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Fleeting Glory in a Wasteland: Wealth, Politics, and Autonomy in Northern Chad

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> Here is no water but only rock
> Rock and no water and the sandy road
> The road winding above among the mountains
> Which are mountains of rock without water.
>
> ———T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 1922

In January 2012, a large number of Teda assembled in Zouar in the Chadian Tibesti Mountains, to celebrate the investiture of a new "sultan," the "*derdé* of the Tubu," as the official invitation put it.[1] It was the largest investiture ceremony in people's memory, as it was attended, for the first time in decades, not only by Teda from Chad and Niger but also by their Libyan cousins, who, due to the open borders of the post-Qadhafi era, turned up in large numbers. Equally noticeable was the strong presence of the Chadian state, represented by three ministers and a large army detachment. A few international dignitaries showed up as well, indicating transnational strategic interest in the region. Yet the ceremony itself was short, disorganized, and much criticized by those who attended. From the local point of view, what mattered in any case was not so much the ceremony itself, but rather the material wealth displayed at the party that accompanied it, in which all could partake, if only for a short

[1] The "Cérémonie d'intronisation du derdé des Toubous," according to the official invitation (see figure 1). The Teda are the inhabitants of the Tibesti and parts of southern Libya and northeastern Niger, and are referred to, in French and Libyan Arabic, as "Tubu." This term (derived from Kanembu) often also includes their southern neighbors, who speak a related dialect of the same language but are locally referred to as Dazagada (Goranes in Chadian Arabic and French).

FIGURE 1. Invitation to the investiture ceremony (photo by J. Brachet).

time. This noticeable preference for wealth over long-term strategies of power provides a window into local imaginings of politics, linked to redistribution and conspicuous consumption—fleeting moments of glory—rather than to notions of institutional governance or control.

Since the 1990s, increasing emphasis has been put in Africanist literature on the "re-emergence" of "traditional authorities," or the "return of the kings," in Perrot and Fauvelle-Aymar's (2003) terms. This phenomenon is generally related to a broader narrative of state collapse or privatization (Reno 1997; Hibou 1998), with the prominence of "chiefs" seen as one of many ways in which states on the continent are restructured after the end of the cold war. In this reading, "chiefs" step in to fill a local or even national "power-vacuum," thereby indirectly consolidating the state (Warnier 2008: 249). Although at first glance the investiture of the Tibesti *derdé* seems to provide another instance of these dynamics, at closer analysis it raises questions that exclusive attention to "power" and "governance" cannot answer. Both the colonial sources and the limited available literature stress the absence of centralized political institutions in the Tibesti and northern Chad more generally. This has not changed with

either colonial or post-independence attempts at control or institutionalization and the *derdé*-ship remains a hollow institution. Indeed, this seems to be why it is broadly accepted and even popular. Similarly, it is difficult to talk about the Chadian state in terms of decline, since according to external criteria it has been "failing" ever since its colonial inception. Locals see the state primarily as a machine for the distribution of cash, but one that, in close proximity to Libya, has to vie with other potentially more lucrative sources of income. Geographically marginal in terms of nation-states and regions, northern Chad has thus created its own centrality, one that owes more to trans-border connections and repeated (and often successful) attempts to capture state resources than to "governance." Rather than participating in the "return of the kings," or bearing witness to the privatization of the state, the *derdé* investiture ceremony seems to be symptomatic of radically different political aspirations, in a region whose "modern statelessness" (Tull 2003: 430) seems to be a deliberate choice rather than a default position.[2]

A HOLLOW CROWN

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, "kings" (or "traditional leaders") have made a spectacular comeback (Perrot and Fauvelle-Aymar 2003; Perrot 2009). Constitutional reforms in Ghana and Uganda in the 1990s made room for "traditional authorities" (Englebert 2002: 345), with Ghana going so far as to make their appointment independent of the state (Ray 1996: 183). The South African ANC increasingly relies on "chieftains" to control rural areas (Van Kessel and Oomen 1997), while chiefs in Nigeria are demanding reforms to enshrine their role in the constitution (Vaughan 2000). Political decentralization and pressure on natural resources have turned "local chiefs" into key players in Burkina Faso and Niger (Ouedraogo 2006), and in 1995 the president of Mozambique called for the return of "traditional authorities," although his own party had formerly abolished them (West and Kloeck-Jenson 1999: 457). The "born-again" Buganda kingdom in Uganda, dissolved in 1867 but reinstituted by the National Resistance Movement in 1993, draws large crowds to its ceremonies and celebrations, is staffed by highly educated urbanites, and is bankrolled by international corporations and Indian businessmen (Englebert 2002). "The continuing role and influence of traditional leaders," writes Logan, "is now widely accepted as given" (2009: 102).[3]

[2] Field research for this article was carried out in January and February of 2012 by both authors, followed by archival research in Faya and N'Djamena. It was part of a larger project based on fieldwork undertaken primarily in Faya from November 2011 to October 2012. Interviews were conducted in Arabic and French.

[3] Most of this literature focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, although similar cases have been described from the Pacific Islands (e.g., White and Lindstrom 1997) and the Caribbean (Ray and Reddy 2003).

This development—or perhaps rather the growing outside interest that makes it visible in the literature—feeds into a general rhetoric of the "retreat" or even the "failure" of "the African state," for which the blame is laid on civil strife, "endemic corruption," or structural adjustment programs (Gaulme 2011; see, for example, Reno 1997; 1998; for a critical review, see Di John 2010). In this reading, chiefs are seen to "step in" to fill the resulting "power-vacuum." Ray says that in Ghana they form a parallel power to the state (1996: 181), while Mbembe, with regards to traditional chiefs and other non-state actors, speaks of a "quasi-constitutional doubling up of power" (1999: 106). In some cases, "traditional authorities" have even been elevated to the status of "civil society," as international organizations attempt to work with them rather than with state officials who are deemed corrupt, inefficient, or both (Perrot 2009).

This argument needs to be nuanced, however, both with regards to the "retreat of the state" and the assumption that "traditional authorities" are simply waiting to fill the gap. The "retreat of the state" narrative has been questioned partly on historical grounds: "An initial objection to the 'state collapse' thesis is that its terminology is misleading, since it gives the impression that once-integral states are now falling apart, whereas states in Africa have never approached a Weberian ideal, nor even resembled European approximations to that intellectual construct" (Tull 2003: 430). Others question the narrative's basis in empirical evidence: we are witnessing not the retreat or collapse of the state, writes Hibou (1998), but rather its privatization. State functions are "discharged" (Hibou 1999, borrowing a term from Weber's analysis of feudalism) to private or quasi-private institutions, while the boundaries between the private and the public are increasingly blurred. States are being restructured in new ways, in response to internal pressure, shortages of external funding, private management of resource extraction and violence, and globalization, but they are not disappearing.[4] Read from this perspective, the "return of the kings" participates in a broader renegotiation of governance and takes place not against but within the state: "traditional leaders" are but one group among others—warlords, successful businessmen, politicians-cum-NGO leaders, black market dealers, private resource extractors, transnational organizations—that jostle for power on all levels. Thus they do not appear to be an alternative to, but rather part of a new form of state politics based on a "hybridization" of political institutions (Logan 2009: 104).

This, however, assumes rather a lot about the nature, ambitions, and homogeneity of "traditional authorities." Most of the examples cited above deal with societies that had identifiable precolonial political hierarchies and centralized states (pace Skalník 1983: 26), or where colonial powers were

[4] In this sense, they probably correspond rather closely to the pre-1930s colonial states in most of Africa. See Diouf 1999: 20; Hibou 1998: 165; and Young 2004: 26.

successful in establishing "traditional leaders" (Geschiere 1993: 151). Northern Chad provides a counterexample: although it has long evolved in the margins of centralized states (Kanem-Bornu to the southwest, Waddaï to the south-east, and the Ottomans to the north) it has no history of centralized political institutions, and colonial and postcolonial attempts to establish a "traditional leadership" have consistently failed. Yet the 2012 investiture of the *derdé*, "paramount chief" of the Tibesti, was celebrated with great pomp and drew a large audience from among the regional population, but also Chadian state officials and international dignitaries. This even though everyone locally knows the *derdé* is powerless and that the current candidate was probably chosen for his relative incapacity. In such a context, the question is not one—inherently normative even in the broadest sense—of the modalities of power or governance, or the relative share or hybridization of state and "traditional" authorities within it, but rather why these celebrations should happen at all.

