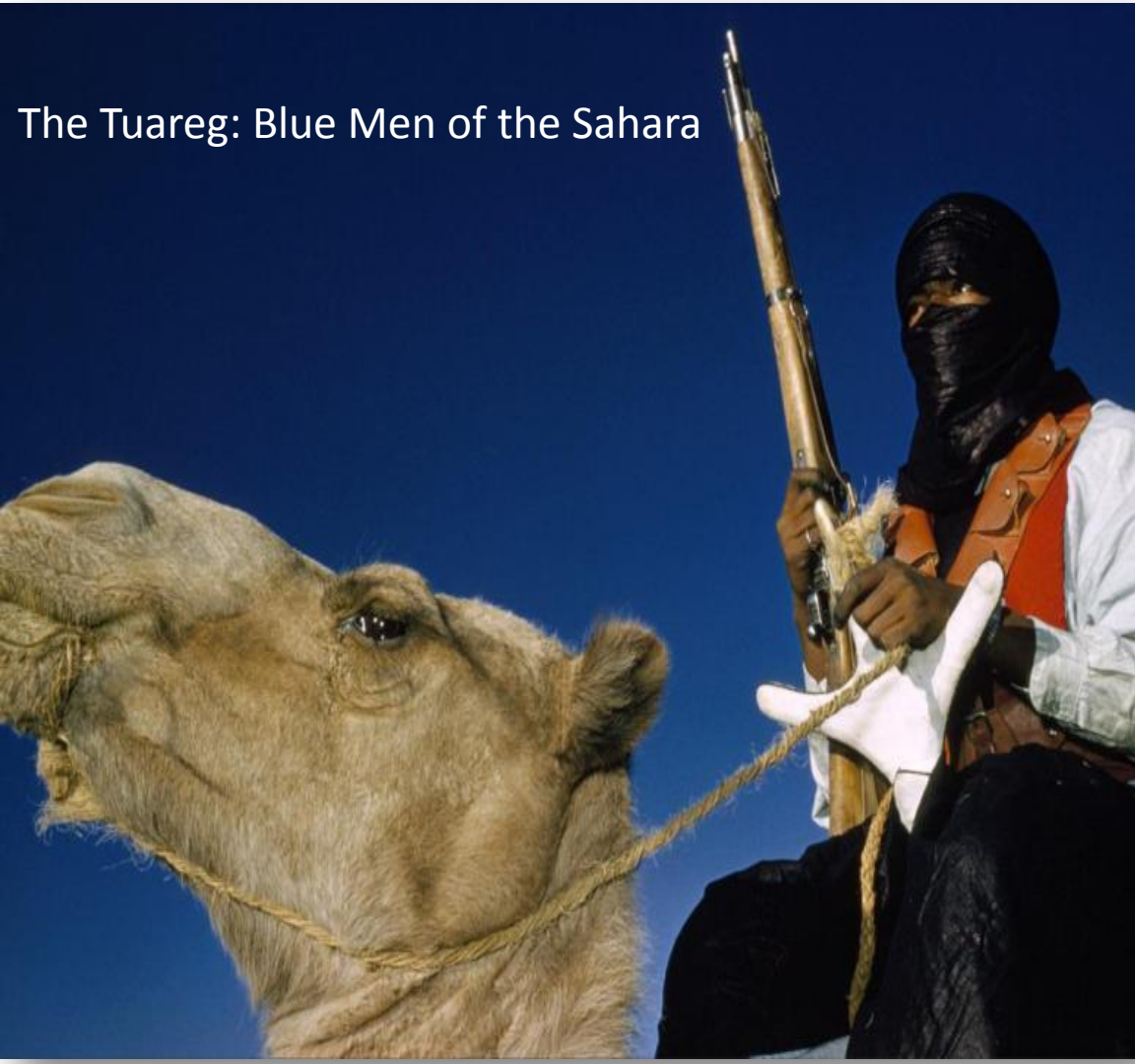


# The Tuareg people

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## The Tuareg: Blue Men of the Sahara



The Tuareg are best known for the men's practice of veiling their faces with a blue cloth dyed with indigo. Early travelers' accounts often referred to them as the "Blue Men" of the Sahara Desert, the region where many Tuareg live. It is believed that the Tuareg are descendants of the North African Berbers, and that they originated in the Fezzan region of Libya. They later expanded into regions bordering the Sahara, bringing local farming peoples into their own society.

