



## SECESSION AND SEPARATIST CONFLICTS IN POSTCOLONIAL AFRICA

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## Map of Mali and Azawad



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## Transnational Communities and Secession: The Azawad Secessionists, 1990–1996 and Beyond

From 1990 to 1996, wars raged across the African countries of Mali and Niger. The Tuareg, a minority people whose traditional regions of authority spread across Mali, Niger, Libya, Burkina Faso, and Algeria, had risen up and begun a guerrilla struggle against Mali and Niger in an attempt to claim what was seen as the heart of their traditional homeland. Although somewhat fragmented in their organization and lacking significant political support even from external sympathetic groups, the Tuareg managed to sustain their struggle through judicious use of their surroundings, the weakness of their opposition, and a rough unity of their goals. While previous revolts of the Tuareg populations had been intended to force their host states to recognize their membership as citizens and access the economic facets of the state, this new rebellion brought forth a new objective. No longer simply willing to be recognized within Mali, the fragmented fronts of the rebellion now demanded their own state: Azawad. The Tuareg rebels in Mali insisted that there was no longer a reason to believe that they would be recognized as an equal community within Mali and so now sought their own nation-state in June 1990. Three months later, their brethren in Niger began their own rebellion, demanding autonomy within the state and recognition of their own unique heritage and culture. Both rebellions would continue for years, with the Tuareg insisting on their goals of recognized national and even state status. However, by 1996 all sides of the conflict

were generally exhausted and peace initiatives were begun. While these would lead to an alteration in goals and relationships between the Tuaregs and their host states, the fires of secession or autonomy would not burn out so easily and embers of the conflict would smoulder throughout the following decade. Despite the failure of outright secession, the struggles of the Tuareg throughout the 1990s serve as a perfect illustration of the ethnic nationalism that pervaded the post-Cold War efforts as well as the efficacy of separatism as opposed to secession with regard to the post-Cold War state.

## THE TUAREG AND THEIR HISTORY

The Tuareg are a trans-Saharan people whose traditional territories stretch from regions in the south of modern Algeria and Libya to the northern areas of Burkina Faso. They are related to the Berbers of northern Africa and still maintain significant ties to those populations. Throughout their early history they had been primarily pastoralists, breeding and rearing camels, goats, sheep, and other livestock.<sup>1</sup> However, due to the region of their inhabitation, they also served as cross-cultural brokers and mediators across the Sahara Desert. This is perhaps best reflected in the etymology of the name Tuareg, whose disputed origin is either from the Arabic meaning “paths taken” or from Targa, the Berber name for the Fezzan region of Libya, which would denote the interior of the country. Neither of these names reflects what the Tuareg call themselves. Instead, within the Tuareg community the term used most often is *Imushagh*, although it has become far more common in recent years to use the term Kel Tamasheq,<sup>2</sup> “the people speaking Tamasheq,” which scholars believe is also more accurate and inclusive of the people represented within the community.<sup>3</sup>

It is generally assumed that the Kel Tamasheq migrated to their current territory sometime around the fourth or fifth century CE. While they initially followed traditional religions, the expansion of Islam led to the conversion of the population.<sup>4</sup> However, like many African communities that were at a significant distance from the centre of the caliphates, the Kel Tamasheq saw a degree of syncretism at play in their Islam. Significant local beliefs were incorporated, leading to a very idiosyncratic practice of the religion. Perhaps the most noted feature is the alteration of clothing norms. Whereas much of orthodox Islam believes in the veiling of women

for modesty's sake, the opposite is accepted within the Tuareg community.<sup>5</sup> As such, the men are veiled while the women are not. This, in combination with the indigo dye used for the clothing of the Tuareg, has led other various titles for the Tuareg, such as the "People of the Veil" and the "Blue People," the latter due to the staining of the skin that the dye sometimes caused.

Tuareg culture is itself quite complex, although much of its complexity may be understood in terms of a bipartite foundation that determines much of the socio-political organization of the Kel Tamasheq.<sup>6</sup> The first of these foundations is *tewsit*, or clan. These are roughly kinship groups that trace their lineage through generations and form the larger associations amongst the Kel Tamasheq. During the colonial period, these were referred to as "tribes" or "factions" by the French government, but this created a false equivalency, as although the *tewsiten* (the plural of *tewsit*) may share some of the characteristics of the archetypal tribe or faction of society, there are significant differences. The largest of these is that the concepts of *tewsiten* are not as immutable or all-encompassing as tribal associations. Instead, the relation of the Tuareg to their *tewsit* is also altered and defined by their place in the second foundation—that of hierarchy.

The hierarchy of the Tuareg was also mistakenly referred to as "feudal" throughout the colonial period, which also served to obscure how the society worked. Instead of a feudal system, the hierarchy of the Tuareg and their attached groups is akin to a caste system, a system of social strata into which one is born. This is where the initial naming of the *Imushagh* comes from; it signifies not the whole of the people but instead the noble warriors who stand roughly at the top of the hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> They operate within a culture of honour and shame, the *temushagha*, which binds together their caste and serves to create the social norms by which they operate. The second major hierarchical group is the *Ineslemen*, who operate by much the same norms but are responsible for religious affairs. Islamic norms are their primary guide to behaviour and structure, but as a still "noble" or "free" caste, they too operate within the strictures of traditional honour and shame.<sup>8</sup> Next down the hierarchy are *Imghad*, who are free but take on no claim of nobility, while trying to still maintain the *temushagha* that guides the noble castes. Due to their lack of nobility but acceptance of the social and cultural norms of the nobility, the French inadequately named them "vassals," but this simply confuses the issue. Following the *Imghad*

were the *Inadan*, who were the craftsmen or “blacksmiths.”<sup>9</sup> They were not noble, nor did they follow the *temushagha*, but they enjoyed certain benefits thanks to the roles they played in the hierarchy. These roles were not limited to the creation of goods, but also included the roles analogous to West African *griots*. Finally, at the bottom of the caste system were the *iklan*, the slaves. While this five-tiered caste system is increasingly seen as inadequate to fully describe the complexities of Kel Tamasheq society, for the purposes of this study it will suffice.

Of course, as noted, within these systems lie the categories of slaves, who are at the bottom of the hierarchy and often lack a formal lineage group. This makes the slaves themselves marginal figures within Tuareg society. Those placed into a slavery role were sub-Saharan Africans captured in the Soudan and impressed into the labour categories of the Tuaregs. They might climb to *Inadan* status, but far more either served as household slaves, the above-mentioned *iklan*, or as simple labour, the *bella*.<sup>10</sup> The *bella* would perform labour and pay a tribute to their master and even often travel alongside them throughout their journeys. In conflict, a *bella* would even take up arms on behalf of his master. These slaves and the Tuareg role in the slave trade were to have a significant effect on their history.

While there was in theory no intrinsic racism involved with the Tuareg system of slavery,<sup>11</sup> the Tuareg themselves remained significantly involved with the trans-Saharan slave trade throughout the Middle Ages and preyed extensively on the sub-Saharan African populations around them. By the early nineteenth century the main trans-Saharan trade routes ran directly through traditionally Tuareg lands and the trans-Saharan slave trade had brought wealth and status to them.<sup>12</sup> The Tuareg themselves often led strong raids into the surrounding African populations to capture large numbers of slaves who would be then sent along the routes north to be sold for a profit. This gave the Tuaregs a significant role in the most profitable source of wealth in North Africa in the mid-nineteenth century, expanding their power and influence. However, this would have two major effects by the end of the century. The first was that those populations that had been preyed upon would become home to a great deal of antipathy toward the Tuareg, who would be seen as a predatory threat to the more settled populations and often were targets of aggression. The second was that the

imposition of colonial control by the French and their consequent destruction of the slave trade and slavery was a deeply disruptive event.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, the disruption was more to the economy of the Tuareg, especially with the removal of the larger routes of the slave trade. They still existed as intermediaries across the Sahara and could make a living from both trading and livestock, but had lost a larger ability to trade slaves on a large scale. Beyond this, while French rule technically emancipated the *iklan* and the *bella*, the legal transformation did nothing to alter the social and cultural structures that still held them within the caste system.<sup>14</sup> Thus, while the French did their best to engage the Tuareg social structures, their misunderstanding of the dynamics at play meant that at best they engaged the elite as local power brokers and left the majority of Tuareg social structures essentially untouched. In fact, throughout much of the colonial period, there was significant sympathy and empathy for the Tuareg within the ranks of the French colonial governments.<sup>15</sup> Their elites, the *Imushagh*, were accepted as essentially feudal lords and left relatively powerful under French auspices, leading to an alignment of the Tuareg elites with the French colonial government.

