Chapter Two

Deserted: Travails of the Tuareg

The Tuareg are a nomadic Berber tribe—indigenous people of the North African Sahara. They first settled across the Sahara Desert around 3000 B.C. The name “Berber” derives from the Roman word for “barabarian.” The Tuareg prefer to call themselves “Imazhighen,” which means “free people.” They began adapting to Arabic culture through the exposure to the Arab invaders with the advent of Islam around the seventh century A.D. The Tuareg share Islam with the Arabs, but they are not descendents of Arabs. The Tuareg speak Arabic, however, French is widely spoken by them because many of their North African countries were French colonies. The Arabic influence on the Tuareg extends to their language (Tamasheq). Today, the Tuareg live in parts of Niger, Algeria, Libya, Mali, and the Western Desert of Morocco.

In the past, the Tuareg served as caravan guides and engaged in trade across the Sahara. Drought and the political and religious strife led some of the Tuareg to settle in the mountains. Livestock and trade are important to their economy. Unlike women in Arabia and other Berber women, Tuareg women have high status socially and politically. Socially, the Tuareg are matrilineal and matrifocal society. Many women can read and write while men focus on herding the livestock. In contrast to many Islamic cultures around the globe, Tuareg women are not required to wear a veil (hijab). However, it is shameful for the Tuareg men to remove the veil even when they are inside their tents. The Tuareg men’s veil is the self-definition of one’s stage of puberty, therefore, man’s veiling is an indicator of the veiled man’s detachment from women. The Tuareg are still going through much travail today. Although the
Tuareg live a relative peace in the Western Desert of Morocco, they are unstable and extremely poor in Niger, Mali, Algeria and Libya. The Tuareg is suppressed by the governments across North Africa. The Sahara is the definition of the Tuareg identity.

The Tuareg society is diasporic by nature. The Tuareg of Mali and Niger, for example, have recently migrated to Libya to find works that maintain an income for feeding their families. For the Tuareg migrants, the situation turned topsy-turvy as most of them have been exploited by the Gaddafi regime and ended up serving it as mercenaries in the 2011 Arab Uprising. Those who are not killed in the clashes have returned to Mali and Niger empty-handed and ill-reputed. The Tuareg oppose the governments that discriminated against them in the past. In Mali, some of the Tuareg fled to Libya and joined the National Movement for Liberation of the Azawad (NMLA) in order to fight for the independence of the Northern deserts of Mali. In 2012, Ansar ad-Dine terrorist group that is linked to Qaeda took control of Northern Mali. Today, refugees from Libya, Chad and Nigeria are fleeing to Niger to escape the instability and violence of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram.12

2.1 The Nature of Tuareg Nomadism

The Tuareg resist any foreign form of intrusion or enforcement. As Andy Morgan writes, “Difference and disharmony is exacerbated by their vast desert habitat and dispersed nomadic lifestyle, both of which tend to foster an allegiance to blood and tribe that is stronger than their attachment to nation or ideology, and militate against collective thought or action.”13 Nomadism is associated with freedom,

12 Boko Haram is a terrorist group based in Nigeria which announced its allegiance to ISIS in March 2015.
therefore, the Tuareg resisted Islam, the Ottomans, and the Western colonization including the French and the Italians. The nationalism of the Tuareg came as reaction to the foreign encroachment on their Sahara. Earlier, the Tuareg were intrinsically wanderers in the Sahara which was inaccessible to missionary campaigns. Yet, the Sufi hermits, like the Christian fathers in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D, were wandering dervishes who looked for solace in the remote regions of the Sahara. Such dervishes were characterized by tolerance and peaceful co-existence with the nomads of the Sahara in Nigeria, Mali, Alegria and Libya. Despite their Sufi missionary mission, they allow the Tuareg to practise their animistic beliefs. The Pre-Islamic Tuareg were pagans, as they used to worship stones and sanctify animals and trees. They did not have the monotheistic belief in one God. Abdul Raufu Mustapha describes “the eighteenth century pre-jihad climate in the Sahara:

