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To Make a World, Part II: The Art of Creating a State

A photo by Moussa Ag Assarid, writer and representative of the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad, or MNLA (National Liberation Movement of Azawad), shows a seemingly deserted space, with only a hand-painted sign stuck in the ground. A flag. A claim. An idea. We see no state in terms of infrastructure – neither roads nor buildings – but we see the *idea* of a state. We see the imaginary of a state taking the form of what, materially speaking, is more a *canvas* than a flag. We see the *bare state* – the state in its most minimal, performative dimension. There was a space, and now there is a space with an idea. Space is politicized; territory gains memory, history, and thus speculates, through the sign – through the canvas, the flag – about a possible future.

Opposing State Performances

In his essay "National Heterologies: On the Materiality and Mediality of Flags – Mali 2013," art historian and writer Tom Holert describes a different flag: the French tricolor, which was widely reintroduced in Mali during France's Operation Serval in 2013 and 2014. The operation targeted what the French described as emergent jihadist groups in the northern territories of Mali. Waved by thousands of Malian citizens upon the arrival of French soldiers and President Hollande, the tricolor formed part of an awkward mass performance, seemingly welcoming the former colonizer back into the territory after Mali had painstakingly gained independence in 1960:

> Foreign correspondents reported on flag shortages in Bamako and Timbuktu. The photographs they dispatched showed streets brimming with flags: Malians who had strapped the Tricolour to their car antennas and motorbikes, Malian soldiers wearing the flag as a turban, and Malian civilians who had dressed themselves in flags … If they did suggest "an immense relief," as characterized by one reporter at the time, this is precisely what made them disturbing, because it demonstrated how fully the population had been let down by its own country's political class.[1]

Holert observes an important shift in what the French flag signifies in today's condition of global capitalism. Whereas the colonial borders of the French-Sudanese colony were drawn during the Berlin conference of 1884–85 by the Europeans and Americans in what became known as the "Scramble for Africa," firmly establishing the practice of state-building

Moussa Ag Assarid, from the series *The Revolution Is Without Frontiers,* 2014. The borders of Azawad are delineated by signs such as this one.

throughout European empires, the capitalist state today has long stopped caring about either its own borders or the ones it used to draw carelessly through a diversity of preexisting communities:

> [France] is a former colonial power and a current geopolitical and geo-economic actor. Among other economic concerns, it doesn't want to see regional instability encumber its uranium mining in neighboring Niger. France is thus acting in its own national interest, but also according to the power logic of the new empire of international capitalism, which holds onto national representation only when it benefits the economic interests of the regime.

We should consider the presence of the French in light of the contemporary scramble for Africa, which is tied to securing fossil fuels and valuable minerals. The continent still accounts "for about 59 percent of the world's platinum; 62 percent of its aluminum silicate; more than 50 percent of all vanadiumites and vermiculites; more than 50 percent of diamonds, palladia and chromites and more than 20 percent of gold, uranium, cobalt and manganese."[2]

Jonas Staal, from the series *The Art of Creating a State,* 2014. Moussa Ag Assarid speaks at a pro-Azawadian demonstration in the MNLA-controlled town of Tédjererte.

Instead of the masses of tricolor flags that covered up the problematic reenactment of France's continuous occupation of Mali, I propose that we consider a counter-performance – one that starts with Moussa Ag Assarid's photo of a sign in the desert (or a deserted sign, depending on one's perspective). For why exactly did "jihadist groups" suddenly flock to northern Mali, forcing, according to reports from several human rights groups, an ultra-rigid interpretation of Islam upon its population?[3]

Especially now that we are seeing a very similar scenario in the blind enthusiasm with which dozens of countries have gathered in the new "Coalition of the Willing" to arm "moderate rebels" in Syria and to bomb the militias of the self-proclaimed Islamic State, it is more important than ever to take the historic backdrop of these interventions into consideration.