While Tuareg society was not transformed by French colonialism, many of the surrounding African societies were. Assimilation led to significant alterations in the levels of education, urbanization, social stratification, and even economic activities, which in turn led to the familiar pattern of the rise of a group of educated nationalists. These were sometimes educated members of the traditional elites, but many were “New Men” who had been educated in the French system and were now grasping at newer ideas of nationalism and liberation. These men, such as Modibo Keita in Mali, wished to gain self-determination for their own states. In 1946, Keita joined Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Bamako and other representatives of the French colonies in Africa to create the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (African Democratic Rally, or RDA), a unified political party representing the majority of the peoples of French Africa.<sup>16</sup> Beyond this, Keita’s political activities stretched all the way to the European mainland, where he served in the cabinet of French Prime Ministers Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury and Félix Gaillard. When the Mali Federation was declared independent in June 1960 after negotiations with France, it was Keita who was inaugurated as the premier of the Mali Federation and then, following its acrimonious

dissolution two months later on 19 August, the first president of the Republic of Mali.

Keita and his RDA government quickly established Mali as a one-party state with a strong socialist program. While there was some interest in these programs on the part of the Kel-Tamasheq, most of their community had been more sympathetic to the conception of the *Organisation communale des régions sahariennes* (OCRS), a French project that would have seen a communal organization of the Saharan territories, which held much more promise for them.<sup>17</sup> With this construction of the Republic of Mali, there came an immediate attempt to build a common polity through history. The name of the state, chosen consciously to echo that of the great empire of Mali from the Middle Ages, was intended to conjure a shared glorious past that could unify a national identity through the history of the Bambara and Mande populations that would be appropriated for the populace as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Large investments in public art, literature, and performances were made to link together the heritage of old Mali to the present state. However, while this was not entirely appreciated by many members of other sub-Saharan groups, it completely excluded the Kel Tamasheq.

Beyond the construction of a national identity, there was also the necessity of building state capacity. Mali remained almost entirely agrarian in nature, and the new socialist regime wished to construct a modern state out of what had been a very loosely run colony. This meant stimulating agricultural production and building industry and a service sector to follow the development doctrine of the day, which in turn required a great deal of infrastructure that was not in evidence at the time of independence. Following the standard Afro-socialist path, this would begin by doing away with the “pre-modern” modes of production. The villages, so long a central social organization of Malian life, would be dismantled and reconstructed as cooperative farms wherein the methods of improved agriculture would be distributed to bring modern techniques to the people. This would also allow a cultural change, as the Africans could remove themselves from the exploitation of colonialism and instead focus on developing their own country as a communal effort.

Unfortunately for the ruling regime, most of these plans, such as building roads with voluntary labour or expecting smallhold farmers to work communally without regard to profit, proved to be wildly optimistic. To try

and keep these efforts going, the government turned to coercion, conscripting young men to use their labour to build the necessary infrastructure under the auspices of the Service Civique. This led to massive passive resistance on the part of the citizens, with many avoiding taxes, avoiding party dues, and avoiding the demanded labour simply by leaving. There had always been a degree of impermanence in some regions of the country, and the attempted reforms of the US-RDA saw a mass migration of young labour to the borders of Mali and beyond in an attempt to avoid the harsh attempts at development that Keita's regime was undertaking.

For the Kel Tamasheq, this transfer of power to an independent Mali and its early years of independence were a disaster. From the beginning there was serious tension between Kel Tamasheq leadership and the leadership of the new government.<sup>19</sup> The issues of race, of political authority, and even of their traditional nomadic lifestyle jumped to the fore following independence. There were already significant tensions on both sides when independence was declared in 1960. For the Mande, Bamabara, and other sub-Saharan populations of Mali, the Tuaregs were horrific slavers and slave owners who had enjoyed a privileged position under French colonial rule. Suspicions ran deep, and many of the stereotypes of Tuareg culture coloured the popular perception of them. On the Tuareg side, there was the question of association with Mali at all. While Tuareg of all of the free castes and many *bella* had been involved in the discourses of self-determination in the 1950s, it had not been taken as a given that they would be citizens of Mali. Their initial inclusion in French West Africa had been the result of a voluntary treaty signed following a military defeat and their acceptance of French rule, light as it turned out to be. The independence of Mali offered them no such parallel; instead they were simply placed within the confines of the new state and expected to be productive citizens.

The first three years of living under the Malian government did not defuse the already unstable situation. The development schemes of the US-RDA were a significant irritant to the general populace, but they would prove unbearable to the Kel Tamasheq. Whereas initially the locally accepted chiefs were kept in place by the Malian government, the traditional aspects of "tribal" leadership were antithetical to the government's modernization schemes. While it was accepted as a necessary evil, the government altered the title of the chiefs themselves and even interfered in

succession struggles, seeing these as government business. However, for the Kel Tamasheq this was outside interference into personal matters, irritating the situation and upsetting an accepted culture.

Beyond this, there was the simple issue of the culture itself. The US-RDA plan called for the creation of infrastructure through conscripted or voluntary labour to aid in the creation of large-scale yields of agrarian goods. The entirety of their platform was built around the conception of farming communities and the cultures they fostered. On the part of the Tuareg, there was almost no acceptance of the need for any of these things. As nomadic pastoralists, they had little need for infrastructure or permanent settlements, livestock was valued in quantity and not for yields of milk or beef, and labour beyond a few routine duties was not acceptable within their cultural strictures. While there were certainly Tuareg communities that settled for a brief while, ultimately their lifestyle was mobile and specifically oriented to their herds. When the US-RDA commissioners arrived, they perceived the impossibility of nomadic peoples taking part in the program and hit upon a simple solution: make them sedentary. Larger numbers of children were placed in schools to acquire the basis of the new Malian society, causing a clash between the new system and the traditions of the Tuareg. Beyond this, there was the simple question of labour. Whereas the new regime believed it could and should extract the necessary labour for building the state from its citizens, the Tuareg had never even been subject to conscripted labour under French rule. This was unacceptable to the Tuareg, with the Service Civique being analogous to slavery, a system that they were all too familiar with and not willing to undertake under the auspices of a regime they had equated with *iklan*.

While these events had kept tensions at a boil, the final straw was the all-too-common issue of taxes. The Malian state required a significant level of taxation, and the nomadic pastoral Kel Tamasheq were extremely difficult to tax. When told the sale of their cattle would be taxed, they simply crossed borders to Algeria or elsewhere and traded the cattle for goods or foreign currencies. To deal with this, the state instead increased the cattle tax multiple times, expecting an amount paid per head of cattle within a Kel Tamasheq's herd. While this was easier to levy, it remained extremely difficult to collect. When the collector came up empty in 1963,

the government sent troops to enforce the taxation. This would lead into the first insurrection against Mali.