Within this wider, Muslim-controlled world there were also, in the countryside, more radical Muslim groups doing Sufi practices. Some were part of wider tariqa (brotherhood) networks—like the Shehu ‘Uthman with his Qadiri affiliation linked to the Kunta of Timbuktu; but there were others, for example in upper Zamfara\textsuperscript{14} (near Birnin Gada), apparently without any well-known tariqa affiliation—like hermits, they had spiritual experiences which were widely spoken of. Muslim and pagan could live side by side and be on good terms, able to banter with each other. (23)

Despite the coercive powers that the Tuareg have undergone, their belief system has remained a paganic-Sufi composite owing to the tolerance of Sufis as well as the

\textsuperscript{14} Zamfara is a region in northwestern Nigeria.
beliefs in the Spirit World and the manifestation of God in all creatures. In other words, the Saharan Tuareg were circular nomads leading a simple life of wandering and not looking for anything beyond the simplicity of the Sahara life where possession of territories lack in the Tuareg’s life. The Tuareg’s formation of larger tribal solidarity and nationality was a response to the external encroachments on them. Édouard Glissant in Poetics of Relation explains the way nomadism develops from circularity to invasion:

Neither in arrowlike nomadism nor in circular nomadism are roots valid. Before it is won through conquest, what “holds” the invader is what lies ahead; moreover, one could almost say that being compelled to lead a settled way of life would constitute the real uprooting of a circular nomad [...] Generally speaking, what is meant is that arrowlike nomadism gives birth to new eras, whereas circular nomadism would be endogenous and without a future. (12-13)

Remote, isolated nomads do not develop new forms of life, rather, they horizontally as they are without any vertical movement beyond the desert space. They do not build oases, but they keep moving from one place to another in search of water and pasture. In the next chapter, we shall see how the desert is depicted as timeless and futureless due to the fact that every moment in it is the same as long as it lacks the preconditions for change or going beyond the horizon. The dervishes’ venture into the desert looks more of adventure than encroachment, Sufi saints stay in the desert till they die and people build up shrines and zawiyas where they turn to be semi-divine attractions to the nomads. Almost until the 1950s, the Tuareg had the experience of pastoralist nomads. The circularity of Tuareg nomadism lies in their preservation of their pre-
Islamic beliefs and the adaptation of the simple Islam of Sufism. Movement is more important than the settlement, however colonization threatened this nomadic syncretic attitude towards the Other of which the Tuareg animistic-Sufi composite is manifestation. Despite the multiplicity of the religious discourses in the Tuareg community (Tuareg myth, Animism and Sufism), the despotism and greed of the colonizers (Ottomans, Arabs, French, and Italians) led to the Tuareg’s ambivalence between sedentarisation and attachment to desert life. Due to the inaccessibility of the desert, the Tuareg use it as a safe haven to escape from invaders. However, the religio-historical interaction with Arabs led to intermarriages between the Tuareg and the Arabs. Some of the Tuareg claim that they are shorafa (ahl al-bayt) as they cherish their direct descent from the Prophet.

Historically and anthropologically, the Tuareg’s unity with the desert surpasses all forms of unity. Unlike the Tuareg, modern Man has a totally different view of the desert. According to David Jasper, “Modernity has failed to understand anything about the desert except as a place [that] has absorbed the mystic path into its positivisms, though, miraculously, the desert wind is again blowing in the unlikely wastes of postmodernity” (The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art and Culture 57). As nomads, the Tuareg are mystically endowed with a “supreme identity,” which develops from a certain plane of cosmic consciousness which is more a matter of experience than knowledge.

For Roger Allen, the Libyan Desert is “cruel, capricious, and uncompromising” (245). The hardships in this desert lead nomads to maintain a sort of strong relationship with animals for the sake of survival. The main themes of desert novels, especially al-Koni’s, are isolation and solitude. Earlier to the Agricultural
Revolution that ushered in gods and religion, the liturgy of Homo sapiens was animistic in the sense that the sacred was deemed immanent and not transcendent. Yuval Noah Harari manifests the radical shift from the animistic epoch of horizontal consciousness to the Agricultural Revolution, which is characterized by vertical consciousness: “Hunter-gatherers picked and pursued wild plants and animals, which could be seen as equal in status to Homo sapiens […] the first religious effect of the Agricultural Revolution was to turn plants and animals from equal members of a spiritual round table into property” (Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind 211-12). Nomadic spirituality\(^{15}\) considers the Sahara as a “cosmos of equality” among all things at the levels of feelings and awareness, a space where animals, plants, the jinn, rocks, and humans feel each other and speak to each other, and where God is immanently manifest in all these forms and beings. Thus, the Tuareg’s Sahara is a universe where animistic shamanism and Sufi dervishism intersect and peacefully coexist in order to fulfill society’s need for encountering the illness of spirit possession, for example. Nomads are compelled and impelled to go by nomadic spirituality in order to make their unbearable life of wandering bearable.