The most recent crisis in the northern territories of Mali started on April 6, 2012, when the MNLA, which describes itself as an alliance of different peoples inhabiting the Sahel and Sahara regions – namely, the Kel Tamasheq, Songhai, Fula, and Arabs – collectively claimed two-thirds of the northern part of Mali as their own independent, secular, multiethnic, and multireligious state. They declared Azawad's independence in the following terms:

> WE DECLARE:
> –The recognition of the existing borders with neighboring states, and of their inviolability;
> –The full adherence to the Charter of the United Nations;
> –The firm commitment of the MNLA to establishing the conditions for lasting peace and to initiating the institutional foundations of the State, based on a democratic Constitution of independent Azawad.[4]

The historic base of the Azawadian revolutionary movement can be traced to the colonization and partitioning of the Sahel and Sahara regions under French colonial rule from about 1880 onward, when many clans living in a fragile system of confederations were fragmented in a territory that until then had existed without state borders. As historian Berny Sèbe writes,

> This process of colonial division has led to a long-term reconfiguration of the territorial, ethnic and socio-cultural borders of the Sahara, going against the geographical unity of the region that had been so potent before the advent of European colonialism. The belated French initiative to bring about a hasty and ephemeral reunification through the creation of the OCRS [Common Organization of Saharan Regions] was unable to prevent a definitive postcolonial fragmentation that has hindered nomadic lifestyles and turned Saharan populations into minorities in all the countries in which they live.[5]

Following the disruption of their nomadic way of life by the imposition of the colonial state and its boundaries, the Kel Tamasheq, "those who speak

Jonas Staal, from the series *The Art of Creating a State,* 2014. Former Malian road signs appropriated and reconfigured in the MNLA-controlled town of Kidal.

Moussa Ag Assarid, from the series *The Revolution Is Without Frontiers,* 2014. A checkpoint of the MNLA in the desert between the MNLA-controlled towns Kidal and Ménaka.

the language of Tamasheq" (and who are more commonly referred to as "Tuareg"), took up arms against the French. The Kel Tamasheq are one of the oldest inhabitants of the territory, living in a large region that cuts across Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Libya; their exact origins remain partly unknown, but their indigenous script – Tifinagh – belongs to the most ancient writing systems in the world. The first Kel Tamasheq revolts began during the period of French colonization and continued through the years 1916–17, when they gained the full support of the Kel Tamasheq population. In the end they were defeated by the much better equipped French army. Later on, the Kel Tamasheq attempted to normalize relations with the French in order to persuade them to back the group's own independence from other peoples of the region. This marked the Kel Tamasheq as an ethnic resistance force rather than a broad anticolonial movement.

During the period of decolonization in Africa in the years 1950–60, members of the Kel Tamasheq asked France for an independent state of their own. However, with the French denying this request for autonomy, and with the subsequent creation of the Malian state in 1960, the Kel Tamasheq took up arms again in 1963. They did the same in 1990 and 2006. In 2011, the MNLA was founded as the first multiethnic coalition for independence in the region, breaking – at least in theory – with the former ethnically oriented struggle. When the regime of Muammar Gaddafi crumbled that same year, highly trained Kel Tamasheq fighters from the Libyan military joined the new movement, bringing military supplies from Libya with them.[6] According to the MNLA, these forces were further strengthened by soldiers that abandoned the Malian army and joined the liberation movement.[7]

The MNLA successfully defeated the Malian army, but soon after, many competing groups started to appear in the territory. The Defenders of the Faith (Ansar Dine) is a cell that split off from the former Mouvement National de l'Azawad, or MNA (National Movement of Azawad), in the early 1990s. It opposes the secular state model that the MNA and later the MNLA have aimed for. It seeks the implementation of an Islamic state ruled by sharia law, and thus forms a key connection to jihadist groups from the region, such as the Mouvement Pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest, or MUJAO (Movement For Jihad and Unity in West Africa), and Al-Qaida au Maghreb Islamique, or AQMI (Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb). After the declaration of an independent Azawad, a coalition of these latter three was able to marginalize the MNLA, to the

point that it lost control over the territory. It is at that juncture that France's Operation Serval began. It lasted from December 20, 2012 until the summer of 2014, when the mission was rebranded "Operation Barkhane." Starting in July 1, 2013, the French operation was supplemented by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Mali, better known as MINUSMA.[8]

And thus, we find ourselves in the present: faced with the masses of tricolors welcoming the French, one flag overriding the complex history of a region that, ever since its colonization, has struggled to articulate its many different identities due to the administrative structures imposed upon them. The masses of tricolors conceal this complex memory in favor of the colonizer's narrative. The single sign in the desert that Moussa Ag Assarid photographed struggles for a different memory, a different history, far more complex and grounded in several (often conflicting) liberation movements, of which the Azawadian independence struggle is the latest. The struggle is not isolated, as Ag Assarid's photo seems to suggest – many Azawadian flags can be found in the region controlled by the MNLA. But the flag in Ag Assarid's photo is largely invisible within the global political order where the tricolor and its many permutations still rule.

