Beyond occidentalism: Critique of life in Europe by Tuaregs in Niger

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Abstract

This article focuses on the narratives of Tuaregs in northern Niger, which discuss life in Europe. The repetitive *topoi* identified within their rather critical narratives about Europe refer to the lack of time and space and consequently, the lack of freedom; appreciation of infrastructure against the backdrop of poor social ties; and absence of atmosphere. While Occidentalist perspective interprets narratives on Europe as the affirmation of identity and cultural values, I will introduce habitus into the analysis in order to include the embodied experience impact on the narratives and practices. I argue that contact and interaction with Europeans and travelling to Europe influences perceptions of Europe by Tuaregs. Furthermore the dialogic construction of ideas about Europe needs to be acknowledged. It is becoming increasingly visible how interaction, exchange and legal travel facilitate alternative versions of Occidentalism.

KEYWORDS: Tuaregs, Occidentalism, perceptions of Europe, habitus, migration

Introduction: Tuaregs[1] encountering Europeans and travelling to Europe

In the last two decades, there has been growing media coverage and public discourse within Europe that claims how the sole objective of non-Europeans is to live and work within the EU. This perception of non-Europeans is based on the idea that life in Europe is better than elsewhere and that those who arrive, want to stay indefinitely. Therefore, this forms another kind of European Orientalism upon which right-wing discourses regarding fear of invasion and the need for the militarisation of borders are built. Despite narratives depicting Europe as a destination of escape in order to gain rights, status and/or economic

1 The term Tuareg is an external definition and is the plural of Targui. Other emic names are used such as Kel Tamasheq (people who speak Tamasheq), *Imajeghen*, *Imuhagh, Imushagh* (compare with Claudot-Hawad 2001:6, Kohl 2010: xii), depending on the dialect and region. In Northern Niger, the term *Imajeghen* (m.pl.; *Chimajeghen* f.pl, *Amajeq* m.sg., *Tamajeq* f.sg.) was used most often. It is the same word used for the highest social class of free people, *imajeghen*. Here I will use the terms Tuareg and Tuaregs, in order to avoid confusion as they themselves use those terms when communicating with Europeans. Tuaregs live in five different countries surrounding the Sahara (Niger, Mali, Libya, Algeria and Burkina Faso). Traditionally pastoral nomads, they are adapting to urban and semi-sedentarised livelihoods.

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wellbeing exists, they are nevertheless embedded in diverse local economic and political realities, values, gender and generational aspirations, and often include temporary or circular mobility and transnational aspects (Monga 2000, Martin 2007, Lo Sardo 2010, Treiber 2007). The narratives do not necessarily idealise Europe nor does everyone want to remain in Europe. Here, I focus on the discussions concerning life in Europe by Tuaregs who live in the North of Niger, paying particular interest to how encounters, contact and travelling experiences shaped their perceptions of Europe. I will concentrate on the narratives of those Tuaregs from Northern Niger, who have either visited Europe or who have had a European co-worker or friend. Most of the narratives presented in this article originate from before the recent political changes[2] in the region, when there were more opportunities to meet Europeans and it was also less complicated to get a tourist visa for Europe.

Tuaregs working in tourism or in development industries formed acquaintances and friends with Europeans, which fostered relations, conversations and an exchange of views. Tuaregs included Europeans in their social networks and some of them travelled to Europe to visit them. During their visits, many sold Tuareg jewellery or promoted tourist agencies. Some married a European partner and lived between the two countries, rarely establishing the desire to permanently remain in Europe on their agenda. Some young Tuaregs were able to study in France. In Europe, Tuaregs form Niger did not form a diaspora in the strict sense of the word since very few stayed permanently and did not occupy a specific economic sector or locality. Those few who did stay became part of knots within a network (Giuffrida 2010, Lunaček 2013), which were composed mostly of European friends whom Tuaregs leaned on during their visits. Travelling to Europe was only one example of many forms of mobility adopted by Tuaregs (Bernus 1981; Claudot Hawad 2002; Rasmussen 1994, 2005; Kohl 2010) or mobilities in Africa more generally (De Brujin, van Dijk & Feoeken 2001; Klute & Hahn 2007, Grätz 2010). The return, not necessarily with means or things, but with knowledge and connections was implied in the nomadic concept of travel (Claudot Hawad 2002; Lunaček 2013) and is often suggested in any idea of travel or practice of mobility (Gregorič Bon & Repič 2016).

From conversations with Europeans and through the experiences of Tuaregs visiting Europe, a rather critical reflection upon life in Europe emerged in their narratives - and of another kind than that transmitted in Niger by media and education system. I will present the main *topoi* in those narratives and analyse them through the concept of Occidentalism, therefore placing them in the context of cultural values and identity. Experience-based Occidentalism, where contact and travel are accessible, does not tend to either demonise or idealise life in Europe, but rather enables realistic and pragmatic representations. Occidentalism as a discursive concept requires complementary concepts to integrate experience-based attitudes. Therefore, I suggest habitus to interpret the embodied real-life experiences

[2] The decline of tourism and projects occurred with the Tuareg rebellion in 2007 and 2008, which involved claiming a better share of state revenues by all regions. Dramatic changes took place with the fall of Khadafy in 2011, which also influenced the 2012 Tuareg rebellion in Mali while the role of Libya in regional and international migration changed. At the same time, radical Islamic movements in the region strengthened. Destabilisation in the region enabled France and USA to increase their military presence while EU externalisation politics was enforced in Niger. Due to all those changes, experiences with Europeans and Americans, discussions on the EU and US politics, and perceptions of Europe and America are changing, but those issues deserve a separate article.

that influence those narratives. Occidentalism is present in academic and also in public debates, but it does not include research about experience-based perceptions of Europe by those from other continents who visited Europe or lived in Europe. Since I will endeavour to introduce experience and interaction in Occidentalism debates, I did not take as a starting point a perspective derived from the study of migration, mobility, movement and place, where perceptions of Europe or "the West" are not the main focus.

