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**Aït Khbach Nomads and A Thousand Plateaus:
An Investigation into the Challenges of Nomadism using Concepts from
Deleuze and Guattari**

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Africa, Morocco, Drâa-Tafilalet Region

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Abstract:

The Aït Khbach nomads of Drâa-Tafilalet Region in Morocco face several challenges to their lifestyle. Namely, their obstacles relate directly to desertification and the state. Through interviews with the Aït Khbach, this paper seeks to present their narratives. Additionally, this paper grapples with the metaphysics of nomadism and the groundwork of its praxis. In their work, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari construct concepts, such as smooth space, the state apparatus, and nomadism, which can be utilized pragmatically to complement and explore the narratives of Aït Khbach nomads.

Keywords: Nomadism, Desertification, Gilles Deleuze

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I. Introduction

An official census of 2014 reported 25,000 people living nomadically in Morocco, which is a 60% decrease of nomadic populations from the decade prior.¹ Now, almost ten years later, that figure continues to fall. This phenomenon lies at the convergence of several critical issues of our epoch, such as climate change, borders, and the marginalization of indigenous peoples. Yet, in the Drâa-Tafilalet region of Morocco, these issues manifest through various articulations that are specific to each nomadic family. Hence, it is imperative to approach this topic through the personal accounts of the nomads.

The people of the Aït Khbach tribe, part of the larger Aït Atta confederation, are the indigenous people to Southeast Drâa-Tafilalet. The desert terrain of the area is diverse, with towering sand dunes, mountains, and expansive rocky plains. Although the majority of the Aït Khbach live sedentarily in small towns, a portion of the tribe still lives nomadically in the unincorporated desert near the Algerian border. Through seven interviews with different nomadic Aït Khbach families, I gathered information about their ways of life and the obstacles they encounter.

The method of this research takes two approaches: anthropological and philosophical. Although the two disciplines are often intertwined, they operate through different means. Consequently, since philosophy and anthropology function in different domains, they complement each other when combined, forming new perspectives and

¹ Starling, Marlowe, Rana Morsy, Rishabh R. Jain, Brahim Alae, and Kira Kay. "Meet the Amazigh Nomads Fighting Climate Change in Morocco." PBS, September 22, 2023. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/peril-and-promise/2023/09/while-moroccos-atlas-region-recovers-from-a-devastating-earthquake-another-crisis-threatens-to-eradicate-a-way-of-life/>.

ideas which are inaccessible to either discipline in isolation. Thus, the present paper lies in the tension between theoretical and practical, empirical and abstract, virtual and actual; it is an attempt to address both sides of these binaries and investigate their relations. Prior to this, however, we must understand the terms of the two disciplines' combination.

My double-method approach will pursue multiple questions and objectives. Regarding theory, I will review concepts from Deleuze and Guattari's book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, and subsequent critiques, in order to learn if they are ethical and applicable in section II. To this end, I will question the relation between nomads as virtual concepts and nomads as actual people. The answer to the latter will be pivotal in finding a helpful philosophical framework to use for analysis. Next, in section III, I will inquire into the history of the Aït Khabach through two interviews in order to briefly contextualize their position². In section IV, I will provide an account of my fieldwork and data collection. The heart of this paper is contained in sections V and VI, where I will present and explore the narratives of Aït Khabach nomads, with special attention to the themes of subsistence, desertification, movement, and relation to state. By sharing their stories, I aspire to elevate Aït Khabach voices; by analyzing their challenges, I aim to create new ways of thinking about their situation.

II. The Nomad as Concept

Although the importance of this paper lies in testimonies of the Aït Khabach nomads, it is also crucial to find philosophical concepts that complement, and help

² I encourage the reader to consult the works of Michael Peyron and Cynthia Becker for a more in depth exploration of Amazigh history

make sense of their predicaments. In their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari invent a vast network of concepts that may lend themselves to this procedure. Ideas such as smooth/striated space, the state apparatus, de/reterritorialization and of course, the nomad seem especially applicable. However, it is necessary to maintain a critical examination of these concepts and attempt to understand how they function. My aim in this section is to explore Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomad, review the heated debates over the concept, and address these discussions in order to find a useful metaphysical framework for the study.

