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REFLECTIONS ON WITCHCRAFT, DANGER, AND MODERNITY AMONG THE TUAREG

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ANTHROPOLOGY AND 'WITCHCRAFT' POWERS

In anthropology and African studies, fundamental to understanding 'witchcraft' beliefs and practices is careful deconstruction (Beidelman 1971, 1993; Bongmba 1998; Crick 1976; Parkin 1985, 1991) and also grounding in history and political economy (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, 1999; Englund 1996; Geschiere 1997; Cickawy and Geschiere 1998; Pels 1998; Moore and Sanders 2001). This essay compares four overlapping, yet distinct, ritual powers. I analyse how these 'witch-like' beliefs and practices continually reassert themselves in larger moral discourses that are modified by long-standing and current upheavals and forces of globalisation, but that nonetheless retain a cultural autonomy, linked to local dynamics. More broadly, the data indicate that the local is not, and never was, unchanging; nor is witchcraft solely a response to changes induced from the outside. Witch-like powers are multiple and contested, as are modernity and globalisation.

The Tuareg, a stratified, semi-nomadic, Muslim people who speak a Berber language, Tamajaq, and live in Mali, Niger, Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Libya, have numerous concepts of powers and dangers. In the Air dialect of Tamajaq spoken near Mont Bagzan in Niger, four types of power are often invoked to explain human destiny: *togerchet; tezma*; (*ark*) *echaghel*; and *al baraka*. These powers both shape and reflect socio-economic and political turmoil in the distant and more recent past, as well as currently in diverse social contexts.[1] Relevant here are local distinctions of historical time and social scale: the pre-colonial era; French colonialism; post-colonialism in the mid-twentieth century; and more recent post-colonial eras, the latter including the Tuareg nationalist/separatist rebellion and its aftermath. Also relevant are disagreements among both local Tamajaq-speakers and outside ethnographers (Nicolaisen 1961; Norris 1990; Rasmussen

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[1] From approximately the early 1980s, there have been World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies termed 'restructuring' applied to many African countries, including Niger. These involve a sharp turn, on the transnational plane, to the political right: enforcing

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2001; Ag Solimane 1999; Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997; Casajus 2000) concerning the orthography and meanings of these terms, which vary across different regions, change over time, and undergo successive translations: into French (the official language of Niger and Mali), and subsequently, into English in the ethnographic writing process. Local residents, furthermore, experience modernity and globalisation differently, based on rural vs. urban affiliation, secular vs. religious education, social stratum background, and gendered differences.

Thus there are only approximate translations of Tuareg ritual powers, and translations of terms should not be taken too literally; as Asad (1986) has pointed out, the translation of cultures is not the same as the translation of language. This essay, mindful of these problems, does not seek to establish a final word or unitary meaning concerning each force, or a neat correlation between witchcraft and old and new social strains. Rather, there is comparison of these ritual powers and analysis of their transformations in dynamic social contexts.

Most rural Tuareg translate *togerchet* into French as *la bouche maline*, denoting approximately 'evil mouth' or 'evil eye' (Nicolaisen 1961; Casajus 2000; Rasmussen 2001). *Tezma*, in some regions called *ettama*, most closely approaches classical anthropological definitions of 'witchcraft' (Douglas 1966; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982): it refers to a force unintentionally activated in conflict over work compensation, usually between a smith/artisan and a noble; *tezma* is a debilitating force said to 'fly' from the 'angry heart' of a client smith/artisan towards his/her patron noble, upon the latter's refusal to adhere to noble–smith, patron–client, rights and obligations. (*Ark*) *echaghel*, sometimes merely *echaghel* (near Mt. Bagzan in Niger the prefix *ark*, 'bad', is added), is often translated into French by local Tamajaq-speakers as *la sorcellerie*, 'sorcery'. In social practice, this force often works when an enemy sends an animal to kill a targeted victim or, alternatively, the force kills through infecting food or tainting amulets. While *echaghel* may also have a broader sense (Casajus 2000), nonetheless in many social contexts it refers to very specialised powers requiring malevolent intent to harm (Nicolaisen 1961; Rasmussen 2001). Finally, *al baraka*, a usually positive blessing, is the power most widely described in the ethnographic literature on North Africa (Westermarck 1926; Gellner 1969; Norris 1990) in terms of its positive conveying of Islamic benediction. This is possessed primarily by Islamic scholars, popularly called 'marabouts', and some prominent respected elderly herbalists

western-based concepts of free-market conditions and loan repayment, including, for example, privatisation, 'democratisation', and curtailing of earlier, more socialistic policies of some African governments of central planning and subsidies. The results for each country are a 'mixed bag'. In Niger and elsewhere, many health-care benefits have been cut and the poor have suffered most from these measures. Downsizing of local staff in some agencies has, moreover, led to widespread unemployment and, in some cases, delays of payment of those employed in public and private sectors. For details see Stryker and Ndegwa (1995: 375–395). In addition, Niger has been hard hit by droughts: in 1969–73, 1984 and, most recently, 2000, and plagued by regional and 'ethnic' conflicts and separatist movements in the North and East.

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and chiefs. It is particularly powerful in maraboutique clans (*icherifan*) who claim descent from the Prophet and are credited with healing powers. Yet sometimes, local residents insist, *al baraka* can be misused and become corrupted, used to destroy, even kill; this is done, they say, by allegedly 'bad' marabouts. These negative transformations of the ideally positive *al baraka*, while hinted at by Nicolaisen (1961), have received less attention.

Each of these powers involves diverse and changing agents, victims and beneficiaries. On several occasions, local residents believed that I was endangered by these powers and attempted to protect me from them. For example, a marabout asked me if I was not afraid of local malevolent powers, and offered to make amulets saturated with *al baraka* for me. A herbal healer expressed concern as she gave me a therapeutic massage (*arabaz*): her hand weakened suddenly upon touching a part of my back, indicating a diagnosis of *togerchet*. She stated, 'This means that someone is gossiping about you. You need to see a marabout and obtain an amulet to protect yourself from further harm.' The next day, however, another marabout reassured me: on the previous night, he said, he had dreamed that I caught a dog by its jaws, firmly closing its mouth. The marabout interpreted this divination/dream to mean that I had now vanquished my enemy and need not worry any more.

In another incident, while I was photographing a spirit possession ritual, my camera shutter suddenly became stuck. I attributed this to the wind and sand, ubiquitous in the Sahara, but several women friends insisted that this was caused by the *togerchet* or *awal* ('speech' in general, specifically 'negative gossip'). Although I had requested, and received permission to take these photographs, there were some people there who had resented the camera or perhaps coveted this new item of technology. Most audiences at that time recorded the possession ritual, which featured beautiful music, on audio-cassette tape recorders. Cameras were then considered a luxury and were rare in the region. Some camera-cases, moreover, resembled gun-holsters. They evoked unpleasant memories of attacks by armed soldiers in conflicts between Tuareg and, first, French colonisers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, later, in the 1990s, when villages were intermittently caught in the middle of battles between militia, separatist Tuareg rebels and 'bandits'.

Friends and assistants also warned me about smiths' alleged *tezma* and advised me to comply with smiths' requests. On one occasion in the countryside near Mont Bagzan, my hosts (who belonged to a noble, chiefly, and marabout clan) surmised that I had caught *tezma* from a smith man reputed to have particularly strong powers, in a puzzlingly violent but brief cold and fever I had suffered while I was staying in his village. I had experienced an intense night sweat and smelled an odd odor, but these had vanished suddenly overnight. My hosts explained that, because I gave him food belatedly, after he came by, the *tezma* had suddenly left me. Another friend believed this *tezma* was cast upon me by another, elderly smith man who had requested eye ointment from

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me, but whom I reluctantly had to refuse because I had left the remedy behind in a distant village.