Algeria, Tuareg Cavalryman, 1960

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT F. SISSON



By the fourteenth century, trade routes to the wealthy salt, gold, ivory, and slave markets in North Africa, Europe, and the Middle East had sprung up across Tuareg territory. The Tuareg grew rich as livestock breeders and traders in the Saharan and Sahelian regions. (The Sahel is the region south of the Sahara Desert that is marked by times of drought but is not a real desert)

In the late nineteenth century, European exploration and military expeditions led to French rule of the Tuareg homeland. By the early twentieth century, the French had brought the Tuareg under their colonial control. They ended Tuareg trade activities, including the collection of tariffs and the protection services for camel caravans crossing the Sahara.



Traditional way of transporting salt

## Total population

~ 3 million

## Regions with significant populations

 Niger	2,116,988 <sup>[1]</sup>
 Mali	536,557 <sup>[2]</sup>
 Burkina Faso	370,738 <sup>[3]</sup>
 Algeria	25,000–150,000
 Tunisia	2,000 (nomadic)

## Languages

Tuareg languages (Tafaghist, Tamahaq, Tamasheq, Tamajeq, Tawellemmet), Maghrebi Arabic, French, Hassaniya Arabic

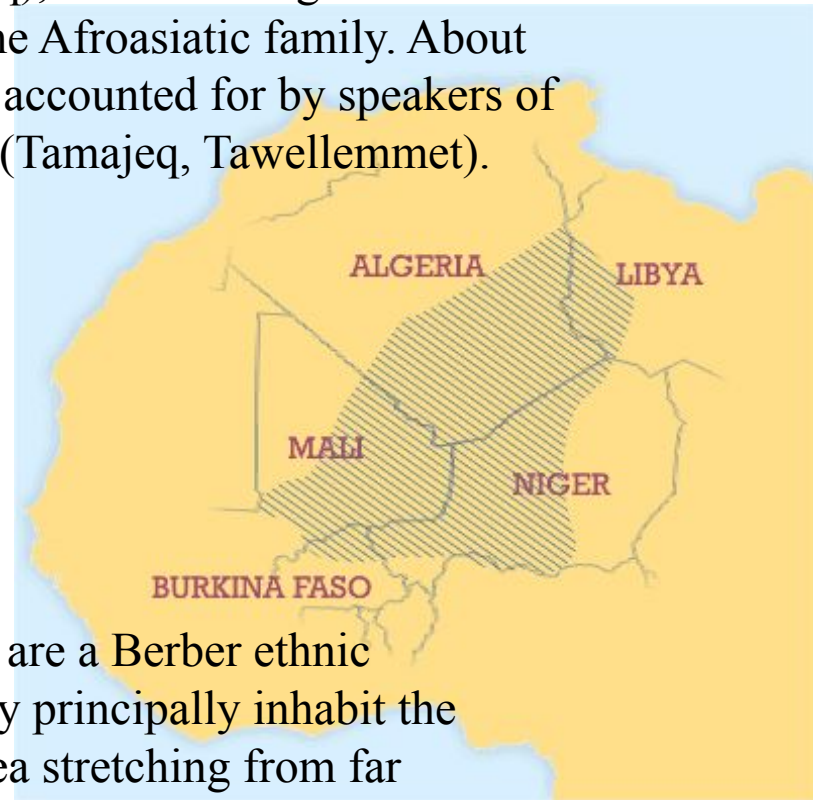
## Religion

Islam

## Related ethnic groups

Other Berbers, Hausa people

The Tuareg speak the Tuareg languages (also known as Tamasheq), which belong to the Berber branch of the Afroasiatic family. About half this number is accounted for by speakers of the Eastern dialect (Tamajeq, Tawellemmet).



The Tuareg people are a Berber ethnic confederation. They principally inhabit the Sahara in a vast area stretching from far southwestern Libya to southern Algeria, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.



