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Do Tents and Herds Still Matter? Pastoral Nomadism and Gender among the Tuareg in Niger and Mali

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INTRODUCTION: TUAREG GENDER CONSTRUCTS IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

After the divorce of Aghaly and Mariama (pseudonyms), Aghaly retained his male-owned adobe mud house, and Mariama retained her female-owned tent, both of which stood inside the same courtyard surrounded by its compound walls, on the same land, in their rural Tuareg village in northern Niger. At first, the ex-husband adamantly refused to leave his house inside this compound. The couple took their case to the secular courts in the nearby town of Agadez, which ruled a compromise: each party changed the door on his or her respective residential structure, so that the buildings faced away from, rather than toward the interior courtyard of their compound. Aghaly ate his meals at his mother's home. This solution divided the property, and also saved the divorced couple from daily contentious interaction. Eventually, Aghaly moved back into his older house adjacent to his parents' compound in a neighboring village, where he worked in an oasis garden. Mariama retained her tent, near her own parents' compound, and continued to herd goats and donkeys with her mother.

There are multiple forces impinging upon gender and pastoralism among the Tuareg, a seminomadic, Islamic, socially stratified people. This is a discussion of women's perceived economic contributions in relation to property ownership, status, prestige, and division of labor in a traditionally pastoral nomadic, stockbreeding society, the Tuareg, also known as Kel Tamajaq ("People who speak Tamajaq"), after their language, who live in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Algeria. I also offer a critique of some interpretations of gender and pastoralism in predominantly seminomadic communities. I draw upon data from my research among the Kel Ewey Tuareg in the Air Mountains near the town of Agadez in northern Niger, and more recently, among the Ifoghas and Iwllemeden Tuareg in and around the Adragh-n-Ifoghas Mountains and the town of Kidal in northern Mali.[1]

Seminomadism and agropastoralism are widely practiced by many Tuareg today, and this process brings challenges, but also offers opportunities for women, who enjoy traditionally-high social prestige and, along with men, independent property ownership of livestock: In seminomadic Tuareg communities, the presence of men's houses competes with women's tents. Men's houses, which have sprung up in many Tuareg Saharan communities and along its Sahelian fringes, complicate property disputes upon divorce, particularly in more settled agropastoral communities where predominantly men own houses and oasis gardens. By contrast, in more nomadic camps, men are guests in their wives' tents, and may be left homeless when their wives eject them from that residence upon quarrels or divorce.

The issue arising here is, to what extent do livestock herds and tents still empower women? Some, though not all Tuareg communities are moving toward sedentarization, oasis gardening, and migrant labor. Many also face wider global processes: neoliberal economic policies of structural adjustment and privatization, and national policies, in Niger and Mali, of de-centralization and semiautonomy for some northern regions following the peace accords ending the 1990–1996 Tuareg Rebellion against the central governments of these countries.

Gender is socially and culturally constructed, and can usefully be understood as a comparative, relational concept (Butler 1990: 6; Di Leonardo 1990; Davison 1997; Wood 1999). Critical to gender structuring are intertwined modalities: social variables such as ethnicity, class, religion, and age, among many (Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Di Leonardo 1990). Regional and rural–urban variations may also impinge on inter- and intragender identities and relationships (Gaidzanwa 1985; Mannathoko 1992; Meena 1992; Davison 1997). Constructions of gender therefore depend heavily upon positionality.[2]

In recent years, a number of scholars have called for studies that treat gender dynamically, as occurring in processes generated by discrete locales and through particular histories; they assert that gender is not fixed either across time or in location (di Lauretis 1984; Scott 1988, 1992; Butler 1990; Kondo 1990; Probyn

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1990; Flax 1993; Barlow 1996). Thus although I use the term "women," I also try to make clear that the Tuareg women about whom I write do not constitute an undifferentiated category of "essentialized woman." They interact with men, and are defined by their age, social origins, occupations, kinship roles, and other locations in Tuareg society. Gender and pastoral arrangements must be understood against the backdrop of seminomadism, sedentary oasis gardening, migrant labor, and some residence in towns, albeit with continuing rural social and economic ties, and interaction with larger, multiethnic nation-states experiencing ecological disaster, economic crisis, and political tensions.