The main part of the research I refer to in this article was conducted between May 2003 and August 2004[3] among Tuaregs in Northern Niger using a multi-sited approach which encompassed the regional urban centres Agadez and Ingal and their surroundings, the oasis Timia and the nomadic region of Azawagk. The methods employed included participant observation, spontaneous conversations, thematic biographies and semi-structured interviews. Part of the information is also based on my personal experience as a host for a Tuareg friend in 2006, as well as a visit to see Tuareg friends in another European country. Later updates originate from one month research visits in Niger in 2011, 2016, 2017 and 2018. Here, I will focus on narratives on Europe, and less so on the categories of *ikufar* ("the Westerners", literally non-believers), which have diverse and historically contextualised content as well (see Rasmussen 1994, Lunaček 2010).

Conceptual frame: Occidentalism

Since I am discussing the narratives of Tuaregs on Europe as part of my research into their perceptions of the West[4], I will start with Occidentalism as an interpretive frame. Before acknowledging the benefits and limits of this approach, I will outline the ways in which Occidentalism can be used in anthropological analysis.

Diverse approaches in the study of Occidentalism and various definitions of Occidentalism itself have emerged in the last decades (see e.g. Jouhki 2016). The Western academic notion to study Occidentalism arose after Said's Orientalism was written, which does not mean that images and the discussion of the West did not exist earlier in other parts of the world (Bonnet 2004). The importance of Said's work (1996) is the revelation that Orientalism was a corporate institution producing a regime of knowledge, which accompanied colonial military conquest and administrative dominance during European colonialism, neo-colonialism and later on, the imperialism of the United States. Occidentalism can be understood as the other side of Orientalism: the creation of a Western identity as opposed to its constructed Oriental Other (Said 1996)[5]. Otherwise, Occidentalism was

[3] The research was financed as PhD young researcher employment by the Research Agency of the Republic of Slovenia.

[4] "The West" is a problematic and ideologically burdened term, with a shifting content; does it mean geographically Europe and USA? Is Japan included in the West or does it rather mean the Global North, or G8 or G20 countries since it is related to old and new imperialism? Or is it not a geographical place at all, but rather an imaginary place related to certain attributes of dominance, technology and modernity? Obviously, the content of imagining 'the West' and the consequences of facing its effects need to be researched in each specific context.

[5] It is impossible to find as much globalised Occidentalism within such a violent context as was the case with Orientalism combined with imperialism, which is still in transformation; the exception perhaps being the most extremist Islamist movements promoting jihad. Hence, the panic of Margalit and Bureima (2004), resulting in their simplified categorisation of Occidentalism as a kind of "Muslim rage", further interpreted as borrowed from totalitarian regimes.

used to frame ideas which Non-Western peoples articulated about the West. Those ideas of the West have been appropriated locally in a cluster of traits along or against which local identity and power struggles were articulated. Most of those studies are related to literature and philosophy in Japan and China, and to literature, media and political studies in the Middle East (e.g. Hutchinson 2011, Meltem 2010, Woltering 2011).

In anthropology, focusing on Occidentalism was not very popular, despite Orientalism influenced the reflection of anthropology's position in relation to colonialism and the questioning of ethnographic authority (Clifford 1986). Occidentalism can be considered as a particular form of constructing the Other, which differs from concepts of ethnicity in its subject, 'the West'. James Carrier (1995) elaborated upon a most comprehensive systematisation of the scope of Occidentalisms in anthropological analysis. He reaffirms, as a starting point, that by producing the Other at the same time, self-identity is produced as its opposite and therefore, attention needs to be focused upon the hidden part of the relation. In other words, the complementarity of essencialisation and dichotomisation processes implies that discourses on modernisation imagined as westernisation, produce on the other hand self-orientalisation, which can take the form of the invention or reification of tradition. Particular customs or habits can become established as markers of national difference, as was the case of *kerekere* in Fidji, the custom of hospitality, despite ironically already having been encouraged by British colonisers (Carrier 1995:7). Occidentalisms are related to historical and national contexts, and different currents in inner power struggles. Gewertz in Errington (1995) demonstrates, for example, how Tolai elites in Papua New Guinea used opportunity to stop an attempt to export shell money by an art dealer in order to establish their position as protectors of traditions in their community and nationwide.

Woltering (2011), a political scientist, emphasises the internal dynamic of diverse Occidentalisms in his analysis of Egyptian media. He argues that Occidentalisms are quite diverse and are constantly evolving, because they depend on particular ideologies (in the case of Egypt, moderate Islamist, nationalist-leftist and liberal) and on uses of attributes ascribed to the West in their articulation and argumentation of one position against the other (Woltering 2011). Sandra Nasser El Dine's (2016) adds more fluid individual perspective in her ethnographic study, where she discusses Syrian and Jordanian youth negotiating gender relations between liberal pro-Western narratives and conservative anti-Western counterparts. As she demonstrates, Occidentalisms are diverse and Occidentalist or auto-Orientalist identities created in relation to the imagined West are negotiated, situational and fluid. Most importantly, they are not just reproductions or reactions to hegemonic Orientalist discourse, even when they use the same stereotypical list of traits. Rather, they use Occidentalism as a means of creating and negotiating one's own identity while contesting other identities and political agendas in local and international contexts (Nasser El-Dine 2016).

