stayed in the first quartier where his first wife and her children lived. After breakfast, we started to walk toward Ahiyou's place, exchanging greetings with neighbors. One was Mohamed, a son of Ahiyou, who lived with his wife close to his father. After exchanging greetings with Mohamed I asked him whether he was to join us at his father's place. Mohamed said: "No I am not coming." When we continued on our way from Mohamed, Inawélène stated:

> You see Souleymane, all *noirs* are not *noirs* in this camp. Some people are *noirs* by their skin color, but all they do is red [read: free white Tuareg]. This hangar is where we *noirs* should come (Inawélène pointing his index finger to Ahiyou's hangar from few meters away). Since you came here in 2012, you saw me, *le vieux* [read: Ahiyou], Assalim, and many others going to the hangar every day. At that time, we met up at the hangar near the office of ACTED. After HCR [read UNHCR] had destroyed this hangar, and that *le vieux* fell sick in between we decided to meet up at his place to discuss things for the *noirs*. It is like *Tessayt n-azawagh* [assessing the history of Awazagh] we had in Menaka. People you see there every day are the *noirs*. They hold our history. They did not abandon it for any reason, like others did. People like Mohamed, Ousmane, they are not *noirs* [black]. Not all. They are red instead. Look at

> Ousmane for example. He worked for Aroudeni, the mayor of Anderboukane who is [red]. Mohamed also supports Aroudeni to the detriment of the *noirs* [black people] including his own father. Do you understand this?[26]

Inawélène's interpretation of Mohamed's refusal to join us reveals the social significances. The account first points to the hangar as a "setting of performance" of men' memberships in the group. Goffman defines a setting of performance as a setting that stays put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place (Goffman 1959, 33). For Inawélène, the hangar is such a situated geographic and social context where the male Bellah-Iklan had to go in order to prove and deserve their memberships of the group like Assalim, Ahiyou, and many others.

Inawélène's account also shows the social importance of the hangar. The topics focused on Bellah-Iklan history and, through recounting this, participants reconstructed the history of the desert in northern Mali (cf. chapters 5 and 6). According to the account above, that is what rendered the hangar a continuum of *Tessayt n-azawagh,* the earlier Bellah political propaganda program broadcast on *radio Adrar* in Menaka prior to their forceful migration. It is also why Inawélène interpreted attending social gatherings, which became associated with blackness[27] due to major themes of the discussions, as expressive of how the participants held their history in exile. To him, the particular focus on the reconstruction of Bellah-Iklan history set those who took part in the discussions apart from those who did not. In later conversations, Inawélène and Assalim spoke very critically of those who, instead of joining the discussions, ran small jobs made available by humanitarian organizations. Both informants treated those who did not join the hangar group as traitors, which, by implication, meant people who denied their history and identity for whatever material interest. Inawélène used the term "*imiwila*" or "*imarhan in tissatenasen*" (see above) who only care about their own material interest to feed their stomachs.

Inawélène and Assalim both worked sometimes as assistants and translators for healthcare programs run by NGOs in 2012 and 2013. Their main critique was that the Bellah-Iklan men could organize themselves in a way that each of them could get a chance to work at least once or twice a week. This could only be done if they all met up under the hangar and decided who could work each day according to the jobs available. From my own observations this happened sometimes. What needs to be understood is that Assalim and Inawélène's ideas of sharing job opportunities were closely informed by their aspirations for inter-Bellah-Iklan

26 From conversations on 14/09/2014 in Abala.

27 I even also observed several times that many Hausa, Songhay, and Fulani left the hangar because they found the topics monotonous in always focusing on the relationships between the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg.

solidarity, which they considered to be a fundamental prerequisite for the success of their political project: the creation and consolidation of the *peuple noir*.

This is why Assalim and Inawélène criticized other male Bellah-Iklan, who sought to work every day without leaving any space for others to gain some income in the refugee camp. One example of this was the chief of the third quartier. Inawélène and Assalim criticized him because, as the chief of the quartier, he was often asked by NGOs to suggest names for certain tasks. They argued that whenever NGOs workers asked him for workers, he immediately chose himself or rather his son. For Inawélène and Assalim, since the son of the chief of the quartier was not married, it meant that he still lived with his father, so that the family would have a double income. This reveals the hangar not only as a space for talking and criticizing others, but also as a space where news and opportunities for temporary jobs were spread and offered. For the Bellah-Iklan gathered under the hangar, their counterparts, who did not join like the chief of the third quartier, remained Tuareg by traits of characters. The former depicted the Tuareg as people who do not show any solidarity toward other Tuareg. To substantiate this claim, Assalim often stressed that in Menaka, two Tuareg siblings could both eat in the presence of the other without inviting him or her to share the meal. For this reason, some Bellah-Iklan were considered Tuareg because of their practices of not sharing with other *noirs*. Such interpretations further complicated our understanding of the Bellah-Iklan and free Tuareg as two distinctive sets of racial categories (cf. chapter 6). For instance, Inawélène argued that people like Mohamed and Ousmane could no longer be considered as *noirs*. In Inawélène's view, what made Mohamed and Ousmane non-*noirs* (black) was their refusal to join the conversations under the hangar, and their support to the free white Tuareg mayor of Anderboukane, the late Aroudeni. In his perspective, working for the mayor Aroudeni implicitly implied working against Ahiyou and the *peuple noir*.[28]