On the one hand, we have the masses of flag-wavers who brought the tricolor back into the eyes of the mass media, instantly legitimizing the French-led mission in northern Mali; on the other, we have a struggle for the creation of a new state, waged by peoples who never accepted the fact that the French handed their territories over to the postcolonial state of Mali. These peoples are waving a different flag, that of their state of Azawad. We are thus dealing with two fundamentally conflicting states performing themselves: the recognized state of Mali, embedded, through the French, in the borderless empire of global capitalism; and the stateless state of Azawad, which enacts the memory of peoples that were never structured in terms of nation-states in the first place, and whose living, insurgent memory continues to resurface.

In his essay, Holert describes the way one of these states – the French through the Malian one – performs itself. I would like to explore the other performance, the one in which stateless peoples, indigenous to the territory – however problematic that term is – articulate the possibility of a state of their own. What exactly is the anatomy of this counter-performance?

Anatomy of a Revolution
The anatomy of the MNLA is a complex one. To comprehend it requires first of all a basic

understanding of the region. The southern part of Mali is home to the capital, Bamako, located in the most fertile and developed part of the country, below the Niger River. Although it has its share of poverty and corruption, Bamako is nonetheless a world apart from Mali's north, which lies above the Niger River in the Sahara Desert. This is where the MNLA has tried to create its new state of Azawad, and where temperatures easily reach fifty degrees centigrade during the day. The region suffers from terrible droughts, hardly knows running water or vegetation, has little to no paved roads, and largely lacks schools and hospitals. Territorially speaking, we are dealing with two geographic entities that have historically always been disconnected, whether under colonial or Malian rule. Development projects have reached little of the north and often remain incomplete – hence the Azawadian belief that it is absurd to consider them part of a state that is unable to even reach them.

To grasp something of the antagonism between the south (Mali) and the north (Azawad) – an antagonism that goes beyond geographic differences – we have to return to the precolonial confederation of "four major ethnic groups (Arabs, Tuareg [Kel Tamasheq], Moors, and

Tubus) … displaying a clear desertic identity in the 3.5 million square miles straddling the Tropic of Cancer and running from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea."[9] Since the Kel Tamasheq are the largest constituency in the MNLA, it is important to examine their internal social and political organization. Kel Tamasheq society is historically organized by social strata that ethnographic researchers have differentiated into five classes: warriors, religious men, free men, craftsmen, and slaves – a class system with a strong emphasis on lineage. This class system had a strong ethnic bias, differences in skin colors between warrior and slave being one of them. This led the French to project their own colonial construct of racial classification upon the region, declaring the Kel Tamasheq as well as Arab peoples "white" and the classes of slaves and servants, in majority Bambara – one of the largest ethnic groups of the Mandé, who were prominent in the medieval Mali Empire – as "black." As historian Baz Lecocq writes:

> To the colonial administration, Tamasheq society combined two races in one social order: "*Blanc*" and "*noir*." Through their own racial perceptions based on phenotype and skin colour, European explorers and French

Jonas Staal, from the series *The Art of Creating a State,* 2014. A village's water tower is painted in the colors of the state of Azawad.

conquerors saw those inhabitants of the Sahara, who would locally most likely be denoted as *shaggaran*, red, as *blanc*, while failing to "see" the locally constructed racial difference between *sattefen* – bluish black – and *koual* – black. Thus, while the lower strata of society were perceived as *noir*, the upper strata of society that would locally be seen as *sattefen* were simply seen as "racially impure."[10]

Lecocq adds that "this divide is not a feature unique to Tamasheq society," as "[o]ther Malian societies, or West African societies in general, know this social divide between slaves and free as well."[11] But the antagonism between the "darker" south versus the "lighter" north, enforced by French classification, partly explains the suppression that the northern rebels have suffered at the hands of the south in the decades since Malian independence. According to Lecocq, the process of integrating the rebels into the Malian state after independence was not without conflict:

> After independence, the new Malian administration set out on an active policy to modernize society and to undo parts of the administrative colonial heritage. Like the French had done before them, but this time based on Marxist theory, the new regime concluded that Tamasheq society was feudal. In order to change this, the "feudal lords" – the traditional chiefs – had to be ousted, and the still existing servile social relations between former slaves and their former masters had to be totally abolished. Paradoxically, part of the pre-existing colonial structure was now formalized by law in order to change the system.[12]

Lecocq refers here to the reforms imposed by the socialist Modibo Keita, who led Mali to independence and served as president from 1960 to 1968. (He was ousted by a military coup led by General Moussa Traoré. A long period of authoritarian rule ensured, ending in 1991.) Keita envisioned the newly independent and social state of Mali as the continuation of the medieval Mali Empire:

> By giving the Republic the name of its adopted medieval predecessor, the Mali Empire, the Republic of Mali presented itself as its rightful heir, and also as the rightful heir to its succeeding kingdoms. Modibo Keita, namesake to the founder of this empire, Sunjata Keita, was without a doubt to any Malian mind a descendant of the great imperial family, and he implicitly

presented himself as such … The colonial period was presented as a short and disturbing interlude to the natural course of history, with only two positive elements: it had brought modern education and technical expertise with which the country could improve its living standards; and it had created the opportunity to reunite most of the areas formerly included in the Mali Empire and succeeding kingdoms into a new state.[13]

Keita's political theory combined Marxist analysis with the specific cultural and religious heritage of the region (as a Muslim, however, he opposed the materialist and secular basis of Marxist class struggle). He was a strong voice in the development of a pan-African movement, and he supported the Non-Aligned Movement as a bulwark against geopolitical interests that might threaten Mali's sovereignty once again. Preceding independence, Keita was frequently arrested by the French government due to his left-wing orientation and anticolonial political work. Even though he did not lead Mali to independence through armed revolution, he was most certainly driven by an ideology of liberation. In his own words:

> Our continent has not benefited from universal evolution. In the middle of the twentieth century, when thanks to technology and science men have found all the means necessary for an easy life, at the moment when, having exhausted all the means of investigation on earth, they seek now, as a diversion, to fly in space, Africa must resolve problems of subsistence, of living conditions, of the struggle against illiteracy, and especially of giving back to African man his confidence in himself, and forever ridding him of the inferiority complex which colonialism has created in him.[14]

Once in power, Keita also engaged in the kind of party-centered authoritarianism that undermined many socialist and communist regimes of the era that tried to enforce egalitarianism through centralized processes of social engineering and planned economy. Keita forcefully imposed collective farming experiments but lacked the means to make mass production a reality. He also introduced a new currency, which quickly led to 50 percent inflation.[15]

The Kel Tamasheq, living far in the north in an area without civil or communications infrastructure, rejected the process of state-building that they had been made a part of. In

Moussa Ag Assarid, from the series The Revolution Is Without Frontiers, 2014. A previously unnamed sculpture in the town of Kidal painted in the colors of the Azawadian flag by artist and radio host Mazou Ibrahim Touré. Today, it is regarded as a monument of Azawadian independence.

Jonas Staal, from the series *The Art of Creating a State,* 2014. Artist, radio host, and calligrahper Mazou Ibrahim Touré in his workplace with one of his many banners, each realized in Tamasheq, Arabic and French, the predominant languages of the unrecognized state of Azawad.

1963 they rebelled. They were met by an inexperienced Malian army, and the battle turned into a massacre. Antagonism deepened with the subsequent suppression of the Kel Tamasheq language (as well as those of other peoples, such as the Songhai and the Fula) in favor of the Bambara people. The Bambara also formed a significant proportion of the historical slave and servant class of the Kel Tamasheq. Then as today, most inhabitants of northern Mali exist off the grid, beyond administration, beyond historical narratives projected onto them, except for their own.[16] It is no surprise then that inhabitants of the north tend to interpret any new effort to rule the region as a continuation of earlier attempts to colonize it. This is the basis for the many rebellions of the Kel Tamasheq – against Keita, against the subsequent military dictatorship that lasted until 1991, and, in 2012, against the Malian government of today (which, as a result of the rebellion, saw another military takeover before new elections in 2013).