On the one hand, many Tuareg invoke these powers in order to make sense of and cope with recent ecological and economic crises, new technologies, rising tensions among the different social strata, and conflict with central state governments. On the other hand, these powers do not imply neat temporal oppositions between 'tradition' and 'modernity', or linear progression from one to another, but rather interpretive problems of how moral discourse is configured from its referents in intrinsically diverse cultural repertoires. At play in these powers are recent political and economic upheavals, but also long-standing ambiguity and fluidity of epistemological and social categories. Disruptions in the balance of material and spiritual resources produce continual negotiations of the stratified hierarchical social categories of nobles, tributaries, smith/artisans, and former slaves, and debates over conduct between youths and elders, and men and women. Irregular rains, diminishing pastures, and colonial and post-colonial state policies have caused political tensions and armed conflict with colonial and post-colonial independent state governments.[2] More broadly, these powers suggest plural and interweaving, rather than singular or sequential, moral discourses of tradition and modernity.

THE HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Many rural Tuareg are semi-nomadic and combine oasis gardening, herding, artisan work, trading of salt, dates and millet on caravans to Nigeria and, increasingly, transcultural itinerant trade and labour migration. In the pre-colonial system, occupations corresponded to inherited social status (of noble, tributary, smith/artisan, and former slave), and noble descent groups or clans wielded military domination

[2] From 1990 to 1995, some Tuareg groups in the northern regions of Niger and Mali were embroiled in a nationalist/separatist armed conflict against the central nation-state governments of these countries. In April 1995, a Peace Pact was signed in Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, but there have been numerous factions and sporadic military confrontations in some regions since. Some former fighters have been integrated into the national infrastructure, for example the army, but others have turned to 'banditry' from the combined effects of political turmoil and economic structural adjustments in Niger. It is beyond the scope of the present essay to discuss in detail the background and causes of the armed conflict but the major conditions underlying it are relevant here. Until recently, there were significant discrepancies in colonial and post-colonial 'development' policies among the different regions of these countries, and while these were often translated into 'ethnic' conflicts, in my view they are largely regionally based. Thus the sources and patterns of political upheavals in Niger are complex. Since French colonialism and into recent times, populations of diverse ethnicity in the northern regions have tended to be cut off from health, education and jobs. On the other hand, some Tuareg in the South of Niger have become more integrated into the Hausa and Zarma-Songhay societies there; and not all Tuareg, even in the North, supported the rebellion. For more in-depth discussion of the historical and political background on this topic, see Bourgeot (1994), Charlick (1991), Claudot-Hawad (1993) and Rasmussen (2001).

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over their client and formerly servile populations.[3] The more nomadic pastoralist nobles collected tribute from subjugated oasis populations. In exchange for nobles' support and protection, peoples of various degrees of servitude performed domestic, herding, and caravan labour for noble owners; tributaries raided and traded for nobles; and smith/artisans provided nobles with goods and services.

Nowadays, persons of diverse social origins practise occupations formerly associated with one or another social stratum, as well as the new occupations of tourism and itinerant trade of artisan products. In some Tuareg groups, despite official social stratum endogamy, there has been long-standing intermarriage between nobles and former slaves (Rodd 1926; Bernus 1981). Smiths remain the most endogamous. Most rural nobles still abhor marrying smiths because of lingering pollution beliefs (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997). Many individuals still appeal to noble origins to justify certain conduct. Chiefly noble and maraboutique clans attempt to arrange endogamous, politically advantageous marriages between close cousins and appeal to Islam in attempts to preserve traditional social prestige in the face of their impoverishment from drought and armed conflict with, first, colonial and, later, independent nation-state governments.[4] There is sometimes,

[3] In pre-colonial Tuareg social organisation, more nomadic nobles controlled the caravan trade and owned most weapons and large livestock animals, for example camels and a few cattle. They also had rights to tribute, in return for military protection from tributary and servile groups in oases, as well as to the labour of newly acquired slaves (*iklan*) in domestic, herding, caravanning, and oasis gardening. Some vestiges of traditional practices persisted even into the early 1980s, well after French manumission of slaves in the early twentieth century and official abolition of slavery upon Niger's independence in 1960. By the mid-1990s, however, most of these privileges had completely broken down, in the aftermath of droughts, refugee flight, and the rebellion. More nomadic nobles (*imajeghen*) and more sedentarised oasis populations descending from servile and client groups (*ighawalen*) now trade cheese and dates and other products, rather than practise traditional tribute (*tiwse*). Many leaders of the five-year rebellion and current cultural revitalisation discourage emphasis upon traditional social origins and encourage unity of all Tuareg, ideally based upon common wider identity as speakers of the Tamajaq language. For discussion of the traditional social system and more recent trends, see Keenan (1977), Bernus (1981), Claudot-Hawad (1993), Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen (1997) and Rasmussen (2001).

[4] Tuareg groups tend to vary considerably regarding devotion to Islam. In some groups, particularly around Mont Bagzan in the Air mountain region of northern Niger, there are numerous clans of influential and respected Islamic scholars (*ineslemen*) and the more revered *icherifan*, who claim descent from the Prophet and are believed to have special blessing and healing powers (see Norris 1975, 1990). In Niamey and the large towns, secular courts from the French legal system predominate and in the countryside local councils of marabouts and elders have always adjudicated disputes according to Qur'anic law (Shari'a), albeit according to local cultural interpretation. Currently in Niger generally, there has been a resurgence of Muslim puritanical/reform movements, although in contrast to a number of states in Nigeria, Niger's neighbour to the south, official Shari'a law has not been declared nationally as of writing this. Niger has intermittently experienced such movements but they have not, as yet, had large followings or official political/legal authority (see Grégoire 1993). But recent events suggest increasing influence: for example, some women in towns have been attacked for wearing non-Muslim dress, and Islamic reformists protested against a recent fashion show of European clothing.

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moreover, competition among marabout/Islamic scholars and other leaders for influence within the community.[5]

In the Air countryside, smiths continue to manufacture silver jewellery and leather, wood, and stone tools for their patron nobles, to assist in arranging nobles' marriages, act as 'ambassadors' for chiefs, and serve food and sing praise-songs at their noble patrons' rites of passage.[6] The traditionally symbiotic relations between nobles and smiths are now becoming more asymmetric, however. Most rural nobles still depend upon smiths as a group for many goods and services; in contrast, many smiths have alternate sources of patronage and income: they can serve nobles outside their traditional client–patron relationships nearby or, alternatively, they may migrate to towns and work in the tourist trade for non-noble and even non-Tuareg customers. Many rural smiths today also practise oasis gardening, herding and tailoring as well, which some nobles until recently stigmatised as manual labour. Nobles are now having more difficulty supporting smiths, due to the droughts, economic crises of unemployment and restructuring in privatisation, and intermittent battles in the region. Some nobles resent the economic success of some smiths in tourist arts. These upheavals in noble–smith

[5] In the pre-colonial political system, chiefs from noble descent groups elected an *amenukal* or sultan of their regional confederation. At the local rural level, councils of elders, chiefs, and marabouts still adjudicate disputes. Beginning early in the twentieth century under French colonialism, nomadic camps' political organisation became more sedentarised and village-based. Some more paramount chiefs' powers were strengthened, backed up by coercive force from the central government: for example, in addition to his traditional mediating between warring Tuareg descent groups, the Sultan of Air in Agadez became responsible for tax collecting and school registration. Other chiefs' powers were curtailed, in allegiance to central state laws. For details see Claudot-Hawad (1993). Traditionally, chiefs ruled by respect, not coercion, and have also depended upon belief in their *al baraka* power to rule. Recently, however, there has been erosion of this power for some, but also, as shown, reinforcement of it for others. During the Tuareg rebellion, some traditional chiefs were killed and some elders were disobeyed, or at least their authority and decisions were questioned by many youths.