THE TUAREG CASE

Tuareg Gender Constructs and Relations between the Sexes: Women's Status and Prestige

Tuareg pastoral nomads today are predominantly seminomadic and practice, to varying degrees, mixed subsistence patterns. Most Tuareg live in the central Sahara and along its borders, in the Sahel. More nomadic Tuareg herd camels, sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. Although Tuareg converted to Islam between the eighth and eleventh centuries C.E., different groups vary in their degree of adherence to Qur'anic law and extent of Arabic cultural influences (Norris 1972, 1975, 1990). Some Tuareg trace their origins to the Fezzan region of Libya; others trace this to Yemen. Allied descent groups comprise a drum group or confederation under the power of a drum chief called *ettebel*, a legitimate male successor from the dominant noble group within it. In each region, the large political unit, the confederation, is socially stratified into noble and vassal named groups. Eight politically distinct descent groups (drum groups) all speak mutually intelligible dialects of their Berber-derived language, Tamajaq, and are designated by geographic region. Two of these, Kel Ajjer and Kel Ahaggar, are the northern Tuareg in Algeria. The other six—Kel Adar, Kel Air, and Kel Geres, Iwllemmeden Kel Dennek, and Iwllemmeden Kel Ataram, and Kel Tademaket—live on the southern fringes of desert in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, and are the southern Tuareg. Within the Kel Adar is the political confederation of Ifoghas, who live in and around the Adragh-n-Ifoghas mountains and the town of Kidal in northern Mali. Within the Kel Air are the political confederations of Kel Ewey, Kel Ferwan, and Kel Fadey, who live in and around the Air Mountains and the town of Agadez in northern Niger. Precolonial social organization was divided into nobles, Islamic religious scholars, tributaries, smiths/artisans, and servile peoples. In most regions, slavery was abolished by the mid-twentieth century.

In general, many Tuareg women enjoy considerable rights and privileges. They are not sequestered, do not veil their faces (although Tuareg men do), and have much social and economic independence and freedom of movement. Separation of the sexes is relatively minimal. Men and women regularly meet and socialize in public. Women are singers and musicians, and organizers of many social events, such as drum playing and dance gatherings, which feature much flirting and courtship. Throughout their lives, many Tuareg women enjoy freedom of choice in sexual involvement and actively pursue romantic preferences (King 1903: 280; Rodd 1926: 174–175). They may regularly have male visitors, though not always lovers, when their husbands are absent (Rodd 1926: 174–175; Nicolas 1946: 225; Lhote 1955: 335; Murphy 1964; Claudot-Hawad 1993).

Although many of these gender constructs and relationships apply to most Tuareg, there is the need to refine and specify, rather than generalize, interpretation of some aspects of Tuareg women's status. Many Tuareg groups display variation in gender arrangements according to relative degrees of nomadism and sedentarization, religious devotion, regional and confederational, and rural–urban differences, as well as age, kinship roles, and social stratum origins. The Kel Ewey *ineslemen* clans of maraboutique Islamic scholars, for example, attempt to control their women slightly more by placing greater emphasis upon virginity and application of Qur'anic inheritance laws. Even among these clans, however, women own property, are not secluded, and go about unveiled and relatively freely visit and receive male visitors, and although extramarital affairs are less tolerated, men, not women, are fined or punished in reprisals (Rasmussen 1994, 1998a, 1998b). In some Iwllemeden Tuareg maraboutique clans in the Azawagh region in Niger, Walentowitz (2002; see also Claudot-Hawad 1993: 47-48) reports unusual restrictions: contrary to most Tuareg women who go unveiled, these women hide the face before men of equal or higher status, particularly potential marriage partners, and conceal their bodies by wrapping large mats around themselves while traveling on foot. Yet as their travel and visiting suggest, these women are not strictly secluded, and they own property independently.

There are also gender transformations over the life course. Older women enjoy security as mothers-in-law and grandmothers. Many specialize in herbal medicine, divination, and bone-setting healing specialties. A widow or divorcee may become a household head in advanced age; if younger, she usually returns to her parental household.

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In rural seminomadic Kel Ewey caravanning villages in the Air Mountains, men are often gone from five to seven months a year on caravan trade and migrant labor. Young, unmarried girls and older post-childbearing-age women often go out and establish temporary camps with their herds, intermittently for four months during the dry season; elderly women in the rainy season leave for several weeks to gather leaves and roots and grasses for sauces and medicines from trees on Mount Bagzan (Rasmussen 2006).