2.2 Situating the Tuareg

The Tuareg are transnational as they are scattered among five nations of the Sahara and the central Sahel. They are a pastoral, nomadic, diasporic community demographically distributed in Algeria, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and the southwest of

\(^{15}\) “The Hunter gatherers’ awareness is horizontal in the sense that it observes the sacred as immanent in everything and is nomadic in the sense that it accepts the world as it is without any search for meaning beyond immanence, whereas the Agricultural Revolution came with a much less trust in the world—an awareness that coincides with agricultural, sedentary civilization which is characterized by a search of meaning of the Self apart from the World. Nomadic consciousness works by horizontal perception while sedentary/peasant consciousness energetically works by vertical perception as it believes in the Absolute as Transcendent” (Morris Berman. Wandering God: A Study in Nomadic Spirituality 12, (State University of New York: 2000).
Libya. Their territories are Fezzan region (with Ghat town as its capital) and Ghadames in Libya, Azawad and Adgagh in the North of Mali, Air Mountains (Air Massif) whose capital is Agadez in Niger and Ahaggar in Algeria. H. T. Norris maintains that historically “Rock engravings indicate that the Tuareg or ‘People of the Veil’ had occupied central Saharan Africa by the first millennium BC” (*The Tuaregs: Their Islamic Legacy and Its Diffusion in the Sahel* xiii). Islam came to the Tuareg from Arabia through the Islamic invasion of North Africa [the Maghreb] by the Arab General Oqba ben Nafea in the seventh century A.D. Despite the dominance of Islam among them today, animism exists as an unorganized religion. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), “During recent conflicts, a mistaken assumption created an association between the nomad identity and the Muslim religion, yet nomads have only been Islamised relatively recently. Practice is carefully structured by Sufi brotherhoods (quietist and characterised by pilgrimages, visits to the graves of saints, etc)” (147). Their language is Tamasheq which is sometimes written as Tamacheq. Tuareg/Tuwariq is an Arabic name whose singular is Tariqi and means “abandoned by God.”¹⁶ The Tuareg identify themselves by the Tamasheq word Kel, which means ‘people of’ with reference to the areas they dwell. In Ahaggar, they call themselves Kel Ajjer or Kel Ahaggar “people of Ahaggar.” They also call themselves Kel Tamasheq meaning “the speakers of Tamasheq.” They also call themselves Imohag or Imazighen (plural) which mean free men. Another title they call themselves by is Kel Tagulmust “people of the veil”—a title that is connected with the cultural custom of men’s veiling.

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¹⁶ Arabs gave them the name Tuareg “Abandoned by God,” because they so long resisted conversion to Islam and Arab encroachment and way of life, and the fact that even after the religion was introduced among them, they repeatedly rebelled against the Arab conversion. This name is “a testament to their protracted resistance to Islam and Arab encroachment (David Henry Slavin 45, and Helene E. Hagan 16).
2.3 Tuareg: Kel Tagelmoust

The Tuareg are known in Arabia as al-Mulath-thamoun (the Veiled Men). Men’s veiling is one of the major, belief-based customs of the Tuareg. The main characteristic of the Tuareg tradition is that men’s faces are veiled while women’s faces are uncovered. The Tuareg are known as Kel Tagelmoust “the veiled blue men of the Sahara.”\(^{17}\) Generally, nomadic societies are known as primitive and traditional as they are endowed with attachment to the primordial culture of their ancestors. There are accounts about men’s veiling among the Tuareg. The veil protects Tuareg men from the Kel Asouf (evil spirits)\(^{18}\). Although some analyses of the reasons of veiling are indisputable, it remains indeterminate to specify the original reason for it as a custom. Protection from dehydration and dust as the original reason for men’s veiling is not valid, because women and children are not veiled. Tuareg nomadism is synonymous with travels where hardships and dangers such as spirit possession are encountered. As a nomadic society, the Tuareg men veil their faces as a means of protection from the people of the spirit (Kel Asouf) or the jinn as the nomads of Arabia call them.