Similar issues emerge when we take the state as our starting point. Chad never experienced a postcolonial golden age of state efficiency (as described in general terms by Young 2004: 24), but has been "collapsing" and "failing" from the outset. Resilience rather than failure or privatization therefore seems to be a key to analysis. This resilience lies partly in different notions of what states are for. Although the state in contemporary Chad is seen to do many things, most conspicuously distributing cash to avert rebellion, "governing" rarely seems to be one of them. This is particularly true in the north of the country whence came the last three presidents (all of whom came to power through coups d'état) and a large part of its armed forces, but which has never accepted anything but token state rule. The image of verticality and encompassment that Ferguson and Gupta (2002: 982) identify as central to state ideology is thus reversed. That is, most of northern Chad, and in particular the Tibesti, is not encompassed by the state, but instead the state is encompassed, or rather restructured, from its (geographical) margins, which nonetheless remain beyond state reach (see Das and Poole 2004; also Leopold 2005).

This marginality entails a different kind of centrality. As Roitman notes regarding the centers of trans-border smuggling in northern Cameroon, "while etching out spaces on the margins, these sites are not marginal," since they remain closely connected to the urban-based merchant and political elite (2007: 190). Nor are the activities that they stand for marginal to local economies (see also MacGaffey 1991). "The demise of local agro-industry, the public sector, and private enterprise, combined with the insidious effects of structural adjustment programs, have made the economic strategies of unemployed and dispossessed people models of expansive techniques in a time of material contraction" (Roitman 2003: 229).

Indeed, the growth of trans-border commerce has in many cases led to a closer integration of geographically marginal areas with centers of political power and wealth through the construction of infrastructure for trade, and

since profits made in border areas are rarely invested locally (Bennafla 1999: 43, 39). Yet the centers these apparently marginal areas refer to are not necessarily those of state power. As a result, "The real map of the continent is about to reshape itself along regional and trans-regional axes of exchange and trade that to a large extent both match and transcend historical itineraries and zones of […] mercantile expansion" (Mbembe 1999: 113).[5]

Pace Roitman (2006: 264), "governance" might not be the best way to capture these new (or renewed) forms of centrality. Across the continent, the development of what Banégas and Warnier (2001: 8) call a "moral economy of cunning and resourcefulness" has led to the emergence of "new figures of success," including, alongside international football stars and multimillionaires, transnational smugglers, con-men, and rebels. These figures stand for wealth and success, but only incidentally attempt to control others in other than ad-hoc fashions. Key in many cases seems to be wealth rather than political power, and although much has been written on the connection between wealth and power in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Bayart 1989; Warnier 2007) one cannot be made to systematically stand for the other. In northern Chad, although wealth and especially its spectacular redistribution are at the heart of local ambitions, wealth is not necessarily used to constitute lasting networks of patronage or political hierarchies, or to contribute to the kind of "embodiment" of power that Warnier (2007) describes for the Cameroon Grassfields. Instead, distribution is a one-off event that derives its brilliance from the apparent absence of long-term calculation. The aim seems to be to create glory rather than lasting power and most participants evince little interest in "governance"—the attempt to effectively control others over the long term. Thus, although it might shed light on similar developments elsewhere, the *derdé* investiture participates in neither the "return of the kings" nor the privatization of the state. Rather, it stands as a symbol of a longstanding refusal to be governed, coupled with an equally enduring ability to accommodate, on the surface, all kinds of different demands and dignitaries, particularly if they know how to throw a party.

THE 2012 INVESTITURE CEREMONY

In the last week of January 2012, the small settlement of Zouar in the eastern Tibesti mountains (see figure 2) was teeming with cars, from Chad, Libya, and to a lesser degree Niger. This was unusual, since the busy trans-Saharan route that connects Chad to Fazzān in southern Libya avoids the steep mountain passes that block the access to Zouar and instead runs through a dusty plain 30 kilometers further east. Therefore, few people have any reason to visit

[5] Border areas are increasingly attracting the attentions of researchers. See, for instance, Nugent and Asiwaju 1996; Nugent 2002; Drozdz and Pliez 2005; Brachet 2009; and Scheele 2012. On Chad more specifically, see Bennafla 2002; and Roitman 2005.

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FIGURE 2. Map of northern Chad and neighboring countries (J. Brachet, 2014).

Zouar's few administrative buildings, which are unfinished or largely abandoned, its five score mud brick dwellings, or the former French military fort that has proved surprisingly resilient to the passage of time—all of these far too scattered through the valley to form what one would describe as a village. Now, however, people were coming and going in the vast spaces between the few houses, looking for friends and cousins, allies and rivals. Soldiers were parading in open four-wheel-drives that had bundles of rockets stuck to their sides. The few market stalls were for once thriving. At the center of this activity was the house of the *derdé*-to-be, who was squatting on the floor in his

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dusty courtyard, surrounded by the prefect, sub-prefect, members of parliament, military officers, and customary chiefs. Visiting the *derdé* meant also, perhaps primarily, paying one's respect to the powers that be.

Most people, however, did not bother walking into Zouar. They stayed in the vast camp set up for the occasion twenty minutes walk away, where the more fortunate guests were put up in large shared tents made out of mats, segregated by sex, and marked out according to their socio-economic status. The more important the temporary resident, the bigger was the tent, the fewer people had to share it, the more food was brought in, and the more impressive was the arsenal of guns displayed outside. Guests of lesser standing had to find their own place to sleep. Younger Teda who had driven down from Libya in their four-wheel-drives in a few hours put up modern cloth tents close to the camp, while teenage pastoralists from Chad, who had often walked for days to attend the proceedings, slept in the open air curled up in their habitual blanket against the biting January cold. There were about a thousand guests in all, from small settlements in remote valleys in the Tibesti, southern Libyan cities, northern Chadian towns, or the capital city of N'Djamena. They included government ministers and traders, pastoralists and soldiers who were mostly very young, boys and girls, a few elderly men, and many women.

On the day of the ceremony, 29 January 2012—the party itself had already gone on for several days by then—everybody dressed up at their most beautiful. Those who could flocked to the local "landing strip"—a flat piece of ground 4 kilometers from the village and surrounded by acacias—to welcome the official delegation flown in for the occasion from N'Djamena on two French and one Chadian military transport planes.[6] About a hundred official guests arrived in this way, most of them Chadian, including the Ministers of the Interior and of Culture and other high-ranking civil servants. Among the foreigners invited for the occasion were several members of the French embassy and the French military detachment, the U.S. ambassador and his wife, and the EU representative in Chad. Also there was Monique Brandily, a French ethnomusicologist who had witnessed the two previous investiture ceremonies, in 1979 and 1996 (see Brandily 1981; 1996). International attention to this celebration of the "Teda community" and of the central figure supposed to hold them together, at least symbolically, was clearly of some importance, at least to the organizers.

[6] Since the military conquest of what is now Chad, the French army has been present in the country almost continuously, with brief interruptions in 1963–1968 and 1984–1986. Currently, as part of the Opération Épervier ("Operation Sparrow Hawk," launched in 1986), eight hundred French soldiers are stationed in N'Djamena, twenty in Abéché, and twenty in Faya-Largeau, the capital of the northern region of the Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti (B.E.T.). Two Mirage fighter planes leave N'Djamena daily to keep watch on the north and neighboring areas. Services such as the transport of goods, state officials, and troops are rendered to the Chadian state in exchange for the continued use of Chadian bases and airspace.