During the cold, dry caravanning season, women construct their tent doors to face outward, toward the compounds of their female relatives, the more matrifocal or matricentric space reflecting these women's greater cooperation and sharing at this time. In contrast, in the hot and rainy seasons while many men are at home, the women close these doors and construct doors opening onto the interior courtyard of the nuclear-household compound; the emphasis here is more patrifocal, and patricentric, reflecting greater focus within the nuclear household.

Most women prefer monogamous unions, and polygyny is a rare occurrence, except among some prominent chiefs, Islamic scholars, and prosperous, more sedentarized gardeners and merchants. Polygynous men try to minimize co-wives' jealousy by installing wives in separate compounds and even distant villages. Co-wives never share cooking facilities or sleep in the same compound.

Tuareg women do not engage in any extreme gestures of subservience to their husbands. Husbands and wives may eat together in private, though not usually at public rites of passage. Name avoidance does not entail wife-to-husband deference among the Tuareg as Schlegel (1975: 167–168) inferred from the data available on Tuareg through the HRAF (Human Relations Area Files). The use of teknonymy and sobriquets is symmetric, applying to both sexes. Direct expression of anger on the part of a man toward his wife is considered shameful, and in rural areas, at least, rape and wife beating are extremely rare. Since the end of the Tuareg rebellion, however, some men returning from refugee flight and political exile have brought back alien ideas concerning gender and relations between the sexes: in order to restore their damaged masculine pride from economic unemployment and military defeat, some men value virgins upon marriage, heretofore not an important local cultural value.

Tuareg women receive their nuptial tent (*ehan*) as part of their dowry. It is constructed communally on the evening of the wedding by elderly female relatives of the bride, and torn down and reconstructed to be larger on each successive evening of the seven-day wedding ritual (Rasmussen 1997). In many dialects of Tamajaq, "to make a tent" idiomatically denotes "to marry." The nuptial tent, which after the wedding will be the married couple's residence, is erected near the compound of the bride's parents. Later, the couple may decide to remain there or move with this tent to the husband's family's camp or village. Because descent is bilateral and the tent is matrilineally defined and transmitted, the tent also becomes a metaphor for matriliny and an allegory for maternity (Prussin 1995: 92). The married woman owns the tent.

The nuptial tent is therefore women's property, but also much more: it symbolizes the traditional ideal of monogamy. Recently, however, many men have been constructing adobe mud houses that the married man owns. These houses now often stand next to the tent owned by a married woman within the married couple's household compound (Rasmussen 1994, 1996, 1997). The more nomadic Tuareg groups still count women as owners of compounds, as well as tents, in identifying the household compounds. But the semisedentarized Kel Ewey in the Air region of Niger have begun to identify compounds by the names of husbands, as belonging to men, as they do the men's adobe mud houses in many of these compounds, standing next to the women's tents. These processes indicate some important changes in gender roles, status, and power upon sedentarization, which disrupts the property balance between the sexes. To what extent, then, does the tent confer women's control? The key issue, as Moore (1988: 52–53) points out, is the relationship between women's productive and reproductive roles, in the descent and inheritance system.

LEGAL/JURAL RIGHTS, PROPERTY, DESCENT, AND INHERITANCE

The Tuareg official political structure is male-dominated. Among the more nomadic groups, the camping group (*eghiwan*) is an extended family headed by a male elder (*amghar*). In more sedentarized, seminomadic groups this term *eghiwan* refers to the village or hamlet, which may include a number of families, many of whom are related, and today often also includes households whose members vary in occupation and degree of nomadism, sometimes combining or alternating between several different subsistence forms (for example, a man of diverse social stratum origins might practice caravan trade, herding, oasis gardening, and migrant labor within a single lifetime, in different seasons).

Most Tuareg descent groups are bilateral, combining influences from Arabic and Qur'anic patriliny with local matriliny. Many descent groups trace their origins matrilineally to female ancestresses or culture heroines, although some more devoutly Muslim

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groups and men in general tend to downplay these ancestresses and emphasize patrilineal descent and male ancestors or culture heroes. For example, many Kel Ewey Tuareg men and marabouts in rural Air communities where I conducted research mentioned Boulkhou, a patrilineal ancestor of the current *ettebel*, as their important founder (Rasmussen 1997). He had sunk the first well, built a mosque, and resisted enemies in battles in that region. By contrast, many women tended to emphasize Tagurmat, the female ancestor of the Kel Igurmaden descent group within the Kel Ewey confederation, who in a myth gave birth to twin daughters who founded the professions of herbalism and Islamic/Qur'anic healing (Rasmussen 2006). The Kel Fadey say their people descend from two sisters who came from the east, bringing with them livestock, herds, and a large wooden drum (the drum, kept by the chief's wife, is used to call the tribal sections together for political or military action) (Worley 1992: 56).