## THE ALFELLAGA (1963–1964)

Like many of the conflicts that erupted in Africa in the 1990s, the Tuareg revolts had antecedents in the colonial and early postcolonial period. With the heavy hand of the Keita regime seeming far worse than the colonial benevolence of the French, the Kel Tamasheq erupted in revolt on 15 May 1963.<sup>20</sup> Pointing to the issues of serving the Black African regime, the removal of their rights over their *bella*, the taxes placed upon them, and the abuse of the militaries, the Kel Tamasheq demanded separation from the Republic of Mali and a return to the status quo ante-decolonization. However, even with the abuses they had undergone, the fighting strength of the rebels was extremely low; perhaps only 250 men at any given time were fighting against the Malian government forces. Given this small amount of manpower, there was no way they could hope for a military victory, even against the relatively small army of Mali. With only a few thousand soldiers themselves, the Malian forces still had a decisive edge in firepower, transport, and logistics. The only strategy that made sense was that of the other revolts ongoing in the 1960s: keep the war going and hope for international aid or mediation.<sup>21</sup> Given the friendliness the Kel Tamasheq still felt toward both the French and the Algerians (along with the significant cross-border ties they had with the latter), there was the hope that one or both of these states would intervene to help them gain a just conclusion to their struggle.

The early days of the struggle saw significant Tuareg successes. Initially Mali only dedicated local police units and a detachment of the nomadic gendarmerie.<sup>22</sup> While these were fine for patrolling the region and occasionally dealing with criminals, the Malian forces were not professional soldiers and the Tuaregs had the advantage of knowing the terrain and having local support. This allowed them to consistently outmanoeuvre the Malian forces and engage only in strategically advantageous situations. The motorized vehicles for the Malian forces at least initially found themselves foundering in the rocky and broken terrain where the Tuareg consistently engaged them, and this caused the police to increasingly lean on their own camel-mounted forces. The gendarmerie, also known as the *Groupes*

*nomade d'intervention de la gendarmerie* (GNIG), were themselves already camel mounted and offered significantly stiffer resistance to the Tuareg combatants but still could not defeat them.<sup>23</sup> In response, the Keita regime committed an increasing amount of its regular army to the struggle. By October, a mere five months after the beginning of the conflict, the army had committed 2,200 soldiers to the conflict, supplemented by 300 vehicles and two airplanes.<sup>24</sup> However, despite the numerical advantage they now enjoyed, which was reaching a ten-to-one ratio, the rugged terrain of the engagements and the increasingly professional hit-and-run tactics of the Kel Tamasheq precluded a decisive victory.

By January 1964 the rebellious Tuareg were confident enough to intensify their raiding. Attacks on columns of Malian soldiers and villages were increasing in frequency. Part of this ferocity was in response to the change in the Malian conduct of the war. While early on the conflict had been characterized by raid and counter-raid between insurgent and gendarme, with the commitment of regular forces new methods of prosecuting the conflict had begun.<sup>25</sup> No longer was the war the sole preserve of the combatants. With the insurgents increasingly retreating into Algeria as the Malians became more aggressive, the soldiers instead turned their anger onto the members of the communities left behind. Categories of people that had been considered outside of the bounds of armed conflict—women, holy men, craftsmen—were now arrested or impressed by the Malians as sympathizers or supporters of the Tuareg rebels. Beyond this, to further isolate the rebels, large numbers of the populace that inhabited the Adagh region were relocated and much of the region was declared a *zone interdite*, or forbidden zone.<sup>26</sup> This meant that any civilian found within the bounds of these forbidden areas was subject to summary execution as a rebel. As this effectively cut off a large amount of the rangeland needed to water and graze the livestock that were the backbone of the economy of the Kel Tamasheq, it offered them a stark choice: obey and be ruined or disobey and risk death.

Despite the increase in raids and the fury that these new tactics instilled in the Tuareg fighters, the tide was turning against them. Diverting part of their manpower, the insurgents did their best to escort many of their people across the forbidden zones to what was seen as safety in Algeria. However, their lines of supply were increasingly strained, the army

was poisoning wells and confiscating or killing the herds found in the zones, and their families were isolated from them in what was named *zones de regroupement* by the Army. These last were in essence concentrated villages where the Tuareg populace was both controlled by the Malian forces and often used as impressed labour. Above and beyond these pressures on the combatants, the hoped-for external aid from Algeria and France never materialized. France remained completely aloof from the conflict as it was ongoing, offering no support to the Kel Tamasheq in the struggle. Algeria, while initially offering a safe haven and holding a significant number of refugees, did not step in to aid the insurgency itself. Mali, cognizant of the refuge that Algeria was offering their foes, pursued a diplomatic strategy to further weaken the rebellion. By late September 1963 they had already convinced Ben Bella's government to arrest and deport several leaders of the revolt. A further diplomatic offensive directed at Morocco saw yet more exiled Tuareg leaders seized and returned to Mali.<sup>27</sup>

By early 1964 the rebellion had lost many of its leaders, its safe havens were disappearing, and its community was in shambles. While many in the resistance wanted to continue the struggle, those who had already been captured or surrendered were sent by the Malians to urge surrender. These voices proved decisive throughout May and June as large detachments of rebels turned themselves in. A few holdouts remained in the field or retreated to Algeria to try and reform a resistance, but these did not trouble the Malians to any great degree. The exiles remained so but were offered amnesty if they would lay down their arms. Those still fighting were hunted and in many cases killed over the next few months. By 15 August the rebellion was declared over by the Malian government.<sup>28</sup> A week later the triumph was celebrated on the country's Independence Day and the overall victory seen as a step forward for the forces of progress within the country.

The initial Tuareg revolt carried many of the characteristics of the 1960s wave of attempted secessions. They featured distinct groups that remained isolated from the independent state and who had lost a degree of privilege with the advent of the postcolonial state, triggering violent resistance. They hoped that this violent resistance could gain them, if not a military victory, at least international recognition and support of their claims. However, whereas Katanga or Biafra could point to firm territorial claims and a functional governance system, making them in essence a state attempting

to secede, the Kel Tamasheq in Mali could not make these same claims. There was no united territory attempting to split away, but instead a cultural nation within a state attempting to remove itself from that state's authority. The end state of this removal was not well defined: would it create an amorphous state with negotiated boundaries? Would it revive the French conception of the OCRS? Would it in fact demand the reinsertion of French authority? This left even sympathetic powers unable to support their claim, as they were unable to effectively express a unified goal, bring forth centralized leadership, or even claim specific territory for their people. In fact, of the entirety of the Malian Kel Tamasheq community, only one segment had truly entered the struggle, with the Kel Adagh providing the vast majority of combatants and leaders.<sup>29</sup> Even though the majority of the Malian Kel Tamasheq had grievances against the Malian government, only the Kel Adagh had taken up arms in significant numbers. In the end, it was not even a unified Tuareg nation that fought for a state; it was an insurrection by some members of the Tuareg people who struggled in what amounted to an armed protest against the state of Mali. As such, the movement was a significant failure despite the initial weakness of the Malian response, and the *Alfellaga*, as it came to be known, was hardly recognized as a secession attempt at all. However, the resonance of the conflict and the remembrance of it would play a significant part decades later when the Tuareg again felt the call of nationalism.

## THE FORMATION OF FURTHER RESISTANCE

With the cessation of the conflict and the reimposition of Malian state power, the Kel Tamasheq attempted to resume their lives. However, the targeting of livestock and relocation or flight of many Tuareg groups during the earlier conflict had left them already in an economically vulnerable position. Many had already found new homes in Algeria, Libya, or even with other Kel Tamasheq in Niger when the new wave of catastrophe occurred. Beginning in the 1960s, the favourable climate of the Sahara had already begun to reverse itself as part of an unpredictable cycle. By the early 1970s the region was entering a period of severe drought that would reach its peak in the middle of the decade. While the Tuareg and other pastoralists had enjoyed significant prosperity throughout the periods of plenty,

the conflict had undermined these limited gains and left them extremely vulnerable to the climatic change. The herds they relied on perished in the drought conditions and the Tuareg themselves were pushed to the edges of their traditional territories. Without the wealth generated by the livestock, the majority of the Kel Tamasheq needed to find alternate methods of survival and alternate locations to pursue them in.

