

Book Review

Georg Klute. 2013. *Tuareg-Aufstand in der Wüste. Ein Beitrag zur Anthropologie der Gewalt und des Krieges.* Siegener Beiträge zur Soziologie, 12. Rüdiger Köppe, Cologne. 696 pp. ISBN 978-3-89645-732-5 EUR 68 hard-cover.

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The recurring Tuareg “rebellions” in Mali and Niger have been major themes of research among historians, anthropologists and policy makers. The book reviewed here presents a comprehensive study of one of these “rebellions”, which occurred in Mali in the early 1990s. Initiated by Tuareg emigrants in Libya and Algeria, the “rebels” swiftly took the upper hand, and in 1991 a peace agreement with the Malian government was reached that gave a strong element of autonomy to the northern region in Mali (105–6). In spite of this success, many Tuareg rejected the peace agreement. In its aftermath, the earlier cooperation between different Tuareg “rebel” groups ended, and finally, around 1994, a civil war started among Tuareg, and with non-Tuareg militias, that ended with a new peace agreement in 1996.

Georg Klute considers his work as belonging to the field of political anthropology, and especially the ethnology of war. Within this framework, he chooses a number of different foci, as is visible in the organization of the book. The first part considers Tuareg poetry on the “rebellion”, the second part is concerned with migration, and especially the migration towards Algeria and Libya and the return of the emigrants to Mali. The third part is a detailed reconstruction of the events during the war, while the last part presents the development of local rule from pre-colonial times to the modern period. In view of the readership of the journal and my own expertise, I will only be concerned with the first part here, on poetry, whose 170 pages (+ 30 pages of texts in the annex) would easily have constituted a book by itself.

In the “rebellion” of the 1990s, poetry was immensely important. From 1978 onward a new type of poetry evolved in the immigrant milieu in Algeria and Libya, called **algitara** after its accompanying instrument. The texts commented upon the situation of the emigrants and their home country, and were instrumental in creating a discourse about the larger political aims of the Tuareg. This discourse involved a unified Tuareg nation **təmust**, which was not only unified in the geographical sense, but also, and especially so, in the social sense, encompassing tribal entities that would traditionally be on different hierarchical

levels. Klute's research aims at an analysis of the "discourse within the group" (*Binnendiskurs*), as opposed to the *Außendiskurs*, i. e., the discourse aimed at the international public. In order to do so, he collected poetry concerning the "rebellion", especially the poetry that was best known among Tuareg in Mali and Niger when he did his fieldwork during the war and in its immediate aftermath (51). Here he aimed at establishing the earliest versions, as well as a precise dating of the pieces. While students of literature may consider this philological approach slightly old-fashioned, it is clear that the historian needs dates in order to establish which *Binnendiskurs* was relevant at what period. The pieces were transcribed, translated and commented upon with the help of one of the most knowledgeable people in Mali Tuareg language and culture, Ekhya ag-Sidiyan, which makes them an invaluable source for any scholar interested in Tuareg language and literature.

Klute distinguishes four phases in the development of this political poetry (78ff.): *Return* (pieces originating in the migration context, revealing the dream of independence, 1978–1990); *Vengeance* (pieces about the war with the Malian government, 1990–1991); *Resignation* (pieces related to the time of the peace negotiations in 1991, which were considered to betray the ideals of the revolution), and finally, *Withdrawal* (pieces related to the civil war and its effects, which deeply disappointed the poets). He analyzes in detail a number of poems related to the different phases, showing their political meaning (often difficult to see for the outsider because of the general Tuareg usage of **tangalt**, veiled language), explaining the images, and showing the way that ancient terms and images are reinterpreted in the new ideological framework, e. g., the reinterpretation of **eya** 'vengeance' from a personal duty to a much more abstract duty towards the nation, or the use of **ayotma** 'brothers' to speak to all Tuareg, which goes against traditional ideologies of kinship in which Tuareg of different groups are not related to each other genealogically. Incidentally one wonders whether this use is a calque on Arab discourse.

He also discusses the international aspects of the images used in the poetry and beyond, especially the links with the north-African Berber movement. Interestingly, while the Tuareg "rebellions" are very salient in the discourse of the Berber movement, for the Tuareg themselves the Berber movement seems to be of little relevance. In the same chapter Klute analyzes the ideological dichotomy between religious and non-religious tribes, and how this dichotomy is constructed in a historical way. It would be interesting to see the way this dichotomy, which remained mostly below the surface in the 1990s, is relevant for the present situation, where Tuareg goals have been reframed into a militant Islamic ideology.

The last chapter in this part of the book provides an analysis of the importance of cassette culture as a way of mediating ideologies and poetry in general.

The organization of the book, while very strict in its superstructure, is remarkably loose within the chapters; thus a remark that the Niger anti-colonial leader Kāwsān is hardly mentioned in the poetry is followed by a six-page elaboration on Kāwsān (143–149); many other examples could be given. One may regret that there is hardly any comparison with the development of political poetry in Niger. Maybe more problematic is the question of how representative the poetry is for the *Binnendiskurs* of the “rebellion”. “Rebel” poetry is strongly concentrated among the (continuously changing) membership of the music group *Tinariwen* and its leader Ibrahim ag Alkhabib; over half of the poems in the annex were composed by people who were at some time members of the group. While its popularity in Mali and Niger shows its undeniable impact, the *Binnendiskurs* shown by it is basically that of one specific group of people, and may be less revealing about the variation that such discourses no doubt had within the “rebel” community.

Summarizing, this is a very satisfying book, well-written and extremely erudite. It is a must-read for anybody who is interested in Tuareg culture, the recent history of the Sahel, or modern poetry, or who is just an amateur of the music of *Tinariwen*.