A recurring question in Tuareg ethnography has been the extent to which Tuareg practice matrilineal inheritance and descent and succession. In matriliny, theoretically, mothers and sisters of heirs enjoy status. A problem here is the use of the term to mean certain institutions, or "society" and "culture" in general (Oxby 1978, 1990). Also often ignored are variations and changes among the different Tuareg groups and according to social context. Thus the issue becomes, which kin links are most important and what factors other than kinship are important in determining relationships between the generations and the sexes? Descent group (*tawsit*) allegiance is, in practice, through the mother. Ideally, however, political office passes from father to son in all groups but the Kel Geres, where it goes from maternal uncle to sister's son. Hence both matrilateral and patrilateral kin ties are important. There are also important criteria apart from kinship in political leadership: for example, wealth and personal qualities of leadership.

Women's property is passed down mainly from mother to daughter; men's, from father to son. Objects acquired by women before marriage include jewelry, blankets, a bed, other household items, and sometimes cloth and sandals. In the past, noble women brought a slave to their married household; today, some rural noble women still inherit an attached smith/artisan client family. But this client–patron relationship is increasingly flexible. Inheritance of livestock is predominantly Qur'anic: daughters receive one-third to one-half of sons' shares. Children are considered, among most Air Tuareg, more important heirs than spouses and siblings. If there are only daughters, a brother receives the son's share. The mother's brother is a more significant figure in some groups than in others, but everywhere the mother's brother/sister's son tie features, at minimum, affection, and frequent gifts, and security in assistance. The sibling tie sometimes competes with the husband-wife tie. Each spouse, regardless of postmarital residence, if possible spends much time during the day (for example, eating meals) at the residence of his/her own kin. Individuals often try to return to maternal kin in later years of life. Brothers often look out for sisters' legal and other interests, support sisters upon the divorce, and contribute to the support of widowed sisters' children. The father's sibling group is equated with the father, as a source of authority and possible conflict; the mother's sibling group, by contrast, is a source of love and aid, generosity, and support (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997).

Some Tuareg say, "It is the stomach that colors the child." Among the Ifoghas Tuareg in northern Mali where I conducted research, matrilineally related "children of the stomach" can be depended upon more than other relatives for future care in illness and old age. Women therefore attempt to remain close to, and surround themselves with, "children of the stomach" for affection and security. By contrast, some other Tuareg tend to place less emphasis upon these maternally-based kin ties; the Kel Ewey Tuareg in northern Niger, for example, often go into business with those they call "children of men," persons—usually men—who share a common father. Significantly, Kel Ewey also tend to be more sedentarized and also practice polygyny to a greater extent than the Ifoghas. Kel Ewey men explain that additional wives and more children are advantageous in the work of oasis gardening. Many Tuareg believe that the maternal nephew inherits intelligence from his maternal uncle. But Kel Ewey do not use separate kinship terms for a maternal versus paternal nephew; they refer to both as *tegazay*.

In some legal contexts, the concept of maternal kinship identity tends to be submerged in Qur'anic and patrilineal influence: for example, in naming, ideas about children's affiliation and identity, and marriage. Some more sedentarized Kel Ewey Tuareg men in Niger tend to disparage an older form of naming a girl "daughter of" (*welet* or *oult*), still actively practiced by the Ifoghas Tuareg in Mali, as "only done with an illegitimate child." Many urban women are now called Madame plus the name of husband's father as surname, in postal addresses, clinic rosters, and school registration. Illegitimacy is considered shameful, antisocial, and greatly stigmatizing to the mother. Some men insist that the secret, Tamajaq name which older female relatives bestow on the child in the unofficial naming ritual the evening before the official Islamic naming by the father and marabout at the mosque, is "not important, it means nothing,"

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but women dispute this, saying the latter name is as important to the child's identity as the Arabic, Qur'anic name. Women's property is sometimes subject to dispute and challenge in Qur'anic-based rulings by marabouts. For example, although a woman has the right to eject her husband from her tent, a woman's bridewealth is only reimbursed to the person the marabout rules is not at fault in divorce; many marabouts rule the woman at fault if she requests divorce to protest polygyny.