[6] Each noble family in the countryside officially still inherits a family of smith/artisans (*inaden*) as attached clients, and continues to rely upon them in rituals, hair-styling, and manufacture of jewellery and tools and, to some extent still, in marriage negotiations. Nobles traditionally owe their inherited smiths some clearly defined wealth in client–patron relationships: for example, special parts of the slaughtered animal as meat (*izouza*) at rites of passage; a portion of caravan trade millet; and sugar, tea, millet, and cash during smiths' praise-singing. Nowadays, however, there is greater flexibility in these arrangements: each individual noble can choose a personal smith on the basis of rapport or work preference outside traditionally inherited families for other tools and jewellery, though not for rites of passage or marriage negotiations, which still tend to be done by the inherited family. In the town of Agadez, these relationships have to varying degrees broken down further: many smiths there have inherited patron families still in rural areas, for whom some Agadez smiths now rarely work. Traditionally, nobles regard smiths are 'next to slaves' or similar to slaves. Smiths themselves emphasise their difference from slaves, however. According to one elderly smith leader in a rural village, 'smiths are more important than slaves; slaves were bought; a slave cannot, in tradition, inherit a smith.' But following the manumission of slaves in Air oases, a few former slaves did, in fact, inherit smith client families. Smiths are also identified with spirits: specifically, fire *djinn*, who work on tiny forges underground and play tricks on travellers. See Nicolaisen (1961), Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen (1997), Saenz (1991), Rasmussen (1992, 1998).

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relationships figure prominently in many, though not all, patterns of not solely *tezma*, but also *togerchet*, accusations.

Marabouts manufacture Qur'anic amulets and conduct psychological and legal counselling. They also derive income from a religious tax (*zakat*) paid for by worshippers at the local mosque (Keenan 1977: 166; Spittler 1993). Nobles require the blessing of marabouts' amulets before any dangerous undertaking. Like smiths, marabouts ideally should not fight, but act as mediators. Yet noble relations with marabouts have not always been tension-free. Moreover, at different times in history, marabouts have become involved in politics: first, during Tuareg resistance to French colonial forces early in the twentieth century; later, during the Tuareg rebellion against the central state governments of Niger and Mali when their amulets against bullets were in great demand by rebel fighters; and now, during post-rebellion repatriation of Tuareg into their nation-states, when local marabouts face wider Islamist reform movements based in the South (Grégoire 1993) and outside religious leaders attempting to establish followings in northern, predominantly Tuareg regions.

Until the Peace Accords of 1995 and 1996, the northern regions of Niger and Mali were not integrated into wider political or economic infrastructures and Tuareg tended to be underrepresented in decision-making and benefits. French colonial policies tended to favour the interests of the southern farming peoples (Fuglestad 1981; Dayak 1992; Decalo 1997). At first, many Tuareg resisted colonial and post-colonial secular schools, regarding them as strategies to force them to sedentarise and to abandon their language and culture. There are now efforts to correct these regional disparities. The terms of the 1995 and 1996 Peace Accords have brought more aid organisations into northern regions and there have been efforts to repatriate Tuareg and, for example, integrate them into the army and government. Yet there remain national problems: of low national budgets, lack of control over militia in peripheral zones, unemployment, social 'banditry', and sporadic armed conflicts between militia and former rebels. Some smith/artisans are becoming wealthier than some nobles; some elders and chiefly authorities are resisted by some youths; and there are disruptions in property balance and descent interests of men and women, of diverse social origins. Some elderly marabouts and chiefs no longer receive unquestioning obedience or reverence from youths, some of whom, as unemployed former rebel fighters, have become 'bandits', and others have acted as regional police forces following the Peace Accords between rebels and the central governments (Bourgeot 1990, 1994; Claudot-Hawad 1993, 1996).

Yet despite all this turmoil, many important cultural values continue to have a hold: respect toward parents-in-law, elders, chiefs and marabouts; generosity; restraint in eating; and verbal reticence, in particular caution in praise. 'Shadowy' or indirect speech by allusion, metaphor or symbol, *tangalt*, is emphasised by many nobles, both for politeness and for protection from misfortune. For example, it is not considered polite to refuse a request directly; rather one should do

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so indirectly. Words are incompatible with some acts, such as eating (Casajus 2000: 32). On the other hand, conversation and sociability are extremely important among age-mates.

In attitudes toward destiny and causation, God or Allah is eternal, all-powerful, and good, but also punishes and condemns. Attached to Allah are angels (*angelouzen*) who also punish on orders from God. Some inexplicable conditions, such as blindness without any discernible cause from illness, are explained as the result of past sins. Other types of personal destiny are explained as caused by spirits, Qur'anic and non-Qur'anic (*eljenan* or *djinn* and Kel Essuf, respectively). Individuals become vulnerable to spirit attacks during isolation in remote places outside villages and camps (also metaphorically, in psycho-social loneliness and nostalgia), or during transitions, on birth and marriage (Nicolaisen 1961; Rasmussen 1995, 1997, 2001). Indeed, even the powers of marabouts' tombs may become malevolent after sundown and their usually protective *al baraka* may attack passers-by. One should pass quickly by these tombs (placed at crossroads in physical and moral space: on roads between communities) and preferably be armed with metal weapons which repel spirits. Perhaps this belief, circulated among maraboutique clans, is intended to deter some lovers from illicit sexual trysts outside villages and camps, though it is not always effective in a society where women are not secluded or veiled, and there is much freedom of interaction between the sexes.

In the following sections, comparative analysis hopefully proceeds beyond verbal and textual discourse, into the domain of social action and time depth.

POWERS AND DANGERS, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

'Evil eye/mouth' [Togerchet]

Togerchet discourse usually takes the form of moral commentary about immediate past actions, and warnings about their future result. There is the belief that boasts or praises are the expression of a kind of envy that can wound people and animals. During his research in the 1950s, Nicolaisen (1961) reported that in Tuareg society, one should also be very little inclined to speak about what one does oneself: 'a hunter who prepares to leave on the hunt does not tell anyone, for if others see him leave and speak to him about it, the success of his hunt will be compromised' (Nicolaisen 1961: 134). This principle remains powerful. I was often struck by its effect upon my ethnographic field research. While I, as anthropologist, continually sought clarification and precision in verbal descriptions, local cultural values often emphasised verbal restraint and caution, leaving open a space for ambiguity in interpretation, due to fear of *togerchet*. To outsiders, this appears as evasion or vagueness. In 1998, when someone accompanied me on a late-evening visit to chat with a mutual friend, our conversation over tea turned to my own work and I touched upon definitions of

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anthropology, ethnography and fieldwork. Suddenly, the friend who had accompanied me stood up and rather abruptly announced our departure. En route home, he expressed worry that I had begun 'to reveal the secrets of my life' to the woman we had visited. Yet in this more recent context, there were additional unspoken dangers present: of the political climate of fear—not knowing friend from foe—during the fragile peace immediately following the truce between rebel fighters and governments, fears of rumoured 'spies', and betrayals.