The result was what became known as the Teshumara, taken from the French *chomage*, meaning “unemployment.”<sup>30</sup> Members of the Kel Tamasheq community were forced to urbanized regions of Algeria, Libya, Mali, and Niger, where they were left to find wage-labour employment. It cannot be overstated how devastating this was to the Tuareg communities. With their caste system as one of the central organizing principles of the Kel Tamasheq identity, the requirement of taking manual labour was a critical blow to the cultural identities of the *Imushagh* and other high-caste pastoralists. The possibility of returning to the pastoral life was undermined by a second wave of droughts in the 1980s, further reinforcing the sundering of the traditional Tuareg lifestyles. Other methods of acceptable employment were attempted, such as smuggling between the various states joined by the Sahara,<sup>31</sup> an updating of the traditional caravans that had contributed so much to the trans-Saharan culture in the past. However, the creation of modern states and the use of this trafficking to trade in prohibited goods and currencies made this both lucrative and dangerous, and certainly not a practice that could be pursued by even a significant portion of the Kel Tamasheq populace.<sup>32</sup>

The end result of this period was widespread marginalization of the Kel Tamasheq community. Those who could still live in their traditional homelands were few and far between; those who lived in exile often struggled to find permanent employment,<sup>33</sup> and the employment that could be found was often anathema to the traditional Tuareg way of life. As conditions in all the Saharan countries worsened, these communities faced expulsion from their new homes as the surrounding countries could not support the large numbers of refugees. The only welcoming home many would find would be in Libya, where Muammar Gaddafi proclaimed the original homeland of the Kel Tamasheq and offered them a place to find work and support for their community to revive itself.<sup>34</sup> This proclamation in 1982 would change

the course of the political life of the Kel Tamasheq and reshape the next three decades of their relations with their former homelands.

The dislocation caused by the waves of droughts had not only forced marginalization upon the Kel Tamasheq, it had thrown their precarious political situation into stark relief for all members of the community. They still had no homeland, the Algerians had not supported their struggle, the Malians and Nigeriens were sub-Saharan Africans who had little use for them, and no outside help was available to aid them in gaining any social or political status. This solitude shaped a new understanding among many of the exiles, whether they were Nigerien or Malian Tuareg. There was now the need to create their own centralized and unified community tied to the communal and traditional space of the Tuareg. There was now the need to create both a national identity beyond the fragmented communities of the Kel Tamasheq and a state to give themselves true political and economic self-determination. While this concept of a nation-state would be struggled over, it emerged as part of the soul searching of Tuareg intellectuals, authority figures, and *evolues* over the course of the 1970s and 1980s as they found their way through the marginalization of the Teshumara.<sup>35</sup> This struggle to shape the conception of a Tuareg nation-state would emerge as a series of narratives that could be collectively known as the *Tenekra*.<sup>36</sup>

The first figures to try and overcome the segmented nature of Kel Tamasheq were the surviving leaders of the Alfellaga still in Algeria. These men, notably Younes ag Ayyouba, Issouf ag Cheick, and Elledi ag Alla, came together in 1974 under the auspices of the Algerian government and discussed what they saw as the way forward for the Kel Tamasheq.<sup>37</sup> Their understanding of the struggle moving forward was as an extension of the previous Alfellaga and the explanation of its import to this new generation of shattered and scattered Tuareg. This could serve as a rallying point and a way to hopefully bring together a collective identity for them. However, the discussion quickly became focused on who could be involved in this project. Was it just the Kel Tamasheq or could the other suffering Saharan pastoralists be a part of it? What of the Bidan or the Fulbe? These were groups that also had been marginalized after being split and were weakened by the disruption of the trans-Saharan communities they had belonged to. These questions led to a second meeting in 1976 involving many of the Tuareg *evolues*, which helped to further define the questions of who would belong

to this imagined community and potential state.<sup>38</sup> The name that emerged from that meeting was the *Mouvement de libération de l'Azawad*, or MLA.

The Azawad is a valley formed by two wadis, the Azawad and the Azawagh, that flow between the Adagh and Air mountains.<sup>39</sup> The valley stretches between Mali and Niger and forms the heart of what had traditionally been the territory of many of the Kel Tamasheq. The call to this traditional land helped form the first territorial conception of the Tuareg state, and the remembrance of many of the scattered communities of the valley helped unify the exiles around a shared identity. By stretching the territory across Mali and Niger, it helped to assuage the divisions that had already grown within the community during its fracturing. With this choice of territory and identity, these *evolues* and Alfellaga leaders also agreed on a plan of battle, with each authority granted a different territory to organize and struggle for. This was to be a war that would not end until complete separation was achieved.

Unfortunately for the leaders of the previous Alfellaga, while they had helped bring together the national narrative of the Kel Tamasheq, they still could not claim leadership. Their support by Algeria, their foundation consisting almost entirely of Kel Adagh, and their separation from the greater issues of the younger generation of scattered Kel Tamasheq all contributed to their undoing. Algeria saw the Alfellaga leadership's inability to unify the Tuareg or direct them to service in the western Sahara<sup>40</sup> and began to withdraw their own support. The members of other segments of Tuareg society disliked their apparent privileging of the Kel Adagh in terms of leadership positions. Finally, the newer generation of Tuareg did not entirely trust their connections with Algeria or their plans for the future struggle against Mali and Niger. Instead, the centre of gravity for the new struggle would be found in the younger generation that was coming of age in Gaddafi's Libya.

Kel Tamasheq had been flocking to Libya since the early 1970s. There were abundant labour opportunities and Gaddafi's government was welcoming of the Tuareg even before his 1982 pronouncement. The Tuareg population fit well into his attempts to create a Pan-African solidarity movement, but one that was markedly pro-Arab and pro-Islamic at its core. Starting in 1979, Libya began to offer support and training to those members of the Tuareg population who believed in the *Tenekra*. These trained

fighters were at first subject to attempts to fold them into larger movements planned by Gaddafi, but each in turn was found wanting. By 1980 the Kel Tamasheq who longed for their nation-state were being trained in Camp Al-Nasr, which at its peak was training 2700 fighters.<sup>41</sup> Above and beyond military training, these camps also offered basic educational instruction on subjects such as literacy and history. Although the camp would close later, hundreds of fighters gained additional instruction after volunteering to fight with the Palestinians in the Lebanon conflict.

Upon their return from the conflict, these Tuareg found two new camps constructed by Gaddafi's government, although these were explicitly for the Nigerien Kel Tamasheq.<sup>42</sup> Despite this bar, many Malian Tuareg managed to undertake the training offered. The fighters from this camp who served in the Chadian wars of Gaddafi earned a substantial amount of money, a significant portion of which was then shared with those Kel Tamasheq who were beginning to organize more political and military opposition to the Malian and Nigerien governments. With the broadening of the Kel Tamasheq involvement, the Kel Adagh senior leadership was increasingly marginalized, and attempts were made to create a unified front between the two major factions, Malian Tuareg and Nigerien Tuareg. The latter was not to be, as these groups were divided between different camps following the formation of a solely Nigerien politico-military group.<sup>43</sup> By the mid-1980s the Malian Tuareg had been trained in great numbers and many had gained significant military experience in Chad fighting for Gaddafi's ambitions. Small groups of Kel Tamasheq fighters slowly filtered back into Mali and prepared for their long-hoped-for conflict. By 1990, both Malian and Nigerien Kel Tamasheq had managed to create a unified identity and goal of statehood and a new war was about to break out, a war they were far more prepared for than the unfocused and somewhat naïve struggle of the 1960s.