What one could draw from Inawélène's account in this regard is that being red (*shaggaran*) or *noir* (*Amikwal* or *Takawalt*) should not be understood as determined by skin color only. Rather, it is also a result from what one does in everyday life. Social practices, such as Mohamed and Ousmane's support to Aroudeni, brought some informants to doubt their memberships of the Bellah-Iklan though they were in exile in Abala too. The argument that rendered Mohamed and Ousmane red (*shaggaran*) reveals how the skin color and specific social conducts come together in the formation and de-formation of racial categories. Since, to stay Bellah-Iklan of the *peuple noir* in Abala was closely connected to the performative capacity of certain social conducts, the discussions also suggested that only successful Bellah-Iklan could call themselves *noirs* (blacks). Moreover, Inawélène also considered the *imiwila* as those afraid of being identified as people against the

28 Inawélène's critic is that, for example, though Ousmane is the son in law of Ahiyou Intagaout, he has accepted Aroudeni's offer to appoint him general secretary of the commune (municipality) of Anderboukane for years.

free-born Tuareg once they returned to Mali. Therefore, for this reason, they did not dare to take part in the discussions criticizing these.

7.2.2 "We *noirs* only listen to music of history, not to Satan music"

Assalim, Inawélène, and Ahiyou defined their relationship to the history of the Bellah-Iklan through listening to the music of history and not that of Satan.[29] What they referred to as music of history in Abala is characteristically a guitar musical genre performed by a group founded by Assalim in Mali. The group is called *atarekh* (*histoire*). Its songs mainly deal with calls for inter-Bellah-Iklan unity. During my stays in 2012/2013 and 2014 in Abala, comments typically prompted ring tones of Inawélène, Assalim, or participants' mobile phones. These comments often began with the exclamation: *allahu akbar* (God is Great)! In answering my question why he preferred these songs by Assalim's group, to others sung by free white Tuareg's *al-guitara* performed by the *Kel-Tinariwen* group, Inawélène once stated that:

> What needs to be clarified to you is that our music sings our history. It tells other peoples that we are owners of the desert. It also tells us that we *noirs* should be united for our future. If we don't unite ourselves, it is clear that we will disappear forever […]. So, if we don't listen a music that tells us things like these, why will we listen to Satan music? Even though they are both guitars. The *Tinariwen* people sing hatred songs. They want violence. They want to destroy everything. We don't do this. Our music never invites people to do violence, to take up Kalashnikovs for killing other peoples […]. We never do this. We are peaceful people.[30]

Inawélène's description stresses the constitutive power of the lyrics. He argued that participants to the hangar conversations identified themselves with this music of history because its content centers attention on the Bellah-Iklan and calls for the necessity of their union. The account therefore reflects on listening to the content as specific social practices through which the Bellah-Iklan men constitute themselves as *noirs*.

The account establishes a contrast between the music of history and that of Satan. What is taken here as Satan music refers to the *al-guitara* musical genre of the free-born Tuareg. To Inawélène that refers to violence, hatred, and armed conflict (cf. Klute 2013; Lecocq 2002). He interpreted the Satan as all that is opposed to God's will, maintaining that God, the Almighty, is peaceful, and therefore does not like and support violence, which always destroys life. Inawélène tended

29 They put "We *noirs* only listen to music of history, not to Satan music" in french sometimes by saying: "la musique de l'histoire et la musique du Satan".

30 Selected from conversations on 13/09/2014 in Abala.

to conceive of the Bellah-Iklan as people who do things that God, the Almighty, likes. By depicting the Bellah-Iklan as peaceful people, whose musical culture does not imply calls for hatred, violence, and armed conflicts, he reflexively considered the Bellah-Iklan as people of the God in contrast with those of Satan. Inawélène's comments enrich our knowledge about the diversity of Tuareg guitar musical culture. He established contrasts between the free-born Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan musical cultures. By showing that there also exists a Bellah-Iklan guitar style that competes with that of the former masters, Inawélène's comments complement the extensive literature that focuses on free white Tuareg musical culture (Brandes 1989; Klute 2013; Lecocq 2010).