Nonetheless women's opinions are highly valued, and they are normally consulted by men on decisions that affect the life of the camp or village (Bernus 1981: 146–147). Yet there are some contexts in which women defer to some men: namely, before Islamic scholars and important chiefs, and toward elders in general, particularly those on the patrilineal side. Female herbal medicine women, for example, referred patients to marabouts for diagnosis of illness, more often than vice versa (Rasmussen 2006).

A number of authors (Lhote 1955; Murphy 1964; Keenan 1977; Bernus 1981; Casajus 1987; Claudot-Hawad 1993) have described a Tuareg endowment known as *akh hudderan*, which allows an individual to make a pre-inheritance gift of livestock to female relatives, usually daughters, sisters, and nieces, which they then own and control corporately. This property cannot be sold or otherwise disposed of. Additionally, Tuareg women accumulate livestock through important gifts (*alkhalal*) from both parents and other relatives after birth, which form the basis of their own herds. Women may receive outright gifts of livestock from consanguine kin throughout their lives, and in all marriages after the first, it is usually the wife herself who accepts the bridewealth (*taggalt*). Women's livestock herds therefore constitute their traditional source of wealth. There has been much property loss in droughts and wars since the mid-twentieth century. Women in particular suffer here; for although these losses affect both sexes, gardens are easier than herds to reconstitute after disasters. Some non-governmental organization (NGO) and United Nations (UN) agencies are trying to compensate women and men for lost herds, in some cases by replacing them, or in other cases, by encouraging Tuareg to settle down and practice oasis gardening and other newer occupations, such as tailoring and artisan work, more extensively. There is evidence that women's bases of property are increasingly altered by all these processes. For example, much property in the Saharan town of Agadez is not independently owned by the married woman, but merged together with that of her husband in civic records. In semisedentarized communities, men's houses complicate property disputes on divorce. Some married women residing virilocally (with the husband's family near his oasis garden) are more isolated from their own kin and more dependent upon the husband and his family.

SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR

Domestic work varies according to region, nomadic/sedentarized, and rural/urban differences. In more nomadic groups, this takes a minimum of women's time. In some regions, for example in northern Mali where the water-table is too low for oasis gardening, many rural Tuareg there still practice nomadic stockbreeding, and women are discouraged from performing heavy physical labor, reflecting past noble disdain for household, herding, and gardening labor formerly performed by servile and client peoples. There, women are encouraged to limit their bodily motility and perform tasks locally defined as "light," such as tent-repair and light herding. In other regions, for example, in northern Niger on gardening oases, women do much more arduous tasks: going to the well, crushing grains, and increasingly, assisting with crop harvesting—the latter encouraged by NGO and aid agencies in that region. In these more sedentarized communities, women's time is taken up more extensively with food-processing work within the compound.

In semisedentarized and urban communities, some women are now described as "housewives" (called by the French term *menageres*) in response to this researcher's query concerning their work. These women have given up herding (though not always herd ownership), or have relegated this task to kinspersons. A few gardeners' wives have even given up their tents. Very few women individually own gardens, which are traditionally inherited and owned mostly by men, though a few women have date-palms through matrilineal *akh huderan* endowments. Until the recent establishment of women's gardening cooperatives in the rural Air region by NGO and aid agencies, planting was traditionally done by men, and harvesting was done only by elderly women. By 1998, a development agency had established a women's garden cooperative in an Air Mountain region Kel Ewey community, and some women had begun enclosing and gardening in this designated space, known as the "women's garden (enclosure)" (*afarag n tchidoden*), and traded millet on the market in Agadez. In order to prevent erosion, a fence was being constructed: each woman is paid an amount to participate in the work party, provide wood, and construct the fence. A female "president" supervises this project, in which the women take up a collection (250 CFA or approximately 50 cents each) from each household to build a well (cost: 25,000 CFA, approximately $50). When the well was

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completed, the project organization gave the group an animal. Alternative occupations to gardening are increasingly available: some women own small shops and restaurants, and some belong to women's sewing and leatherwork cooperatives.