One should also be cautious about praises addressed to the family or animals of others. One woman, my field hostess, was shocked when I returned from the home of a sick baby I had treated with an anti-dehydration remedy for diarrhoea and announced to her, with satisfaction, that the baby was now better. She winced and cautioned me that, when a baby is cured of an illness, it is safe to say, 'This baby is beautiful,' but not 'This baby is healthy,' because the latter stimulates *togerchet* and may cause the baby to fall ill and die. Casajus (2000: 61) reports a similar injunction when a woman told him that she was now toothless because of having once been complimented on her very white teeth. Clinic staff who are not knowledgeable about the local culture sometimes complained to me that patients 'hid' their illnesses and also their progress once treated (Rasmussen 2001).

On one level, *togerchet* beliefs limit the accumulation of wealth or resources in an environment of scarcity. A field assistant explained to me after we had eaten several dates that, 'if someone with *togerchet* sees how many date pits you leave and gossips about how much you eat, this gives you a toothache.' *Togerchet* in this context has to do with perceived greed and hoarding, refusal to share belongings, especially food. While cultural values still emphasise sharing, international NGO agencies emphasise privatisation and individual initiative: work for monetary gain, rather than the old client–patron give and take or caravan bartering, creating contradictory demands. 'In the past,' an older woman who headed a herding cooperative indicated, 'food was scarce. We had to move around constantly to find it, and everyone had to share. Today, food is more varied, but it is expensive, it comes in boxes in stores, and requires money to buy.'

Often at stake in *togerchet* warnings are more long-term concerns of wider property- and success-related issues. One case of *togerchet* I encountered concerned a smith/artisan man who had become highly successful. This man, whom I shall call Mounkaila, was born to the west of Agadez in a small nomadic camp, where he began the work of the forge for nobles at an early age, as is customary. Later on he attended school in Agadez and eventually married there. He was bright and talented, and for several years was assistant to a French ethnographer in the Agadez region. Eventually, the two collaborated on a book. Mounkaila continued to manufacture beautiful Tuareg silver jewellery as well and went to France where he participated in NGO-sponsored artisan fairs and was awarded a prize for a necklace he had made. He creatively combined old and new designs in his jewellery, and worked in gold as well. His jewellery became popular with both Tuareg and

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Europeans, and he established a store in Niamey, the capital city. He acted as a liaison in arranging for a fashion show to come to Agadez. In 1999, Mounkaila and a business partner began travelling further afield: they came to the United States, visiting New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Atlanta and Houston. They sold their jewellery and their wives' leatherwork at international fairs and to local jewellers, African art dealers and art museums.

Later, however, Mounkaila experienced difficulty creating jewellery. He felt depressed and his work declined. A marabout Mounkaila consulted indicated that Mounkaila was suffering from *togerchet* activated by the jealous gossip of some other smiths over his extraordinary success. Smiths in rural Air mountain communities normally divide up and share the gifts they receive from nobles following their performances of praise-songs at the nobles' name days and weddings. Here, Mounkaila's individual monetary success and prolonged personal benefit from outside the kinship and client–patron networks in the local community, over many years of absence abroad, had alienated him somewhat from other smiths. The marabout made amulets for him from Qur'anic verses and, as of this writing, Mounkaila was feeling better and at work again. He boarded up his Niamey store, however, and eventually settled more long-term in his new home and business base, in a large city in the United States.

Not solely smiths, but also nobles, may be attacked by *togerchet*. Yet significantly, several highly successful smiths have suffered from particularly strong cases of this, emanating from other smiths. *Togerchet* in some contexts appears to be emerging as a counterbalance to smiths' alleged power of *tezma*. Smiths, at least in principle, are the ones who are supposed to be poor: in the countryside, older smiths still tend to go about in ragged old clothing. Smiths, in order to comment critically upon and mediate between noble social groups, cannot become too much like nobles. But nowadays, increasingly, smiths themselves accumulate wealth they were once believed to covet from nobles. A man of noble origins employed a smith man to make him a wooden well pulley during the rainy season of 1998. This smith wore an elegant silver-cased amulet around his neck; the noble remarked to me, somewhat ruefully, that such amulets were until recently worn only by nobles. A smith woman was teased by some nobles in her village because she 'dressed and acted like a noble', in wearing fine clothing and jewellery. Her nickname was Tamajeghat, denoting approximately 'a little (or like a) noblewoman', i.e. 'pretending to be a noblewoman'.

Under certain circumstances, however, everyone is vulnerable to *togerchet*. During transitions such as rites of passage, special precautions should be taken. At the name day held for a third child by a nobleman's second wife, a marabout wrote verses from the Qu'ran on a tablet and the baby's father washed it off for the mother to drink to protect against *togerchet* from anyone there who might be jealous or resentful of the child and/or the mother. It was widely known that this man's first wife had been unhappy over his contracting of the second, polygynous

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marriage.[7] Not surprisingly, songs at name days and weddings, settings of joyful praises and admiration, often contain verses repelling *togerchet*. Consider the following selected wedding praise-song verses:

> In the name of God against the evil mouth, Atahir, the handsomest of the young people.
>
> In the name of God against the evil mouth, of those who do the *togerchet*.
>
> The young girls of Banaga, all of them are present.
>
> Where is Adama, daughter of Khawa? In the name of God, they are all present.
>
> I call Mariama, the beautiful yellow one with small eyes, black rounds. . .[8]

Images of beauty and wealth abound—hence the need to protect against *togerchet* with verses that act as amulets. Good fortune and praise are desired, yet dangerous. One should not be too complacent or open about one's achievements, property or even one's future goals. Many people know all too well that there are reversals in fortune and one should be prepared for adversity.

Yet there is often no agreement on a single diagnosis of misfortune. There is considerable overlap between *togerchet* and other forces, for example (*ark*) *echaghel*. Consider the case of a woman of noble origins married to a retired school supervisor and daughter of a prominent marabout: she was normally healthy but suddenly fell ill one year with aches in her ribs and a fever and vomiting. She tried the Agadez hospital and herbal medicines but was still ill. She travelled to a clinic to receive injections several times but subsequently complained of *togerchet* from her neighbours, who gossiped that her trips there included trysts with a lover. Later, this woman was accused by her husband of an extramarital

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[7] While women sometimes divorce men who become polygynous, some couples remain together for the sake of their children. Many more prosperous and prominent men (chiefs and Islamic scholars) in more sedentarised communities are acquiring second, and even third, wives. (Up to four are permitted by Islam.) There is much variation and also great change in gender roles and relations between the sexes in Tuareg society. Many ethnographers, however, agree that in general, Tuareg women have enjoyed traditionally high prestige and independent socio-economic status. Most Air Tuareg today practise bilateral descent, inheritance, and succession. There are vestiges of ancient matrilineal institutions, such as those forms of property called *akh hudderan* or 'living milk' property (herds, date-palms) that can be transmitted only to sisters, daughters, or nieces, sometimes referred to as 'endowments' in English (Worley 1991). Many Tuareg trace their early descent to a female founding ancestress, although in some groups, notably those with many influential clans of Islamic scholar/marabouts, men tend to minimise this and instead highlight male and marabout founders. There have also been many recent upheavals in which women's rights are disputed. The state has frequently been deleterious for nomadic women as households are forced to settle. See for example O'Kelly and Carney (1986), Oxby (1977), Rasmussen (1995, 1997, 1998). Women build and own the tent, and may eject men from this upon divorce, which women as well as men have a right to initiate. Women are not secluded and are not compelled to wear a veil. Rather, it is Tuareg men who wear a face-veil, a sign of modesty, reserve, and respect. See Claudot-Hawad (1993), Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen (1997).

[8] Reference to yellow ochre make-up with four eyes: two on the cheeks, one on the forehead and one on the nose.