A Thousand Plateaus is, as Brian Massumi aptly puts it, “a positive exercise in the affirmative ‘nomad’ thought.”³ What is meant by this? It is an attempt of thinking outside the categories of identity and representation— categories of the state and significations of the established order. Composed of ‘plateaus’ instead of chapters, it is a book of experimental philosophy which employs the method of creating concepts to work against what Deleuze calls “the dogmatic image of thought,”⁴ which assumes an upright nature of thought. This method is partly why it is infamously difficult to read, since it devoid of an external, central organizing principle; it is intentionally all over the place and non-linear. Instead of thought as a systematic, arborescent model, Deleuze and Guattari intend a rhizomatic model of thought: one which is non-hierarchical, always finding new lines of flight, and fundamentally creative. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari present the reader with an open system and a pragmatic conceptual toolbox— a notion we will return to.

³ Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi. “Pleasures of Philosophy.” Foreword. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, xi. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.

⁴ See *Difference and Repetition*, Chapter 4

For Deleuze and Guattari, “The primary determination of nomads is to occupy and hold a smooth space: it is this aspect that determines them as nomad (essence).” (ATP 410). Consequently, an understanding of smooth space is necessary for describing the concept of nomad. A smooth space is unincorporated, open, and the space of becoming; Deleuze and Guattari use the physical examples the desert, the steppe, and the ocean. Unlike the gridded, striated space of the city, nomads occupy these smooth spaces. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, smooth spaces and nomads are not, however, strictly physical: A Thousand Plateaus is considered a smooth space for nomadic thought, with its continuous variation and amorphous content; conversely, the striated space is the nonphysical structure of the book, which is constituted through axioms, propositions, and even grammar. The latter example is also an illustration of how these two spaces are opposed, but never independent from one another. In a smooth space, the reader is encouraged to read out of order, flipping to different plateaus as points in a trajectory of their own creation. In a plateau titled “The Smooth and the Striated,” Deleuze and Guattari write:

In striated space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another. In the smooth, it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory. This was already the case among the nomads for the clothes-tent-space vector of the outside. The dwelling is subordinated to the journey; inside space conforms to outside space: tent, igloo, boat. There are stops and trajectories in both the smooth and the striated. But in smooth space, the stop follows from the trajectory [...] (478).

This passage is a lucid illustration of the nomad’s relation to space that may be germane for subsequent discussions. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the nomad is constantly in a strategic movement of displacement from point to point. The nomad is

an agent of deterritorialization within a locality because they are perpetually in a state of movement, fluidity, and displacement. The aforementioned examples are by no means an exhaustive elucidation of Deleuze and Guattari's notions on nomadism, but serve as provisional entrance into their concept.

It is important to note that when they speak of the nomad, it is not a particular one, nor *necessarily* an actual nomad. Instead, as Eugene Holland notes,⁵ it is a conceptual personae, which Deleuze and Guattari explain "is the becoming or the subject of a philosophy, on a par with the philosopher."⁶ Examples from other philosophers include Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Descartes's Idiot, and even Plato's Socrates. These conceptual personae reside on a virtual level rather than one of actuality, although they are derived from latter. At bottom, the conceptual personae allows the thinker to inhabit a newly created perspective and opens up new trajectories of thought.

Deleuze and Guattari build their conceptual personae of the nomad with etymological, historical, and ethnographical components. The concept of the nomad is partially constructed from the Greek word *nomos*, which has the common meaning of "law," but also of "pasture." Thus, the etymology of the word nomad is traced back to a notion of roaming to find a pasture in antiquity. A pasture is determined by the animals that organize it in their grazing and the pasture comes to be defined by the animals that create it as a space of grazing. In a relevant article titled "Nomos of Deleuze and Guattari," Cowan notes the word "nomos as law derives from earlier senses that suggest

⁵ Holland, Eugene W. "Representation and Misrepresentation in Postcolonial Literature and Theory." *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 1 (2003): 163–64. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.2003.0008>.