Because the *derdé* is officially a civil servant of the Chadian state, the ceremony could not start without the Minister of Civil Service. He finally arrived on a separate plane as the sun was already high in the sky. By then, many of those who had spent hours waiting had given up, thirsty, tired, and disappointed. It was time for prayer, so they would not watch the ceremony after all and outspokenly criticized this lack of organization and, more obliquely, the allegiance paid to the state and its representatives despite the "traditional" nature of the ceremony.

The delegation from N'Djamena was ushered to chairs in the shade of a small purpose-built shelter, facing an empty pad of soil guarded by armed soldiers, 2 or 3 kilometers west of Zouar. The *derdé* was carried in on a chair and set down next to his newlywed (third) wife on a small mound of sand covered with a carpet at the foot of a big acacia tree. Palm leaves were brought in and then a short whip made of wood and leather with which the *derdé* beat the air around him. In the meantime, the crowd of spectators had overpowered the many police officers and soldiers and drawn close. People were jostling to get a good view, the youngest among them trying to get as close as possible without being hit or pushed back. The aim of the game was to touch the *derdé*, never mind where, or else to be photographed next to him. It was impossible to see anything from the official seats and people were gesticulating wildly as they attempted to catch a glimpse of or even film these moments, said to be at the heart of the ceremony. Meanwhile, the Minister of Civil Service had launched into a speech in French reminding those—few—who cared to listen that the *derdé* was an employee of the Chadian state. Elaborately dressed camels were ridden straight through the crowd and praise-singers began playing their drums, well aware that their singing was drowned out by the general turmoil. Women pushed forward to pay their respects to the *derdé*'s second wife in her tent, while others started to pack up and leave, since there was no sign of the orderly singing and dancing promised in the official program. Especially younger women and girls had eagerly looked forward to this occasion to display their finery.

It is difficult to ascertain how much of the ceremony was "traditional" in any sense. The few documents describing earlier investiture ceremonies are mostly based on second-hand sources. The Austrian ethnologist Andreas Kronenberg, for instance, did not witness the ceremony before producing an account (1955), which, apart from colonial sources, remains the earliest we have. Monique Brandily noted that the most important parts of the ceremony happened very quickly and were difficult to observe (1996: 15). She then clearly reproduces a local summary of what ought to have happened. From the local point of view, if all spectators participate actively then few have a vision of the ceremony as a whole. Most do not know exactly what they are meant to do, what each scene means, or even what exactly is supposed to

FIGURE 3. The *derdé* during the investiture ceremony (photo by J. Brachet).

happen. In any case, there is no general agreement about these things and many quite simply do not care, although others, mostly urbanites, eagerly offer their own, often widely divergent interpretations.

The official delegation from N'Djamena was taken back to the local health center where they were served a lunch of the kind declared suitable for international visitors and sourced in N'Djamena. Now was the time for Francophone Teda dignitaries who reside in the capital to have serious discussions and exchange business cards with foreign diplomats in order to obtain a meeting or to plead for assistance with a local development project, a village, or an association. The planes took off for N'Djamena at around 4:00 p.m. In the camp young Libyan Teda were printing photographs taken on digital cameras or mobile phones during the ceremony on a little printer plugged into a generator (Zouar has no electricity), much to their local cousins' amazement. In most of these photographs it was impossible to see the *derdé* (see figure 3). That evening the young women and praise-singers (*aza*) took turns singing, illuminated by small electric torches and blinding headlights. For many, this was what the ceremony really was about: an occasion to party, to show off, to flirt. The *aza* made up for lost time and sang until late at night, to the greater glory of everybody generous enough to remunerate their efforts. Far from there, the *derdé* was squatting on the ground talking to an old lady. People who happened

to walk past greeted him simply, clearly much more interested in the party than the old man.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE *DERDÉ*

The origins and even the exact nature of the office of *derdé* are shrouded in obscurity. There are no written sources that go back further than the late nineteenth century. Secondary sources, mostly based on oral material, are few and far between, and despite their small number they tend to disagree with each other. Throughout, the office is associated with the Tomagra family, among whom the *derdé* is still chosen today. The Tomagra are said to have migrated to the Tibesti from Kanem in the sixteenth century, and Kronenberg (1955: 40) claims that they brought the institution with them along with Islam, an explanation that is plausible given the long Islamic state tradition that exists in Kanem.[7] On the other hand Jean Chapelle, military officer and author of the only full-length monograph on the Tubu of northern Chad (1957), cites local legends to the effect that on arrival in the Tibesti the Tomagra acquired the turban—sign of command—by ruse from the local *derdé* who preexisted their arrival, and then kept it "through diplomacy and force" (ibid.: 83). Other legends describe the first *derdé* as a Muslim stranger who the locals invited to stay, marry locally, and adjudicate in their disputes. Explanations of the historical origins of the office are as numerous as the informants questioned, and nobody, writes Chapelle (ibid.: 85), is sure who the first *derdé* really was. None of the lists of successive *derdé* that are available today fully agree, which in no way diminishes their prestige in the eyes of those who hold them.[8]

There are several reasons why there might be so much disagreement. Firstly, although the position is now represented as unique, there probably used to be several *derdé*s, in charge of different families or different parts of the Tibesti. Such sharing of the office would more closely correspond to the centrifugal tendencies of Teda social organization. Gustav Nachtigal, who in 1879 provided the first eyewitness account of the *derdé* and the Tibesti more generally, claimed that until very recently there had been two *derdés* in the northern Tibesti alone, one from each ruling family, Tomagra and Gounda.

[7] Le Rouvreur notes, "In Kanem, the term *derdé* used to refer to a collaborator of the sultan's" (1999: 42). The empire of Kanem-Bornu was founded in the eighth century and ruled by Muslims from the eleventh century onward. At the height of its expansion in the thirteenth century it extended to Fazzān in what is today southern Libya (see Lange 1977).

[8] The most recent list that we saw was compiled in 2001 by the *derdé* Chaï's grandson, Abderrahmane Salah Chaïmi. One list is available in the archives, "Rapport au sujet de la succession au titre de Derdé," 23 June 1939, Archives Nationales du Tchad (ANT), box W 85. The latter almost exactly corresponds to the one published by Charles Le Cœur in 1939 and reproduced in Chapelle (1957: 94). Both were probably based on Schneider's finding, also published in 1939. Another list is published on Wikipedia, but it mentions only one *derdé*, Tahorké Adémi: http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_des_souverains_du_Tibesti (consulted Mar. 2013).

Only when the Gounda migrated in large numbers to the Kanem around the mid-nineteenth century did the *derdé* come to be exclusively appointed among the Tomagra, while the Gounda retained a right to certain material compensations otherwise reserved for the *derdé*. Similarly, the Arna, who lived on the southern slopes of the Tibesti, had their own independent *derdé* (1879: 442). This is confirmed by a document published in French translation in 1956, but whose Arabic original purports to date back to 1889, consisting in an agreement between Tomagra and Arna to appoint a *derdé* for both, in addition to the ones the families already had (Arbaumont 1956).[9] What emerges, then, is not an image of one centralized power, but rather one of different arbiters (in Arabic, the term *hākim* is used throughout) vying for influence and resources.

However many *derdé* there might have been, all historical sources agree that they had little power. According to Nachtigal, used to Prussian splendor, the *derdé* he met in 1870 was powerless, greedy, decrepit, and poor:

> One has to admit that Tafertemi's outward appearance has nothing kingly about it. A small old man bent with age, skinny, with rapid movements, turning his small, pinched, wrinkled, quite dark face with a modest beard timidly to one side or the other, he was dressed in a blue Bornu *tob*, that betrayed its venerable age through dirt and defective patches. He wore a faded tarbush on his head, with a greasy, originally white turban, whose lower part was dangling loosely over his chest, and he supported his sandal-clad feet with a stout stick taller than himself, holding it half way up (1879: 331).[10]

The *derdé*'s blatant poverty made him entirely dependent on the goodwill of his "subjects," and as Nachtigal met him he was in Bardaï seeking gifts on the occasion of the date harvest. His position otherwise mainly entailed presiding at the (ill-defined) assembly of nobles, where his opinion was easily ignored, and at times acting as an arbiter, but only if people appealed to him on their own account (ibid.: 441). Ultimate appeal was made not to the *derdé*, but to either the assembly or the Sanūsiyya at Wāw in the Fazzān (ibid.: 442).[11]

Since little authority seems to have attached to the office as such, only outstanding personalities could turn it into something more meaningful. Those *derdé* who are still remembered, Nachtigal (ibid.: 440) notes, owe this distinction to their personal qualities, an example being Tafertemi's immediate predecessor Tahorké, who is credited with introducing various customary rules and a

[9] D'Arbaumont worked with a copy made by the *qādi* of Faya-Largeau in 1950 and does not provide the Arabic text.