## THE SECOND REBELLION

While preparations had been made for a rebellion throughout the 1980s, there was no agreement on when or how it would begin. Caches of weapons had been hidden, returned refugees were ready to rise up, but there was no spark agreed upon to launch the rebellion. While initial plans were still

focused on the future, a series of catastrophes involving the locally based insurgents running afoul of the Malian armed forces created a necessary truncation of the timeline lest all of the cells within Mali be swept up. On 28 June 1990, the Menaka cell of the Kel Tamasheq rebels attacked the administrative and police headquarters of Menaka itself and seized several four-wheel-drive vehicles from the government and local NGOs.<sup>44</sup> This strike, although small in nature, marked the official beginning of a second rebellion against the government of Mali.

Between June and October of that year the rebellion was shaping into a rough parallel of the previous struggle. The Kel Tamasheq used hit-and-run tactics to avoid any decisive confrontation with the scattered and ill-trained forces of the Malian government. The raids provided the rebels with additional vehicles, weapons, and supplies, all while creating a confused response from the Malian armed forces. The new generation of fighters was more coordinated and far better trained than the rebels of the 1960s, leading to far more effective attacks and efficient use of the material seized in them. Their experience in Lebanon and Chad, combined with their understanding of mobile warfare, made them a formidable opponent for the less mobile and more conventionally organized Malian army. In particular, the mobility allowed by the Tuareg's technicals<sup>45</sup> far outstripped that of the Malians.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the first several months of conflict were extremely one-sided as the Malian forces were continually forced onto the static defensive in the wake of the lightning attacks of the Tuareg.

Quick assaults were not the only tactics that the Malian Kel Tamasheq employed. Radio broadcast challenges to the Malian armed forces were established, giving the location of Kel Tamasheq bases, enjoining the state's army to attack the Tuareg fighters. These led to costly losses for the Malians, as they lacked the training or cohesion to use their advantage in firepower to the fullest and instead were often repulsed after desultory bombardments and charges on prepared rebel positions. The Kel Tamasheq quickly established themselves as the far superior military force, gaining victories on the offensive against caravans and bases and on the defensive from their own prepared positions. Perhaps the most devastating of these victories was the raid at Toximine, where 45 lightly armed Kel Tamasheq rebels attacked a camp of 450 Malian soldiers on the night of 4 September 1990.<sup>47</sup> Using a surprise assault to initially capture the heavy weapons of

the army, and then turning them against the soldiers, they routed the whole detachment while killing approximately a quarter of the enemy force.

The Malian response to these actions was initially an attempt to re-introduce the same system that had worked in the previous conflicts: the creation of forbidden zones and the suppression of local populations that were seen as possible collaborators. These methods were unfortunately well suited for descending into excess, and although they caused logistical difficulties for the Kel Tamasheq rebels, in combination with the rebels' success they created widespread sympathy for their cause, spreading the rebellion further. By late 1990 this had become a significant problem for the Malian government under Moussa Traoré. This was not necessarily because of any decisive losses, although Toximine had demoralized government forces, but instead because Traoré's government was facing several other political and economic challenges during the rebellion. With Traoré's government teetering, negotiations with the Tuareg seemed like the fastest way to settle at least one significant challenge to their rule.

Negotiations with the rebels began in October 1990 through initial contacts with traditional authorities in the Kel Tamasheq communities. By December 1990 the talks were in earnest. However, at this point it is important to discuss who was actually negotiating on behalf of whom. The Traoré government was weak and looking for a fast way to disentangle itself from this insurgency in the north to instead deal with the political restiveness in its southern heartland. It was looking for a workable solution that could lead to general stability. The traditional leaders of the Kel Tamasheq, although serving as mediators, had no formal authority over the rebels and instead were opposed to the armed uprising. The question quickly became that of who could speak for the rebels. Many of the rebels had identified themselves as being associated with the *Mouvement populaire de libération de l'Azawad* (or MPLA, sometimes alternately named as the *Mouvement populaire de l'Azawad*, or MPA), but there were deep splits in what that actually meant within the movement itself. While the peace agreement with the Traoré government was eventually mediated by Algeria and signed by a representative of the rebels,<sup>48</sup> the result was not peace but instead a fracturing of the rebel movement.<sup>49</sup>

The agreement, named the Tamanrasset Agreement after the Algerian city where it was negotiated and signed in January 1991, proved to be the

seed of serious division within the ranks of the rebels.<sup>50</sup> As negotiated, it implicitly placed Azawad and the Tuareg within the framework of Mali, making the region of Kidal, where the Kel Adagh dwelled, a full-fledged and relatively autonomous region within Mali.<sup>51</sup> While this gained significant freedom for the Kel Adagh, who had been at the heart of the 1960s rebellions and the kindling of Kel Tamasheq nationalism, this autonomy was not appreciated by many members of other factions of the Tuareg community. While the MPA could feel confident in their negotiated peace, the more hardline groups, which tended to be outside the influence of the Kel Adagh and the more *evolue* members of Kel Tamasheq society, rejected the new peace and continued their attacks on the Malian government. The first of the significant splinter groups was the *Front populaire de libération de l'Azawad* (FPLA), which launched a number of significant strikes at Malian military targets starting in February 1991.<sup>52</sup>

The FPLA was to prove a very different group than the MPA. While the MPA was seen as a group of moderates using military force for separatist goals, the FPLA insisted on a militant separation from Mali and the establishment of the state of Azawad. Given these more aggressive goals, the attacks of the FPLA had a much further reach than those previously launched by the MPA and the initial rebellion. No longer fighting for recognition but instead for a military victory, the FPLA spread their attacks south and west, passing Timbuktu and the bend in the Niger River. Of course, the MPA was not a monolithic whole either, and by the end of the year had split into the MPA and the *Armée révolutionnaire de libération de l'Azawad* (ARLA), further fragmenting the Kel Tamasheq along social and class boundaries.<sup>53</sup>

While the Kel Tamasheq combatants were fragmenting and the Tamanrasset Agreement was being broken by both sides, the Traoré regime was faring far worse. Traoré had ruled as an autocrat since overthrowing the Keita regime in 1968 and had only slightly liberalized his regime in the 1980s under pressure from the IMF. However, this window had been all that was needed for the opposition, who formed the *Congrès national d'initiative démocratique*, or CNID, in 1990. Demonstrations rocked the capital of Bamako, destabilizing the regime just as the Tuareg revolt had begun. The failure of the peace agreement had come on the heels of a suppressed demonstration that had seen 300 dissidents killed, driving the military into

action. On 26 March 1991, the Malian armed forces under Colonel Amadou Touré entered the capital and arrested Traoré, overthrowing his government and ushering in a new regime in Mali.<sup>54</sup> This was to have significant effects upon the peace process, as although the Tamanrasset Agreement remained in force, the signatories to it had been marginalized or removed and the framework itself had been largely ignored by both sides.

However, with the advent of Touré's regime and his determination to transition to democratic rule as quickly as possible, there was also the need to finally deal with the Kel Tamasheq fighters in the north. The previous agreement had called for autonomy, many of those still fighting wished to have complete secession, and the government of Mali simply wished for the conflict to be over. This called for a unity of purpose amongst the Kel Tamasheq combatants, which was provided by the United Movements and Fronts of Azawad (MFUA), an ad hoc organization consisting of military and political representatives who claimed legitimacy from each armed group.<sup>55</sup> While these men were undoubtedly authorities within their spheres, there was a question as to how much they truly represented the wishes of all combatants and how much they actually represented the more central concepts of the MFUA. However, these men were able to negotiate with Touré's government and come to what was called the National Pact peace treaty, which was to define the ultimate goals of the Kel Tamasheq armed movements in terms of state, nation, and citizenship within Mali.