However, there are other functions of veiling according to mythological and anthropological narratives. Gabriella F. Scelta, for instance, remarks that “It should be suggested that while the unveiled Tuareg woman finds divine protection in the magic square and dome of the tent, the Tuareg man finds protection in the famed veil he

\(^{17}\) “The tagelmoust or alechcho [veil] is the traditional veil worn by the Tuareg. It is a piece of Sudanese indigo-dyed cloth, 1.50 to 4 meters long and 0.25 to 0.50 meters wide, wrapped around the head and across the face. It is a dominant symbol of Tuareg identity” (Hsain Ilahiane, Historical Dictionary of the Berbers 117).
\(^{18}\) Kel Asouf are particularly active in darkness and around empty places, fireplaces, trees, caves, slaughter places, and water holes. They are believed by the Tuareg to have human qualities. They are essentially wicked human beings, and many of the daily mishaps are attributed to them. The Tuareg maintain that most illnesses are caused by the Kel Asouf entering the body, which can cause death to both humans and animals. Exorcism involves the practice of a series of taboos of Sufi baraka (blessing) and the use of herbs.
wears at almost all times” (9). For women the tent protects them from the *Kel Asouf* while for men the veil plays the same role of protection. Similarly, “[…] children who have not yet spiritually come of age do not,” according to Scelta, “need as much protection due to their inherent closeness to God. They have no need for the liminal tent or veil as they are considered liminal beings themselves” (“The Calligraphy and Architecture of the Nomadic Tuareg within the Geometric Context of Islam” 9). However, as we shall see later, this argument does not give an answer to why women do not wear a veil outside their tents.

Remarkably, veiling (*anagad*) is the defining property of the Tuareg men. The veil even today has a symbolic value for the Tuareg as it is one of the main distinctive features of Tuaregness. The Tuareg do not call themselves Tuareg, rather, they title themselves as “people of the veil.” Jeremy Keenan tracks the history of the Tuareg veiling as follows, “The veiling of Tuareg men is an ancient custom. Reference to the veil is found in the writings of several Arabic authors such as El Beri (1028-94) and Ibn Batutah, whose journeys in the fourteenth century certainly took him to Tuareg country” (“The Tuareg Veil”). Keenan describes the way the Tuareg men wear the veil as follows: “The cloth is wrapped around the head to form a low turban (*amaoual*-*oua*-n-*afella*); one fold is brought across the face to form the veil (*amaoual*-*oua*-n-*aris*), so that the top of the veil usually rests on the bridge of the nose, and the bottom (*agedellehouf*) falls across the face to the upper part of the chest” (3). Thus, the way the turban is worn means that only a narrow slit around the eyes is revealed by the veiled. As for H. Duveyrier, the veil functions in terms of its

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19 Sanskrit has a name (*angad*), which might sound similar to this word in Tamassheq, means “Of my own body.” If there is a connection between the two languages, then veil in Tamassheq is equal to an organ of one’s body.

20 Keenan carried out a fieldwork among the *Kel Ahaggar* over a period of 24 months, comprising five visits between 1964 and 1971.
hygiene, as it protects the eye (shet), the mouth (imi), the nostrils, and the ears from the sand, the sun, and dehydration. Keenan among others holds Duveyrier’s argument inadequate because “[…] it does not explain why men remain veiled when in camps or asleep, and why women are unveiled” (“The Tuareg Veil” 5). With reference to the function of the veil as a sort of taboo, Keenan observes that the veil protects the mouth from the evil spirits surrounding it, however, the inapplicability of veiling among women and children remains challenging to these assumptions. The veil taboo is also associated with aspects of social status and behaviour, for it is shameful to discard the veil before women, parents, or other respected persons such as maternal aunts and uncles, older cousins and brothers, chiefs, and Sufi marabouts.