[10] This name does not figure in any of the lists of *derdé* provided elsewhere, although it might be a transformation of Tohorti, who like Tafertemi (Nachtigal 1879: 440) was Tahorké's successor.

[11] The Sanūsiyya, founded in 1837 by the Algerian-born Sīdi Muhammad b. 'Alī al-Sanūsī, expanded into what is now southern Libya in the mid-nineteenth century, setting up a *zāwiya* at Wāw in 1856 and shifting its headquarters to Kufra in 1894 (Hassanein Bey 1924: 278). They moved into northern Chad in 1899, when they established new headquarters at Gouro just east of the Tibesti (Triaud 1995: 495).

fixed-rate *diyah*. These exceptional *derdé* could shape the office as suited them and this might account for some of the disagreement among historians; this is not so much an invented tradition as one that, not only in representation but in fact, was highly malleable and therefore is difficult to trace retrospectively (see Guyer 1996). The best example of this is the *derdé* Chaï Bogarmi, appointed in 1890, whose forty-nine years of office spanned precolonial, Ottoman, and French times. He managed to "establish personal power of a kind that until then had been unknown among the Tubu" by using outside powers: the Sanūsiyya, whom he visited several times even before they moved their headquarters to southern Libya and then northern Chad; the Ottomans, whom he permitted to construct garrisons in Zouar and Bardaï; and finally the French (Chapelle 1957: 93; see also Triaud 1995: 947). "It is strange to see a kind of savage, subtle and crafty, established at the meeting point of four converging and opposing powers—the Sanūsiyya, France, Turkey, Italy—competing in sharpness and acumen with them, perceiving their aims and their respective power accurately enough to deceive them all and to never really serve any of them, adapting to one situation after another while always making the most of it and, more generally, brilliantly playing a game of great political intelligence" (1957: 96–97).

The Ottomans offered Chaï a monthly salary and auxiliary troops and authorized him to imprison, fine, and even whip offenders. They also granted him the right to levy the *zakāh* on agricultural products, "a fact that had no precedent in the Tibesti" (ibid.: 93, see also Kronenberg 1955), although we will never know how much success he had at this. Yet even then his power was limited because the Ottomans took care to appoint his longstanding rival, Guetti, as their representative in the southern Tibesti (ibid.).

In 1920 Chaï submitted to the French, mostly in order to play off the French administration of the A.O.F. at Bilma against that of the A.E.F. in Faya, who supported Guetti.[12] All illusions that the French military officers might have had about the *derdé*'s influence soon faded. While in 1919 he was still described as "ferociously hostile" to the French,[13] the French colonial sources quickly agreed that he was merely a symbolic figure with no real power, among a people that had always refused all attempts at institutionalized political leadership. "The *derdé*'s authority has nothing in common with that of a indigenous chief among the Blacks, or even among the Tuareg," observed the *chef de bataillon* Rottier in 1929, adding, "His prescriptions are in no way orders of immediate execution, but only recommendations."[14] He was, as the French commanding officer put it a year later, "hardly obeyed in the radius

[12] Cercle de Bilma, "Notice sur le Tibesti," arrived in Chad on 28 January 1930, ANT W 126.
[13] "Rapport trimestriel du 2ème trimestre 1919, Circonscription du Borkou-Ennedi," ANT W 19.
[14] "Rapport de Mission de M. le chef de bataillon Rottier," 1929, ANT W 18.

of his own hut."[15] By 1957, a political report described the *derdé* in an utterly derogatory tone and concluded that he was "of purely ethnographic interest."[16] The French seem to have kept him in office mainly because he was cheap—by 1949, he was paid less than a *goumier* (auxiliary guard)[17]—and got some people to pay taxes sometimes. Moreover, they were keen to invent traditions, perhaps because otherwise there was so little else that seemed recognizable to them among the Teda. This keenness was immediately picked up and manipulated by the *derdé*s themselves.

After independence, the status of "customary chiefs" in Chad changed little. Most were maintained in office and continued to play an important role in taxation, as the colonial head tax was replaced by a "civic tax" that functioned along much the same lines.[18] The various rebellions that shook Chad from the mid-1960s replaced a number of colonial chiefs (while others joined them), but overall, by dismantling the state, or rather by preventing it from developing, they strengthened local positions of power, whether "traditional" or not. As northern Chad came under rebel or Libyan rule in the 1970s the number of customary chiefs doubled or even tripled. The "official" incumbent often fled to N'Djamena to look after his "subjects" and to petition the president from close quarters, while others went over to Libya, and still others appointed themselves to take up the now-vacant office locally. The latter position was especially lucrative if it involved the distribution of foreign aid.[19] The *derdé* Oueddeï went into exile in Libya in 1966, where he stayed until 1975 and drew a stipend from the Libyan government until 1972.[20] He died in Chad in 1977. His successor Kinimi Adoum Sidi also spent 1982 to 1987 "in exile," and a replacement, Ali Tchenemi, acted in his stead from 1985 from his base in northern Kanem.[21]

CHOOSING THE *DERDÉ*: LOCAL NEGOTIATIONS AND PRESIDENTIAL FIAT

Kinimi Adoum Sidi was reinstated in 1987 and died in 1995. He was replaced by Maï Barkaïmi, who held the office until his death in October 2009, more than two

[15] "Rapport trimestriel, B.E.T., 4^{e} trimestre 1930," ANT W 18.
[16] "Rapport politique, B.E.T.," 1957, ANT W 21.
[17] "Rapport politique annuel, année 1949, District du Tibesti," ANT W 221.
[18] See the Ordonnance 59-066 1959-10-17 INT/ADG, signed on 17 October 1959, which remains in effect.
[19] "Since the occupation by the Libyan enemy of parts of the prefecture, certain chiefs have abandoned their chiefdoms to accept Libyan slavery, either by staying in the occupied zone or by going into exile to Libya" ("Lettre du Préfet du B.E.T. au Ministre de l'Intérieur," 24 Sept. 1986, unclassified document kept at the Archives de la Préfecture de Faya [APF]). Positions thus left vacant had been taken over by replacements that were often loath to abandon their post after the original chiefs returned from Libya. See "Lettre du Préfet du B.E.T. au "Ministre de l'Intérieur et de l'Administration du Territoire," 29 Jan. 1987, APF.
[20] "Bulletin de renseignement hebdomadaire, du 12 au 18 juin 1972," APF.
[21] "Note de service," 6 Aug. 1985 (appointment of replacement), and "Note de service," 3 Mar. 1987 (reinstatement of former *derdé*), APF.

years before the investiture of the current post-holder. These two years were taken up by at times passionate negotiations. After the prescribed period of mourning, two candidates from two different branches of the Tomagra family put themselves forward. Erzé Barkaïmi, a former Frolinat (Front de Libération Nationale; see Buijtenhuijs 1978; 1987) fighter of venerable age, appeared to be the legitimate candidate according to the rule of rotation among three branches of the family consigned in the colonial and ethnographic literature. Yet a young colonel of the regular army based in Bardaï who belonged to a different branch put himself forward as an alternative candidate, on the grounds that Erzé was too old and incapable of managing contemporary problems. Further, it was widely known that the colonel was rich enough to be incorruptible. He had earned his wealth through involvement in illegal trans-border trade, or so people said, and was thus independent from N'Djamena. Faced with this opposition, Teda "elders" intervened to achieve reconciliation. They included the *chefs de canton* de Zouar, Wour, and Bardaï, the governor of the Tibesti, and local "wise men." Even Goukouni Oueddeï, son of *derdé* Oueddeï and a former leader of the Frolinat and Chadian president (1979–1982), was flown in from France for the occasion. Although the colonel managed to buy some outside support, "custom" was upheld and Erzé was designated the only possible candidate. The colonel and his family refused to accept this decision and brought the whole matter before the Minister of the Interior, whose attempts at mediation failed. The colonel then used his army connections to approach Chadian President Idriss Déby and asked to be nominated directly. Déby refused, but decided to intervene in order to accelerate the "traditional" procedure that he considered too slow and inefficient at a time when the Tibesti was in great need of a "ruler."[22] He called all the Teda "notables," as he chose to define them, to a meeting in N'Djamena on 22 November 2010 (International Crisis Group 2011a: 6). After this meeting Erzé Barkaïmi was officially announced as the new *derdé*.