The National Pact peace treaty was signed in April 1992 under the auspices of France and Mauritania. The pact was intended to smooth over the long-standing grievances of the Kel Tamasheq and their isolation from the levers of the Malian state. Kel Tamasheq fighters and intelligentsia were to be integrated into the Malian armed forces and administration, meaning that there would be notable representation of their needs within the government. Funds would be made available to help approximately 160,000 Kel Tamasheq refugees return and reintegrate into society. Additional funds would be set aside to help reconstruct the north following the conflict that had erupted there for the previous two years, and a tax exemption for ten years would be granted to northerners to help them reconstruct their lives as well. Finally, the northern region would be granted a special status within the Malian administration, essentially bestowing social, economic, and administrative autonomy.<sup>56</sup> While all of these were renegotiated over the

next several years and most were incompletely implemented at best, they offered at least the framework of a deal that was agreeable to both sides of the conflict. However, as the deal evolved and was implemented in a piecemeal fashion, the greater Kel Tamasheq community was left further outside the dealings of the MFUA and began to lose their patience.

Throughout the period, the fragmented armed fronts were already rarely obeying the ceasefire that had been called to aid in negotiations. While the MFUA was put forth as the representatives of the combatants and the community as a whole, their authority over the many armed groups was always in question and, as negotiations dragged on, began to evaporate. These groups launched raids on the settled agriculturalists throughout this period, especially on the ethnically Songhay people of the Niger Bend.<sup>57</sup> As refugees returned following the 1993 acceptance of the pact by the FPLA, there was increasing strain on the food resources of the region as aid was slow to arrive. This was exacerbated by the increasing infighting between various Kel Tamasheq factions in the resistance, especially between the ARLA and MPA over the shape of Kel Tamasheq society.<sup>58</sup> These tensions kept the struggle at a simmer, and events in Gao would soon cause the conflagration to erupt again.

The ethnic Songhay populations inhabited the north but had been left in limbo by the negotiated settlement. Already at odds with the Kel Tamasheq thanks to their raids, the Songhay formed a self-defence militia in May 1994. Called the Ganda Koy (“Masters of the Earth”),<sup>59</sup> these militias rapidly took on forms analogous to the Kel Tamasheq fronts, with small arms, heavy weapons, and technicals fleshing out their arsenal in a rapid burst of organization.<sup>60</sup> With what has been referred to as the tacit if not explicit support of the military and the local government, the Ganda Koy began to arrest and kill the local Kel Tamasheq and other Saharan nomad populations. By the end of June they had reportedly killed over 450 Kel Tamasheq and others and had stepped up their patrols both on land and with boats on the river. Large-scale pronouncements urging other citizens to drive away or kill the “nomads” were distributed, creating at least two other similar organizations that continued the conflict.<sup>61</sup> The Tuareg groups responded with their own raids and killings, creating more chaos in the north even as the main negotiators worked toward a solution. It was only following two outbursts of violence in Gao, one by the *Front Islamique*

*Arabe de l'Azawad* (or FIAA, one of the secessionist groups fighting in the north) on the Ganda Koy members and African civilians and the other the reprisals of the survivors on the remaining nomadic population in the city, that both sides returned to the negotiating table.<sup>62</sup> The attacks had convinced the non-combatants on both sides that the violence would have no end without their own intervention, and in late 1994 the local authorities signed their own pact to force a ceasefire in their communities.

With the state still unable to enforce the National Pact, many local conflicts were resolved over the next year locally. Communities that had used their disparate histories to create conflict now used it to try and stop the violence. Local initiatives were aided by the UN personnel who were in the region and smaller efforts to integrate the militias of both sides into the national military. While these were underway, parallel efforts by the Malian government and the local authorities were undertaken to disarm the militias and enforce local peace agreements. The efforts by President Konaré, who had won election to the presidency of Mali in a transition to a democratic administration in 1992, were considered especially important, as his rhetoric consistently defined the issue as a national Malian one as opposed to a Tuareg problem that the nation had.<sup>63</sup> This defined the Tuareg as part of the nation, a critical step in being able to reintegrate the fighters into the nation as opposed to defining them as an ethnic enemy of the state.<sup>64</sup> By March 1996 these multiple lines of effort had borne fruit, and on the 26th the stacked arms that had been surrendered were burned in the Timbuktu market square in a symbolic *La Flamme de la Paix*.<sup>65</sup>

Following the peace of 1996, elements of the National Pact were able to be more fully put into place and a relative calm returned to the north. The combatants on both sides were largely amnestied and allowed to resume their former lives.<sup>66</sup> While violence was still occurring, it was not a directed political act and instead was a reflection on the difficulties the region was still having while reconstructing its communities. The decentralization of the region, that is, the local autonomy that the Tuareg had won, had reduced the prevalence of conflict and the region had returned largely to normalcy.<sup>67</sup> While there would be further political ruptures a decade later, the Tuareg had at this point completed their rebellions for the purpose of gaining political concessions in Mali in the initial post-Cold War era.

## THE KEL TAMASHEQ: A NATION WITH AN IMAGINED STATE

The revolts of the Tuareg in Mali serve as an interesting case study of the interactions of secession, separatism, irredentism, and the changing ideas of nationalism in the post–Cold War era. The revolts in the 1990s began as what could be understood as a direct attempt at secession and the establishment of a state around the conception of Azawad, the putative Tuareg homeland for what was now considered the imagined community of the Kel Tamasheq. However, local and regional events took place that would shape it into different forms, opening the possibility for secession, then possible irredentism, and finally an acceptance of autonomy under the decentralized rule of the Malian state.

Of course there is the question of the earliest revolt against Mali in 1963. Given the stated objectives of the leaders, does this not point to a continuity and establish the struggles of the Kel Tamasheq as one of the Long Wars for secession in terms of duration? There were certainly combatants who were more than willing to hold forth on their desire for separation from the hated Malian state and that their struggle was to bring that about. However, there are difficulties in linking this earlier war to the later efforts that characterized the struggles of the 1990s. As noted earlier in this chapter, while there were certainly members of the leadership of the rebels who dreamed of being separated from Keita's state, there was little to no idea of an end state after such separation was completed. Considering that much of the rancour was due to the loss of what the Kel Tamasheq saw as their deserved privilege following independence, it would seem that much of the struggle was instead somewhat paralleling the earlier Civil Secessions, with the major difference being that while Katanga had a specific civil structure inherent within its community, the Kel Tamasheq almost appeared to be looking for an outside party to construct it.<sup>68</sup> Whether this would have taken the form of a French enforcement of what the Kel Tamasheq had assumed would be their deserved autonomy or the final creation of an *Organisation commune des régions sahariennes* that would benefit all of the Saharan pastoral groups was never quite articulated. It is therefore difficult to say that this is necessarily a secessionist conflict without there being an understood state to be created.

Further complicating the issue is that while the 1963 revolt has been generally discussed as a revolt of the Kel Tamasheq based upon their disgruntlement with the Malian government, this is actually a mischaracterization. While many important traditional figures arose and helped coordinate the conflict, the truth remains that the leadership and fighting manpower for the struggle came almost entirely from a single segment of the Tuareg community: the Kel Adagh. Coming from the region nearest the mountainous terrain of northern Mali near the Algerian border, the Kel Adagh were certainly the most aggrieved and felt it necessary to take up arms, but they represented only one confederation of the Kel Tamasheq community. None of the other confederations saw fit to rise up or even coordinate with them on any level, leaving the Kel Adagh the lone members of the revolt. This is not to say that the Kel Adagh would not play a large role in the later revolts, but simply that they were an isolated community at the time in terms of their armed resistance. Without a fully articulated goal of a state or even the representation of the entire nation to which they belonged, it is hard to place the original struggle as a precursor of the later revolts in any fashion, aside from inspiration for the Kel Adagh themselves and an early attempt at a reform insurgency within the newly independent state of Mali.

However, the revolt that began in 1990 can without a doubt be linked closely to the reignited secession desires amongst the Kel Tamasheq of the post-Cold War Era. While the 1963 struggle had failed because of its fragmented participation, the capacity of the Malian state to project its power, and its essential lack of a practicable end-goal, the new struggle was taking place in an entirely different context. The intervening years had dramatically changed the political, economic, and military landscape, allowing for a much different outcome within this struggle. In terms of fragmented participation, those years had been disastrous to the entirety of the Kel Tamasheq community, and the Teshumara had forced large-scale changes on them. While there remained questions about exactly how the Kel Tamasheq community could or should be defined, by the end of the Teshumara there was a shared experience that had begun to draw the scattered populace together. By midway through the 1980s there was a palpable conception of a Kel Tamasheq community and shared experience that began to define a modern Tuareg nation through the narratives of the *Tenekra*.