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affair with a smith/artisan attached to noble families of their old rival *tawsit*. Smith/artisan men are in principle forbidden as husbands or lovers and permitted only to be friends and confidants of noble women. Here, the force of *togerchet* targets the breaking of social stratum sexual taboos. In the violation of these taboos, reproduction was in danger of becoming detached from property interests.

The connections between reproduction and changing sources of wealth and power are also shown in the interplay of *togerchet* with other forces, for example *echaghel* or sorcery. Another case I collected concerns a husband and wife, whom I shall call Ibrahim and Fatimata, whose marriage was threatened by a pact with the spirits promising wealth. One year, Ibrahim left for Katsina in Nigeria in order to obtain magic for becoming rich. He was given this magic and told that he must slaughter a rooster each Friday, because the magic was a spirit bull that nourishes itself with the blood. If he did not do this, he would lose each child his wife Fatimata gave birth to. Ibrahim at first followed these instructions but he eventually neglected to slaughter the rooster and, each time Fatimata gave birth to a child, as predicted the child died until four children were lost. In despair, she requested a marabout's protection and the marabout killed this bull with sorcery (*echaghel*). Ibrahim subsequently became poor and Fatimata allegedly 'went crazy'. Since Islam frowns on divorcing someone if they are ill, Ibrahim did not divorce her. He became polygynous, however, and spent more time with his second wife.

A herbalist diagnosed Fatimata as suffering from Kel Essuf spirits (*togerchet*) and *tuksi*, a generic category of 'hot' illness in the local counteractive medical system.[9] Fatimata's son-in-law sacrificed an animal in the hope of curing her and Fatimata also underwent the possession ritual called *tende n goumaten*.[10] Many local men explained this family's misfortunes in terms of another allegedly female affliction: they indicated that some women in that family have difficulty marrying 'because they cause men's herds to die'.

These disputes over power, causation and agency address transformations in the connections between wealth and reproduction. Since

[9] This *tuksi*, 'hot' category of illnesses, opposed to the generic category of 'cold' illnesses (*tessmut*), is part of the more general counteractive local disease classification and healing system, which is similar to Moorish and Latin American systems. 'Hot' illnesses tend to refer to stomach and liver-related ailments usually caused by exposure to 'hot' foods and other hot conditions such as the sun and heated sand. It is, however, metaphorically extended to include much more than literal, physiological responses such as fever, heat stroke, etc.: for example, it can also refer to anger and other imbalances from sources ranging from psychosocial to dietary, and thus includes many non-organic, as well as organic, illnesses. Its opposite, *tessmut*, refers to afflictions caused by cold but this is likewise, extended metaphorically to include a whole range of problems, for example, many sexually transmitted diseases and urinary tract infections. Women are supposed to be ideally 'cool' and men 'hot' (Figueredo, personal communication, Aix-en-Provence, France 2000; Rasmussen 2001).

[10] See Rasmussen (1995) for an ethnographic study of these Tuareg spirit possession rituals, in which predominantly, though not exclusively, women participate in trance possession. Apparent here is matrilineal imagery in which these spirits are inherited through the mother's milk, pervasive throughout many Tuareg healing rites (possession and herbalism, in particular).

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approximately the mid-twentieth century, husbands and wives are caught in conflicts over ambiguous property ownership in sedentarisation and some men's oasis gardening and migrant labour. In some regions, such as the Air, many men have been constructing adobe mud houses, which they own, next-door to their wives' tents, which women own, inside the couple's compound; and they try to bring their wives to reside near their kin while they are absent on long-term new travel. (In the past, many men felt wives were better off near their own kin while men went on the traditional caravan trade for five to six months a year.) Polygyny, while still not prevalent among most Tuareg men, nonetheless is becoming more common in semi-sedentarised communities among more prominent chiefs, marabouts, prosperous gardeners and merchants. Motives include men's seeking of new, wider political and economic alliances and different homes in their diverse places of work and sometimes, also, younger wives to bear more children to assist with gardening tasks. Most gardens are owned by men, whereas both women and men traditionally own livestock animals. Many women now feel greater pressure to bear more children that men insist they need to help with oasis gardening whereas in the old, more pastoral, nomadic economy, births were spaced. Now many women fear their husband will become polygynous unless they fulfill their increased demands of fertility.

This couple therefore suffered a collision between different forms of wealth: children, livestock herds, and money. More children now signify greater wealth, whereas in the past, more livestock herds—including some herds passed matrilineally through women—provided greater wealth and security for women. These forms of women's wealth (*akhu huderan*, 'living milk' property) in effect become symbolically inverted, and converted by some men in their comments regarding 'dangerous' women into 'misfortunes for men'. *Togerchet* power increasingly expresses the newly problematic boundaries—of gender and social stratum and newly emergent class relations within and beyond the household—in both immediate and long-term changes in the moral and social system.

Smiths' mystic powers [Tezma]

While *togerchet* comes from conscious envy or desire, *tezma* is believed to be unconscious. Nonetheless, smiths are usually believed to activate this power, and are blamed for it (Nicolaisen 1961: 136). In the Air countryside near Mont Bagzan, smiths may still ask for something upon demand and nobles must, in principle, give on these occasions. *Tezma* attacks a region of the stomach through the orifices and is often fatal among children and animals. Symptoms include a swelling of the stomach and a kind of diarrhoea called *karambaza*, diagnosed by herbalists in a special divination rite (*takobar*), done by spinning a clay pot around and calling out the names of particular foods or other items possibly wanted by the offended smith; where the pot stops, the coveting is identified.

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Noble violence against smiths is traditionally rare because they are a protected people against whom it is not appropriate to express anger without denigrating oneself. In my early field research in the 1970s and 80s, many Tuareg described smiths as 'like women . . . also like cousins (who practise a joking relationship and also may potentially marry) . . . you must not get angry at them, but (rather) joke with them'.[11] By the 1990s, some nobles complained that 'in the past, smiths were afraid to commit excessive acts; but now they seek things much more aggressively, from disobedience towards an owner or patron (*ahelek*)'.

There are escalating social tensions and even violence between some nobles and smiths. While some are becoming business partners, many are rivals in an economic system where rewards are scarce and some nobles accuse some smiths successful in tourism of 'abandoning' or 'cheating' on their traditional duties toward nobles. Accusations of sexual transgressions and pollution appear as a kind of metonymy for jealousy and wider concerns. Alleged sexual offences figure into many, though not all of these tensions. In one rural community, for example, a smith man was accused (accurately or inaccurately, I do not know) of starting a ring of prostitution and of engaging a young noblewomen in this for his own profit. Local residents reported that such organised prostitution had never existed in the countryside before, only in the towns. Outraged, they flogged him and ejected him from the community. The man went into exile and later became a mason in a distant region, although his relatives remained in the community and this scandal caused a rift among his supporters and detractors.

On the other hand, not all *tezma* accusations are against male smiths. Recently, a smith woman was accused of *tezma* by one of her noble patron woman's daughters. She had asked for, and been refused, sugar at this household and the daughter fell ill afterward. The smith woman cried and vehemently denied this, but her client–patron relationship with this family was broken. (Nobles may now choose to employ smiths other than those they inherited.) This breakdown was somewhat disadvantageous for the smith woman. Most rural smith women have fewer alternative sources of income or customers than smith men in the new tourist trade, where there is greater demand for men's silver and gold jewellery than women's leatherwork. Although this woman was a popular praise-singer, an important role in the countryside, she did little leatherwork and was somewhat impoverished. This smith woman had also broken a sexual taboo: she had two illegitimate children. Despite tolerance of some premarital affairs, women who give birth out of wedlock are stigmatised. Worry over spouses' infidelity is long-standing in these communities where husbands and wives are frequently separated: during men's traditional caravan expeditions,

[11] For additional examples and case studies involving alleged *tezma* effects from that earlier era, analysed in a different framework, see Rasmussen (1992). For in-depth analysis of longitudinal cases and histories of more recent tensions involving noble and smith women and men, see Rasmussen (1998, 2001).