The Tuareg are called the “Blue People” due to the fact that they wear blue turbans and veils whose colour merges with the skin colour and makes it blue. Jill Condra writes, “Tuareg men are known as blue men because the indigo dye from their clothes rubs off on their faces and hands, turning their skin blue” (540). The blue colour of the veil and the turban, not only for men but also women, has a symbolical value. The veil not only prevents Kel Asouf from entering men’s orifices [mouth and nose]21 but the blue colour is also similarly significant. Blue colour is believed to be the defensive stratagem against Kel Asouf for both men and women. Symbolically, the reason for being blue men or wearing blue is strongly connected to the Tuareg’s firm belief in the possibility of being overtaken by evil spirits in the solitude of the desert. Therefore, Tuareg women wear the blue agate among their jewelry. In this context,

21 The Tuareg’s relationship with a marabout/sheikh lies in the latter’s miraculous blessings of exorcism. In the Western Desert of Morocco, such beliefs and practices are still dominant today even though most of the inhabitants whom I visited in 2014 descend from Arab lineage. Although veiling is no longer a regular custom among them, their beliefs in evil spirits as well as their resort to sorcerers and marabouts are still existent today.
Helene E. Hagan and Lucile C. Myers elaborately highlight the significance of the blue colour with reference to the Tuareg, “The color blue carries hope and optimism, and symbolizes all good things. In Tuareg healing practices, the color blue which is often incorporated in jewelry as turquoise or with an agate with various shades of blue, is associated with spirits tamed for constructive purposes” (Tuareg Jewelry: Traditional Patterns and Symbols 89). The blue veil which is supported by the anti-spirit blue color supports the Tuareg against Kel Asouf. Veiling functions as a protection against the dust and sandy storms of the desert and the blue colour exceeds the veil in its function as a protector of both men and women. Additionally, the veil functions as a means of the Tuareg’s resistance to extraneous changes or traditions whether these traditions are Arabic, Islamic, or Western. For the Tuareg, the desert is more powerful than any of these foreign influences.

The wearing of the veil determines one’s social status and role as the Amenukal (supreme chief) or an Ihaggaren (noble) underwrites his higher social status before members of Imrad (vassals) or Isekkemaren.22 Veiling has a double function in terms of distanciation: “[…] the external dialogue maintaining the interaction situation and the internal dialogue of Ego maintaining ego” (Robert Murphy 36). Murphy illustrates this veiling-related social complex by arguing that a hajj, for example, divests himself of the veil for dignity and esteem is his by right whereas others do not have that religious merit. In addition, the veil plays the role of the actor’s facial gestures in the interaction. As silence takes a major part in interaction among the Tuareg, the changing position of the veil manifests the reaction such as approval or disapproval. Aside from its social function, Murphy’s argument of

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22 The meanings of these social classes in the Tuareg are quoted from Keenan’s Glossary in The Lesser Gods of the Sahara.
the sacred status of the hajj proves the idea of the function of the veil as a protector from *Kel Asouf*. In this connection, the veil is spiritually, culturally, and socially important for the Tuareg.

### 2.4 The Tuareg: A Matrilineal Society

Ethnographically, the Tuareg society is matrilineal. According to Ilahiane, “They [Tuareg women] own property, initiate divorce, lead raids, have leadership positions and participate in council deliberations, and do not wear the veil. They are active agents in the public sphere and take the lead in musical celebrations” (139). In the pre-independence era, Tuareg women, such as al-Kahina, Kenza of Awraba, Lalla Fadhma n’-Soumer, Dassine Ult Ihena, Fadhma at Mansur Amrouche, and Taos Amrouche, have had influentially taking active part in confronting the colonial encroachments not only in the battlefields but also in organizing resistance. Even though the Tuareg are Muslims, one of the anti-Islamic modes of women’s resistance is promoting their rights in contesting polygamy. Initially the Tuareg society was women-centric. However, the independence of the states, where the Tuareg dwell, has led to the emergence of an anti-feminist movement due to the influx of Arabization, political Islamization in addition to sedentarisation and modernization that altogether undermined women’s status in society. Norris describes the hazards of such influences on different aspects of the Tuareg society as follows:

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23 Mahjouba, a leading woman figure whom I visited in Layoune, the capital of the Western Desert of Morocco, in 2014 sent her son with me to Sidi Maa’ al-Ainine’s Zawiya in Smara for blessings. Her mother is known for her penchant for Sufism. An example of Arabization, namely the anti-feminist attitude, happened when her cousin, an Arab nomad, saw me with her in the car. He said to me a famous Arabic proverb there, which can be translated as “Being with women is scandalous, but being with men is a treasure.” The lady manages a charitable society for widows and divorced women.
Culturally Tuareg life is attacked by Arab influences, the spread of Arabic, the dying out of Tamasheq, and the missionary work of Marabouts has resulted in a greater spread of stricter Islamic conceptions of society and religious observance, all of which clash not only with Tuareg superstitions but the traditional matrilineal character of the society. (“Tuareg Nomadism in the Modern World” 154)

In response to these radical changes, “[...] an increasing number of women have opted to live independently of men and are forming all-female communities in the desert—suggestive of classic Tuareg matrilineal-based social organization” (Ilahiane 140).

At the therapeutic level, women herbalists (tibb al-‘ashab) work hand in hand with marabouts in healing people. The Islamic belief in the superstitious powers of the jinn parallels animism. As a nomadic society of animistic-Sufi nature, the profession of women-as-herbalist-healers is based on the Tuareg myth of an ancestress named Tagurmat who was stabbed in her stomach (tedis) by her jealous husband. Besides the incantations used by sorceresses to heal diseased people, Tuareg women are known for their better knowledge of herbal therapy whereas Sufi marabouts heal people by Koranic amulets. In fact, Tuareg society is anthropologically vulnerable to different griots, smiths, artisans, and other ritual specialists who altogether tread across the Sahara and negotiate various socio-cultural interests. Notably, the Sufi Marabouts, the sorcerers, and women herbalists work side by side peacefully. There are similarities between the women herbalists and marabout-healers at the level of

24 Rasmussen in her article “Only Women Know Trees: Medicine Women and the Role of Herbal Healing in Tuareg Culture” reports the story of Tagurmat who has twin daughters who were herbalists and to whom the origins of herbalism as a matrilineal inheritance is traced. “Despite their low profile,” the author argues, “women herbalists are resilient in the face of long-standing contradictions and recent change to protect their special power of healing” (148).
practice of healing process. Rasmussen describes the relationship between Sufi healers and women herbalists as follows:

[…] they [women] indicated that they can transmit *al baraka* (Islamic blessing) like Islamic scholars, who are predominantly male among the Tuareg. Like marabouts, a medicine woman spits on the medicines in her hand when she administers them in order for her blessing power to be transmitted. Also like marabouts, in order to cure adequately, the healer must begin when she has no sin. *Takote*, or almsgiving to convey blessing, is central in this. (“Only Women Know Trees…” 149-150)

Peaceful coexistence at different levels has been a unique feature of the Tuareg as a semi-nomadic, socially stratified society. The geography of the desert plays the role of constructing the horizontal thought of the Tuareg, as different hardships and problems require different traditions to draw solutions for such problems.

In their collective memory, the Tuareg genealogy is traced back to their ancient ancestress Queen Tin Hinan (Ansari, 2006, and Helene E. Hagan and Lucile C. Myers, 2006). Interviewed by Hagan, Mohamed Ag Ewanghaye affirms that “Tin Hinan inaugurated the era which has lasted until our time and Tuareg speaks of ‘before TH’ or ‘after TH’” (19). She is actually said to be the ancestress of some of the Tuareg of the Ahaggar and Adrar of today. Her name characterizes the nomadic nature of her existence, as it is synonymous with travel, mobility or immigration. “Tin Hinan” is interpreted as “She who travelled” or “She who moved about” or yet “She who dwelled in tents” (Hagan and Myers 19). Tin Hinan came with her attendant Takama from a region Tafilalet in eastern Morocco and settled in the Hoggar/Ahaggar
region at Abalessa Oasis. Therefore, the Tuareg place their origin in Morocco as Berbers.