"Custom" is a slippery and inherently malleable term. In 1995, for instance, the successor was chosen according to "regional usages and customs and traditional norms of succession." Yet these turned out to be a casting of lots among the five candidates who had been put forward, all five vetted by an "assembly of wise men," and there was no sign of any "rule of rotation."[23] Similarly, when the *derdé* Chaï died in 1939 French military officers originally favored Oueddeï Kichedemi, whom they had already mentioned in 1935 as the likely successor, although "custom" of the kind put forward in 2012 would have disqualified him.[24] Because several Teda expressed discontent with this choice, the French momentarily questioned their own preference: "It appeared to the *chef de*

[22] Interviews conducted in Zouar, Jan. 2012.
[23] "Procès verbal de l'intronisation du derdei du Tibesti," 012/P.BET/95, Zouar, 16 June 1995, APF.
[24] "Carnet de chef du Derdé Chaaï Bagarmi," 16 Sept. 1938, ANT W 85.

subdivision that it was in his interest to have by his side a *derdé* whose authority was recognized. He examined the Zouar archives … and in particular a well-documented study by the captain Schneider based on, it seems, information given by the *derdé* Chaï, the only repository of tradition in the Tibesti."[25]

"Tradition" was thus largely decided by Chaï, whose political astuteness, as we have seen, was legendary. The French then came up with a different candidate, but at an assembly convoked at Bardaï in July of the same year he found no support whatsoever. The French therefore reverted to their original choice, although during the investiture ceremony Oueddeï was nearly killed by partisans of the rival candidate.[26] Throughout the process we find little indication that anybody local really cared about the "custom" invoked by the French, and grievances against Oueddeï rather mention his rapacity and bias.

This malleability of "tradition" is quite normal. As John Comaroff writes, "The very concept of an *ascriptive political system* would appear to be contradictory. For, if the devolution and incumbency of authority, or access to power, were entirely a function of non-negotiable ascription, the system would not admit *political* action as this term is generally understood today. […] The transmission of office … is determined by factors *extrinsic* to the stated prescriptions; and the meaning of these rules is an empirical problem *sui generis*, to be resolved after, and not before, the fact" (1978: 17, 2, his emphases).

It is this rather arbitrary attention to "custom" in the justification of the choice of the current *derdé* that needs to be explained, then, as well as the extrinsic factors that made it happen the way it did. Let us start with the latter. On one level, the involvement of the central government was unsurprising. As a 1970 presidential decree states, in Chad all customary chiefs above the level of village are appointed and revoked directly through presidential decree. As "auxiliaries of the administration" answerable to the prefect, their primary functions are to control public meetings and markets, help with the census, and survey natural calamities and dangerous animals.[27] While the 1993 constitution, which was drafted under close international supervision, only mentions customary chiefs in passing, as "guarantors of custom,"[28] a 2008 presidential decree states that "traditional chiefdoms" are the smallest administrative unit of the Republic of Chad and that they are constituted "based on traditional and customary authority," but at the same time "created, modified, and abolished by decree."[29] This close dependency of contemporary

[25] "Rapport au sujet de la succession au titre de Derdé," 23 June 1939, ANT W 85.

[26] "Procès-verbal de la réunion du 1er juillet 1939," ANT W 85; and "Rapport trimestriel du B.E.T., 2e semestre 1939," ANT W 20.

[27] "Décret n° 102/PR.INT."

[28] *Constitution de la République du Tchad*, 1996, Titre 12, Article 214.

[29] "Ordonnance portant détermination des principes fondamentaux de l'organisation administrative du territoire de la République du Tchad," 08-003 2008-02-20 PR [Présidence], Articles 4, 12, and 13.

"traditional chiefdoms" on postcolonial states is common throughout Africa, although particular political arrangements vary from case to case depending on the structure of the state involved, the nature of political institutions co-opted, and the impact of colonial rule (Geschiere 1993; Ouedraogo 2006).

Yet that the unlucky candidate to the *derdé*-ship managed to contact the president directly and expected him to intercede in his favor tells us something more about the Chadian state. Contemporary Chad is largely governed through presidential decrees with little to no power accorded an ever-changing government and parliament. Déby's de facto direct control over "customary chiefdoms" seems to be first and foremost a way of bypassing intermediate administrative structures, and is mirrored by direct presidential control over most local structures that matter, "traditional" and not. As a result, a particular chief's authority depends primarily on his personal relationship with the president (Néné Tassi 2000: 13) and appointments are understood as sinecures. Conversely, Déby attempts to harness "traditional authority" to further his own. For example, in early 2006, as he weathered rebellions, coups, and elections, the president, usually fond of presenting himself as a simple "camel-herd's son," added "Itno" to his name, with reference to his grandfather, Zaghawa sultan of the Dar Bilia in colonial times (see also Marchal 2006: 149). In December 2010, he appointed himself to his grandfather's former throne, replacing his half-brother Timan, whom he judged to be too powerful. Déby, playing to all audiences, is thus both a "democratically elected president" and a "super-sultan."[30] This seems to confirm Hibou's analysis of an internal "restructuring" of African states that blurs the boundaries between public and private, "modern" and "traditional" (1998; 1999).

That said, central state involvement is only part of the answer. From 1997 to 2002, the Tibesti was the site of an armed rebellion led by Youssouf Togoïmi, Déby's former Minister of Defense. Teda have been heavily involved in many of the subsequent rebellions that have shaken Déby's government, and there is no doubt that were Déby to affirm state control in the Tibesti then rebellion might flare up again at any time.[31] Furthermore, it is an open secret that the Tibesti is home to a flourishing trans-border trade with Libya and beyond. It is thus a region where fortunes can be made quickly and where local power brokers have the means, firepower, and potential allies to resist excessive "meddling," as, in his own way, the colonel proposed to do. Chadian state control of the Tibesti is thus based on a delicate balance between state sponsorship of local dignitaries, judicious laissez-faire, and short-lived public affirmations of military might, as in autumn 2012 when Déby suddenly replaced all senior military officers in the area, accusing them of involvement in illegal

[30] Ismael Aidara, "Idriss Déby Itno, super-sultan de Dar-Bilia?" *Les Afriques*, 3 Jan. 2011.

[31] In 2006 and 2008, rebels marched into the capital and threatened the presidential palace. Déby was saved *in extremis* by French intervention (see Marchal 2006: 144; and Rolley 2010).

trade and corruption. The newly built hospital in Bardaï in northern Tibesti stands as a reminder of this. Vast and shiny, it has been left empty, with no doctors or even nurses, because the money allocated to equipment and salaries simply disappeared, without raising eyebrows on either the local or the national levels. Spending funds in the Tibesti without asking what happens to them afterwards is one way to buy peace in the region. Indeed, "politics" in northern Chad, as represented on the national news, seems to be but an endless round of doling out of wads of cash to those who matter, while people gossip endlessly about the unimaginable sums of money sunk into the current fragile peace.