It is worth noting what those approaches have in common: they put into focus how actors outside the presumed West not only create images of the West, but adapt and negotiate them in conjunction with their respective ideologies or creation of their collective or individual identities. On the other hand, Occidentalism was used in anthropology

and the history of colonialism to frame categorisations formed through encounters with the Western Other by Non-Western peoples. The study by Robert Thornton (1995) for example, shows that during the colonisation of South Africa, the Zulus did not interpret all Westerners as belonging to the same category (they differentiated between British and Boer); neither was it obvious which of the involved parties was the strongest (Thornton 1995). Spittler (2003) and Klute (2006) likewise demonstrate how knowledge about and the changing attitudes of Tuaregs towards incoming Europeans was in constant flux during colonisation, the perception shifting from interesting travellers to invading forces, where strategies of alliance or rebellion were adopted to confront them.

When Nyamjoh and Page (2002) present a very diverse scope of narratives in Cameroon on the whites and *Whiteman kontri* (country of White men), they argue Cameroonian students themselves participated in creating images of "the whites". Their ideas of whites are ambiguous, because they are derived from two different sources: one direct experience, and the other from television. Through experience with the whites in Cameroon, they find them rather repulsive, ugly, dirty, feeble and poor while at the same time, the overall image of the United States in particular is glorified as a land of opportunity with high standards and beautifully well-dressed rich whites as seen on TV. They notice themselves those images are contradictory and therefore, whites in Cameroon are seen as second-class versions. Concurrently, Cameroonian students feel injustice when whites are automatically valued more in institutions, despite their competences possibly being much lower than those of Cameroonian students. Following disappointment through first-hand experience in France, the USA has been labelled as a land of wealth and promise. Yvette Djachechi Monga (2000) also discovers that for Cameroonian women, the USA functioned as 'a vessel in which to pour their dreams' (Monga 2000: 193). American beauty products did not only guarantee quality, but were able to relate a person to the promised world of opportunity. Female heads of households made the effort to invest in their children's schooling in the USA in order to gain social capital and economic benefits in the longer term. Monga's analysis shows those dreams enact a claim for economic survival and for participation in a globalised world (Monga 2000).

I argue that we need to consider both aspects: not only the images and narratives produced by the media, consumed, adapted, invested and refashioned locally, but also the perceptions produced in other ways – such as through contact by travelling, and transmitting those experiences orally in narratives. In this way, I aim to make the discursive space occupied by different Orientalisms and Occidentalisms more complex and nuanced.

On the basis of my fieldwork research, I will present the *topoi* prominent in Tuaregs' narratives on Europe: the lack of place and time related to the lack of freedom; appreciation of infrastructure against poor social relations and the absence of "atmosphere". While it is possible to interpret them in the frame of Occidentalism, in order to really grasp the issue of the lacking social atmosphere, I will introduce habitus as a complementary concept in the second part of the analysis.

No time, no place, no freedom

The question of time in relation to social atmosphere was the most common and most elaborated reproach on the European lifestyle. It was often connected to the sociality of visiting people. This kind of contrast with Europe was expressed almost by all those visiting Europe, observing their European host arranging meetings and constantly struggling to stay on time with the myriad of diverse activities. The idea of over-organised time was perceived as limiting in several senses - not only by limiting the openness of social relations, but also by producing stress and taking away freedom, as the following examples illustrate.

Mohamed,[6] from a village in Aïr who was in his fifties, had been collaborating with several development projects and with European researchers. He had also visited Europe several times. In terms of time, he could not understand how people managed to deal with the pressure of scheduling:

> As an African, I am asking myself how people can always keep on time. This day, at this time, they are programmed for a month in advance. I could do that, but not all the time. There are moments I can keep on time, but there are other moments when I want to be free, to give my brain a rest. For me, this makes old. Because one needs time to think, for freedom, to rest. If you want to keep on time, you are at risk to be always worried. Even if one is rich. This makes old, to think constantly how to make everything.

After visiting Europe, Mohamed therefore made a distinction between Africans and Europeans, which might look like a kind of self-Orientalism, contrasting his African perception of time with a European one. However, to look at this as Occidentalist essencialisation is too restrictive, and does not permit the understanding of his insight. He exposed his personal need to have time in order to think and feel free in comparison to the conditions in which Europeans live, where they 'are programmed for a month in advance'. The difference was identified on the basis of his embodied need, observation and comparison. In this case, he related freedom to time; not to be organised all the time so as to keep one's thoughts free - a critique which European academics and non-academics would easily recognise in themselves and identify with.

Another aspect of freedom related to time and space was expanded upon, contrasting Tuareg freedom with European enclosure. Taher, who possesses a high-level university degree, married a European woman and they lived and raised their children in Agadez. Working in tourism, he gave a critical analysis on the life of Westerners enslaved by their work. Taher's elaborate reflections are presented below more extensively: first, he exposes the different value systems, relating the lack of time and freedom to excessive work and the need for money.

> There are other values. For example, Tuareg can take his car, or a camel, or even he can walk and then spend all day lying down and thinking. I want to say, to what serves the work? It is for survival. If it becomes something just opposite it means work, work, as people in Western countries do, it is

[6] All the names are replaced with other names in order to ensure anonymity.