7.2.3 "We stay here for our history"

Ahiyou, and several other Bellah-Iklan men, valued staying in the refugee camp whereas they could have gone somewhere to live in better conditions. Their statements reveal the crucial significance the social location of Abala has come to acquire in Bellah-Iklan social life. For example, Ahiyou once argued that:

> When one looks closely at the social composition of the camp population, I can only see my relatives. They are about 80% of the camp population. I prefer to suffer with them, even though my health condition is now degraded enough due to these winds, nutritional problems […]. But, still I will continue to stay here. I prefer this suffering here. It is our history that tied us with each other. Ah yes, it is for our history that I stay here.[31]

Ahiyou's statement illustrates that Abala has become a social site through which several Bellah-Iklan men could define and express their relationships to their history. Ahiyou assessed his own stay in Abala as a manifestation of commitment to Bellah-Iklan communal history. To understand Ahiyou's statement further, we need to situate it within its specific context. It was particularly cold in Abala during the night from Saturday, 29 to Sunday, 30 December 2012, the temperature dropping to 6°C between 2 and 6 am. At that time, the refugees in Abala had not begun to build brick houses, still living in plastic tents torn by the wind. Many parents got up at night due to children crying. When I arrived in the refugee settlement I went to greet and share morning tea with Ahiyou around 7.30 am. Soon after, Inawélène arrived. Ahiyou wore a black pullover under his grey *boubou*. His disturbing state of health was revealed by recurrent coughs that punctuated the few sentences he pronounced. Inawélène and I noticed that these recurrent coughs affected Ahiyou's persuasive voice and capacity to dominate the discussions. After a while, Inawélène said: "You see Souleymane, *le vieux* is sick today. But even if you tell him now to go to Niamey or Bamako, he will refuse." Reacting to Inawélene's

31 Selected from conversations with Ahiyou and Inawélène and few other men on 09/01/2013 in Abala.

statement, Ahiyou stressed that "despite I have my sons in Bamako or in Niamey, where I could go, I prefer to stay here to show my solidarity towards the others." In many respects, this statement further substantiates Ahiyou's account above. Both arguments illustrate that, to him, staying in Abala expressed his solidarity toward other Bellah-Iklan, who did not have means to go anywhere else.

Mohamed Intabagaout, a former headmaster of the public primary school in Menaka, once stated that:

> I have a monthly salary. But in spite of that, I still stayed in the refugee camp because of the others. We are all relatives we are of the black people. I cannot go somewhere else to have a better life whereas the others are suffering. We will all suffer together here.[32]

Both Ahiyou and Mohamed Intabagaout attempt to define their relationships to Bellah-Iklan history through staying in Abala, though they had opportunities and means to go somewhere else, implied reflexively their depictions of those Bellah-Iklan who chose other destinations (such as Bamako and Niamey) as people who have abandoned their history. For both informants fleeing to Bamako was somewhat different from fleeing to Abala due to conditions evoked earlier in chapter 4.

7.2.4 "When we return back home, nothing will be like before"

To Inawélène, Assalim, and Ahiyou, to engage Bellah-Iklan history in everyday life were preparations for their return to Menaka. Inawélène put this in more explicit terms as follows:

> In all cases, what I can tell is that when we return this time, nothing will be like before. We will never fight against each other again. You know before we came here some of us considered themselves Tuareg. They supported ADEMA. But now we came here and they now saw they are not Tuareg. The Tuareg are not here. They are those who forced us to leave our home. The lesson these people who supported ADEMA learned from being here is that we are the *noirs* but not the Tuareg. That we should not fight against each other anymore. *Inchallah*, the UMADD will come to power in Menaka for the better of the *noirs*. This was what Aghamad had told us.[33]

This account shows that the desire to return and to change the balance of political power between the free-born Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan was the interpretative framework of the everyday action of male Bellah-Iklan. It also demonstrates that

32 Selected from conversations with Inawélène, Assalim, and other men under the hangar in Abala on 09/01/2013. What is peculiar about the school headmaster is that he was politically supportive of the free-born before his exile. But now he shares the views of Inawélène and Assalim against the free-born Tuareg in Menaka.