Smith/artisan men and women derive much income from arts and crafts. Metal and woodworking are smith men's work; most leatherworking is smith women's work. Women of diverse social origins tan hides, but mostly smith/artisan women cut and embroider them. Smith/artisan women in rural areas obtain cash and food gifts through leatherworking and rites-of-passage services for nobles. In Saharan towns, women smiths continue to do leatherwork, but with fewer raw materials, which cost more in the sedentarized setting, and also fewer customers; for there is less demand for leatherwork than in rural communities. Recently, some aid organizations in France have assisted by bringing art objects made in workshops (by both men and women specialists) to sell in France.

COMPARATIVE AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSION: WOMEN AND MEN IN PASTORAL NOMADISM

Some researchers (Barth 1961; Martin and Voorhies 1975: 332–366) view pastoralism as one extreme on a continuum of dependence upon herd animals and cultivation for subsistence, in which segments of sedentary tilling communities may, during periods of scarce resources (i.e., droughts, overpopulation) come to depend increasingly on the products of their herd animals for subsistence. Many Tuareg have been pressured during difficulties of drought to become more sedentary, and to depend increasingly on products of their oasis gardens rather than herd animals for subsistence. Despite this, however, a pastoralist ideology persists. Many Tuareg yearn to return to pastoral nomadism, but realize the necessity today for mixing subsistence modes of herding, oasis gardening, caravan and other itinerant trading, and migrant labor, and among the more specialized artisan social strata, arts/crafts production (Rasmussen 1992, 1994, 1996; Claudot-Hawad 1993). Martin and Voorhies also observe that during periods of plenty, when the size of herds becomes cumbersome or provides the wherewithal for purchase of arable land, pastoral segments may be repatriated to villages. Most Tuareg remain predominantly rural, but often alternate between nomadic camps, sedentarized oasis villages, and large towns according to seasonal needs and more long-term stresses, such as ecological disaster of drought and political violence of war. In the 1960s, the central government of Mali pressured many Tuareg in the northern region to come to the towns for food relief distribution. Many migrated south during droughts of 1969–1971, 1984, and 2001. In the 1990s, there was massive refugee flight of many Tuareg from northern Niger and Mali during the armed rebellion. In more peaceful times, during the rainy season, nomads often congregate at wells and other water-points for special festivals. During the cold dry season, some men travel on caravan trading expeditions. Many Tuareg families are also dispersed in both town and countryside at different times of the year; for example, some children board with relatives in town to attend school, and return to the countryside to assist with herding and gardening tasks during the rainy season.

Tuareg patterns therefore suggest the need to modify or refine some prevalent representations of the cyclical pattern of pastoralism (Martin and Voorhies 1975: 334). They offer contradictions, or at least variations, of some previous interpretations of gender in pastoral nomadic societies, and show the need to deconstruct concepts in both pastoralist and gender studies. In a classic study, Martin and Voorhies (1975: 351) make several tentative generalizations. They note that the sexual division of labor seems related to the degree and nature of mobility required for the successful execution of subsistence activities (Martin and Voorhies 1975: 352). They argue that gender variations among pastoralists are influenced by at least three factors: (1) their specific adaptation to a given environment (settlement pattern, interaction of herding and cultivation); (2) cultural history of society (common culture areas such as sedentary community origins in Africa south of the Sahara correlate with economic independence, the hoe, polygyny, and sexual freedom; those in the Middle East and of agricultural origins display the opposite pattern); and (3) recent diffusion of ideas rather than cultural origins (Islam, for example—although the Tuareg are an exception to other Muslim pastoralists, in demonstrating less emphasis on the patriarchal family and on gender inequalities) (Martin and Voorhies 1975: 365–366).

From their study of forty-four pastoral societies, Martin and Voorhies conclude that the female contribution to the diet of herders is small. Men do almost all herding and women dairy in only about one-third of societies. Men also do most of the cultivation in half of their sample, however, where cultivation is based on horticultural techniques, women are either the exclusive cultivators, or men and women share equally in cultivation (Martin and Voorhies 1975: 339–343; O'Kelly and Carney 1986: 66). O'Kelly and Carney (1986: 66) argue that gender division of labor within many pastoral societies is "tipped toward male dominance" of economically productive tasks. These authors explain this in terms of the strength required to handle large

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animals. Males tend to be exclusive herders of large animals. Females may, however, herd smaller animals and serve as dairy maids for large and small species. Women and children contribute by gathering food, carrying water, and processing byproducts such as milk, wool, hides, and dung. But the lack of firm differentiation between domestic and public spheres encourages gender egalitarianism. Where women have some economic control, women's status may be raised. Tuareg women make important contributions to subsistence; most of the rural diet derives from products of small animals, and Tuareg women, unlike women in some other pastoralist societies, own herds, milk them, and control their products.