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refugee flight from droughts and wars, and men's more recent far-flung labour migration.

Not all *tezma* accusations involve sexual transgressions, however. Once, during January of 2002, when the small daughter of a noblewoman in a chiefly family fell ill with stomach pains after she had eaten meat left over from a wedding the previous day, the mother blamed a smith woman for causing this *karambaza*, claiming she had coveted the meat eaten by her daughter. (Stomach problems are less frequent in the dry season than in the hot, rainy seasons, thus adding to suspicion of an alternate cause.) Smiths are supposed to receive a portion of the meat served at weddings after praise-singing but in that particular wedding, the bride's second marriage in a chiefly but poor family, smiths had not been called to perform their more elaborate evening praise-songs. The mother treated her daughter's illness by combining several remedies: first, in a small ritual against *karambaza*, she gathered up grains from the footprint of the smith in the sand in her compound and threw it into the fire to burn; and next, she took her daughter to the newly constructed nearby clinic. There was no further discussion of smiths' 'transgressions' more generally, only that the female smith had coveted the portion of meat eaten by the child.

In a town in northern Mali, smiths' contemporary social and ritual roles appear more attenuated; most there are itinerant and either work in tourist cooperatives or do repairs. Former slaves, called Bella, now perform wedding praise-songs. A nobleman there even denied the existence of *tezma* force today, though his aunt recalled its existence until recently; he insisted firmly, 'in the past, a smith could follow a noble and set up camp right next to his well ... but now, we do not allow smiths to interfere in our affairs.' Here, smiths' activities appear to have projected much further outward, beyond the local community; in contrast, in the Air countryside many smiths remain partially embedded within the local community.

How do smiths themselves view *tezma*? Two elderly smiths I questioned explained with some exasperation, 'there is a verse of the Qur'an that cures illness caused by *tezma*, which marabouts can read,' thereby emphasising alternative solutions to scapegoating a smith. Many also indicated that, related to belief in *tezma*, is smiths' lack of reserve; the reason for this is 'so that they may accept compensation [remuneration] from nobles for their work, and therefore smiths and nobles must be kept separate. [We] smiths need this protection, in order to practise our work and receive our compensation.' *Tezma*, in other words, often comes from smiths' freedom to ask nobles for goods, conceived of as a kind of labour law protection, and from nobles' ideal hesitation to ask for something because of values emphasising dignity and indirect speech. These attitudes validate client–patron roles and relationships but are difficult to maintain once individuals become detached from local social roles. Disputed interpretations and changing outcomes of *tezma* accusations reflect not solely upheavals in these relationships but also uncertain outcomes of power and competing

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vectors of interpretation which have always been characteristic of social relations.

The two elderly smith men added a sociological 'self-fulfilling prophecy' analysis to *tezma* accusations as well. 'With some people,' they said, '*tezma* is so strong a belief, that when a smith comes to visit even for a short time, if he leaves [without doing anything], they are [still] going to say that he did *tezma*.' To illustrate this, a woman related to me a case of *tezma* from a smith in her home village, which was cast on a nephew of her sister's mother-in-law while he was a child. Allegedly, this smith had seen wheat in the family's garden and had gone to their home, though he had not actually asked for the wheat. Rather, he had merely wanted or coveted it and that is sufficient to activate and cast the *tezma*. To undo this, the smith had to jump three times over the child while the latter was stretched out on the ground.

The foregoing cases suggest that, despite some scapegoating and jealousy of smiths by nobles, there is a certain symmetry to *tezma*-related causation. Nobles and smiths alike lament the breakdown of these social values. They perceive themselves and each other as violating certain important values that everyone once agreed on, intended to protect them both in their patron–client relationships. Not solely one or the other social category, but both may contribute to this breakdown by reneging on the old mutual obligations. Nonetheless, *tezma* these days is often converted into a source of danger for smiths (in more violent retaliation). Rather than acting to smiths' advantage as purely an economic levelling device as it once did, this force often acquires an added dimension of sexual pollution and sometimes reverts back against the smith.

Furthermore, as shown earlier, some highly successful smiths are also afflicted with *togerchet*, suggesting a double vulnerability: their loss of communitas within their own social stratum, as well as their loss of status as a traditionally protected people within their larger community, as they acquire rewards from outside. To protect themselves from *tezma* accusations, they must either flee the community altogether, as in parts of northern Mali, or remain deeply embedded within it; those with 'one foot inside' and 'one foot outside' their small rural community are particularly vulnerable to *tezma* accusations.

'Bad work' or 'sorcery' [(Ark) echaghel]

(*Ark*) *echaghel* involves intentional, rather than unintentional, use of knowledge/power, explicitly for malevolent purposes, with the aid of specialists. (*Ark*) *echaghel* practitioners are often neighbours, but slightly more distant than the perpetrators of *togerchet* or *tezma*, powers more closely anchored in the local community. Some local residents say some outsiders have malevolent power ([*ark*] *echaghel*, literally 'bad work'): for example, some former slaves of the Kel Geres confederation of Tuareg are believed to be able to cure, as well as cause sorcery. In some contexts, this belief appears to be a projection of fears of the unknown. A noble from Air near Mont Bagzan pointed out to me a group of Tubu origins, called Ikarkawen, alleged to have this power,

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and related how once, at the SNTN (national bus transport) station in Niamey, they had tried to suck his blood. In another region, near Kidal in Mali, children came running to tell adults they had found a human stomach in the dried river bed; rumour had it that at the same time, a Bella ex-slave with allegedly sorcerer-like powers had died in the local hospital. Here, local residents made a connection between these two events, metaphorically expressing the widespread associations of stomach afflictions with malevolent powers generally, in a confluence of events we might call a 'coincidence'.

Thus *tezma* and (*ark*) *echaghel* reveal a nearly (though not literally) 'totemistic' classification ideal, of clearly demarcated boundaries between self and other (Lévi-Strauss 1962); these are not, however, always neatly drawn, contrary to some formulations (Douglas 1966, Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). In contrast, *tezma*, the unintended malevolent power, tends to be associated with those much closer to the community: in effect, with those who stand with 'one foot in, and one foot outside' the local social universe. These boundaries are continually redrawn; hence the difficulty in fixing these powers and the search for clear signposts.

Another difference is that whereas one can perpetuate *togerchet* or *tezma* oneself directly without the collaboration of an outside specialist, (*ark*) *echaghel* requires the services of an expert or mediator. I collected a tale about sorcery, untitled, from a middle-aged smith/artisan man, which illustrates the use of sorcery in female rivalries, and the role of an outsider, a slave, as intermediary in its use:

> There was an old mother [ancestress] of ours. A smith from Mont Bagzan married her. On the Bagzan, he had another wife. The one from the Bagzan had a slave woman. She worked for the smith woman. One day, he said he was going to his wife who was in Banaga [a village inhabited by smith/artisans]. The one on the Bagzan sent sorcery [*echaghel*] so that the one in Banaga would die [i.e. the co-wife was jealous]. She sent that with her slave. The slave came, and after having eaten, the slave left to urinate, but she forgot the evil medicine which she had dropped outside, and the other woman saw it, and she took it and placed it under the bed, she left it there. And when the slave woman came, the package had disappeared. The slave left in the night, there was no one who saw her. And the old woman in Banaga took the package and threw it away, everyone thought this older woman was going to divorce. The husband was named Tafado, the woman was named Ouwene; she is our ancestress.