33 Selected from conversations on 18/12/2012 in Abala.

the Bellah-Iklan informants continued their earlier struggles against the free white Tuareg in Abala. To Inawélène their stay in Abala seemed to have a significant role in this because it enabled to reshape several Bellah-Iklan notions of themselves as *noirs* and not members of their initial free-born Tuareg clan structures. For him, such changes already manifested themselves through ways in which those Bellah-Iklan, who supported ADEMA, that is associated (at least in the refugee camp in Abala) with the free white Tuareg in Menaka, now decided to join other *noirs*. Inawélène argued that the refugee camp offered a greater opportunity for Bellah-Iklan living in Menaka, in the village of Anderboukane who were freed from their masters and those who still lived in bush with their masters at the time of their forceful migration to meet up, to get know each other, and organize themselves politically before their return home. In his view, these changes will ultimately imply significant reconfigurations of the balance of political power in Menaka. The change will result in significant support that UMADD will gain. This significant support will, in turn, allow the Bellah-Iklan to gain political control over the three northern regions of Mali in the near future. Yet, the longing for a new balance of political power, to which the male Bellah-Iklan aspired to in Abala, indicates the future.

7.3 How the two perspectives relate to each other?

The previous two sections have consisted of examinations of various areas of social practices through which urban free-born Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan in Abala sought to maintain and express their distinctive social identity as Tuareg in Niamey and *noirs* in Abala respectively. I have shown that authentic Tuareg identity (*Kel Alassal*) is revealed through everyday visits, youth gatherings, language, and ideal Tuareg dress pattern, as well as choices of marital partners and the desire to return to live in an exclusively Tuareg country. In contrast to the free white Tuareg in Niamey, informants associated the sword with "some negative connotations" in Abala. From their perspective, the sword is a material object for non-Muslim people due to its form that is similar to the cross of Jesus Christ. Assalim and Inawélène evoked the sword while referring to the free white Tuareg historical connection to "Christian culture." Also, like the sword, while the Tamasheq language was an important aspect of the ways in which my town informants labored to distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups in Niamey, the Bellah-Iklan informants in Abala did not take it as markers of collective identity and difference. They spoke three main and different languages and the Tamasheq did not have any particular importance for them. What mattered to them was the everyday participation to male conversations, listening to the music of history, and the specific aspirations for a better Bellah-Iklan political future in northern Mali.

The social significances both groups of informants gave to domains of their social life examined throughout this chapter set the free white Tuareg, who stayed

"Tuareg" in Niamey, and the Bellah-Iklan, who stayed *noirs* in Abala, apart from those who did not. I argued that while these areas of social practices could consolidate the memberships of either group for some, which might not be the case for others. This revealed that the Tuareg and the Bellah-Iklan did not constitute two fixed sets of racial categories (chapter 6). Mossa Ag Attaher, Mohamed Ag Irgimit, Alhabib Ag Sidi, and Ibrahim referred to other free-born Tuareg as those who became Zarma and Hausa due to fact that they did not visit fellow free-born Tuareg, wear the turban, the *jalabia ensemble*, listen to *Kel Tinariwen*'s songs. Similarly in Abala, Inawélène, and Assalim ironically called Ahiyou's son Mohamed and his in-law Ousmane "the red" (read: free white Tuareg). This was due partly to their support to the free-born Tuareg mayor of Anderboukane. The social processes explored have also in common the fact that the Bellah-Iklan and the free-born Tuareg informants did not conceive culture or history as a set of past customs, habits, heritage, and traditions only. Rather, their arguments illustrate that their representations of their past histories or cultures were also aspirations for specific future they longed for.

Both groups envision their future in northern Mali, but their political projects stand against one another. The future of the Bellah-Iklan is conceptualized in the shadow of Aghamad's prophecies referred to in chapter 4. According to Aghamad, the Bellah-Iklan, who are the "true inhabitants of the desert" in northern Mali, will return and live in peace and prosperity. But their return, peace, and prosperity are closely connected to the future of their rival free white Tuareg. As the informants recalled it, Aghamad has insisted that the free white Tuareg will be expelled from northern Mali. Therefore the Bellah-Iklan will return and live in peace and prosperity. These aspirations clash with the free white Tuareg project for the future. They envisaged a future "Tuareg country" in northern Mali. Their claims did not clearly define what would be the relationship between the "Tuareg country" and other social groups living in the north. But, the claims implicitly assume that the withdrawal of the Malian state will result in the withdrawal of its allied Bellah-Iklan and Songhay as well.[34] Therefore, the "Tuareg country" will take place in the absence of the other social groups living in northern Mali.