The most significant change the Kel Tamasheq have undergone since Malian independence seems to be their self-perception. While prejudices continue to exist, colonization and integration into the Malian state significantly altered the Kel Tamasheq's traditional class structure. Severe droughts in the 1980s forced many Kel Tamasheq people into exile in neighboring countries, causing the fragmentation of countless Kel Tamasheq families. As researcher Melanie Cramer writes, the exiled Kel Tamasheq reinvented their traditional family structures:

> From a practical perspective, this meant that the Tuareg [the Kel Tamasheq] had to develop an alternative to their system of endogamous matrilineal marriages. Instead, new systems were devised. For example, friends might exchange sisters or cousins.This diluted the concept of direct kinship and caused the Tuareg to reimagine a broader shared ancestry at the level of language group.In addition, there were greater interactions of Tuareg from different regions and social backgrounds. The drought had equalized many of them so that in exile, even a noble and slave could become friends.[17]

Thus, over the last half century the people of northern Mali have engaged in a series of liberation struggles that, while not aligned, have nonetheless followed certain similar patterns. Keita's rule revived the Mali Empire as a historic foundation, emphasizing the Bambara people in the development of the socialist state of Mali. During the subsequent military regime, the

peoples of the north, especially the Kel Tamasheq, continued to rebel. Then crises changed their inner organizational structures to the point that, after four uprisings, the new liberation struggle is no longer defined in terms of a single ethnicity, but as a multiethnic coalition of peoples vowing to break with former racial and class divisions, although still without being able to include many Bambara Southerners amongst their ranks. Since 2012, this movement has also started to work with independence movements in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Corsica, Somaliland, and the Philippines, and is of course in continuous dialogue with the larger Amazigh community – the so-called "Berbers,"of which the Kel Tamasheq are a part – and its many liberation movements throughout North Africa.[18]

Thus, the declaration of the new state of Azawad is just as much a response to French colonial rule as it is an answer to the Malian state. Whereas the Malian government and the ethnic groups that dominate it continue to frame the rebels as ruthless oppressors – a reference to the historical enslavement of some of these groups by the Kel Tamasheq – the Azawadians, while recognizing their history of slave ownership, claim that this rhetoric has become a tool of propaganda to legitimize massacres of their people. They decry the passive attitude of the Malian state during severe draughts, suggesting that this inaction was intended to annihilate the government's northern opponent. They also decry Mali's poor governance, corruption, and collusion among military, political, and financial powers.[19]

Here we are confronted with the complex colonial dialectic that Frantz Fanon famously described. He argued that colonial oppression functions in a dual manner. First, colonialism confronts the superstitions, patriarchal structures, and underdevelopment of "feudal" systems with the industrial development of the colonizers:

> During the struggle for freedom, a marked alienation from these practices [superstitions and myths] is observed. The native's back is to the wall, the knife is at his throat (or, more precisely, the electrode at his genitals): he will have no more call for his fancies. After centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantoms, at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which contend for his life – the forces of colonialism.[20]

Second, the colonizer is an occupier, an invading opponent that needs to be defeated. This creates

solidarities across class divides in the colonized population. This can lead to new revolutionary alliances: "in concrete fact *everyone* will be discovered by the troops, *everyone* will be massacred – or *everyone* will be saved. The motto 'look out for yourself,' the atheist's method of salvation, is in this context forbidden."[21]

In the case of Mali, this revolutionary alliance first led to the independent state of Mali under the leadership of Keita, until he was toppled by the military. Today, the state that came about as a result of this military rule is questioned by yet another liberation movement – the MNLA. Does the theory of national liberation include parallel forms of liberation, such as liberation from internal oppression as a means of breaking with structures from the precolonial past? Fanon identifies a complex dialectic that exists between national liberation movements and the colonial states that try to suppress them. But can another dialectic exist, one between successive or parallel – and perhaps conflicting – liberation movements? This is where Holert's analysis of the role of the French flag becomes relevant once more:

> the "flag" (as a concrete material thing and as an abstract symbol) is only interesting in its relationality, as a thing among things, an actant among actants – only interesting when it is experienced as part of an event, as an element of affective encounters or a socio-technological fabric, which is materially and virtually changed in and through these frames.