> only that what is left. Overwhelming work, you are 80 years old and still you work. They never had anything from life. What is this kind of life good for? To accumulate money? In order to do what?

Here he defines overwhelming work as responsible for taking over all the time, removing the freedom to think and to live. He further elaborates on this issue in terms of the constraints imposed by the system:

> There is no aim or the aim is hidden, if the system is such, in which you do not dare to have something from life. You have to work, if you do not work, you do not have social security. You take a credit, because you need to buy your little flat and then you can't leave the job anymore, because you have credit. Then your kids are at school and you say you cannot do this and that or go. ... This really becomes too limited. It has no taste of life … and then, even when you understand what is going on, you cannot exit any more. Therefore, you are in prison. You are free, but you are in prison.

His analysis of the West is based on his experience, observation and on conversations with his European and American guests. He lived in Europe for several years, but returned to Niger and when possible, worked with tourists. He was very critical of the situation many Europeans and Americans found themselves in, where they were caught in the daily rhythm of work not having time for anything else nor being able to change the situation. On this basis he also explains why Europeans and Americans are so fascinated by Tuaregs living in the desert:

> And this is one of the things that brings together Westerners, when they come here, with Tuaregs. When they come here people dream about life. They, Tuaregs, become as their dreams. And what do they do? When they come here into the desert and see people there, they keep asking: 'But from where he comes? What does he do? What does he eat?' They almost ask 'where is the supermarket, doctor, fire brigade, police....?' For them, all this seems necessary, and it is not possible to explain that Tuareg can live under the tree, without all this, with some goats and this is all. For me, there is a luxury in poverty. Great luxury and this is the only thing that gives the taste to poverty.

Taher explains the Orientalism of tourists by their fascination with the nomadic ability to live "with nothing", where the presumed freedom of nomads is in stark contrast with European enslavement through material needs and dependence on infrastructure. He appreciates the freedom of nomads, but at the same time, he admits it is related to the poverty; nomads appear to him as free, but poor. With luxury in poverty, it seems that he is referring to the ability of nomads to live as their own masters, independent of consumer products or modern state infrastructure: therefore, they supposedly do not depend on paid jobs nor on the state. Simultaneously, they appear poor from the perspective of access to comfort that certain goods and services can provide. They are also seen as poor compared to the prosperity of the past, when animals were more numerous, representing and provid-

ing wealth. Taher succeeded in achieving freedom without poverty precisely by working in tourism and also being able to take the time to drive freely in the desert, alone or as the host with his guests. Growing up in the countryside near the nomads, his perception of nomadic life was ambiguous since he knew their life conditions were harsh. On the one hand, he identified with the feeling of freedom ascribed to the nomads, but on the other, he appreciated the possibility to choose to live in the city and school his children in order to provide them with another kind of freedom: that of choice, more global than the nomads had, the freedom related to having enough means to travel the world and choose their jobs.

The issue of freedom as a certain kind of positive self-Orientalism, particularly among some of the schooled Tuaregs living partly in the cities, emerges against imagined Occidentalism: Tuaregs' freedom is related to open time, movement and place in contrast to Europeans caught in their time and spatial enclosures.

The issue surrounding the importance of open spaces, where one is free to move in any direction, was confirmed even in casual conversations, such as when talking to random villagers near Agadez while watching a camel race. One of the villagers asked me: 'You don't have open spaces like here, no? That you could go anywhere you want?' This issue of moving freely in *etakas* (the uninhabited space outside the villages and camps) was again related to the issue of freedom. Space in Europe was often perceived as limited, enclosed – particularly in the cities – where even parks are behind the bars as Taher complained (for Paris), and many had the impression that even in the countryside you could not go where you wanted since land was privately owned.

In this light, I would have to re-read the sentence which Souleymane, a Tuareg amateur photographer and friend who visited me in Slovenia, composed for an exhibition on Tuareg nomads; he wrote: 'For the nomads, space is infinite and time is non-existent.' I contested this sentence, worried it would re-produce Orientalism by imagined visitors of the exhibition. Souleymane defended the sentence as being true. Souleymane belonged to *imghad,* who were a social category of free people. He has spent part of his life working in the city and recently returned home to live as a nomad. He was right to defend this sentence as true to him and in a way to the nomads, despite knowing very well how contested nomadic territory is and how aware nomads are of the struggle to control territory and resources. Although urban schooled Tuaregs usually stay in the countryside during the holidays to visit family, while nomads depend on the bush for survival, both share an appreciation of open views and a kind of self-organisation of time. The freedom of living in the bush with enough animals not to be obliged to work for others, was expressed as a value by the older nomads I spoke to in different locations.

The need for the feeling of freedom arising from open spaces, where it is possible to walk, ride or drive was particularly important for urban and schooled Tuaregs, as they related to the idea of nomadic freedom. When nomads visited a city in Niger, such as Agadez, they complained about enclosed courtyards and limited views, while gardeners and craftsmen have not paid attention to this. It seems everyone observed the landscape and noted information about it through the biased lens of what was most important for their own activities and identity which was related to social category they belong to.