The coalition of Kel Tamasheq fighters, both abroad and within Mali, helped define the struggle around the creation and reclaiming of Azawad, a homeland built around the conception of the traditional homeland of the Kel Tamasheq. With the initiation of the hostilities in 1990 there was initially one and then several armed fronts, each claiming to represent the now-conceived ambitions of the united Kel Tamasheq and the desires of an ethnic homeland.

This is not to say that the conceptions of this ethnic homeland or who would belong to it were monolithic. As with any process of identity formation, there were fractious struggles over the inclusion or exclusion of peoples and the conception of what social and cultural form the nation itself would take. Even the period of transition, the Teshumara, was not experienced in the same way across the Kel Tamasheq populace, and these experiences then were expressed differently when individuals and groups attempted to define their “Kel Tamasheq”-ness. When the conflict began, this was immediately seen in the fragmentation of the armed groups struggling against Mali. While all fronts were opposed to continuing Malian rule of Azawad, by the end of the first few weeks of fighting there were already four major armed fronts in the conflict, each with a separate view on how Azawad would be defined and run. The MPLA (later MPA), FPLA, and ARLA were all struggling initially for a Kel Tamasheq nation or region, and the *Front islamique arabe de l’Azawad* (FIAA), which comprised primarily nomadic Arab groups from northern Mali, also rejected the Malian government rule and also broadcast their own Azawad-focused agenda.<sup>69</sup>

This fragmentation of armed groups and ultimate goals led directly into the confusion following first the 1991 signing of the Tamanrasset Accords. With the fronts so fragmented and the leadership of each not entirely clear—especially with the growing rift between the Kel Adagh fighters of the previous generation and the newer rebellious groups—the accords were simply not seen as binding by the vast majority of combatants, since they also involved concessions that only a portion of the combatants agreed to. While the MPA and the FIAA agreed in theory to the Tamanrasset Accords’ settling of grievances within the framework of a unitary Mali,<sup>70</sup> the FPLA categorically insisted on a separate Azawad and so refused to cease their struggle. The formation of the ARLA from splits in the MPA was another result of these contestations of the identity of the movement.

The MPA had been led initially by many of the same leaders from the Al-fellaga generation of the 1960s who were pushing for a re-establishment of traditional Kel Tamasheq society in their traditional regions, but the ARLA included many members who felt that the Kel Tamasheq people had undergone significant transformations in the past decades and needed to reform themselves from within.<sup>71</sup> This same process repeated itself with the National Pact under the Konaré regime. While the MFUA was technically an umbrella group that represented the interests of all the armed fronts, the National Pact represented something far closer to the separatist desires of the MPA than those of the more radical groups. The fact that even years later splinter groups continued clashing with the government and the MPA despite the “settling” of the conflict is a stark illustration of how contentious the new nationalism of the Kel Tamasheq was.<sup>72</sup>

Harkening just as closely to the themes of the 1990s waves of secession is the characterization of the peace proposals and process, from the Tamanrasset Accords to the National Pact to the eventual final ceasefire brokered by local elites. The Tamanrasset Accords were essentially a discussion between a Cold War-era regime and what had been the previous generation of Tuareg and Arab leadership, brokered by Algeria, a state acting as a third party within the negotiations. However, the wave of changes that the ending of the Cold War enabled occurred with startling rapidity within Mali and its neighbours. The Traoré Regime, which had been in power since 1968 with the complicity and support of France and other African regimes, was swept out of power through a popular uprising against the disliked government. While the failing war in the north had helped delegitimize the regime, its ailing economy and increasingly firm opposition had seen the regime teeter and finally fall to a coup led by Lt. Col. Amadou Touré, who quickly arranged for a National Conference to figure out the next step of ruling in the post-Cold War, post-dictatorship Mali. Central to this process was the settling of the conflict in the north. Whereas the independence-era states of Africa had been unbending Westphalian states in theory, the new era offered significantly more flexibility. The new state could maintain its most important attribute, its sovereignty, and still offer significant decentralization of governance and developmental incentives to the Kel Tamasheq. In effect, the new state could offer the Kel Tamasheq autonomy under their sovereignty along with integration into the political

and financial networks of the state without compromising the practical functions of the post-Cold War state.<sup>73</sup> This allowed for the political resolution of the conflict, that of separatism and not secession, whereas the earlier era of African politics could not have offered that solution.

It is, finally, worth noting that the resolution leading to the *Flamme de la Paix* also sits within the conception of the new wave of secessions. Whereas from independence to the 1990s the state remained supreme and rarely tolerated alternative or parallel structures of influence, by the 1990s in many ways the African state had grown weaker and less able to fulfill all of the functions necessary to provide for the citizenry. The bloody conflicts between the Kel Tamasheq and other pastoralists on the one hand and the Ganda Koy and their parallels on the other were not solved by the state. The Malian military often found itself more entangled with the conflict than controlling it. Instead, the final ceasefire was the result of dozens of small local ceasefires negotiated by traditional authorities. Where the state could not bring the combatants to heel, those local authorities that represented alternative structures of authority did so.

In the end, the struggles of the Kel Tamasheq in the 1990s are extremely typical of the new wave of secessions. The struggle itself did not begin with the delineation of a state and then the conflict to defend it, but instead with the imagining of an ethnic nation-state and the beginning of the guerrilla war to compel its secession. The struggle itself rarely saw decisive battles and instead was intended to weaken the already distressed state. The conflict itself also often saw the parallel negotiation of who belonged to this new imagined state, with consequent confusion about the final goal. The democratic reforms sweeping Africa with the end of the Cold War also affected the struggle, bringing in new regimes that had other means of settling the conflict than outright military victory. Finally, the 1990 Kel Tamasheq revolt in Mali had ended with that most typical of settlements. Secession, while initially a stated goal, was still simply almost impossible to effect. However, the new Malian state was able to make use of its sovereignty to both maintain its status as a state and pursue a policy of decentralization. This let the Kel Tamasheq have their own local control of their desired “Azawad” while also giving them access to the flows of influence and capital that the sovereignty of the weak state allowed them to maintain.

However, although this system would theoretically help halt secessionist attempts, in practice this was not the case, as will be discussed later.

## WHITHER IRREDENTISM?

As noted, the Kel Tamasheq are not simply a Malian group. Like many ethnic groups in Africa, their population was divided multiple times by the borders drawn at the Conference of Berlin in 1885. With the advent of independence, there were sizable populations of nomadic pastoral Tuareg in Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Libya, and Niger. It is the last of these, sharing a large border with Mali, where a large number of Tuareg militants were to take up arms as well. The Tuareg of Niger's struggle had many connections in its genesis and its prosecution with those of their kin in Mali. The Kel Tamasheq of Niger took up arms in the 1990s in response to the same crises, prosecuted their conflict in much the same manner, and even shared many of the same goals of secession or separatism from their host state.

While the Kel Adagh of Mali had risen up in revolt in the 1960s, the Kel Tamasheq populations of Niger did not rebel in the early years of independence. However, they both regretted the failure of the *Organisation commune des régions sahariennes* and much like their brethren were swiftly subsumed by the new state government of their host state. The new Nigerien state constitution had devolved almost all important powers to the new president Hamani Diori.<sup>74</sup> Quick action during the later years of independence had transformed Niger into a de facto one-party state, with Diori's *Parti progressiste Nigérien* (PPN) in firm control. Since the PPN was dominated by the Zarma/Songhay ethnicities, the political influence of other ethnicities was circumscribed, with the nomadic Tuareg left almost entirely out of the patronage of the new state.<sup>75</sup> While the Kel Tamasheq continued their traditional practices, tensions rose within other interest groups, culminating with a coup in 1974 led by Lt. Col. Seyni Kountché.<sup>76</sup> The coup was initially welcome due to the coercive nature of the PPN, but within a short time Kountché's military government proved to be no less repressive and brutal.