Being nomadic, they move constantly across national borders, and small groups of Tuareg also live in southeastern Algeria, southwestern Libya and northern Burkina Faso, and a small community in northern Nigeria.



Most Tuareg are Muslims. But their traditional belief system and rituals overlap with Islam. There is a widespread belief in spirits. Most spirits are considered evil and are believed to cause illnesses. Some Tuareg perform fortune-telling with cowrie shells, lizards, mirrors, and the Koran (the sacred text of Islam).



Unlike women in many other Islamic societies, most Tuareg women do not wear veils in public. They may also independently inherit property and begin the process leading to a divorce.

Islamic holy men, called *marabouts*, are believed to possess a special power of blessing, called *al baraka*. They educate children in verses from the Koran and they officiate at ceremonies marking rites of passage and Muslim holidays.

The Tuaregs have been one of the influential ethnic groups who have helped spread Islam and its legacy in North Africa and the adjacent Sahel region.



**Timbuktu, an important Islamic center famed for its ulama, was established by Maghsharan Tuareg at the start of the 12th century.**





A diagram of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina is one of the treasures found among thousands of ancient manuscripts.

*Tabaski* commemorates the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son.

The Tuareg celebrate *Ganni* (also called *Mouloud* ), the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, with special sacred and secular songs and camel races.