Such selective ways in which groups of informants assert and protect their differences from the others in exile, in preparation of the future, correspond to processes of Hutu refugee's purification in the refugee camp of Mishamo in rural Tanzania. Inspired by Douglas's classical work: *Purity and in Danger* (Douglas 1966), Malkki wrote:

> Curiosity, the status of "refugee," which ordinarily acts to make interstitial or liminal—and hence polluting […] in the national order of things, had here been transformed through a curious social alchemy into a state of purity.

34 As discussed in chapter 5, the free white Tuareg informants did not conceptualize the state, the Bellah-Iklan, and the Songhay as distinct. To them, all of these three stand against the free white Tuareg.

> While they were by definition, as refugees, boundary crossers […], this particular crossing was actually the beginning of categorical purification in the refugees' own eyes. (Malkki 1995b, 230f.)

Transferring Malkki's discussion from its original ethnographic context to the present one is helpful because it enables us to grasp the social and political implications of the collectivities at once. For example, the free white Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan tend to break with any social mixture in exile. They reconstructed collectivities that are purely composed of people according to specific physical and moral characteristics and social practices. For the Bellah-Iklan in Abala their redefinition as "a people" implies breaking with any mixture free white Tuareg. Thus, the construction of the *peuple noir* goes hand in hand with purification of the Bellah-Iklan identity. As for the free white Tuareg in Niamey, the argument that the Bellah-Iklan are not Tuareg, according to moral and physical characteristics, entails avoidance of mixture with non-Tuareg groups. For both groups of informants, these processes began in Niamey and Abala but will be effective under specific political orders in Mali.

7.4 Concluding remark

This chapter began with an argument of the French anthropologist André Bourgeot, who depicted Tuareg refugees in the Maghreb as people who are disconnected from their social and cultural roots linked to the territory and lineages left behind them northern Mali and Niger (Bourgeot 1990). His understanding interconnected and fixed culture, social identity, and territory in a rigid fashion. Therefore, the social fact of exile that implies the relocation outside the ordinary sites of living consequently leads to the collapse of culture and identity. In contrast to this argument, I have attempted to show what has become idioms of constructions and expressions of Tuareg identity and *noirs* for the Bellah-Iklan under social conditions of exile in Niger. Drawing on Ferguson's notion of *cultural style,* which refers to practices that signify differences between social categories (Ferguson 1999, 95), I took the notion of *adinat wi ataf nen atarekh* (those who did hold the culture, history, or tradition) as a key metaphor to trace what the free white Tuareg did in order to stay "authentic Tuareg" (*Kel Alassal*) in Niamey. They did so through visits they paid to fellow free-born Tuareg, choice of marital partner, their Tamasheq dialects, spoken in northern Mali, listening to *al-guitara* culture, wearing the *jalabia ensemble,* and their desire to return and live one day in their country (*akal*). According to their interpretations, these domains of social practices have become criteria that could do and undo membership of the Tuareg group. The interpretations also showed that in contrast to most studies that traced how urban refugees sought to hide their identity from their host communities in Dar Es Salam, Tanzania (Malkki 1989; Sommers 2001), the informants labored to keep their difference visible from ethnic residents in urban Niamey.

As for the Bellah-Iklan, I examined male social practices of meeting under the hangar between 2012 and 2014, their refusal to listen to music by free-born Tuareg *Kel Tinariwen*, solidarity toward Bellah-Iklan, and the desire to return and rule once back home through which Ahiyou, Assalim, and Inawélène reconstructed themselves as "a people" who kept their history under social conditions of exile. Their interpretations of these domains of social practices revealed that the refugee camp becomes an historical location and provides material conditions that mediate Ahiyou, Assalim, and Inawélène's relationships to Bellah-Iklan history and identity.

8. Conclusion—a "critical event"

In *Critical Events*: *an Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*, Veena Das introduces the notion of "critical events" to point to the extent to which the riots during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1946–1947 and the Bhopal tragedy in 1984 reshaped Indian societies (Das 1995). Her understanding of what renders an event "critical" follows François Furet's conceptualization of the French Revolution as an event *par* excellence (Furet 1978). According to Furet, the revolution instituted a new modality of historical actions that was not inscribed in the inventory of that situation (Das 1995, 5). Following Furet, Das regards the events in India as having marked the onset of new modes of actions that redefined traditional categories such as the codes of purity and honour, the meaning of martyrdom, and that of a heroic life. A variety of "political" entities, such as caste groups, religious communities, women's groups, and the nation as a whole acquired new forms of significance (1995, 5f.). For example, speaking about the Sikhs' discourse in the Punjab that came to yield consequent political influence in the India nation-state, Das wrote