Open spaces and time to think in relation to the feeling of freedom were most emphasised by those who belonged to the social categories of *imajeghan* and *imghad,* which were traditionally identified as free people (for more on Tuareg social categories, see Bernus 1981, Nicolaisen & Nicolaisen 1997, Claudot Hawad 2001). *Inadan*, blacksmiths and craftsmen more often stated they appreciated the positive sides of work in relation to Europe. Musa, a blacksmith form Timia, was in France with an association to demonstrate his working skills and knowledge in making silver jewellery. He observed:

> In Europe everybody works, there is less time to just sit idle. Here people gossip a lot, instead of working. Someone who doesn't work comes to talk when you are working, but you do not have time for this. There, everyone has his work, this is very good.

By observing everyone as busy, travellers concluded that everybody works. Minata, a blacksmith woman from the oasis of Timia who went to Europe to perform traditional music, related working men and women to prosperity. She said:

> In France everyone has work, women have work, men have work. Here women don't have jobs, they only have their goats. In France all women were in school and have jobs. Every morning they go to their job. Now, when girls go to school also here, if they will study, they will have jobs as well.

Certain observations about Europe included in the narratives are connected to a particular social category, because this influences certain activities individuals take an interest in and identify with. *Indadan*, like Musa, were in Europe to present their knowledge how to work with jewellery and they have also put more attention to appreciation of work in general in Europe. Nomads retained information about the greenness of the landscape and the abundance of water in Europe, despite never being there. The values between traditional social categories (Bernus 1981, Claudot-Hawad 1996, 2001, Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1996), are not all the same: while for *imghad* and *imajeghan*, honour and freedom are highly valued and heavy physical work is seen as a burden, *inadan* are proud of their manual skills. Still, it would be hard to interpret different narratives on Europe and the West in the context of ideological and power struggles at home, as El Dine (2016) and Woltering (2011) did. This possibility is not excluded, for example on questions concerning ideologies related to religion or slavery[7], but I did not collect data on these issues nor is this my focus in this particular analysis.

Infrastructure vs. social relations

Some positive aspects of Europe were also observed. Technology (*masnet*) was an aspect that stood out in the imagining of Europe. Those who travelled to Europe were eager to see achievements such as the TGV, modern ports and skyscrapers. Others who studied natural

[7] Non-Governmental organisations, like Timidria in Niger, have been continuing to prove existence of slavery in Niger and work in connection with anti-slavery and human rights international organisations. At the same time imagheran and imghad, I spoke to in Azawak and Aïr regions claimed slavery was over long time ago. For more details about this see Tijani Alou (1996).

sciences and technology in Europe and receiving job offers stayed longer to improve their technical knowledge. Certain people, including those who did decide to live in Europe, appreciated the level of organisation and planning facilities. In addition, the provision of social services including health benefits and schooling were known to be more accessible in Europe than in Niger. Jusuf, who worked in direct contact with people in the countryside within the development programme, proposed, without having visited Europe himself:

> This is what I like, is that nothing lacks there, because you have all possible health services and education is simply available. I do not know Europe, but I suppose that what I would like is exactly this: you can get treatment everywhere and education as well. It is not possible they would let someone suffer as here. Because here one can be very ill and die for nothing, only because health services are not available he can die; or from hunger because he doesn't have means and there is nobody who can find a solution.

His appreciation of Europe was marked by the problems of the people he had encountered in his work in the development program. This, therefore, translates to the critique of development projects and particularly the critique of the state, which does not provide access to basic social services.

Although Jusuf was not alone in noticing this, as some people who had the opportunity did go to Europe to receive specific medical treatment, others judged they would not be able to access those services. Ghabidin, a retired public official of nomadic origin, who briefly visited Europe and USSR in the context of his job, stated that in Europe you cannot do anything without money. In his view:

> If you have means, it is better to live in Europe. If you have money to stay in good place. If you do not have money is better to be here. Because here mutual help is much more developed. There the development led to the point where you need to sleep outside if you don't have work.

He suggested in Niger another kind of social security is accessible, not in the form of social services, but rather in the context of family and social networks. Ghabidin moved to the countryside after retirement in order not to be alone in the big city, taking on cows and returned to herding.

The idea prevails that social relations are richer at home (in Niger), because they always take precedence. Due to reciprocity, money is not always a necessity, because a network of relations provides security. Mohamed (previously mentioned), who comes from the oasis and has experience in Europe made a similar point when recounting how one can get fruit from the garden *el her* (as a blessing, for free), as one gives *el her*. He was a person able to get different jobs with Europeans, particularly due to his curiosity. His existence depended more on social relations than on money. Furthermore, his travels to Europe were possible through social relations. In terms of social care, one of the most shocking things he observed in Europe was that people placed their elders in institutions instead of keeping them with family; he understood this practice as the ultimate sign of alienation and degradation of social values.

Abderahmane, who had a university degree and worked on development projects, had the chance to go to Europe occasionally. He reinforced and added to the point under discussion:

> People that work there are well-paid, but I think that life there is so expensive, that in the end conditions are same as here. Maybe there are more services on material level, for health, hygiene, in some comfort and materials, but all this is spoiled by the fact that there is not much on social level. ... There is no compensation. I think, what is gained on material well-being is lost in social benefits.

He confirmed what was repeated by other urban Tuaregs in Niger: what is gained on the material level is lost in the social aspect of life.

Technology and money versus superior social relations at home resonates with the perception of Europeans as rich, but without proper manners versus noble, but poor Tuaregs (analysed in Lunaček 2010). This kind of Occidentalism/auto-Orientalism pairing preserves pride and agency in decision-making. It is possible to reject travel to Europe or conversely, to take the opportunity if it arises, facilitating pride and assertiveness about one's own culture. Social relations are seen as providing social security, but not in all aspects such as healthcare and schooling. Those functions of the social state were seen to be better fulfilled in Europe and in certain narratives can be understood as a critique of the weak and dysfunctional social state in Niger.