The Azawadian flag forms the ideological, visual, and performative texture of a stateless state whose vanguard no longer recognizes itself in terms of the "north" and, in their public statements and aims, no longer in terms of a singular people. The space of the desert is injected with a symbol of a complex relationality, a symbol that embodies the heritage of successive processes of internal ethnic and class conflict, colonization, and revolution. In contrast to the mass-performance of the French, which was staged to reinforce France's empire, we have a mass-performance that forms the art of creating a new state.

The Art of Creating a State
The art of creating the new state of Azawad is, at least for now, a project that is de facto stateless in nature. It concerns a "state" that is an existential condition rather than an infrastructural, administrative, and military reality.

Artist, calligrapher, and radio host Mazou Ibrahim Touré, who works in the city of Kidal in

northern Mali/central–East Azawad, is responsible for most MNLA protest slogans and murals. Touré is himself the embodiment of the complex history of the region: his father is Songhai and his mother is Kel Tamasheq, two peoples that have known many conflicts between them. His parents worked for the Malian government, as did he. He is thus one of the many Azawadians who once believed that a united federal state of Mali was the most effective solution (many in the north still believe this). After he struggled to be recognized by the MNLA as a key contributor to the independence movement, Touré was put in charge of all visual communication at the time of the declaration of the new state of Azawad:

> The MNLA realized that the whole world was going to come to see us. So what were we to do, to make clear to the world that we exist? What is the first image journalists and politicians see when they arrive at the airport? One day I had the luck of running into a media team from France 24. I passed by them while they were shooting an item, and I heard a reporter say: "We are here today in Kidal, and the very first thing we see upon arrival is the flag of Azawad" ... These are the flags, the paintings that I had made, the first visual signs of an insurgent Azawad.[22]

This is an important part of the counter-performance: the first signs of the stateless state manifesting itself beyond its own territorial boundaries. Touré explains this counter-performance as follows:

> The first thing is not to wait until others recognize you – other states, in this case. The first thing is to be confident of oneself, to understand that you represent something, because if you have not accepted and internalized that, then others will never recognize you. The recognition of others, *Inshallah* [God willing], will come as result of our belief.[23]

This is what Jolle Demmers, academic and cofounder of the Center for Conflict Studies, refers to as "mocking the state:" an appropriation of state structures in order to build a collective entity *outside of* recognized state structures.[24] In Azawad, the appearance of the new flag on water towers, signs, military uniforms, and regular clothing forms a collective canvas through which a stateless state manifests itself in a new notion of a people – of *peoples.* Touré describes this as a process of new self-recognition.

It seems that this process – in which a state exists in a permanent mode of questioning its own history, language, symbols, and the very meaning of a "people" – can only exist in the revolutionary practice of the stateless state. This condition of permanent revolution is contrary to the monopolization of power that is necessary for a state to naturalize itself into permanence. It resists the very concept of the "national." In traditional national liberation movements, the art of creating a state is based on a population redefining itself from a communalist point of view. The natural endpoint is the monopolizing of state structures. As Jolle Demmers has pointed out, this final process inevitably creates new minorities and new stateless entities.[25] Demmers describes a cycle of violence inherent to the very idea of the state. This brings us to the question of what a liberation movement that renounces the very concept of the state could be.

A Liberation That Concerns Us All

To question the concept of nationalism in liberation struggle is not to diminish either the struggle for Malian independence or the struggle for Azawadian independence. All too often, it is people with passports and money in the bank who celebrate statelessness as some divine, nomadic condition. The Malian and Azawadian independence struggles have demanded autonomy from colonial forces, the right to self-defense, education, education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure, and the importance of these fundamental democratic pillars cannot be underestimated. But we can nonetheless ask whether the next phase of liberation, beyond gaining recognition as a nation, is not confronting the very construct of the state itself – our internalization of its structures and its inherent violence. In recent times, attempts to move beyond the state have been made by Bolivian President Eva Morales – through the notion of "indigenous socialism"[26] – and the Kurdish movement in Rojava (Syria-Kurdistan) – through its concept of "communalism."[27]

What we learn from stateless struggle is to ask the questions that acknowledged governments are no longer asked. For, however critical we ought to be of abuses committed by revolutionary movements demanding new forms of autonomy, as citizens we are blind and powerless to the abuses of our own states. Even though we might formally decry the abuses of the self-proclaimed democracies that we live in, we are also their subjects – we exist in a *state* of dependence. We have to relate to them in order to even critique them. It is exactly this that represses the liberation of our indignation regarding the massacres that have been carried out in the name of the Coalition of the Willing. As

it turns out, the War on Terror after September 11, 2001 was only a mild prelude to the state terror awaiting us. Now, with every bomb that is dropped on the self-proclaimed Islamic State, another stage in a guerrilla war is fueled – a guerrilla war that will reach far, far beyond the limits of Syria and Iraq.