> This discourse was part of the political language being evolved by the militant movement, of which the purpose was to create a politically active group and forge effective unity among the Sikhs. Thus a "we" group was being created out of a heterogeneous community to function as an effective political agency within the modern state structures in India. (Das 1995, 118)

Das also argues that this militant discourse represented a continuation of a series of historical efforts by Sikhs to preserve their identity. It was thus for the purpose of community formation that the Sikh militants established contemporaneity between non-contemporaneous events (Das 1995, 121). By establishing relationships between certain key events in the Sikhs' history, the militants' political language functions more to *produce* a particular reality than to *represent* it (1995, 121). In this sense, Das insists that Sikh identity cannot be treated as possessing an unchanging essence. Rather, it is an identity being produced anew in every period (1995, 121f.). To what extent can the exile of free-born Tuareg and Bellah-Iklan in Niger be read as critical events? And if so, to what development did this critical event give rise? Because their exile in Niger has not ended yet, we cannot grasp its full implications at this stage. Still, Das's perspective is useful for reflecting on the implications of the process of constructing collectivity in Niamey and Abala that I have illuminated throughout this dissertation.

The perspective of the study has been informed by scholarship that analyses how concrete social conditions may give rise to a sense of community among people of heterogeneous social background (Hansen 1997; Malkki 1990; Malkki 1995b; Samaddar 1999; Sommers 2001; Willems 2003). My analysis has focused on different "elements" or criteria for claiming a particular community identity in response

to their predicaments of exile. Chapter 4 started with the frequent observation of male refugees that the conditions of exile had reduced them to "nothings" or socially useless persons (*adinat n bànan* or *aytedim*). Refugees in Niamey used this term *adinat n bànan* (or *aytedim*) to express dismay at their loss of family authority, bemoaning that they were no longer able to respond to the expectations placed on them in their roles of fathers and husbands. With this, a central feature of the ideal of adult masculinity was no longer in place, and family members no longer paid them due respect and heeded their directives. Along similar lines, my Bellah-Iklan informants in Abala argued that the "arrogant attitudes" of humanitarian workers toward the refugees made them feel like children again. By describing their life in the refugee camp as a situation of social childhood, Bellah-Iklan men, too, centered on their experience of being degraded in their roles as men and family fathers. My informants identified the regulations imposed by the UNHCR in the refugee camp in Abala as the main motor of this degradation. Their feelings that the regulations subverted conventional gender hierarchies within the family and increased their own vulnerability culminated in the claim that, under these conditions of exile, "women become men and men become women."

The chapter, therefore, demonstrated that both groups of exiles took their experiences of degradation and humiliation as a reference point to project themselves as communities with shared past and a joint future. My informants' reliance on prophecies, proverbs––and of memories of instances of their marginalization within the Malian nation-state allowed them to recognize their new situation in exile as a "familiar" one (see the interpretation of Marris 1974). These explanations also enabled them to frame their situation as a collective experience, that is, as an experience that concerned them *as a community*.

The ways in which my informants constructed their group identities in exile differed significantly from how they are commonly portrayed in the scholarly literature. Both groups of informants were intent on silencing intra-group cleavages stemming from their original clans and federations and were adamant in their assertion that former clan distinctions no longer mattered to them. As chapter 5 detailed, my informants took their historical position *vis-à-vis* the Malian state since 1960 as another reference point to frame themselves as communities with a shared past and future. Interlocutors from both groups of refugees recalled their personal encounters with the state over the past decades in northern Mali to reconstruct their group identity in oppositional terms, that is, as defined by a double opposition: against the Malian state and against each other. Chapter 6 has shown that both groups of refugees use racial stereotyping to define their respective communities in moral, social, and physiognomic terms.

Chapter 7 departed from the focus on narratives of chapters 4, 5, and 6 and looked at other social practices of community constructions and their social significance. The chapter demonstrates the social significance my informants attribute to their daily mutual visits and socializing activities, and also to dress, language and choice of *al-guitara* music. In Niamey, the main rationale for these

preferences and practices was that they instilled and reinforced the refugees' desire to return and live in their country (*akal*). In Abala, informal gatherings and information exchange "under the hangar" created a social space for Bellah-Iklan men in which to reflect on their decisions to stay in the refugee camp and a place where they all could listen to, and express their preference for, songs sung by Bellah-Iklan's musical group called *ataregh* (*histoire*). All these practices and expressions of sociality allowed refugees to define and claim group membership in Niamey and Abala. In contrast to the preceding chapters, which illustrated how refugees imagine and construct the group to which they belong as a homogenous community, this chapter discussed idioms that point to cleavages within each group. The cleavages are between those who hold to their history and those who do not. This demonstrates that the endeavor of refugees to reconstruct inclusive communities in Niamey and Abala has remained partly incomplete because they have turned out to be not totally inclusive. By seeking to reconstruct their groups' identities in new ways, the refugees have ended up creating new lines of intra-group cleavages and exclusions, thus making the initial intention of the collectivity formations difficult to achieve.