The lack of atmosphere, the missing habitus

Despite the possibility of interpreting the *topoi* in narratives within the theoretical framework of Occidentalism as a discursive frame, and taking into account the experiences of encounters with Europeans, their translation in narratives does not adequately cover lived experience recounting the lack of social atmosphere, which was the subject of reproach to Europe. In order to include the lived experience, I propose as an additional concept the habitus, as developed by Bourdieu (2002), because it articulates reproduction of embodied habits learned through socialisation and in their relation to the changing environment. When social environment changes, habitus allows for the rich adaptation of practices, but only within the structural possibilities it permits. Consequently, habitus is also historically and cumulatively changing (Bourdieu 2002). At the same time, a certain attachment of individuals to learned habitus does exist, influencing people to select environments where they can reproduce it (ibid.: 104, 106). Through the values it embodies (ibid.: 117), and as I suggest, through the embodied feeling of being at home or 'in one's skin', habitus is related to identity. In the case of certain Tuaregs, the ability to select social environments more favourable to particular habitus, was reflected as a deliberate choice by them. The need for preferred habitus, conceptually and in concrete environments and lifeworlds[8] of people, explains the need for social atmosphere. It can be demonstrated by the example of the atmosphere related to the tea ceremony, which will be considered in detail below.

[8] I am adding to environment (Boudieu 2002: 104, 106) a lifeworld, since it is possible to conceptualise lifeworld as including both habitus and environment. Michael Jackson argues habitus is close to lifeworld in its improvisational, creative, subjective aspects; on the other hand, habitus can also be understood as determined by discourse (Jackson 1996: 20, 21). If we follow habitus as embodied in socialisation and with the capacity to change in shifting circumstances, but only to a certain extent, a subject takes habitus 'with her' or 'with him' into another environment, where he or she creates another lifeworld.

Musa returned from Europe to Agadez in his early thirties, after several years attempting to live in Europe with his girlfriend. Back in Niger, he was lucky with his investment in the newly established goldfields and earned enough money to build a house. He decided to stay in Niger and was about to marry a young cousin. One morning[9], we were sitting with other relatives and friends in a house of another cousin, sipping freshly made tea and talking. I enquired why he came back to settle in Niger. 'Look', he said, 'you are sitting here, we are sitting here, it can never be like this there, it's not the same. It is not the same.' He referred to the atmosphere related to sociality around the tea ceremony.

The atmosphere created by the tea ceremony does not mean only drinking the strong sweet tea, but also taking note of its preparation that needs time, including lighting a fire, washing glasses, waiting for the tea to boil, pouring it from one glass to another in order to produce a thick foam on the top of the glass, three times for three rounds of tea, drinking it slowly one by one in a group of people. It means taking time or in other words, to forget about time in order to talk with those that happen to be in the room, which are mostly relatives and friends – including adopted strangers like me. In a family, men and women can take tea together; only when there are many guests must their circles be separate and tea is brought to women by a small child learning the importance of distribution. Having tea translates to a deeply embodied feeling of familiarity by sitting or half lying on the carpet on the floor, using a pillow to make oneself comfortable, waiting for the youngest boy or sometimes girl in the room to make the tea, sending someone younger to bring coal and sugar. While tea is being prepared, it also means enjoying a conversation that has no particularly evident aim, except for the higher purpose of binding together endlessly the social tissue among people, exchanging news about close and distant relatives, where they move, what they do, who will marry next, information about prices, the possibilities of travelling, and jokes. *Duunet* during daytime and *takkayt* in the night are the expressions used for those relaxed conversations. Commensality is important: having a meal together, although this is not a good time to talk as eating is not considered appropriate to combine with talking. However, tea without talking - except when one is travelling alone far in the bush – is not real tea-time. Even the lonely traveller, when passing by a camp or tent, will be joined under the tree by the men from nearby dwelling, in order to make tea together and exchange news.

Enjoying and preparing tea is similar to the Bosnian *ćeif*, which is related to the preparation and consumption of Turkish coffee as described by Ana Croegaert (2011). Coffee needs to be boiled three times, prepared by a host and served in traditional kitchenware used for Turkish coffee. *Shai* also needs to be made with traditional equipment, preferably on charcoal, and served in small glasses. Ćejf means to slowly sip coffee, (preferably with a cigarette), when time stops for enjoyment (Croegaert 2011), as time stops with shai. Like coffee, shai is made especially for the visitor, and is part of obligatory hospitality and the exchange of news.

[9] This was in December 2017 – I have known Musa since 2003. He was not the only one to return from Europe and I collected similar narratives on returning home also in 2003 and 2004, some of which are presented in Lunaček 2013. In this part, I use some narratives on return collected in 2017.