The 19th Ghat Festival in Tripoli , December 2013 In the annual event

The 19th Ghat Festival in Libya , December 2013 In the annual event

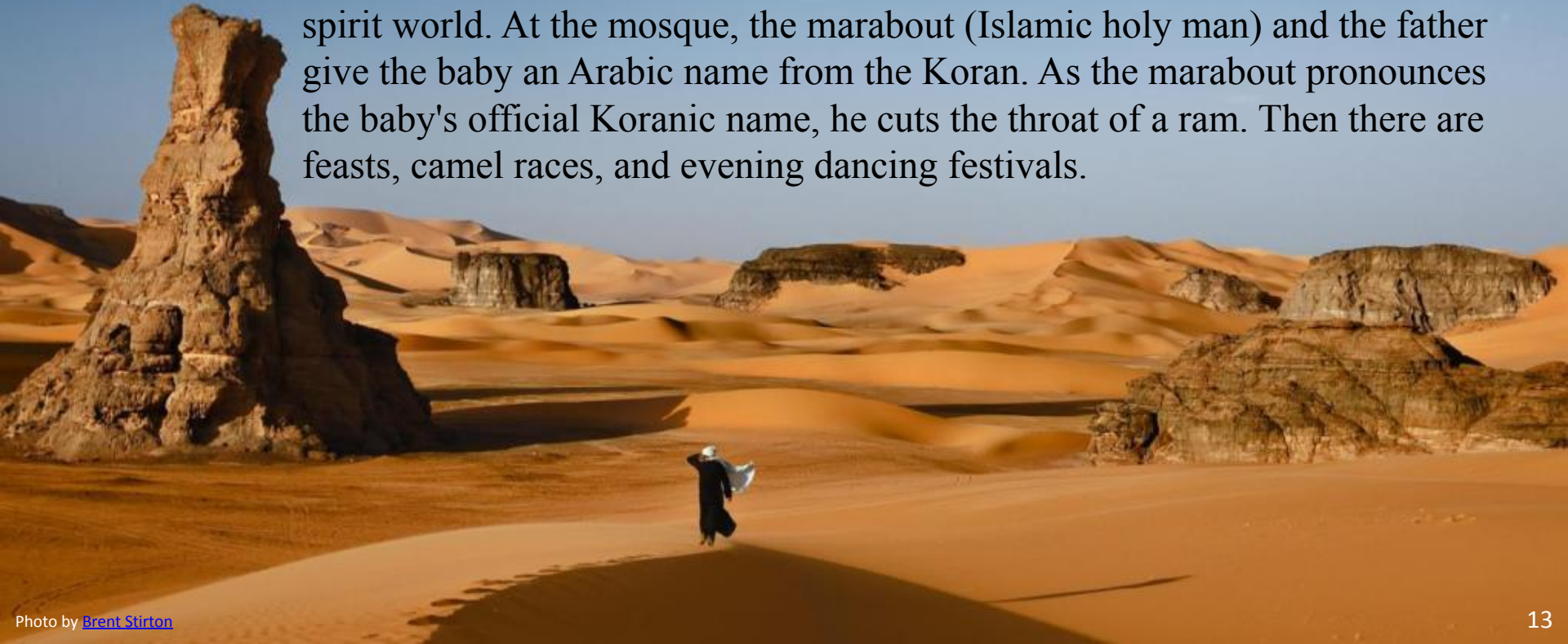




The end of the month-long Ramadan fast is celebrated by animal sacrifice, feasting, prayer, and evening dancing festivals. Secular holidays that the Tuareg celebrate include Niger Independence Day (August 3) and Niger Republic Day (December 18). On these days, there are camel races and feasting in the countryside, and parades and speeches in the towns.


## rites of passage

Name day is held one week following a baby's birth. On the evening before the name day, the older female relatives carry the baby around the mother's tent. They give him or her a secret name in the Tamacheq language. The next day, the baby's hair is shaved in order to cut off the baby's ties to the spirit world. At the mosque, the marabout (Islamic holy man) and the father give the baby an Arabic name from the Koran. As the marabout pronounces the baby's official Koranic name, he cuts the throat of a ram. Then there are feasts, camel races, and evening dancing festivals.



Tuareg men begin to wear a veil over the face at approximately eighteen years of age. This signifies that they are adults and are ready to marry.





The most famous Tuareg symbol is the Tagelmust (also called éghéwed), referred to as a Cheche (pronounced "Shesh"), an often indigo blue-colored veil called Alasho. The men's facial covering originates from the belief that such action wards off evil spirits. It may have related instrumentally from the need for protection from the harsh desert sands.


A Tuareg man in a traditional indigo veil, which is likely to leave his face with a blue mark across his skin.

Weddings are very elaborate, lasting for seven days. There are camel races and evening festivals featuring songs and dances. The groom's family arrives in the bride's village on gaily decorated camels and donkeys. Older female relatives of the bride build her a special tent.



*A Tuareg husband and wife wearing traditional jewellery*



A close-up photograph of an elderly woman wearing a black headscarf, looking down with a somber expression. The background is blurred, showing a traditional structure and other people in a rural setting.

Burial takes place as soon as possible after a person has died. It is quickly concluded with a graveside prayer led by a marabout. Burial is followed by condolences. Relatives and friends gather at the home of the dead person, and the marabout offers a prayer and blessing. The guests eat a memorial feast.

## RELATIONSHIPS



Like many other African societies, the Tuareg have very elaborate greetings. In the Air regional dialect, *Oy ik?* signifies "How are you?" This is followed by *Mani eghiwan*, meaning "How is your family?", and additional greetings such as *Mani echeghel?* (How is your work?). The usual polite response to these questions is *Alkher ghas*, or "In health only." Exchanging gifts is an important sign of friendship between women.



The Tuareg in rural areas still recognize social categories from the time before colonization. These are based on family descent and inherited occupation.

For example, *imajeghen* (nobles) refers to Tuareg of noble birth, while *inaden* refers to the smiths and artisans.

In principle, people are supposed to marry within their own social category. However, this practice has been breaking down for some time, especially in the towns.

## FAMILY LIFE

In rural communities, a nuclear family (parents and their children) live in each tent or compound (living area). Each compound is named for the married woman who owns the tent. She may make her husband leave the tent if she divorces him.

Fathers are the disciplinarians of the family. But other men, especially maternal uncles (uncles on the mother's side), often play and joke with small children. Grandmothers also have a close, affectionate relationship with the children. Cousins have a relaxed relationship marked by teasing and joking. Relationships with in-laws are reserved, distant, and respectful.



For a Tuareg man, it is highly shameful to eat in front of his mother-in-law, who commands great respect.

Photo by Henrietta Bulter





Traditionally, the Tuareg have married within their own social category, preferably to a close cousin. In the towns, both of these traditions are breaking down. In rural areas, they remain strong. However, many individuals marry close relatives only to please their mothers. Later they divorce and marry nonrelatives. Some wealthy Tuareg men practice polygamy (having more than one wife at the same time).