Similarly, that the *derdé* was ultimately chosen in N'Djamena does not necessarily indicate the influence of the central government, but rather that of Teda resident in the capital and in exile abroad. Chad is remarkable among Sahelian states in that while Saharan populations tend to be marginalized elsewhere, most famously in Mali, here they are generally understood to "run the country" (Buijtenhuijs 2001; Magrin 2002; Debos 2013: 97). A few had been ousted with the demise of Chad's former president Hissène Habré, a Dazagade from Faya (and thus also a "Tubu" in the broader sense of the term), but "Tubu" and Teda continue to occupy central government posts and key positions in the national administration and army, and also provide a disproportional percentage of rebel leaders.[32] On the day of ceremony, the respect paid by the guests who had arrived in Zouar by car, truck, or on foot to those who came by plane underlined the importance of the N'Djamena Teda as much as that of the official delegation and international guests. It was also powerful symbolically: not everybody, sultan or not, can mobilize two national armies, French and Chadian, and borrow three military transport planes to cover the more than a thousand kilometers between Zouar and the capital. To make this happen, people in influential places had to decide that it should, and their influence was thus felt throughout whether they were physically present or not.

Neither was the large number of foreign participants in the ceremony innocuous. The French army provided infrastructural support as a matter of course. French soldiers, masters of the Chadian airspace backed up by a permanent base in Faya, were strutting up and down all over Zouar and feeling quite at home. Several high ranking foreign diplomats had chosen to assist the investiture of what is, after all, but a minor customary chief in a remote and sparsely populated area of a poor country with little international visibility. From an international perspective, northern Chad is the last area of the Sahara still

[32] Although Idriss Déby is Zaghawa rather than "Tubu," his first wife is from Faya, and before overthrowing him in a coup in 1990 Déby was a close ally of Hissène Habré's and at times his commander-in-chief. The passage from government official to rebel leader, and from regular soldier to rebel, is common in Chad. Debos talks of "status fungibility" between military, rebels, and bandits (2013: 31).

considered relatively "secure" and as somehow immune to Islamist involvement, whatever that might actually mean on the ground. This, and its proximity to southern Libya, makes northern Chad a desirable military base and training ground from which to combat "trafficking," human and otherwise, and "international terrorism." The Chadian government is France's first ally in the region and the Chadian army has proved a valuable and much-courted partner in the 2013 war in northern Mali. But the French are not the only foreign influence interested in this part of the world, as witnessed by the EU representative and especially the U.S. ambassador's presence. However, despite Déby's keenness to establish international partnerships, his actual hold on the Tibesti is limited. International players wanting to benefit from the Tibesti's newfound "centrality" in contemporary Saharan developments are thus faced with the difficult decision of whom to address. (Not the *derdé*, as it turned out, since he carefully kept, or was kept, away from the international delegation.)

These multiple interests and influences contributed, perhaps not so much to choosing a particular *derdé* as to making sure that nobody of any real political significance would occupy the post. The candidate chosen at the end was very old, partly disabled, overwhelmed by his new responsibilities, and consequently probably open to outside influences of all kinds. Moreover, participants in the ceremony speculated unashamedly about his proximate demise, and in a way his appointment postponed rather than resolved the problem of succession. The maintenance of "custom," with all its inbuilt uncertainty, thus allowed for political negotiation on all levels and made sure the choice at the end would be inoffensive to all.

THE LIBYAN CONNECTION

Chadian political tussles were only part of this picture. The most remarkable feature of the 2012 investiture ceremony was the highly visible presence of Libyan Teda. They were everywhere, particularly young men, with flash cars, "modern" urban outfits (jeans and shirts, or brand-new *jallābiyya*s clearly bought for the occasion), sun-glasses, expensive mobile phones, and digital cameras with which they photographed everything and everybody. They ignored local political negotiations and barely acknowledged the existence of the Chadian state—border controls have collapsed with the 2011 war—while thoroughly enjoying the folkloristic aspects of the occasion, the beautifully dressed camels and girls, and all other ostentatious presentations of "Tubu culture." Many had never set foot in Zouar before, or only once or twice during their childhood, but they were filled with pride at the proceedings and wanted to immortalize and take away with them as much of it as they could. Their Libyan ways jarred with local notions of sociality and they tended to stay in groups speaking Arabic, but this in no way diminished their pleasure at being there. They also felt much at ease with the Euro-Americans there, especially those among them who knew some English. "Welcome to Libya!" one of them smilingly announced, with his

arms stretched out to encompass the whole Tibesti, before noticing his error, laughing. Far from marginal to them, the Tibesti is the heart of "Tubu-land" and an integral and "authentic" part of Libya as they imagine it.

With the Libyan war in 2011, Libyan Teda have gained in confidence in terms of both claiming an independent identity and political autonomy. Some Teda joined the uprising against Qadhafi as early as the spring of 2011 and in exchange for their services they have obtained what they interpret as total control of the Libyan south and its borders. Many in private express a rather ambivalent attitude toward Qadhafi's regime, well aware that there are no guarantees that any future Libyan government will treat them better than its predecessor. Publicly, though, they described the post-Qadhafi era as an occasion to claim back their "rights" to southern Libya, of which they have been deprived by Qadhafi-backed regional Arab tribes. This optimism has led to the creation of not only various Teda militias, but also a nation-wide "conference" of Teda and several cultural associations whose aim it is to further Teda language and culture.[33] These are run by well-educated Libyan Teda, speak primarily to Libyan and international audiences, and voice notions of history, identity, and culture that make little sense to most inhabitants of northern Chad but fit neatly with similar "identity movements" in North Africa.[34]

Although in contemporary Libya most claims to political preeminence are negotiated at gunpoint, questions of "culture" and history are crucial to local notions of legitimacy. The 2011 conflict and its aftermath have brought a strong return to local identities, exacerbated by the absence of a centralized state and the state's lack of legitimacy (Lacher 2011: 142). Most of Libya is still run by local military councils with the help of "notables," and several towns have expelled residents of outside origin and confiscated their property (International Crisis Group 2011b: 28). Often such local xenophobia has racist undertones and many of the victims are of darker skin color than locals.[35] Similar logics are at work in the Libyan south: a few weeks after the *derdé*'s 2012 investiture ceremony, fighting broke out in Kufra between Arabs and Teda, followed by analogous fighting in Sabha later that year.[36] From the

[33] On these see, for example, *Libya Herald*, 1 Mar. 2012, and 3 June 2012. Several newspapers have started to appear in Tedaga, transcribed into Latin script. Their content is largely innocuous, but their format highly symbolic. Meanwhile, the Jibhat al-tibū li-inqādh Lībiyā (Tubu Front for the Salvation of Libya), founded by Issa Abdul Majid Mansur in exile in Norway in 2008, is overtly political. Although dissolved in 2011, it was reconstituted after violent clashes between Arabs and Tubu in southern Libya in 2012 and puts forward more radical views.

[34] Such as, most famously, the Berber movement: for Algeria, see Slimani-Direche 1997, and Guenoun 1999; and on Libya, al-Rumi 2009. For examples of current Libyan Berberist websites, see: tawalt.com and libyaimal.net.

[35] See, for example, *Human Rights Watch*, 4 Sept. 2011; *Amnesty International Online*, 7 Sept. 2011; and International Crisis Group 2011b: 28.

[36] Fighting broke out in Kufra in February 2012 and in Sabha in March 2012, leaving an estimated 147 dead and hundreds wounded, partly due to the heavy shelling of Teda neighborhoods.