As with the ćeif practised by Bosnian refugees in the USA, who make Bosnian Turkish coffee in their homes (Croegaert 2011), the tea ceremony is likewise recreated in Europe by Tuaregs; most often Tuareg music groups, staying in hotels are making tea most of the day. When Tafa, who comes from a village near Agadez and was previously a student in Niger's capital, studied in France, he undertook a train ride of several hours from the south to visit his cousin in Paris, or vice versa, twice a month, in order to have a tea together. Tea is not taken just to prevent headaches and avoid *anghru*, a sickness that arises from the change in food when travelling, but also to cure the feeling of missing home – or *esuf* (feeling lonely, because you are far from your people) – through the combination of tea preparation and enjoyment in talking with a relative. Tuaregs who live in Europe keep tea equipment (*ala n shai*) at home, and a gas or electric stove adapted for preparation inside without charcoal. They visit each other or hold tea ceremonies in summer-time and during festivals, when relatives and other Tuaregs from Niger come to visit. Croegaert (2011) explains how ćejf reproduced in the USA by Bosnians also has an effect similar to a pneumotechinc device in connection with nostalgic memories of a past life in socialism. Together with the habitus of ćejf, they have facilitated the recreation of Bosnian identity in the diaspora. As we might add for ćejf as well, the Tuaregs' recreation of habitus in shai attempts to be a "teleportation device", having the function of recreating a particular embodied habitus of being at home in one's culture.

The tea ceremony is adapted to different circumstances and can even be commercialised to a certain extent. In touristic contexts in Niger, the tea ceremony has been included as part of the Tuareg trademark in all-inclusive desert trips, but it has never been sold separately. After dinner, for example, shai would be served with an explanation so as to teach what Tuaregs do. The completeness of the tea ceremony can only be experienced in a more or less a complete cultural setting, and not bought alone, only with a cup of tea. Furthermore, in touristic contexts, it was used as an invitation to share identity by exchanging particular habitus, inviting interested visitors to learn the culture by starting with the tea ceremony. In Europe, European friends are invited to join in.

The atmosphere of the tea ceremony (*alwakh n shai*, time for tea – or simply shai – where tea is most often used in phrases such as *gowr, egu shai*, sit down, make/have tea or *anəgu shai,* let's make/have tea) embodies the habitus of home. Embodiment in habitus of shai is re-enacted in Europe; however, it is very difficult to reproduce the habitus completely since it involves the spontaneous containment of time in order to share it with relatives and other close people, as well as those who happen to drop by. Sitting there with Musa and others having tea, it was evident, what he meant by saying 'it is not the same.' There is a difference in Europe when we meet friends and drink coffee as we have to prearrange and plan our time to relax together. This was related to the resentment Tuaregs held for Europe, in connection with the aforementioned planning of time and opportunities to meet others.

As Bijan, who worked for an NGO in Niger and never went to Europe, said: 'What I would miss in Europe, it would be the atmosphere, in comparison to life in Niger. Here people come to me. They do not need to phone and arrange a meeting in advance. They leave home when they want and same for me.' He related the atmosphere of social-

ity without the previous arrangement to the issue of time, as we have noted in previous sections.

The habitus of sociality can also be recreated to a certain extent in other ways in Europe. Amako accompanied her husband during the year when he worked an international job in Europe and formed her own sociality in Europe by creating a community of African women. She met other mothers in international school her children attended and invited them home every day. They recreated a habitus of commonality and commensality in a female space, which was common in their home lifeworlds. Originating from different areas on the African continent, but belonging to a relatively similar social class of the international African expat community, they enjoyed their new common space. What Amako missed was meeting new European friends. This proved impossible for her as she found no places or opportunities where she felt welcome enough to make contact. Amako noticed, similarly to other women from Niger, a big difference if you knew a European friend who had experienced life in Niger and therefore, had learned local habits and habitus. This friend would prove to be like a family member and he or she would dedicate time to his/her hosts from Niger. In the case of Amako (and Hadiza, another woman form Niger), it was much more difficult to include new Europeans in their own networks after arriving in Europe as it would necessitate including and teaching them one's own habitus from Niger.

Those who returned to Niger as well as those who never considered going to Europe, judged the quality of habitus achievable in Europe as too low. Preferred habitus, represented for example in the atmosphere of the tea ceremony and in the social atmosphere of visiting and spending time together, was much more accessible in Niger than in Europe. The importance to live embodied cultural values in the lifeworld that enabled this was articulated among the main reasons for returning home (see also Lunaček 2013), or even for not going at all.

The habitus of the tea ceremony was on the one hand a process of confirming, recreating and sharing identity in Europe. On the other, the missing social atmosphere was partly why Tuaregs rejected the European environment and chose to return to Niger. As we saw in case of social atmosphere of which tea ceremony is an example, we can see that it is not possible to explain Occidentalism or the perceptions of Europe without taking habitus into account. It is inadequate to say 'we have shai and you do not,' and 'shai is important for us,' and therefore, merely to interpret shai as a distinctive mark or performed as the reification of tradition. If we want to discuss Occidentalisms based on travelling experience, in the migration context more generally or through contact, it is not enough to deal only with the images and values; we need to take into account the embodiment of values in habitus.

Transmission of knowledge in conversations

Narratives about what can be discovered and what is missing in Europe were reproduced also by those Tuaregs who did not live or travel there. Alghabid, who comes from an oasis village and whose friend visited Europe several times, knew Europeans himself by working on development projects, Although he was never in Europe, he knew he would

miss embodied habitus: 'I guess I would miss everything, already sitting like this,' he said lying and leaning on a pillow to support his elbow. This was similar to the impressions of Bijan, who also worked with Europeans on development projects. After a longer discussion about his experiences with Europeans and their desire to understand local culture and needs, I asked him if he would like to ever try to live in Europe and he said:

> No, no, I'd rather stay here. This is really my last worry to go to live there. I think that the atmosphere would not be too good. I feel more at home here. To get integrated in this circulation in Europe – I am not interested in this. I prefer here, I have surely more freedom, I have family in many places, so I think here is better. And I do not like planning. Also climate, I do not know. ... And I think everything is too much calculated, even time. I do not like that; I think there is not enough freedom for me. There is not much space, not much time, no time, no life.