Two-thirds of a family's property goes to the sons as an inheritance; one-third, to the daughters. A political office usually passes from father to son.

Women who lack daughters of their own often adopt nieces to help with the housework.

Women keep the tent and all the possessions when they split, including the domestic animals which the tribe relies on to survive.





It is the men who cover up their faces, while the women are happy to show off their faces - although they often cover their hair.



## CLOTHING

The veil that Tuareg men wear on their faces has several meanings. It is, first of all, a symbol of male identity. It is also thought to protect the wearer from evil spirits. In addition, it is considered an attractive adornment and can be worn in various styles. The face veil is worn differently in different social situations. It is worn highest (covering the nose and mouth) to express respect in the presence of chiefs, older persons, and in-laws.



Once they marry, Tuareg women wear a head scarf that covers their hair. In rural areas, Tuareg men wear long Islamic robes. Women wear wraparound skirts and embroidered blouses. In the towns, clothing is more varied. It includes West African tie-dyed cottons, and also fashionable European styles for some wealthier people.



Photo by Brent Stirton



Photo by Frans Lemmens





A female murzuq band member wears a traditional costume of highly coloured clothing and a headpiece adorned with buttons and shells.

## FOOD

Almost 95 percent of the daily diet in rural areas consists of grains. Protein is added by dairy products (milk and cheese). Fruits such as dates and melon are eaten in season. Dried and pounded vegetables are added to sauces. Meat is eaten primarily on holidays and at rites of passage.



Photo by Brent Stirton

## EDUCATION

Until recently, many Tuareg resisted sending their children to secular (nonreligious) schools because they did not like or trust the government. Nowadays, however, more Tuareg recognize the importance of formal education.



Photo by Brent Stirton



Photo by Brent Stirton

Most rural residents finish at least primary school. Some continue on to junior and senior high schools in the towns. Very few Tuareg attend universities. Koranic (Islamic) schools are important and respected among the Tuareg.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

Distinctive styles of music and dance are associated with various social classes. Sacred music is performed on Muslim holidays. Secular music is performed on instruments including the *anzad* (a bowed, one-stringed lute) and the *tende* drum.





In the countryside, most everyday occupations involve hard physical labor. The Western concept of "exercise" as a separate category does not exist



In the towns, there are organized athletics at schools, including soccer and racing. There is also traditional wrestling



In the countryside, most residents provide their own entertainment. Children make their own dolls and other toys. Adults dance, sing, and play musical instruments at festivals. In addition, people of all ages play board games with stones and date pits.



Most camel herding and all caravan trade are still done by men. Men plant and irrigate gardens, and women harvest the crops.



The camels are of vital importance in the Sahara, and are often the only thing a man is left with when he gets divorced.

Because of natural disasters and political tensions, it is difficult to make a living only from nomadic herding.



Most rural Tuareg today combine different occupations, including herding, oasis gardening, caravan trading, and migrant labor.