⁶ Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari, Hugh Tomlinson, and Graham Burchell. "Conceptual Personae." Essay. In *What Is Philosophy?*, 64. London: Verso, 2015.

self-organization without any transcendental template.”⁷ This is what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they write, “The nomos came to designate the law, but that was originally because it was distribution, a mode of distribution. It is a very special kind of distribution, one without division into shares, in a space without borders or enclosure.”⁸ Hence, it is in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari use nomos in their concept of nomad: it denotes that which organizes or creates its own laws and land– self determination. This component of the concept is deeply important, leading Holland, in his work on *A Thousand Plateaus*, to write, “Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of nomadism depends as much (if not more) on the term nomos in Greek philosophy (and on its differential relations with polis and logos [353, 369-73, 384-6]) as on nomadic people themselves [...]”⁹ Thus, besides its etymological components, the conception of nomad is also drawn from descriptions of nomadic peoples within history and from ethnographies. To build their concept, they draw from a number of historians and anthropologists, including: Ibn Khaldun, Robert Lowie, Arnold Toynbee, Pierre Hubac, Jose Emperaire, Anny Milovanoff, Montgomery Watt, and many others. The use of these historical ethnographic accounts is the source of much controversy for scholars such as Christopher L. Miller and Mokhtar Ghambou; they launch criticisms that must be heard and addressed.

⁷ Cowan, Bainard. “Nomos of Deleuze and Guattari.” 280. Academia.edu, July 14, 2014. https://www.academia.edu/7659015/Nomos_of_Deleuze_and_Guattari.

⁸ Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi. “1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine.” Essay. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 380. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.

⁹ Holland, Eugene W. In *Deleuze and Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus: A Reader’s Guide*, 123–24. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Miller is especially critical of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadism in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and he draws attention to the footnotes of the book in order to demonstrate their problematic roots. His article, "The Postidentitarian Predicament in the Footnotes of *A Thousand Plateaus*: Nomadology, Anthropology, and Authority" is an unconventional critique: "What I aim to do here is to read a dimension that should not exist— to read the referential within a universe that is supposed to be purely virtual."¹⁰ Miller follows with examples of how Deleuze and Guattari draw from problematic ethnographic sources, such as Hubac, to create their virtual concepts. He holds them to be representations reproduced in thought that is supposed to be anti-representational—a move that apparently invalidates much of Deleuze and Guattari's work. Following this discussion, Miller writes that "Behind all these questions and behind all uses of anthropology lurks the condition without which anthropology would not have come into being: colonialism and its project of controlling by knowing" (20). Although Deleuze and Guattari hold philosophy to be the creation of concepts in a virtual, self-referential space, Miller argues that the concepts cannot be disentangled from the references that birthed them. Summarizing his position in a later article, he writes:

To be clear, my objection is not to antirealism in philosophy, nor to 'pure,' virtual concepts. My reservations bear on what seems to me the bad faith of a consistent Deleuzian attempt to have it all ways: 1) to leave the real behind, yet 2) remain engaged with it, yet 3) not be accountable for contact with it. It is the constellation of all three of those conditions that I find problematic."

¹⁰ Miller, Christopher L. "The Postidentitarian Predicament in the Footnotes of a Thousand Plateaus: Nomadology, Anthropology, and Authority." *Diacritics* 23, no. 3 (1993): 9. <https://doi.org/10.2307/465398>.

By this move, Miller calls us to reject Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomad, since he understands it to be always contaminated with representation, colonial tendencies, and anthropological authority. He wants to set limits on how Deleuze and Guattari situate their philosophical concepts in the relation between virtual and actual.

In a similar critique, Mokhtar Ghambou decries the postcolonial use of nomadism for critical purposes. Echoing Miller's sentiment, Ghambou writes, "Considering that nomadology is a poststructuralist theory that essentially models its subject on 'authentic' nomads from the Sahara, Arabia, Mongolia, Aboriginal Australia, and Native America, it is intriguing, indeed, that postcolonial critics participate in such a discourse without first verifying its epistemological foundations."¹¹ One of Ghambou's primary concerns of the paper lies in nomadism's "misleading flexibility" (13), and dwells on the ambiguity of the term: he queries if it is used metaphorically, literally, authentically, or critically. The most dangerous outcome of its usage, Ghambou writes, is the perpetuation of a exotic myth, or what he terms as the Western 'nomadist discourse' (2). The article ends with a powerful punch that must be addressed if the concept of the nomad is to be employed in any fashion: "As long as nomadism continues to enjoy its multiple and flexible meanings, it risks recycling all the myths and discourses of power we thought we had already dismantled" (13).