Furthermore, there is connection between the Tuareg mythology of fauna as denizens of the spirit world and the story of the Tuareg ancestress Tin Hinan, for the latter had three daughters named Tinert (the Antelope/Waddan), Tahenkat (the Gazelle), and Tamerwelt (the Hare) (Hagan and Myers 20). However, Hinan’s story cannot be put under the rubric of myth for one reason that she is a real person. The story of Tin Hinan is another evidence of the Tuareg culture as a culture that developed on its own apart from Islam. Moreover, the story evidently shows the Tuareg animistic belief in the appearance of the Kel Asouf in the form of animals. One of the reasons for the Tuareg to welcome the Sufi sheikhs is that Sufis claim to be professionals in exorcism. Ansari, as noted earlier, argues that the Tuareg are a nation whose ruler was a she-jinni Queen called Tin Hinan. To him, “The Queen controlled the whole world of the Tuareg, therefore the society is matrilineal. She was the first to establish this law of priority to matrilneality as far as chieftaincy is concerned” (13). Women, not men, teach their kids the Tifinagh calligraphy on sands. According to Helen, “Tifinagh is part of the Tuareg female knowledge and has traditionally been taught by women to their children […] in drawings on the sand. Even today, one form of geometric sand designs is used as divination” (37). Although the Tuareg are influenced by Islamic teachings which emphasize female chastity, women have freedom of social interaction. Children inherit the mother’s family name and belong to her clan. Unlike the Arab community, which is intrinsically patrilineal, the Tuareg community is matrilineal—an evidence of the Tuareg identity as an independent

25 “The actual remains of Queen Tin Hinan were found in the Oasis of Abalessa (An Oasis in Algeira), where her funerary mausoleum was discovered in 1925 by a French-American archeological team led by M. Reygasse, Director of the Bardo Museum of Algiers. They have been dated to the fourth century AD” (Hagan and Myers 21).
identity. The center of power is woman. The earliest rock paintings show women playing “imzad” which is still a custom today and they are also poetesses. However, all Tuareg traditions are in more danger than ever before owing to the extremist Islamization of their regions.

2.5 External Encroachments on the Tuareg

Ethno-culturally, the colonization of the North African landscape between the 1880s and the 1940s has resulted into the formation of anti-colonial nationalism represented by the Arab-Berber combination. Arabism was associated with Islam as a Salafi reformist movement which is characterized by subversion and fanaticism that turned out to be an anti-Tuareg movement after the 1950s when decolonization led to the categorization of the Berbers as minorities. The Tuareg language and culture have been subject to decay and neglect. Their languages were replaced by Arabic as the Arab states including Algeria deliberately started promoting an Arab-Berber dichotomy that advocates Islam as salvation and Amazigh culture as heresy. James McDougall displays the aftermath of this post-colonial process that worsened the status of the Amazigh identity: “Pushed out of their place in the nation, Berber language and culture became instead the expression of a ‘minority’, oppositional

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27 Salafi or Salafism has been intellectually associated with Wahhabism since the 18th century when its founder Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab whose Kitab at-Tawhid (The Book of Monotheism) strongly emphasized all other sects and streams outside its framework including Shi’ism and Sufism as people of innovation [bida’] and blasphemy [kufr] who must be killed. Having the claim of following pristine Islam, the book intellectually paves the path to today’s terrorist warpath (jihad) not only in the Arab-Islamic world but globally. Zubair Qamar has given a detailed account of Wahhabi discourse and its implications in his essay: “Wahhabism: Understanding the Roots and Role Models of Islamic Extremism.” N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Feb. 2014. <http://www.sunnah.org/articles/Wahhabiarticleedit.htm>.
political identity [….] Amazigh languages and cultures signify backwardness and ignorance—the rural, the illiterate, the jahili—leaving Arabic as the only legitimate language of the national state and of national culture.” (28).