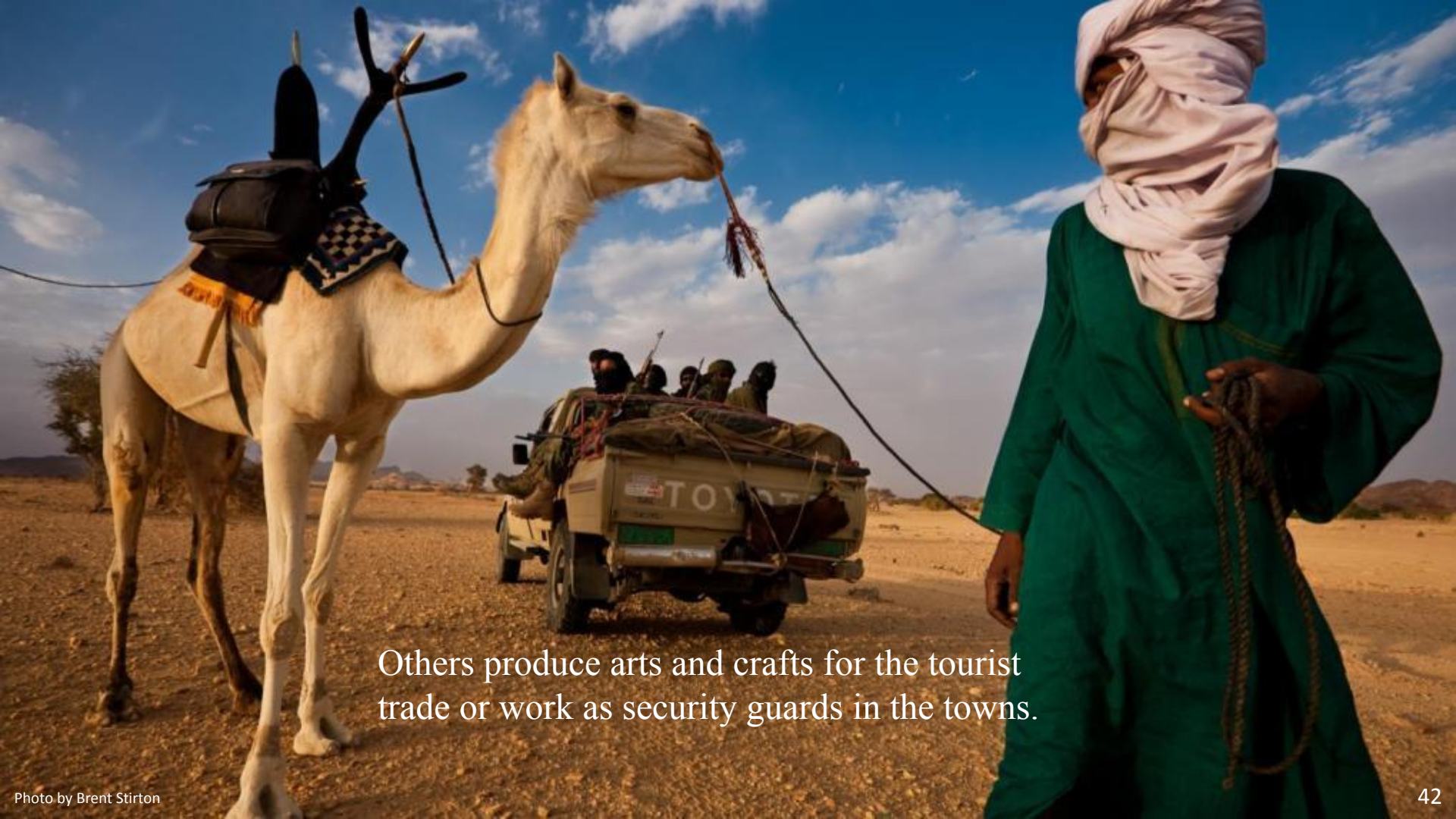


The Tuareg have travelled across the Sahara for more than 1,000 years, the camels leading the way to fresh pastures.





Photo by Brent Stirton



Others produce arts and crafts for the tourist trade or work as security guards in the towns.



In the towns, a few Tuareg have become businessmen or teachers.

Tuareg crafts consist mainly of metalworking (silver jewelry), leather working (boxes and saddles for camels), and woodworking (delicately decorated spoons and ladles)







Photo by Brent Stirton

## SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Development programs from the 1940s into the 1970s failed to help the Tuareg because the programs worked against their traditional herding patterns. Between 1991 and 1995, Tuareg who had received military training and arms in Libya carried out a separatist rebellion. They demanded the right to rule their own region. Since that time, there has been continued off-and-on fighting in some regions of Mali and Niger. Some of the Tuareg have been forced into refugee camps.



A photograph of four individuals standing in a field under a clear blue sky. The person in the center foreground is wearing a dark red or maroon thobe and a black ghutra with a black agal, and is wearing white-rimmed sunglasses. To their left, a person is wearing a white thobe and a white ghutra with a white agal, also wearing sunglasses. To the right of the central figure, a person is wearing a blue thobe and a black ghutra with a black agal. Further to the right, a person is wearing a purple thobe and a black ghutra with a black agal, also wearing sunglasses. All individuals have their arms crossed. The background shows a flat, dry landscape with sparse vegetation under a clear blue sky.

# THE END

All photos were taken from Daily Mail, National Ggeographic, Trip Down Memory Lane.....Internet, ect.



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