Arab viewpoint, the "Tibbū" are "African"—a perspective unwittingly echoed even in more cautious media reports—and therefore have no right to be there.[37]

This idea is not shared by most Libyan Teda, who consider themselves the original inhabitants of Libya's extreme south and now wish to translate this claim into political preeminence. Paradoxically, this means that the younger generation, at least, understood their presence at the *derdé*'s investiture ceremony, although it took place in Chad, as a way to not only show their economic and military superiority but also prove their historical legitimacy with regards to southern Libya: thus the casual redefinition of the Tibesti mountains as Libya. In conversation, the *derdé* was described as a Teda king of great antiquity and reputation, intimately connected to the settlements of the Libyan south. Young Libyan Teda intellectuals eagerly claimed that written documents about the *derdé* could certainly be found in Kufra, or even in Arabic manuscripts kept in Egypt. In any case, there were no doubt some historical traces somewhere that would prove their history to be as venerable as that of their Arab neighbors and give them prior rights to the Libyan south. "It is all written down, one just has to find where," two university-educated youth explained in polished classical Arabic, "There can be no doubt that we are the Garamantes [the inhabitants of the Fazzān in Roman times]." Chad, and the difficult relationship the country maintains with Libya, were simply bracketed out, as is, in a sense, the local background of the *derdé* himself: the historical and cultural emphasis on his position in no way implies that young Libyan Teda would ever feel bound by the political directives of someone who remained, in their eyes, an uneducated old man.

This de-localized renegotiation of local identity is possible because, despite the current emphasis on local identity, few notions could be worse suited to capturing the complex tissue of networks and alliances that inform the Libyan south. The Arab tribes that now dispute the "ownership" of the southern oases conquered them in the mid-eighteenth century from their original Teda inhabitants (Rohlfs 1881: 290). At that time these oases acted as trading posts rather than places of permanent settlement and functioned as part of a socio-economic system within which notions of local origin made little sense. Many of the Arabs who now claim priority in Sabha and Kufra have family also in northern or central Chad, who migrated there in the mid-nineteenth or early twentieth centuries as refugees from the Ottoman and Italian conquests.[38] Reluctant to leave Chad, they were called back by

Throughout, the Teda were accused of either being foreign or relying on Chadian and Sudanese recruits.

[37] Thus the Teda are described as "sub-Saharan" in an International Crisis Group report (2012: 6) that is otherwise cautious not to take sides.

[38] See Cordell (1985) on the Awlād Sulayman, long established in Kanem. Faya-Largeau, the main town of the B.E.T., was largely constructed by Libyans, first by the Sanūsiyya (Triaud

Qadhafi in the 1980s and settled, many for the first time, in the Libyan south. More often than not they left behind wives, children, in-laws, and property, and this in turn allowed them to seek shelter in Chad during the 2011 war. Their claims to "local identity" or even historical precedence in southern Libya are thus as tenuous as those put forward by their Teda neighbors; while continuing close connections between northern Chad and southern Libya exemplify the renewed visibility, observable more widely on the continent (Mbembe 1999: 113), of longstanding historical regions based on exchange rather than (national) political control.

Conversely, a large number of Chadian Teda migrated to Libya with Qadhafi's rise to power in 1969 and particularly with the discovery of oil and concomitant development projects in the Libyan south (Clanet 1981). Many only returned to Chad for sporadic visits. Libya played an important part in the Chadian civil war and for some time parts of the Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti were occupied by Libyan armed forces (Buijtenhuijs 1987). In order to bolster his claim to the disputed Aozou strip Qadhafi distributed Libyan identity papers to all northern Chadians who wanted them, only to several years later deny their validity and that of identity papers owned by Libyan Teda.[39] This makes it difficult to distinguish between "Chadian" and "Libyan" Teda, a distinction that in any case makes little sense locally, where almost everyone has spent at least some part of their life in the other country. This fluidity further exacerbates conflict, not least because it means that Teda and Arabs are equally well placed to benefit from the many transnational business opportunities the border region offers.

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

These business opportunities have changed socio-economic conditions on both sides of the border. Real money, the kind of money that makes girls giggle with admiration and gives rise to stories that will still be remembered years later, was not brought by the Libyans, despite their classy outfits and digital cameras. Rather, it was raised locally and spent ostentatiously in bouts of excessive generosity. The camp set up for guests at the investiture ceremony was, by local standards, lavishly equipped. The huts contained carpets, hangings, and heavy Libyan blankets, one of the central prestige objects in every Teda bride's trousseau and a great comfort on cold Saharan nights. There was far more perfume, skin-cream, oil, incense, and henna than the women could possibly use. Nobody really bothered washing up dishes, since there were always

1995: 440), then by Libyan refugees from the Italian conquest. See the six-monthly reports by French colonial officers in charge of the B.E.T., 1928–1934, ANT W 18.

[39] *Libya Herald*, 21 May 2012, and 4 July 2012; and interviews conducted in Faya, spring and summer 2012.

new ones to hand. Vast quantities of fizzy drinks replaced the usual murky well water and their empty cans piled up next to the *derdé*'s tree. Food almost uniquely consisted of sweets, imported chocolates, and meat, in strong contrast to the usual boiled flour or Libyan pasta. Thirty-five camels had been killed to honor the *derdé*, more than ever before, it was claimed. The place where they had been slaughtered near the campsite was drenched with blood, and everyone's belly was bloated with fresh boiled intestines and meat washed down with unlimited helpings of extremely sweet tea.

Other tokens of wealth were less equally distributed. Girls and young women had come carefully dressed in new veils or *jilbāb*s worn for the first time. Libyan women especially shone, through excessive use of lightening creams and heavy and expensive makeup and scent. Golden jewelry dangled on slender wrists, representing sums that every female present could calculate in her head within seconds and that were counted in hundreds of thousands of francs (or hundreds of dinars). The ubiquitous mobile phones had been replaced for the occasion with vastly more expensive (and in Chad, illegal) satellite phones, for family calls and to be played with ostentatiously. Most of these good things were simply left behind at the end of the party to be taken by those who wanted them—why bother washing a veil or blanket when there are so many to be had? Half a day later the camp had been stripped bare and only a few anemic youths scavenged the now-empty huts for remains of tea sets. The *derdé*, who was nominally credited with everything given at this occasion, was extremely wealthy, and this wealth was intimately tied up with his prestige, but it only lasted a short while. Everything he received for his investiture had to be distributed, leaving him, despite his new government salary, as poor as he had been before: an old man on the floor of his half-finished house, now blessed with the burden of an additional wife.

The few researchers who have studied the Tubu have described ceremonies of giving as the only way in which Tubu society, otherwise portrayed as bereft of political institutions, is held together (see especially Baroin 1985). The *derdé* investiture ceremony seems to back up this argument, but only to a point. It is true that the ceremony was only possible because the *derdé* could draw on generous contributions from all of his family and that everything he had collected he had to give away at the end.[40] It is also true that this lavish display of goods and giving was the element of the ceremony that seems to have impressed itself most on people's minds, or at least was most talked about after. Yet there appears to have been no notion locally that acts of giving were constitutive of a coherent whole, or that by giving, the *derdé* or anybody else involved created lasting social ties. There was no rhetoric of having to be "thankful for the gifts that we all received," or that the *derdé*

[40] Indeed, the delay between the appointment of the new *derdé* and his investiture is generally explained by his need to gather enough wealth from his relatives to hold the ceremony.

had accrued "power" through his generosity, but rather one of disappointment that the excess had not been more excessive, coupled with a real spirit of competition about who managed to take away the most, ideally by stealth.

Most importantly, what was most admired was gratuitous giving or even ostentatious destruction. One of the *derdé*'s brothers-in-law had offered him a fleet of "Toyota V8 *toutes options*," the most expensive model around and still rare in Chad. The next day the *derdé*'s younger brother rammed one of them into a rock. No attempt was made to repair it; the *derdé*'s brother-in-law simply gave him another one, one price bracket up. More generally at the heart of the local fun were flagrantly risky driving and open destruction of four-wheel-drives, the most widely recognized markers of wealth and status as well as a central means of production. Nights were spent in endless "rodeos."