Here, it is interesting that female-initiated (*ark*) *echaghel*, with a slave messenger, was implicated in the founding of a smith village. Although as shown, local social typifications allege that persons of low or ambiguous social origins, are 'real experts' in (*ark*) *echaghel*, nonetheless anyone may practise this, provided they consult a marabout to carry out the necessary ritual formula. These smith and slave characters, female and outsiders, thus point to gendered as well as class-related tensions: of women who resent men's polygyny, a common theme of Tuareg verbal art tales and women's informal gossip. This story reveals

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the connections between 'sorcery', rivalry, and outside 'alien' forces intruding into local space. Gendered experiences of sexual jealousy, directed against strange, newly arrived co-wives (these latter often non-kin, 'love' matches, in contrast to first wives who are more likely to be kin in arranged first marriages), are often implicated in (*ark*) *echaghel*. Women's (*ark*) *echaghel* therefore seems to express men's fear of women's active agency and resistance, for example, retaliation for polygyny, or extramarital affairs while men are absent from home.

However, *echaghel* can also afflict men and reflect male rivalries. It can come hand in hand with marabouts' *al baraka*. For sorcery to have a truly successful, fatal effect, the help of a marabout is imperative (Nicolaisen 1961: 137). Only marabouts who are knowledgeable of the Qur'an can do this. Also required is the use of written, not solely oral, words in the form of curses drawn from verses of the Qur'an or formulas of incantation drawn from Arabic manuals on magic. A marabout can practise sorcery either in order to avenge himself against someone, or upon demand from a third party. In Agadez, Niger, there was an incident in the late 1990s involving a nobleman who was a renowned dancer. He belonged to a cultural exchange troupe due to go to France for a performance. The dancer loved the same woman a marabout loved and the marabout became jealous of him. So the marabout activated a form of (*ark*) *echaghel* that caused his teeth to sink into his leg and wound it, thereby debilitating the dancer and preventing him from travelling on the tour.

Thus social ties may be either affirmed or betrayed by the same power. The (*ark*) *echaghel* in this incident emanating from a marabout in effect operated as an inversion of marabout's normally benevolent *al baraka* power, reflecting the collisions between different bases of status and prestige—not an entirely new phenomenon, but one intensified by widening travels and news of others' value systems. In the scramble for male prestige to appeal to potential wives, men must compete for sources of economic and symbolic 'capital' (Bourdieu 1977). This widely travelled, renowned performing artist posed quite a threat to the marabout, despite the latter's respected status as a holy man. Poets, musicians, singers and dancers are much admired, in particular, those in the professional international ensembles. The celebrity vs. the holy man—two possible sources of esteem—could possibly coincide in one person, but in practice this is difficult and they often become dispersed. Into the vacuum created by this dispersion of sources of prestige steps reformulated *al baraka* power.

Marabouts' Islamic blessing [Al baraka]

As observed, marabouts, like smiths, are ambiguous figures who manipulate and transform powers. Since medieval Tuareg nobles initially resisted Islam, valued valour in war and challenged the social equality promoted by Islam, some compromise was necessary in the social system: the only sacerdotal class was confronted by moral dilemmas and had to provide standards to transform a warlike society (Norris 1975: 20 f.) Today, there are new strands in noble–marabout

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relations. Like smiths, marabouts do not form politically autonomous groups, but each faction is attached to an adjacent noble descent group for protection. Marabouts' status varies regionally, from quasi-tributary to a status comparable to that of nobles. Tuareg treat them politely and respectfully, but simultaneously they also feel a certain fear of them because they know they are capable of using their knowledge malevolently in sorcery. Hence the ambiguity and indeterminacy of marabouts' *al baraka* power.

Thus the fourth power—*al baraka*, that life force, blessing and benediction believed to be concentrated in prominent marabouts and leaders—has a complex meaning, intrinsically and in relation to the other powers. Norris (1990: 167) defines (*al*) *baraka* as 'a divine blessing or grace bestowed upon Sufis in holy places, in their communal meals, in prayer from a specific and revered Shaykh, and also from the discarded *khirqa* (ritual Sufi) mantle'. The Icherifan nobles who claim descent from the Prophet seek to establish a rapport with the force of *al baraka* and the chief of the clan also has this. There exists a connection between the responsibility of chiefs concerning the fertility of the country and their relation to *al baraka*. This applies particularly to the Sultan of Air, the Amenokal in Agadez who, it is said, keeps the bones of his ancestors as amulets. There is a relationship between the mystical force of *al baraka* and fecundity, similar to the conception of *al baraka* in Semitic religions which refers to the power of reproduction (Nicolaisen 1961: 121).

Marabouts manufacture many amulets to protect against thieves: for example, one was on the wall of an adobe house in the compound of my host family. It came from Nigeria and was believed to cause a thief to lose his way. Ideally, 'good' marabouts make use of their *al baraka* as guardians of the local 'home' terrain. But this terrain has often been disputed and invaded. For example one local chief and marabout forbade the cutting down of trees in a forest on Mont Bagzan, intending to benefit the local populations ultimately by preventing erosion but some local herders resented this restriction (Rasmussen 2001).

Both currently and in the past (pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial—distant and immediate—eras), some marabouts have acted protectively as guardians of sacred places in times of economic and ecological crisis. They have taken a stand against what they view as dubious benefits of colonial and post-colonial policies: government, international NGO aid programmes and tourism agencies intruding into their communities. Even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, marabouts played an important role in the conflict with colonial powers (Norris 1975, 1990). Some marabouts led efforts to unify the Tuareg. In 1908 and 1916, for example, an attempt to unify the Tuareg was instigated by the maraboutique clans in the Kel Antessar, who rallied the noble warriors, attempting to defend the integrity of their mandate to educate youths in Qur'anic schools (Bourgeot 1994: 663). The 1916 uprising was suppressed, however, and followed by the opening of early French secular schools for nomads in 1917. The colonial efforts to educate Tuareg in the French language and culture

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threatened the importance of Qur'anic scholarship in Tuareg society and the marabouts undoubtedly understood this. Camel (1993: 58) describes how French schools were blatantly intended to 'peacefully conquer the spirits, particularly of the ruling class'. While some noble children attended school (often driven by soldiers at gunpoint), predominantly children of lower-status Tuareg were at first sent to school (Dayak 1992; Rasmussen 1997). This was a strategy encouraged by marabouts for resistance against these French policies and for preservation of Tuareg cultural and religious values. Yet by 1920, Mohammed Ali, chief of the Kel Antessart, and other Tuareg in the Ahaggar as well, recognised the political and economic necessity of sending youths to the (secular) nomadic boarding schools (Keenan 1977; Camel 1993: 61).

These conflicts between indigenous Qur'anic and secular education have continued into post-colonial times: a literacy instructor indicated that he felt uncomfortable about teaching older respected persons. Staff in literacy programmes encounter conflicts between the different scripts/alphabets emphasised by locals and outsiders: Tifinagh, Arabic of the Qur'an, and Roman scripts. In most literacy programmes, for example, Roman script is emphasised—characters that are neither indigenous to Tamajaq nor to Arabic, the medium of prayer and inscriptions in amulet protection. In this, marabouts guard their terrain, including, for example, writing Qur'anic verses on amulets. While some nobles in northern Niger and Mali now prefer Tifinagh in efforts at cultural revitalisation following the Peace Accords, marabouts tend to encourage Arabic script.