Responding to these critiques, Eugene Holland provides a defense of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomad. Primarily responding to Miller, he retorts with an argument that orients their philosophy, and situates what they are doing by outlining *how* they are doing it. Bringing in crucial aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy—that neither Miller or Ghambou address—Holland explains:

¹¹ Ghambou, Mokhtar "A Critique of Post/Colonial Nomadism," *Journal X*: Vol. 6, No. 1 (2020) Article 5: 2. Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jx/vol6/iss1/5>

They devote a good part of *What Is Philosophy?* to rigorously distinguishing philosophical concepts from scientific ones. Unlike science, which is representative, philosophy is creative, serving as a kind of relay between one practical orientation to the world and another, new (and hopefully improved) one. Philosophy responds to problems that arise when a given mode of existence or practical orientation no longer satisfies. Such problems are real enough, but they are not reducible to reality.¹²

Thus, Holland asserts a fundamental misreading of *A Thousand Plateaus* by its critics. Although Miller would accuse Holland of “orthodoxy”¹³ in a subsequent response, Holland makes a strong case for why Deleuze and Guattari might use dated, problematic historical and ethnographic sources. It seems baffling that the authors of *Anti-Oedipus*, which contains long sections attacking colonialism,¹⁴ would make such a heavy handed mistake. What’s more, Holland continues, “A relatively small number of ethnographic works on nomads is cited— alongside a much greater number of works from philosophy, mathematics, history of science, political theory, and other fields Miller doesn't care to mention” (164). I read these points as a compelling defense against Miller and Ghambou’s critiques, since it answers them by highlighting parts of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy which they are silent on. Miller and Ghambou require deeper philosophical engagement and argumentation with Deleuze and Guattari— especially concerning their book *What is Philosophy?*— before rejecting their concepts.

¹² Holland, Eugene W. “Representation and Misrepresentation in Postcolonial Literature and Theory.” *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 1 (2003): 163. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.2003.0008>.

¹³ "Miller, Christopher L. “‘We Shouldn’t Judge Deleuze and Guattari’: A Response to Eugene Holland.” *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 3 (2003): 135. <https://doi.org/10.2979/ral.2003.34.3.129>.

¹⁴ See *Anti-Oedipus*, Chapter 2

So, the fundamental question of how the concept of nomad is situated between the virtual and the actual seems resolved, but this still leaves questions on its applicability to the world. Ghambou's criticism that the concept reinforces a mythical, exotic narrative is one we must take seriously: if the use of nomad as a concept is interpreted as referring to actual people, we partake in the perpetuation of the colonial spirit. However, if it is used pragmatically to make sense of problems in the world, while acknowledging that the concept is not in reference to actual nomads, then it will render itself as a conceptual tool devoid of harming or representing others. Hence, the concept of nomad in *A Thousand Plateaus* does not represent or refer to actual ones, but it may aid in thinking about them, just as the concept may lend itself as useful in other experiences. The concept does not refer to the actual, the actual forms the concept— it is prior. In terms of my present project, I will not impose the theory onto my experience, but rather, impose my experience onto the theory. Recalling what I wrote in the Introduction, the paper lies in the tension between theoretical and practical, empirical and abstract, virtual and actual. The concepts of smooth/striated space, nomadism, and others will be employed in a highly pragmatic sense for understanding my experience. Additionally, I have intentionally left out related concepts of *A Thousand Plateaus*, such as 'the war machine' out of this study because they are simply not useful. The concepts are selected situationally for this study, and purely for their functionality. As Deleuze said in an exchange with Michel Foucault, "that's what a theory is, exactly like a tool box."¹⁵ My hope is that utilization of metaphysics in this way will point toward new directions, new conceptions, or new answers.

¹⁵ Deleuze, Gilles, and David Lapoujade. "Intellectuals and Power." Essay. In *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 208. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004.