Boulding (1976: 288–299) argues that women participate more fully in the total life of these societies than they do in settled agricultural communities. But Martin and Voorhies (1975) argue that male dominance of economic production gives rise to male dominance in the wider culture and social structure of pastoral societies. Lois Beck, on the other hand, found a flexible division of labor, economic interdependence between genders, and a low degree of gender segregation among the Qashqai of Iran (Beck in Beck and Keddie 1978: 365–367). Furthermore, because of the small size of independent households of these pastoralists, males and females were partners in economically independent units, and neither males nor females formed strong separate solidarity groups.

Many authors agree that, however diverse the forms it takes, the division of labor among herders does not create a sharp dichotomy between domestic and public spheres. Women's tasks are more likely to take place in camp than men's tasks, but they do not isolate women in the household (Wood 1999). Much women's work is done in cooperation with other women. Both men and women participate in collective work patterns with other members of the same gender. Camps are typically divided into women's spaces and men's spaces, but almost all activities are carried out in the open, avoiding development of private domestic spheres for women versus public spheres for men (O'Kelly and Carney 1986: 67). Women's work may be household work, but it is public household work; public/domestic domains thus emerge as overly rigid and bound to western cultures.[3]

In many pastoral nomadic societies, ownership and control over the disposition of livestock appear to be predominantly in male hands. However, females are sometimes at least nominal owners of some livestock through inheritance, dowries, or purchase (O'Kelly and Carney 1986: 68; Hutchinson 1996). But even owners of livestock cannot usually dispose freely of their animals: they are bound by an intricate web of kinship-based exchanges, which requires giving periodically large numbers of animals to close kin, as bridewealth to the bride's family, dowries to the groom, and as compensation for violation of certain rules, for example, homicide (Evans-Pritchard 1956; Hutchinson 1996) and adultery (Rasmussen 1998a). Males who control large herds thus do not necessarily derive significant economic power from these herds; rather, use rights are important considerations. But large herds bring prestige and influence to owners.

Other factors influencing gender are the defense needs and warfare practices of herders and patricentric kinship systems. In terms of Peggy Sanday's (1981: 181) typology, many pastoralists, such as the Gabra of the Chalbi Desert on the Kenyan-Somalian border (Wood 1999), appear to fall under the rubric of "real male dominance," because in most cases the environment is sufficiently dangerous for the society to depend on the strength and aggressiveness of their men for survival. Sanday argues that under such conditions of stress, for the sake of social and cultural survival, women "accept real male dominance." The Tuareg data suggest modifications of this hypothesis. Tuareg men's frequent absence from home in past raiding and more recent separatist warfare against the central state governments of Mali and Niger, and also men's peaceful trading, have encouraged, indeed necessitated women's independence in some domains of activity (education of children and work). However, some high-status men remain at home and control official political decisions. Thus a warrior aristocracy does not produce gender inequality in all respects; rather, there is a mixed bag here. In fact, some authors report legends of "warrior queens" in Tuareg and other pastoralist nomadic cultures (Rodd 1926: 170; Boulding 1976: 303–312; Worley 1988, 1992; Brett and Fentress 1997).[4] While difficult to verify, they suggest that women's elevated position in the class structure may modify their gender roles; thus class cross-cuts gender (Ortner and Whitehead 1981; di Leonardo 1990). The pastoral-nomadic/gender relationship is therefore complex, and defies facile generalizations or typologies.

CONCLUSIONS: DO TENTS AND HERDS STILL MATTER?

