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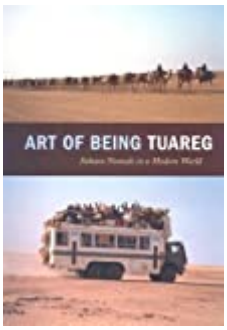

Edmond Bernus, Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University., Los Angeles. University of California. *Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World.* Los Angeles: Stanford University Press, 2006. 291 pp. $45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-9748729-4-0; $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-9748729-6-4.

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Smiths: Makers of Tuareg Identity

In French, German or Italian, scientific books dedicated to the Tuareg are numerous. Not so in English. This publication is the "first major scholarly work published in English to focus on the Tuareg peoples," as the two directors of the museums involved from UCLA and Stanford University respectively, proudly write in their foreword. Of the eight authors who participated–Edmond Bernus, FranÃ§ois Borel, Jean-Yves Brizot, Gian Carlo Castelli Gattinara, Kristyne Loughran, Mohamed ag Ewangaye, Susan Rasmussen, and Thomas K. Seligman–three are Americans, the other five are from France, Italy, Niger, and Switzerland. It's a beautifully produced book and its target audience is a rather wide American readership interested in the Tuareg "mystique," in their craftsmanship, their silver jewelry and leatherwork.

It is becoming more and more difficult for museums to produce exhibitions on specific ethnic groups because of the enormous changes that must be considered. That is exactly where the strength of this book lies. Social change is stressed; adaptations to new economic conditions are shown. This is often done with very personal narratives about individuals and craftsmen like silversmiths, leather workers, or musicians whose full names always figure in the captions of the field photographs.

The book has many merits but it makes me uneasy. It has at least two remarkable shortcomings. First of all, the title looks strange and ethnocentric to me: Why is it an art to be Tuareg? Aren't we all formed by our own societies and that's what we basically are? Would the same title be accepted for, say, the Kurds of Iraq or the French of Europe?

Second, the title is not only ethnocentric, it is misleading: The book is not really about today's nomadic Tuareg in the Sahara. It is rather a book about sedentary silversmiths, their families, and their crafts in a place called Agadez, Republic of Niger. Readers looking for topics considered to be typically Tuareg–like how to live in a tent (in today's modern world often with refrigerator and TV), how to breed camels, how to trade salt all over the western and central parts of the Sahel, or how to send children to school in a nomadic society–will be disappointed.

The difference between "Tuareg" and "Tuareg smiths"

or *inadan* is basic to Tuareg society–and the book says so, too. Smiths are considered to be very special people. Besides being artisans (or artists), they are also keepers of tradition and counselors to the chiefs. That's why the contribution of Mohamed ag Ewangaye, himself a member of a silversmith family from Agadez, is so important and revealing, although he writes from a rather defensive point of view. Mohamed ag Ewangaye knows that the smiths are just a minority of less than 10 percent of those speaking Tamacheq but that their products stand for most of what non-Tuareg people think is Tuareg. He has good reason to be proud.

The book is organized into ten chapters. After a very general introduction to the Tuareg (by Seligman), poetry as a reflection of Tuareg cultural values and identity is treated by Castelli Gattinara. Beautiful examples of oral poetry about war, love, and the pastoral lifestyle can be found here. Every poem has its phonetic transcription. The third chapter is the one written by ag Ewangaye: "The *inadan*, makers of the *amazigh* identity"–which translates as "the smiths, makers of the identity of the free people." In my opinion, his chapter, in fact, should provide the book's title. Among other topics, the Tuareg author touches on such delicate questions as the Tuareg rebellion against the governments of Mali and Niger from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s.

Chapter 4 is on the Tuareg artisans and the change of economic conditions, written by Bernus who died in 2004. The volume is dedicated to him as well as to the Tuareg people. Borel writes about music. This chapter is full of detailed information on musical instruments, who plays them on what occasion and where and why. Rasmussen writes about dress, a topic slightly less dramatic than music. The last chapters are devoted to silversmiths, the challenges they face in today's world, and to jewelry, including the famous cross of Agadez. In a long and detailed chapter, Loughran in fact gives a summary of her Ph.D. thesis on Tuareg jewelry. She also describes the modern tendency towards wearing gold, pointing out that jewelry really becomes artful only when it is worn. Seligman then introduces us to the silversmith Saidi Oumba and his wife, leather worker Andi Ouhoulou. This is a rather beautiful and personal chapter in which Seligman writes about his own experiences over the years with these two individuals and their children. Here we learn, among other things, how and when certain new forms were created and by whom–something we almost never read about in works dealing with contemporary innovations in Africa. In this chapter we also learn how silver jewelry made in Agadez finds its way to international markets in Europe and the United States. In a further chapter Seligman and Loughran go into the history of the well-known cross of Agadez, the most famous type of Tuareg jewelry and one of the best-known symbols for Africa. Luckily, the authors do not try to give an answer. What comes out, however, is that this cross was mostly worn by men, in former times, and not (or less) by women, as has been the case since the 1970s.

Many of the photographed objects in silver and leather are from the collections of the MusÃ©e du Quai Branly, Paris, and the MusÃ©e d'ethnographie de NeuchÃ¢tel, Switzerland. They all were collected before 1950. Borel has recently published pictures of the pieces from NeuchÃ¢tel in a catalogue accompanying a traveling exhibition through Spain (2001). Strangely enough this publication is not mentioned in the bibliography, which seems a bit skimpy to my mind.

In their foreword, Thomas K. Seligman, director of the Cantor Arts Center, and Marla C. Berns, director of the UCLA Fowler Museum, thank HermÃ¨s, the famed French couture house, for its support. HermÃ¨s, as a global player, is commissioning silver pieces from silversmiths in Agadez for the Paris-based fashion house. This is a positive development, as it provides skilled craftsmen with a secure income. In practice, however, the silversmiths are dependent on some French intermediaries who do the designs and who have established ties with HermÃ¨s. Another problematic story concerns the printing of images of classic Berber jewelry and Tuareg leather bags on HermÃ¨s silk scarves. Are they "Tuareg-inspired designs," (p. 265) or are they copies of Tuareg designs, taken, and reproduced for HermÃ¨s' commercial benefit? Does HermÃ¨s pay any copyright fees to the Tuareg community? Such questions have to be asked today, although it is not always easy to find an answer. When Volkswagen produced a 4x4 jeep with the name "Touareg," Professor Georg Klute from the University of Bayreuth, Germany, who does his field work among the Kidal Tuareg in Mali, negotiated with Volkswagen a copyright fee of well over $500,000 for using "Touareg" as a brand name. This money has been used to finance many schools and health projects in the vast hinterland inhabited by these people. This is the "modern world."

I hope visitors will enjoy the exhibition and buy the book, which, despite some shortcomings, is a welcome addition to the literature on the Tuareg. And I hope that some of them will travel to the Republic of Niger and order the leather bags or silver crosses they like best, directly from the artists who make them.

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