The Tuareg are territorially peripheral and marginalized as a nation and a culture so they have been vulnerable to several trespasses by Easterners and Westerners. The Eastern intrusion is represented by Arabization and Islamization, while the Western one is represented by the French and Italian invasions of the Sahara. Religiously, the Tuareg are presently sunk in the tidal wave of barbarism initiated by Islamic extremism which is represented mainly by Salafism or what is described today in the media as Sunni Islamism. The animistic belief system of the Tuareg has also undergone upheavals of doubt. The desert encounter entails hardships and calamities and the Tuareg had a tryst with animism, Sufism, and Salafism that could help them handle the supernatural forces such as wind, drought and the evils of the Spirit World of the desert. Modernity has come to the Tuareg as a curse for it was represented by the hegemonic forces of colonization. The encroachment on the Tuareg community by the French is described by a Sufi marabout, who was interviewed by Susan Rasmussen. The marabout laments the devastation of the original environment of a village as follows:

After a time, there were wars with Toubous and French....[Later], the French colonial administration...and people came to stay here [to escape being taxed]....Then to escape the war led by Kaousan...even his supporters, the Ikazkazan [clan], killed....Kaousan was pursued in this region. The French imposed taxes. Chiefs were elected and people
remained calm, but the French installed authorities and controls. (“Re-Formations of the Sacred…” 193)

True, Tuareg history rhymes in different forms. Earlier, they were suppressed by the Western, Arab and Ottoman colonizers, today they are under the impact of jihadists. Salafism has its own Tuareg converts and dictatorial regimes have their own Tuareg supporters. Andy Morgan, who travelled extensively in the Tuareg Sahara, describes the status quo of the Tuareg along with Sufis there with regard to the dilemma of Islamic extremism:

Some Salafi Tuareg consider their Berber culture to be backward and irrelevant in the modern world [...] They would prefer their people to adopt Arabic, the language of Quran and of the wider Muslim community [...] They deem certain other aspects of Tuareg culture, especially music and dance, to be licentious and ungodly and they object to the relative freedom and social power that Tuareg women enjoy. They also revile the old ‘backward’ Sufi traditions of Islam that most Tuareg adhere to. (N. P.)

In addition to the Wahhabi pose of the transformation of the matrilineal system of the Tuareg into a patrilineal one, they bring Sufi healers and practitioners under the charge of magic and sorcery. Several Sufi sheikhs have been recently beheaded by Wahhabi-nurtured terrorist groups in Libya and Mali in addition to other countries in the Maghreb. Wahhabism was brought to the Sub-Saharan either by preachers from Saudi Arabia or by some Tuareg leaders who went to Saudi Arabia for hajj (pilgrimage), received Wahhabi education there and came back to forcibly spread it with full support from KSA. Although Sufism follows the same trajectory of
confronting the colonists, its jihad, unlike the Wahhabi jihad, has not happened against the indigenous people. Sufis are targeted by terrorist groups the same way as the Tuareg under the charge of heresy and irreligion. Hence, the Tuareg culture, identity and traditions are in peril.

In conclusion, the ancient traditions of the Tuareg are in peril today because of the influx of radical Islamism and the proliferation of fanatic terrorist groups. Formerly, the Tuareg used to have a balanced life in spite of the climatic factors that they resisted by movement in search of fertile places, pastures and water. The horizontal thought and life of the Tuareg nomads, which are characterized by errantry, morphed into a vertical energy as a result of extraneous encroachments. Although majority of the Tuareg has gone for sedentarisation and modernization, there are still minorities of pastoralist nomads distributed in the North African Sub-Sahara. The stronger those encroachments and influences are the weaker the Tuareg animistic-Sufi traditions become. The Tuareg nomadic world, thus, is a world on the wane. Glissant’s account of the threat posed by arrowlike nomadism upon circular nomadism is applicable to the Tuareg’s traditions and heritage. They have not only changed into arrowlike nomads but also started embracing contemporary globalization. All foreign influences and ideological confederations and movements tend to radically change the Tuareg situation today. However, the animistic beliefs combined with Sufi Islam are still extant among them. The desert is the locus of their turath (heritage) but it is also invaded by massive modernization that exploits its natural resources including fauna, flora and minerals. Like the Tuareg nomadic culture, the desert spirituality of the past is presently in jeopardy of enormous transformation and radical change. Politically, the Tuareg are not different from the Kurds and the Basques in terms of statelessness.