Despite not being there, Bijan used the same *topoi* as those who had visited Europe: the lack of atmosphere, time and place, missing relatives, and the absence of freedom. It seems that topoi in narratives were transmitted among those who were there and those who were not. Additionally, it seems these topoi were elaborated upon in conversations with Europeans: would a European reader also not agree on the critique of place and time constraint? Since those who elaborated on those topics were in close contact with Europeans by observing how they lived in their own homes in Europe as guests, very similar to ethnographers, they were able to exchange ideas with their host friends or with colleagues and friends of European origin in Niger. These conversations therefore, played a part in shaping the opinions of Tuaregs on time and place in Europe. This was the case with Taher, who cited the example of a wealthy American tourist who wanted to be alone in the desert as he was working all the time, and likewise with Bijan who spoke to his colleagues at work in Niger, Hadiza who spent time alone in Switzerland while her hosts were working, Mohamed who observed European academics at work, or Souleymane who observed my work, noticing differences despite my efforts to recreate familiarity and sociality by constantly inviting friends. Insights were therefore, achieved by observing Europeans and by talking to them. Consequently, a certain qualitative element can be added to the analysis of perceptions of life in Europe: it is dialogically produced not only by experience and observation, but also in conversations with Europeans. If we compare this approach to Orientalism, it can be noted that the Western approach was scriptural (Said 1996), thus expecting reality to fit into a pre-read text (this continues today in travel guides). The Tuareg approach in Niger seems to be rather oral - as opposed to scriptural, or better said, dialogic. In this vain, I can conclude that it is produced in intersubjective relationships (Jackson 1996).

Therefore, next to perceptions based on the media, I argue that experience in contact between people and the dialogic construction of narratives need to be added to the discussion on perceptions of Europe, and more widely in the construction of the West - not only in case of Tuaregs in Niger, but more generally when considering Occidentalisms.

Conclusion

In this article, I was interested in how encounters, contact and travelling experiences participated in shaping the narratives on life in Europe by Tuaregs living in the North of Niger. While Occidentalism can be reproached for reproducing dichotomisation and essencialisation (in positive and negative extremes), alternative, more ambiguous, nuanced and pragmatic views on the West do exist. Not only in the scope of appropriation of the ideas of the West as part of inner ideological debates and negotiations of identity but also when experiences influencing perceptions of Europe are considered.

Tuareg narratives on life in Europe are rather critical; in main topoi they claim there is no time, no place and consequently no freedom and there is absence of atmosphere. They acknowledge certain technological and social infrastructures, but this cannot replace social security and social embeddedness at home. Occidentalism can explain the particular distinction of one's own values and confirm positive self-identity. In order to include lived experience influencing those narratives, the embodiment in habitus was introduced into my analysis. Habitus simultaneously explains the need to reproduce and adapt habitus in Europe connected with the choice of environment. Consequently, it explains the individual choice of lifeworlds, which are considered to fit better preferred habitus. Studies of Occidentalism and (auto) Orientalism, particularly when related to migration and travelling, may consider the ambiguous meaning of the West more comprehensively when taking into account habitus. The reproduction of habitus in Europe serves as a 'teleporting device' to home and encourages intercultural sharing. On the other hand, embodied habitus facilitates the assessment and selection of where to live and where to travel. What enabled Tuaregs to choose pragmatically preferred habitus, which was often the case in Niger, was precisely the possibility of autonomous legal travel.

The Tuareg concept of travel enables adaptation and the acquisition of knowledge, but it also favours the possibility of return. The pragmatic decision to visit more distant places was less motivated by dreams of 'somewhere better,' than by the practical choice of bringing benefits home. Knowledge of Europe was collected through observation of Europeans and conversations with European friends. Instead of the scriptural transmission of Occidentalism, Tuareg narratives on Europe are based on experience, produced in dialogue and transmitted orally; therefore, they are more open to experience than Orientalism. Finally, it can be stated that contact with Europeans and the possibility of legal travel facilitated alternative Occidentalisms.

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Izvleček

Članek se osredinja na pripovedi Tuareogv iz severnega Nigra o življenju v Evropi. Posveča se temu, kako stik in sodelovanje z Evropejci in potovanje v Evropo vplivajo na te pripovedi. Ponavljajoči se *topoi* v precej krtičnih naracijah o Evropi se nanašajo na: pomanjkanje časa in protora in posledično pomanjkanje svobode, priznavanje večje dostopnosti infrastrukture v Evropi, ki ne more nadomestiti družbenih vezi doma in na pomanjkanje socialnega vzdušja. Naracije obravnava skozi teoretski pristop okcidentalizma z namenom širitve perspektive okcidentalizma tako, da vključuje pomen izkušnje za naracije. Medtem ko okcidentlizem interpretira naracije skozi potrjevanje identitete in kulturne vrednote, avtorica v analizi vpelje habitus, da bi vključila utelešene izkušnje, ki vplivajo na naracije. Ugotavlja, da so naracije o življenju v Evropi ustvarjene v dialogu z Evropejci. Pokaže, da je prav možnost stika in leglanih potovanj omogočila alternativne Okcidentalizme.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Tuaregi, okcidentalizem, percepcije Evrope, habitus, migracije

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