Thus despite nobles' dependence on marabouts for their protection through Qur'anic amulets and *al baraka*, they do not constitute a unified interest group. There is little consensus on religious devotion; and noble–marabout as well as local–outside relations have sometimes been characterised by tension. Marabouts face increasingly difficult decisions regarding their own allegiances and how to define and practise *al baraka* and Islam more generally: they must contend, on the one hand, with newly emergent ideas of nationhood formulated by educated youths and, on the other, with ideas of Islamist reformists in some regions of Niger and Mali. In response to these tensions, there are some parallels—but also divergences—between marabouts' colonial resistance activities and their more recent activities in the rebellion and following the peace pacts. In difficult years of drought in the late 1960s, early 1970s and in 1984, some marabouts' powers to bring rain were marshalled, but also threatened. When an aid agency installed rain gauges one rainy season on the plateau summit of Mont Bagzan, the rains did not fall as expected. Local marabouts insisted that it was these rain gauges that were causing the drought, by preventing the rain from falling. This veiled their fear of some political competition with outside influences from these post-colonial central state authorities, in the form of technical aid. So rumours circulated that it was the rain gauges that were preventing rainfall. There was a conflict of modernities here: in effect, the marabouts sensed the competition for technological control

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and possibly also for political power from the aid agency, despite the general welcoming of some of its benefits.

Perhaps in response to such fears, some marabouts are rumoured to bury 'bad' amulets underground in certain places; for example, along some paths on Mont Bagzan, to deter outsiders from entering the area. This was vividly shown during a conflict between residents and the government several years ago. This dispute concerned when exactly to begin to celebrate a holiday called Biannu, a celebration of renewal for the coming year. Its date of onset is calculated by the lunar calendar, as are other Islamic holidays. One begins to celebrate it upon confirmation, by marabouts, on their sighting of the moon. During the regime of Seyni Kountché (1974–87), the then president of Niger declared that it was time to celebrate the holiday, that the moon had come. The leader of the Air marabouts, however, disagreed and refused to follow the central government's declaration. Kountché allegedly sent several functionaries as representatives into the region to initiate the celebration but each time a car set out, there was an accident and fatalities. Local residents insisted that this calamity was caused by the prominent marabout's *al baraka* against Kountché. Subsequently, the marabout declared the sighting of the moon, thereby overriding, allegedly at least, the president's declaration of when to start Biannu celebrations. These attitudes and incidents illustrate transformations, but also continuities, in marabouts' *al baraka* powers in contexts of tensions between Tuareg and local, regional, central state and international authorities.

Some marabouts are rumoured to manufacture amulets protecting against bullets in the armed conflicts between Tuareg separatists and government militia. One marabout was particularly renowned for his amulets believed to protect rebels from militia bullets. Now, many people believe that the (former) rebel leaders, especially Rhissa Ag Boula, have powerful maraboutique protection against bullets. Following the Peace Pact, interestingly, the government appointed this same Rhissa Ag Boula as Minister of Tourism. This appointment fulfilled the terms of the Peace Pact: to integrate more Tuareg (heretofore minorities underrepresented in the national infrastructure) into the militia and government and university. On another more unspoken, yet equally powerful, level, however, this leader's alleged protection by the *al baraka*-saturated amulets of prominent Air marabouts was also, surely, taken very seriously. Some marabouts publicly bless local political rallies, others read from the Qur'an at government-sponsored peace and reconciliation gatherings.

There are indications of a factionalising and perhaps fractionalised *al baraka*. Though this was never a completely unitary or monolithic power, there now appear to be fewer guidelines demarcating the spaces it once protected and more numerous competitors have different agendas. There have been several shootings in Agadez between marabouts in disputes: one involved alleged fights over bridewealth return upon a divorce. In August 1995, a marabout in Agadez was killed in an armed robbery. Prior to that incident, there were only rarely attacks on

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marabouts, ideally men of peace who, like smith/artisans, traditionally must not be the victims of aggression.

Local marabouts' attitudes toward the new Islamist reform movements is difficult to discern; they appear to tolerate them, albeit with some ambivalence because the newcomers represent ideologies alien to Tuareg cultural values and some economic competition as well. Izala, an Islamic puritanical-reformist sect influenced from the Sudan, has gained ground in some towns of Niger. A reformist Islamist sect from Pakistan called Doragh was recently permitted to enter northern Mali by local marabouts, stipulating 'as long as it does not preach violence'. While many Tuareg remain somewhat cool toward transcultural reformist Islam and continue to associate marabouts' *al baraka* power with peace and reconciliation, a few Tuareg marabouts are turning to Islamist sects in order to reconstruct male gender pride in the wake of the upheavals of the rebellion. One recent convert to Doragh, though polite, refrained from the usual custom of shaking my hand at a cooperative meeting in Kidal, explaining gently, 'I am Muslim now,' thereby giving a new sense to the older Tuareg Islam that was based more in Tuareg cultural values; these latter do not forbid shaking a woman's hand. He somewhat anxiously asked how old I was, looking relieved when I indicated I was in my mid-fifties (an older woman was apparently more acceptable to him at a meeting—though many Tuareg men are not disturbed by women of any age at meetings). Thus in the distant, as well as more recent (post-colonial and immediate) past, marabouts deploy their religious power to negotiate transformed ideas about power and social relations. Now many marabouts feel the need for increased vigilance against new dangers to *al baraka*, yet in so doing, they also transform the very power they guard.

CONCLUSIONS AND WIDER IMPLICATIONS

Ritual powers, plural discourses, and time depth

The foregoing analysis has situated witchcraft as not only a singular moral discourse, but as an unsteady intersection of plural discourses. The contexts of 'witch-like' powers are fluid and dynamic. Old and new notions and practices of power operate in contrasting ways, in different contexts of interaction, and produce intended and unintended consequences. Hence the need for anthropologists to avoid either extreme in their analyses of witchcraft: on the one hand, of assigning only 'traditional', micro-community social tensions to witch-like powers or, on the other, of superimposing western academic and popular notions of modernity onto them. The data also underline the need to historicise witchcraft studies, but not simply in a linear or chronological manner. The relevance of modernity in relation to witchcraft might be more appropriately understood by anthropologists as a rearrangement of the vectors of moral argument (witchcraft discourses) rather than exclusively a unitary response to the emergence of something wholly new. More broadly, the foregoing data suggest ways in which

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moral discourses are creatively reconfigured from cultural referents in intrinsically diverse repertoires.

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the varied ways so-called 'witchcraft' powers are implicated today in an African society, the Tuareg of the Republic of Niger. There is analysis of the interplay of these powers and dangers in case studies and vignettes, suggesting that recent assertions of 'witch-like' powers are grounded in moral discourse that addresses negotiated social relationships rather than linear temporal transformations from 'tradition' into 'modernity'. A comparative analysis of these powers in diverse contexts reveals that witchcraft discourses are multiple and invite less a lineal temporal question of 'tradition' versus 'modernity', more a question of how moral discourses are reconfigured from cultural referents in intrinsically diverse repertoires.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet essai étudie les divers modes d'implication des dits pouvoirs de «sorcellerie» dans une société africaine, les Touaregs de la République du Niger. Il analyse l'interaction de ces pouvoirs et des dangers dans des études de cas et des évocations, suggérant que les récentes assertions de pouvoirs «assimilés à de la sorcellerie» trouvent leurs racines dans le discours moral traitant des relations

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sociales négociées plutôt que des transformations temporelles linéaires de la «tradition» vers la «modernité». Une analyse comparée de ces pouvoirs dans des contextes divers révèle que les discours de sorcellerie sont multiples et suscitent moins une question temporelle linéaire de «tradition» contre «modernité» que la question de savoir comment les discours moraux sont reconfigurés à partir de référents culturels dans des répertoires intrinsèquement divers.

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