Another key finding of the study has been that, as part of their effort to reconstruct themselves as communities in exile, members of both groups of refugees redefined the inferior social status they held in society "back home" in Mali. Reviewing the long tradition of scholarship on Tuareg social organization and their social and political history in northern Mali, I pointed out that they tended to focus on and adopt the perspective of free-born and noble Tuareg and, among them, on politically dominant groups. These authors emphasize significant regional differences between the free born, and trace these differences to their distinct genealogies and histories of settlement in the Sahara desert region that currently forms part of Mali. My study complements the perspective of these authors by drawing on how the free-born white Tuareg in Niamey dismissed the relevance of these regional cleavages and the former social status hierarchy between free born of inferior social status and noble free-born Tuareg clans in exile. Similar to the Sikhs who, according to Das, invoked a "we" group which was created out of a heterogeneous population, free-born refugees of different social background imagined themselves as a homogenous group in Niamey. They did so by constructing arguments about their past experiences that fused them together into one community and distinguished them from others living in northern Mali. Another mode of invoking a "we" group was to stress their common moral characteristics. Furthermore, my study complements the existing scholarship on Tuareg social organization and their social and political history in northern Mali by showing how the Bellah-Iklan refugees also dismissed the relevance of inter-Bellah cleavages and redefined the former social status hierarchy between themselves and their free-born "masters." They did so by also articulating claims about their past experiences that fused them together into one community and distinguished them from others living in northern Mali.

Rather than searching for the truth-value of their historical accounts (Eppel 2009), I followed Cole's and Olivier de Sardan's attention to the form of narrating the past (Cole 2003; Olivier de Sardan 1976). This allowed me to understand that the narratives of both groups were informed by the desire to disregard their inferior social background and to stress, instead, commonality and sharing among the members of each group. Here I followed the argument by Foucault that power cannot be monopolized by those in power, but that subordinated groups can also appropriate it to question the definitional power of the dominant groups (Foucault 1980, 40). I argued that the reliance on stereotyping discourses allowed refugees of inferior social status to challenge the hierarchy between themselves and the more dominant groups. The discussions of the refugees' steorotyping or labeling discourses also provided insights into scholarly debates on ethnicity discourses and as boundary drawing, by showing the key relevance of steorotyping or labeling in these discursive practices. In contrast to studies that conceive of identity formations mainly as a matter of discourse on exclusion and inclusion, the refugees' arguments discussed in chapter 6 illustrated that "othering" practices entail the positing not only of social difference (e.g. Barth 1969; Epple 2014; Geschiere 2009; Kopytoff 1987; Lentz 2006; Lentz 2013; Schlee 2002; Schlee 2008), but of moral hierarchies (Brenner 1993; Malkki 1989; Tambiah 1985).

Ultimately, these ways in which the refugees re-ordered the Tuareg society present new challenges to nation-state formation in Mali. Scholars who discuss the relations between the Tuareg and the central state since colonial times argue that the Malian nation-state has failed to become an inclusive political community and has been repeatedly challenged by Tuareg secessionists' movements. These scholars have adopted the perspective of the free-born white Tuareg and state relationship, ignoring the resentment of the Bellah-Iklan towards the state and also failing to point out that their perspective on free-born Tuareg was eclectic and partial. Against this portrayal, my study has made two related arguments: Firstly, that these scholarly accounts have always been partial and, secondly, that as a result of more than five decades of persecution, expulsion, and exile, and particularly in response to the recent upheaval in northern Mali, the Bellah-Iklan now consider themselves (and are considered by free-born Tuareg) as a distinct "ethnic" group. They may speak *Tamasheq* but this does not make them belong to the Tuareg community as is imagined by free-born Tuareg in exile. In line with this view, my Bellah-Iklan informants in Abala stressed their first-comer status in their area of origin, and that this status historically endowed them with primary access rights to land. The book has also shown that both groups of informants expressed the membership of their community and difference from each other through specific social practices in everyday life in Niger. By thus showing that the refugees' constructions of community in Niamey and Abala were made up of different criteria, my study conveys a much more complex picture of identity formations and discourses than that of other authors (who focused only on white Tuareg and took their claims and arguments and points of view at face value).