Ultranationalist discourse has made sure that those colonized and criminalized *within the state* are guaranteed to become new recruits in this guerrilla war; and our very own governments cannot wait to kick-start a new phase of eroding what's left of civil rights, the rule of law, and democratic institutions. Only recently, the UN Security Council *unanimously* decided that the mere suspicion of terrorist activity can be enough to strip citizens of their passports, so they can be bombed safely without having to consider international law.[28] In other words, to the extent that we should consider our states to even still exist, we are soon to be rendered stateless within them. So when something is presented to us as a "terrorist," "separatist," or "stateless" struggle, we ought to look carefully, listen, and learn.

Between the Coalition of the Willing and the Islamic State, there is no true choice: both wish for a total state, beyond boundaries; and both benefit endlessly from the other's aggression, the Islamic State being largely a product of Western intervention, and Western interventionism continuously profiting from its self-manufactured opponent. The state as such has become inflated, totalized, to the point where we need a new political horizon.

While what is left of democracy is being consumed through these total states, our question – in line with the Azawadian Slogan "*La Revolution est Sans Frontière*" (The Revolution is Without Frontiers)–is, how we can liberate democracy from our states? How do we redefine the *practice* of democracy without the *construct* of the state? Our liberation, I believe, is to enact, in the face of the total states arising before us, a *stateless democracy*.

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Jonas Staal is a visual artist whose work deals with the relation between art, propaganda, and democracy. He is the founder of the artistic and political organization New World Summit, which develops parliaments for organizations excluded from democracy, and the New World Academy (together with BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht), which invites artists and students to work together with organizations invested in progressive political projects. He is also the initiator of the Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennale, a free smartphone app that provides insight on the social, political, economic and overall ideological backgrounds of every pavilion in the 2013 biennale. His upcoming book *Nosso Lar, Brasília* (Capacete & Jap Sam Books, 2014) investigates the relationship between spiritism and modernism in Brazilian architecture. His latest book, *The Art of Creating a State* (with writer Moussa Ag Assarid) can be downloaded here http://newworldsummit.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/The-Art-of-Creating-a-State.pdf Staal is currently working on his PhD on Art and Propaganda in the twenty-first Century at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands. http://www.jonasstaal.nl

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Berny Sèbe, "A Fragmented and Forgotten Decolonization: The End of European Empires in the Sahara and Their Legacy," in *Francophone Africa at Fifty*, eds. Tony Chafer and Alexander Keese (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 205–206.

6
Jeremy Keenan, "Mali's Tuareg rebellion: What next?," Al Jazeera, March 20, 2012 http://www.aljazeera.com/ind epth/opinion/2012/03/2012320 8133276463.html

7
Information about the desertion of Malian soldiers is scattered, and although confirmed by several news sources, it is impossible to get an overview of their exact numbers.

8
The basis for the MINUSMA mission was laid out in Security Council Resolution 2100, April 25, 2013 http://www.un.org/en/peaceke eping/missions/minusma/docum ents/mali%20_2100_E_.pdf

9
Berny Sèbe, "A Fragmented and Forgotten Decolonization," 205.

10
Baz Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 84 https://openaccess.leidenuni v.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/1 8540/ASC-075287668-288701.pd f?sequence=2

11
Ibid., 7.

12

13
Ibid., 13.

13
Ibid, 61.

14
Modibo Keita quoted in Francis G. Snyder, "The Political Thought of Modibo Keita," *Journal of African Studies* vol. 5, no. 1 (May 1967).