III. Local History Directly from the Aït Khbach

To properly introduce the people in this study, it is important to cover their rich, complex history. As mentioned in the introduction, this section will primarily cover recent history of the people and the region as opposed to a deep exploration into centuries of nomadism in the area. I have made this decision for the sake of brevity and relevance, but also for the sake of tradition: Amazigh history has always been an oral tradition, passed down through generations, and this is how I received it. The historical contextualization of the people in this study does not derive from scholarly records, but from the people themselves. Aside from basic, commonly known facts for a general biographical sketch of the Amazigh, all the information in this section draws from the people. I obtained historical accounts through interviews with my local guide, Brahim, and the grandmother of Hmad.

The Amazigh are the indigenous people of the Maghreb region in North Africa who belong to various tribes. Although they have significant populations in Mali, Niger, Tunisia, and Libya, the Amazigh are primarily located in Algeria and Morocco. The Amazigh are also known as Berbers, but due to the origin of the word 'berber' coming from the root as the word 'barbarian,' there is debate on the ethicality of its use. Consequently, I will refer to them by their self-given name. The word Amazigh roughly translates to "free men," and it is a testament to their spirit of independence. Amazigh people speak a number of related, but different languages; each one is lumped under the umbrella term 'Tamazight.' For example, in the area where this research takes place, people speak the Tachelhit variety of Tamazight, and most of them belong to the Aït Khbach tribe. The Aït Khbach are united with other tribes under the Aït Atta tribal

confederation. 'Aït' translates roughly to 'the people of,' and it is in front of every Amazigh tribe name in the region.

Brahim and Hmad's grandmother are highly knowledgeable of the history of nomads in the area because it is also the history of their families and communities. Hmad's family were some of the first inhabitants of the Taouz, which is where he lives today; before settling there, his ancestors lived nomadically. Brahim told me that Taouz, Ouzina and Bagaa were the original places of nomads in Southeast Morocco. There, they mined Antimony, a metal they used for medicinal and cosmetic purposes, and treated it in the sedentary town of Rissani. There, they traded for foods such as onions, green beans, eggplants, peppers and dates. As they moved around the region, they would sprinkle the seeds from this food in local oases, which grew to be a food source for them. In Taouz, they dug wells that led them to be more agrarian in addition to their pastoralism, using their camels and cattle for plowing. The different tribes of the area would draw water from the wells using buckets made from camel wool and thin green tree branches. This was their subsistence and lifestyle until the arrival of the French colonization.

The French colonization was a brutal and oppressive authority to the Amazigh in the area, especially to the nomads who resisted. Brahim told me that the nomads had no weapons to defend themselves against the colonizers, so they fled to Tiharyin, near Ouzinathe, and climbed the mountains where the French soldiers could not find them. Some also ran to Bagaa and Béchar, which is on the Algerian side of the border. According to Hmad's grandmother, only men managed to run at that time, and soldiers brought back women and children after catching them, and some of them died on the treacherous journey back to Taouz. French soldiers rode horses and used military

aircrafts, so they had an advantage for chasing the nomads. Disturbingly, when the military caught nomads running, they put them in chains and forced them to show where other nomad camps were; if they led them to the wrong place, the nomads were beaten, tortured, and eventually killed. The soldiers were so insistent on capturing nomads that they sometimes followed them until they reached the Atlantic coast. Hmad's grandmother also highlighted the horrific internal divisions this dynamic created: for example, she told a story of a man who spent the night with his friend who was running from authorities, and the next morning he took his friend to the colonial bureau in Taouz; later, the soldiers let the captured man run inside a dry riverbed and proceeded to shoot him. The people who came back to Taouz on their own accord were not imprisoned, but the ones who got caught running were. The French erected a prison in Taouz for this purpose, which still stands to this day. Some Aït Khbach did not run, and they stayed in the French controlled towns, such as Taouz.