Little of this mattered to the Nigerien Kel Tamasheq, who continued to live within the Sahara as they always had. However, the great droughts of the 1970s that had so devastated the flocks and herds of their Malian

brethren were just as harsh on their own beasts. The same crushing and scattering process led to their own Teshumara, and Nigerien Kel Tamasheq joined their Malian brethren as refugees in Algeria, in Libya, and as wage labour in the urban centres of the other Sahelian states. Many underwent the same training with Gaddafi's forces, serving in the same conflicts and forming their own units and militant groups. Several of the camps within Libya for training militants were even set aside as only for Nigerien Kel Tamasheq.<sup>77</sup> It was here that the first organization was created for the militants who intended to return to Niger, the *Front populaire pour la libération du Niger* (FPLN).<sup>78</sup> These would be many of the initial combatants in the new struggle.

Much like the Malian Kel Tamasheq, the Nigerien Tuareg were slowly repatriated back to their homeland by Algeria and Libya in the late 1980s. While the repressive regime of Senyi Kountché had been overthrown and a new republic was now in power, there remained significant ethnic tensions, and many of the aid supplies intended to help support the repatriated refugees had been stolen or sold by government officials. In May 1990 numerous protests took place against the government, culminating in the slaying of a soldier in the city of Tchín Tabaraden by Tuareg youths.<sup>79</sup> The Nigerien response was devastating, with a strong military expedition dispatched that undertook a violent manhunt for the perpetrators. Over 300 Kel Tamasheq men were killed, their possessions stolen, and the women of these Kel Tamasheq communities sexually assaulted.<sup>80</sup> This galvanized some of the Tuareg men who were already disposed to resistance, while also driving others back across borders with the movement of Tuareg being thrown back into Algeria and Mali.

It is here where the stories of the two Kel Tamasheq populations intersect. Several of the Nigerien Kel Tamasheq who fled across the border were promptly arrested by the Malian authorities at Menaka. The Malian MPLA launched a raid in June 1990 to free those Nigerien Kel Tamasheq, a raid that marked the beginning of the MPLA's formal armed revolt against the Malian government, as noted previously.<sup>81</sup> The Nigerien rebellion would take slightly longer to begin, with its earliest escalation after the Tchín Tabaraden massacres being in later 1991.<sup>82</sup> However, the hit-and-run conflicts were much more sensitive for the Nigerien government, as the main road linking landlocked Niger to the coast and the extremely important uranium

mines both existed within what had been traditionally Kel Tamasheq territory. By 1993 there were four separate Kel Tamasheq fronts fighting the Nigerien government over this territory: the *Front de libération de l'Air et de l'Azaouak* (FLAA), the *Front de libération Tamoust* (FLT), the *Armée révolutionnaire de la libération du Nord Niger* (ARLNN), and the *Front patriotique de libération du Sahara* (FPLS).<sup>83</sup> The pattern followed was much the same as that of the Malian struggle, with the Nigerien military unable to effectively come to grips with the Kel Tamasheq rebels, and several attempts were made to cordon off regions to lessen the amount of manoeuvring space the rebels had. The Nigerien government even broadcast its willingness to negotiate but found few takers amongst the rebels, who by late 1993 had formed the *Coordination de la résistance armée* (CRA), an umbrella organization for prosecuting the conflict.<sup>84</sup> Conflicts riddled the government as those loyal Tuareg were discriminated against and many lost their positions, further fuelling the war. By 1994 the rebels were demanding a large autonomous region as a precondition for their further negotiation.

By late 1994 these demands were seen to be largely bluster. The CRA and other armed fronts began negotiations, and although there were several false starts, by 1995 most combatants had begun to negotiate in good faith. That year marked the signing of the Ouagadougou Accords, which eventually served as the outline for a peace between the Kel Tamasheq and Niger. Although autonomy was not achieved, the Kel Tamasheq were assured participation in the government and aid in reintegrating their people into the Nigerien state. By 1998 the very last of the combatants had signed the accords and peace returned to the Republic of Niger. While the war was not as high-intensity as that in neighbouring Mali, it was extremely economically destructive, with the primary routes out of Niger and the most valuable resource-rich region both severely disrupted by the fighting. In the end, the Kel Tamasheq found it more agreeable to make a deal with the Nigerien state than to continue a conflict that was as exhausting for them as it was for their foes.

However, with the transnational linkages between the two conflicts, from ethnic solidarity to shared history to shared goals of autonomy or secession from their host states, why didn't the Kel Tamasheq of Mali and Niger form a united front to achieve their goal? Given the territory they claimed as their traditional homeland and their similar aims, an

irredentist movement would have offered a shared goal for the whole of the Kel Tamasheq community. Given these factors, why did such a movement fail to emerge?

The first reason is essentially that despite the shared language and heritage within the Kel Tamasheq community, they were still not a monolithic group. The experience and identity of each of the segments of Kel Tamasheq society was unique unto itself and it took remarkable measures for even larger confederations to come together to work toward a common goal. The conception of a unified Azawad was a creation of the 1990s *Tenekra* amongst the Malians, developed during the experiences of the Teshumara and Gaddafi's Libya. While efforts were made during this period to unite the Kel Tamasheq communities, under the guise of the united *Front populaire pour la libération du Sahara arabe central* (FPLSC) or even the short-lived Kel Nimagiler movement, the community remained fractious both between Kel Mali and Kel Niger groups and within these divisions.<sup>85</sup> By the time the various Kel Tamasheq began repatriating, there was an almost complete separation of the communities. While Azawad was the dream of Kel Mali, it was not that of the Kel Niger, and so each went their own separate ways. This is not to say that there was not still some crossover at the local level, as at Manaka, but ultimately the two divisions of the same ethnic group had different goals for their fronts, and this was a barrier to their united front.

The second reason that an irredentist movement was ultimately impossible had to do with the differences in the territories claimed. While Mali proved to be flexible in its settlement, allowing decentralization throughout its state, this was largely acceptable due to the regions the Kel Tamasheq wished to control. Northern Mali, absent the historically and economically significant towns of Gao and Timbuktu, is largely already outside the scope of the Malian state. With the post-Cold War assumption of sovereignty and all the benefits it entailed despite lack of direct state control, it was thus not only possible but to a degree beneficial that the north would be autonomous. However, for Niger the opposite was true. The two most vital resources of the state, its logistical connection to Algeria and its strategically vital uranium mines, both fell within the territory that the Kel Tamasheq wanted to control.<sup>86</sup> There was no way that the government could accept the separation of this territory from central control. These were resources that

required possession to maintain their benefit to the government. Given this reality, the Kel Tamasheq of Niger could not be offered any sort of separatist settlement and they could not win secession on the battlefield. This would leave any irredentist movement effectively checkmated. The ultimate result—that of a decentralized Mali giving autonomy to its Kel Tamasheq and a firm Niger offering concessions to their own rebels—remains the end expression of the political realities of the states involved in the conflict.

## CODA

Despite the settlement in Mali and Niger, there were still the issues of the fragmented community and the need for both parties to adhere to the agreement. Already fragile, these efforts were also vulnerable to a change in the regional contexts that spawned them. While autonomy and integration were both possible solutions to the conflicts, new regional realities would cause another eruption of violence in the next decade, one that would again raise the spectre of a Kel Tamasheq homeland splitting from Mali and Niger. However, these outbreaks will be covered later in the Conclusion to the volume as it examines the continued legacy of past secessionist attempts and their intersections with transnational conflicts, particularly those ignited by the numerous confrontations subsumed under the title of the Global War on Terror.