15
"The US-RDA's [*Union Soudanaise–Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine*] high modernist social economic policies were unrealistic and unwanted, and they proved to be a failure in the end for more or less the same reasons as they were a failure elsewhere in the country: Too few material and financial investments, and too much reliance on willpower. But perhaps more so than elsewhere in Mali, the patronising attitude of the regime toward the population, informed by existing stereotypical ideas, caused a build-up of tension that would in the end form one of the root causes of the rebellion. The regime's lack of understanding of local work ethics, gender relations, social dynamics, and political power structures led to a wavering policy that was much resented among a population bent on preserving the colonial social-political legacy." Baz Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 116.

16
Meeting a Kel Tamasheq delegation from France, I spoke with a young man who told me he had grown up in one of the most deserted parts of northern Mali. Once, when he left Malian territory to travel further northward, he encountered a Libyan checkpoint. He was asked for his papers. He not only had no papers; he didn't even know that he lived in a state named Mali, nor that there was a neighboring state called Libya. This story might have been embellished, but it is a fact that for most northerners, administration is absent. For example, dates of birth and age are unknown, and many northerners live without passports or other forms of identity documents. Moussa Ag Assarid, one of my main contacts in the liberation movement, made up his date of birth on the spot when he first applied for a passport.

17
Marissa Cramer, "From Nomads to Nationalists," 9.

18
Of this I can testify personally, due to my direct collaboration with Moussa Ag Assarid, writer and European representative of the MNLA, with whom I was present during several of these meetings and public declarations of mutual solidarity.

19
Andy Morgan – interestingly enough the manager of the

world-famous militant Kel Tamasheq band Tinariwen – regularly engages in debates on the Azawadian revolution. Speaking about the historiography proposed by his artists, he argues that "the first rebellion of 1963 and its brutal suppression by a paranoid and inexperienced Malian army ensured that relations between the central government and their far-flung nomads in the north got off to the worst possible start. The bitterness generated by the conflict was deepened by the terrible droughts of 1972–73, during which up to 80 percent of the northern animal herds died and thousands of Tuareg families were forced to flee the country in search of food and work. The corrupt misappropriation of aid by government officials during the crisis only made things worse." – Andy Morgan, "What do the Tuaregs want?," Al Jazeera, January 9, 2014 http://www.aljazeera.com/ind epth/opinion/2014/01/what-do -tuareg-want-201419139234984 38.html

20
Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 37.

21
Ibid., 45.

22
The Art of Creating a State, eds. Moussa Ag Assarid and Jonas Staal (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, 2014), 94.

23
Ibid., 94–95.

24
Jolle Demmers shared a series of reflections on the concept of "mocking the state" in a debate with Moussa Ag Assarid during the inauguration of the New World Embassy of Azawad at BAK (basis voor actuele kunst) in Utrecht, September 9, 2014.

25
Demmers made this point during her introductory remarks for the "Global State" block of the 4th New World Summit on the Stateless State, September 19–21 2014, Royal Flemish Theater (KVS), Brussels. Demmers served as chair of the Global State block.

26
In an interview with Al Jazeera, Eva Morales spoke about the concept of indigenous socialism: "On the topic of Socialism, every country has its peculiarities ... It is our obligation to protect the rights of our 'Pacha Mama.' It is a very different characteristic [of Socialism] that comes from the indigenous movement. I still firmly believe that regaining or re-establishing this way of life – living in solidarity and complementarity – is the best political, social and economic tool for combatting capitalism and imperialism."

http://www.aljazeera.com/pro grammes/talktojazeera/2014/1 0/evo-morales-bolivian-idol- 201410171100284921.html

27
In early November of this year, I had the chance to interview Saleh Muslim, who is copresident of the Democratic Unity Party (PYD) and who represents the people's armies of the Rojava region. He explained the region's model of democratic autonomy as follows: "Together with the ethnic and religious minorities of the region – Arabs, Turkmen, Assyrians, Armenians, Christians, Kurds – we have written a collective political structure for these autonomous cantons: our *social contract*. We have established a people's council including 101 representatives from all cooperatives, committees and assembly's running each of our cantons. And we established a model of co-presidency – each political entity always has both a female and a male president – and a quota of 40% gender representation in order to enforce gender equality throughout all forms of public life and political representation. We have, in essence, developed a democracy without the state." http://tenk.cc/2014/11/a-rev olution-of-life/

28
Security Council Resolution 2178, September 24, 2014 http://www.un.org/press/en/2 014/sc11580.doc.htm