Retracing the multi-dimensional nature of the identity claims and community formations at work in the Tuareg diaspora in Niger, the study has shed light on various and complex tensions that exist between the two different segments of Tuareg society, all of whom nourish their own grievances against each other and against the Malian state. In my view, these claims are not only the result of recent events in northern Mali but have also further complicated the inter-social status groups conflicts since the colonial era. In 2012, the conflicts first started with violent confrontations between the Tuareg secessionist movement (MNLA) and the Malian army, and has subsequently expanded into a conflict that involves a range of actors and organizations, among them, notably, the militant Islamist groups the Mujao, AQMI, Ansar-Eddine as well as the *secularist-minded* free-born white Tuareg military structures, that are the CMA created by the noble Tuareg in Kidal, and the GATIA created by the vassal social status groups in Menaka and Kidal. Any peace-building effort must take into account this complexity; to settle local tensions one needs to consider the grievances different groups hold against each other and also *vis-à-vis* the central state in Bamako. The refugees' comments and claims made it abundantly clear that the central state lacks legitimacy in their eyes.

Both groups of informants tended to present their collectivity as an alternative framework for political belonging. The free-born white Tuareg in Niamey envisioned a future independent Tuareg nation as one that granted its people security, prosperity, and justice, all of which (the informants stressed in Niamey) the Malian state had failed to provide since the early days of independence. As for the Bellah-Iklan, they envisaged their return to a situation where free-born white Tuareg would be absent, where social and political relations would be shaped by justice and where the Bellah-Iklan, as the numerical majority, would take over political control in Menaka. Peace-building efforts need to take into consideration these discrepant, and partly diametrically opposed visions and aspirations. Such a development, to which the multi-dimensional nature of the identity claims and community formations at work in the Tuareg diaspora in Niger has given rise, provides some answer to my initial question, to wit: can the exile of the two different groups of "Tuareg" refugees from Mali be considered a "critical event"? In addition, the multi-dimensional nature of the identity claims and community formations at work in the Tuareg diaspora in Niger also allows for conceptualizing exile not just as particular social contexts and fragments of time disconnected from the refugees' antecedents and the future (Agier 2008; Agier 2011; Bourgeot 1990), but as a social context in which the refugee actors live simultaneously across spaces: their ordinary sites of living before exile, their current social and political contexts in exile, and to where they return after exile.

List of Acronyms

ADEMA	Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali
ACTED	Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement
ANSAR EDDINE	Islamist faction created by Iyad Ag Ghaly
AQMI	Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique
ARLA	Armée Révolutionaire pour la Libération de l'Azawad
ATT	Amadou Toumani Touré
CFA	Communauté Financière d'Afrique
CMA	Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad
CNE	Comité National d'Éligibilité
DEF	Diplôme d'Études Approfondies
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMIA	École Militaire Interarmes
FIAA	Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad
FNLA	Front National de Libération de l'Azawad
FPLA	Front Populaire pour la Libération de l'Azawad
GATIA	Groupe autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés
GSPC	Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat
IBK	Ibrahim Boubacar Keita
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IRD	Institut de Recherche pour le Développement
LASDEL	Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local
MFUA	Mouvements et Fronts Unifiés de l'Azawad
MNLA	Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad
MPA	Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad
MPGK	Mouvement Patriotique Ganda Koy
MPLA	Mouvement Populaire pour la Libération de l'Azawad
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OCRS	Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes
PSP	Parti Soudanais Progressiste
RPM	Rassemblement pour le Mali
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
UDPM	Union Démocratique du Peuple Malien
UMADD	Union Malienne pour la Démocratie et le Développement
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US-RDA	Union Soudanaise—Rassemblement Démocratique Africain

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The Truth about the Desert explores the living conditions under which Tuareg refugees from northern Mali rebuild their lives in the Nigerien diaspora and how these conditions affect their self-understandings and cultural practices, established status hierarchies, and religious identity formation. The book counterbalances an earlier scholarly preoccupation with Tuareg nobility by zoning in on two inferior social status groups, the Bellah-Iklan and free-born vassals, which have been neglected in conventional accounts of Tuareg society. By offering a multi-layered analysis of social status and identity formation in the diaspora, it pleads for a more dynamic understanding of Tuareg socio-political hierarchies. Analyzing in detail how both status groups rely on moralizing labels and racial stereotyping to reformulate their own social and ethnic identity, the study highlights refugees' aspirations and capacities to remake their imaginary and material worlds in the face of adverse and often deeply humiliating living conditions. The book provides vital insights for refugee studies and for scholarly debates on ethnicity, social identity formation, and memory politics.

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