A similar argument can be made with regards to money handed over to the *aza*, traditional praise singers of the blacksmith cast, who were one of the investiture ceremony's main attractions.[41] Giving to *aza* (singular *eze*) is part of any large Teda celebration and wedding videos tirelessly reiterate the act, with all spotlights on the giver. It "works" precisely because *aza* are considered incapable of holding on to anything: "notorious drunkards and wasters," they will just lose the money "in one night"; giving to them is like "throwing money into the wind." Like the *derdé*, then, the *aza* may become incredibly rich in one day and lose it all the next—a wealthy *eze* is an aberration, and a grateful one a myth. In sum, giving is seen to be at its most prestigious and most memorable when it leads to nothing but instantaneous and short-lived glory, and this, rather than any "traditional authority" or "social structure," seems to be what held together most of the Teda who were concerned with these events.

This time, however, there was more to this. It was not only that the *aza* were given almost exclusively 10,000 francs CFA notes (the highest denomination), but also that people placed "packets" instead of individual banknotes on the *aza*'s foreheads, 100,000 or even a million francs at a time. Men and women who had carefully prepared bundles of new 1,000 or even 5,000 franc notes found no occasion to use them and so, with resigned shrugs, put them back into their pockets or handbags (bought for the occasion). Some people attributed this situation to a more general inflation of the gifts given at all kinds of celebrations, including weddings. More immediately relevant, as people said proudly, were the incredible sums gained recently by people engaged in illegal trans-border trade of a new kind, mostly involving drugs, but also guns.[42]

[41] On *aza* in neighboring Niger, see M. Le Cœur 1970; and Baroin 1991.

[42] Northern Chad is largely dependent on imports from Libya for basic foodstuffs and petrol (Arditi 1993). Trade between both regions is thus regular, necessary, and despite the vicissitude of diplomacy and war, longstanding and commonplace. The 2011 war in Libya has enhanced

One of the *derdé*'s brothers-in-law, in particular, is famous for his role in local trafficking. He himself does not smuggle, people claim, but he runs a kind of shop and service station stocked with Libyan goods and especially petrol that sells to everyone who passes through with reason to move quickly and undetected. His camp near Zouar is called "new Dubai" because with the money he earns he has made it look "just like Dubai." He made a much-celebrated apparition at the ceremony at night, "driving a chocolate-colored V8, dressed in a chocolate-colored *jallābiyya*, with chocolate-colored trousers and a chocolate-colored turban, chocolate-colored boots and a chocolate-colored pistol in a chocolate-colored holster—nobody had ever seen anything like it!"[43] He had also given all of his female relatives new veils and dresses, and satellite phones and phone cards. People whispered that he was the real reason so many people had turned up, not just Teda but also Dazagada from Faya, since he is from a family that can be counted as both. This family connection gave the *derdé*'s second wife particular standing during the ceremony, and as the women saw it, she rather than her husband was responsible for the bounty distributed and it was she and her fairytale brother, rather than her ageing husband, who really mattered.

Everybody was clearly aware that giving, once pushed to such excesses, becomes exclusive, limited to a select few, and destructive of more accessible patterns of exchange. Yet this inspired admiration rather than criticism, perhaps because everybody knew that it might well not last. The colonel, ousted from the official selection process and electing with his family not to attend the ceremony, had in a way come in through the back door. As much as the Chadian central government and Teda dignitaries residing in the capital tried to control the proceedings, the show was stolen by a different kind of hero: the swaggering cash-dispensing smuggler.

This seems to be an example of Banégas and Warnier's (2001) "new models of success and power" in post-structural-adjustment sub-Saharan Africa, as functionaries, university graduates, and politicians make room in the popular imagination for fraudsters, bandits, and football stars. In northern Chad this is by no means a new development. There, military heroes, rebels, and "war lords" have long ousted more sedate political figures from the pantheon of men to emulate, while glory has "forever" been linked to the momentary ability to give wildly and without calculation. Rich people in the Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti are either a short-lived phenomenon or else they

trade, adding looted or stolen material to the goods on offer, such as cars, medical equipment, carpets, and electrical goods. Arms smuggling has a long history in the area reaching back to colonial times, while the drug trade seems to be more recent, so far limited in its effects, and marginalized. See International Crisis Group 2011b.

[43] Interview, Zouar, 30 Jan. 2012.

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carefully invest elsewhere. Political loyalty is similarly unstable since social values emphasize autonomy and opportunism. Some of this is certainly due to the recent history of the country where, in Marielle Debos' phrase, "The very conception of time is linked to experiences of war and to the permanent reproduction of the conditions that led to war" (2011: 426). But much of it simply seems to be a matter of taste and a pronounced social preference for brief spectacular glory and improvisation over institutionalization and "tradition," and over stable political control and governance.

CONCLUSION

For many who attended the *derdé* investiture ceremony, *derdé* genealogies and historical notions of power mattered far less than the brief spectacle of wealth, waste, and distribution that occurred. This perhaps tells us more about local notions of power and their volatility than historical documents ever can. In the contemporary Tibesti wealth matters because it can be given away, and power is subsumed in short-lived glory. Questions about the "real political influence" of the *derdé*, or about governance and the restructuring of the state, must therefore remain unanswered, and for many of the people involved they are incomprehensible or at best irrelevant. As a result, the Tibesti represents the apparent paradox of a region that, while instrumental in Chadian state politics and central to the conflict in southern Libya, remains internally autonomous. It is a region that seems at first glance to be geographically marginal, but has developed its own centrality within the contemporary Sahara by avoiding rather than renegotiating state control or any other form of government. It therefore presents a challenge to approaches to African politics that focus exclusively on power and governance, whether state or transnational (see also Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 989).

Read in this light, the *derdé* investiture ceremony was a success, since opinions among different sets of spectators and actors about what was really going on were so different, to the point of being mutually incompatible, that all could be satisfied. Government officials had appointed a minor auxiliary with a small salary and publicly asserted their interest in the Tibesti; diplomats had visited the north and shown their support; the French army had proven their control of Chadian airspace; N'Djamena Teda had visited their relatives and shown who really pulled the strings; Libyan Teda had confirmed their historical legacy and contemporary status; and the Chadian Teda organizers had played everybody's game while giving away nothing and confirming their preponderant position among their peers. The *derdé*'s brother-in-law and his friends, by participating in this clearly "traditional" event, not only indicated how economic power relations were changing fast, but also displayed that they cared for social proprieties while at the same time testing their limits. People from Faya found their importance confirmed through their newly influential in-laws and their many marital connections to the Tibesti, whose importance

was thus reaffirmed. Women thought that true influence lay with them and their "sister," the *derdé*'s second wife. Young Teda had a great time and stuffed their bellies; girls danced and felt beautiful; everybody reveled in the lavish destruction and distribution of wealth, was high on sugar and meat, and left with a valuable present. The person who seemed most overwhelmed by it all, and least in control, was the *derdé* himself. But perhaps this simply means that he had played his part to perfection.

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Abstract: In January 2012, a new *derdé* (traditional leader) of the Teda in northern Chad was officially appointed. Held in the Tibesti, a remote, notoriously unruly but strategically important part of the Sahara, the investiture ceremony was attended by Teda from throughout the country and neighboring Libya and Niger, as well as by an impressive number of Chadian civil servants and international diplomats. Yet the ceremony itself was short and messy. Similarly, the historical underpinnings of the institution of the *derdé* and the selection process were unclear, leaving much room for debate. This uncertainty appears to lie at the heart of the institution of the *derdé*. Far from a resurgence of "traditional authority" to make up for "state failure" or to partake in the restructuring of postcolonial states —as observed elsewhere on the African continent—the investiture ceremony confirmed the decentralized nature of Teda social organization and the absence of even attempted governance, both with regards to the Chadian state and local political institutions. What mattered from a local point of view were not long-term strategies of power and control, but rather the immediate and gloriously wasteful distribution of wealth. Admiring eyes were turned not toward the *derdé* or the state officials who appointed him, but instead toward high-ranking military officers, well-dressed urban Libyan Teda, and trans-border smugglers, models of rapid but often short-lived success. This provides a counterexample to the current emphasis on governance and power in the analysis of African states and politics.