Summary of Socioeconomic and Political Changes; Implications

One of the key changes affecting the organization of nomadic pastoralism is the nomads' loss of autonomy after incorporation into sedentary nation-states, in the wake of the military advantage of sedentary states and revolutions in transportation technology during

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the past century (Barfield 1993: 207). Upon sedentarization, there is disruption of traditional ties and undermining of important sources of defense and security. As men are increasingly obliged to travel as migrant laborers and children are sent to school, the workload of women extends from their traditional routines to a heavier involvement in supplementary tasks. In Niger and Mali, colonial and postcolonial eras saw pastoralist border zones farmed, depleting the soil and disrupting ecological and socio-economic balance and relations between groups and lands. Mobility has been curtailed, censuses, schools and taxes imposed by colonial and postcolonial central state governments. Sometimes these have imposed a patrilineal bias. Tuareg are unique among pastoralists in the enduring significance their matrilineal institutions have for gender and relations between the sexes. But there is evidence that matriliny is under duress. This is shown by the transformations in property balance described in this article and elsewhere (Oxby 1990; Rasmussen 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998a, 2006; Figuereido in Claudot-Hawad 1996: 113–137). It is also shown in Gast's (1992: 151–172) description of Tuareg cultural encounters with more powerful neighbors: nation-state policies toward Tuareg nomads brought many workers, functionaries, soldiers, and tourists into rural Tuareg communities. Often, they were ignorant of and disrespectful toward traditional beliefs and practices; for example, they misunderstood evening festival and courtship customs as opportunities to seduce women, whereas traditionally, Tuareg cultural values emphasize music, poetry, flirting, visits, and conversation without necessarily including sexual intercourse. In some respects, then, Tuareg women appear to have become the wards of men in encounters with outside males, and in national systems of registration/naming, food relief and medical distribution programs, taxation and census counts. However, as shown, there are also new opportunities—in new cooperative agencies and projects offering some benefits for women, as well as men.

The question raised is how nomadic pastoral Tuareg women actively respond to forces of sedentization, urbanization, and nationalism. Do they gain or lose? How? Women can use the urban setting to escape from an extended household ruled over by a mother-in-law. They can also gain access, in more sedentarized centers, to new jobs, thereby benefiting from emerging economic opportunities not available in more remote rural areas. Finally, they often alternate back and forth between locations and occupations over long-term, and/or combine different strategies at the same time. It is therefore hazardous to generalize too sweepingly about pastoralism, women, and gender—some urban Tuareg women still own livestock, but keep them in the countryside with relatives, and some rural Tuareg women have given up herding. Hence the importance of not solely structural, but also situational meanings and practices. Rather than building models and typologies, anthropologists need to deconstruct and refine pastoral and gender-related categories and processes.

NOTES

1. In these projects—on spirit possession, aging and the life course, herbal healers, divination, rural and urban smith/artisans, gender, and verbal art performance, I gratefully acknowledge assistance from Fulbright Hays (1983, 1998, 2001); Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (1991, 1995, 1998, 2006); Social Science Research Council (1995); National Geographic Society for Research and Exploration (1995, 1998); Indiana University (1983), and University of Houston (1991).
2. For example, Mohanty (1992) criticizes Western feminists for essentializing women's experience regardless of race, class, or nationality. Mohanty faults Western feminists for universalizing women's oppression, as well. She argues that western feminists psychologize complex and often contradictory historical and cultural realities that mark differences among women. Differences among women need to be engaged rather than transcended. She also warns against globalizing women as victims; there is the need to acknowledge women's active agency. Yet feminists in these areas are diverse; they come from various schools of thought depending on their national and cultural orientations.
3. Pastoralist societies therefore break down the assumed dichotomy of private/public or domestic/public domains, a tenacious concept in some early feminist anthropology (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974) later critiqued in more recent anthropology of gender studies (Ong 1987).
4. These observations of female battle warriors in mythico-history raise interesting issues. There is a paucity of data on women's roles in the recent armed rebellion. Traditionally, most women have participated indirectly in fighting because men's honor depended upon women's praise music upon their victorious return from battles; thus women control men's reputations. Women's praise songs of men often welcomed them after successful raids or migrant labor or caravan trade, but women could also mock and scorn men who returned less victorious or without money. Women still hold power over men's reputations, but many men have not returned victorious or wealthy in recent years. Some men have attempted to find social recognition through participation in the 1990–1995 nationalist/separatist military conflict. Much new music of the Tuareg rebellion composed by both sexes, as well as women's traditional songs, perhaps is responding to these new predicaments and in effect, conveys men's and women's efforts to reconstruct social prestige and independent socioeconomic status in Tuareg gender-role relationships.

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