In the towns, colonial authorities subjected the Aït Khbach people to violent punishments if they displayed any resistance. According to Brahim, those who refused to obey became enslaved, shackled with chains, and forced to work by the French colonizers. They also took control of the nomad's sheep herds, making them herd their sheep for the profit of the French. Hmad's grandmother explained that women who did not have a husband used to work for soldiers, especially nomadic women. Under their colonization, one either had to obey or become a slave. The mines the nomads used to excavate also became a site of French control. Brahim told me about a nearby mine where the colonizers would make the locals work without pay, and only give them meager rations of lentils, oil, tea, and sugar— in Brahim's words, "literally nothing!" Hmad's grandmother also spoke of an 'Asgas N Rouz' which means 'Rice's year' when

soldiers used to give small portions of rice to people after finishing work including road construction. The French colonial powers also instituted a school in Taouz, and authorities only permitted students to advance until the sixth grade. If a student studied for two more years in the neighboring town of Erfoud and the distant city of Meknes, they could become employees. However, there were few options for employment after school: it was either join the French military or become a teacher. This form of colonial rule left deep scars on the region and the Aït Khbach tribe. As Hmad's grandmother put it, "it was really bad times for Aït Khbach."

After colonial rule, many nomads returned to the places they formerly inhabited. The towns grew, and the number of nomads began to fall. The effects of climate change and consequent desertification began to exert themselves more and more noticeably, and it is why Brahim's family moved from Taouz to Bagaa in the 1960s, which is where he grew up. In the 1990s, tourism started to trickle in from over the Atlas Mountains, with tourists coming in 4x4 vehicles and staying in Erfoud. Eventually, it became a massive trend starting in the 2010s, which greatly shifted the economy.

IV. Fieldwork

With the help of Brahim, Hmad, and Ali, I collected the data for this research through interviews and observation during days of fieldwork. In four intensive days over the span of three weeks, we recorded seven interviews, each from a different nomad family. On days of fieldwork, Brahim, Ali, Hmad and I set out from either Taouz or Merzouga to travel deep into the desert. We traveled using Ali's 4x4 Toyota, which was always necessary because we rarely encountered roads, and when we did, they were

unpaved and unsuitable for most cars. Brahim, who is very knowledgeable of the land and knows the nomadic communities well, directed us to each of the camps. However, as one might anticipate in a study with nomads, there were several occasions where we could not locate them. When they were absent, it was either because they were away from their tents herding their goats, or because they moved their camp to an entirely new location. When we were able to find the nomads, we greeted, sat, and conversed with them. In most of our encounters, they were hospitable, offering us tea and nuts. The Aït Khbach nomads are generally friendly, but also conservative, and they do not give their trust easily to people outside of their inner circle; for this reason, most of their names are not disclosed in this research. During these visits, Hmad obtained their consent to participate in my study, and he asked them my research questions in Tachelhit. After this process, we would say farewells and drive to the next location. On these days, Ali brought seasoned meat to cook over a fire for lunch. Hmad and I usually collected firewood, while Ali made a salad and Brahim was responsible for cooking the meat. After lunch, we continued our journey to find other sites of nomad tents. In the evening, if it was not too late, we drove back to Brahim's house in Taouz to relax with coffee or tea. In the days following each fieldwork day, Hmad translated the interviews from Tachelhit to English and sent them to me. This was my general process for data collection, and the following is a brief description of my fieldwork.

On our first day, we started at Taouz and traveled thirty kilometers to Tijkht, which has one of the biggest mines in the area, where nomads sometimes work. On our drive, Hmad told me of an unorthodox practice the nomads of this area partake in: there is a Jinn (an intelligent spirit that can take the form of humans or animals in Islam) believed to be in the area, and the nomads make animal sacrifices as offerings to the

Jinn. Hmad added that this practice of animal sacrifice does not correspond to traditional Islamic beliefs. Then, we arrived at their camp of three tents situated at the base of a small mountain. Like most we would encounter later, the nomad family constructed their tents using a patchwork of different fabrics, such as rugs, blankets, and clothes; the different fabrics are held up and structured by tree branches and ropes. At this site, we spoke to the mother of the family, who had her baby strapped to her back, and her two other young children watched us from inside one of the tents. Eventually, the father returned from tending to their animals, whom we spoke to as well. After our interview with them, we traveled down a dirt road and came to their well, where the grandfather of the family sat. We crouched in the shade of Ali's car and spoke with the old man for a while before continuing. Later that day, after lunch, we reached another encampment in Ramlia. In this camp, there were several families; the men sat around a fire while the women and children were spread around the camp. The men cooked fatty goat meat over the fire, which they gave to us with tea. Hmad told me that they were having a meeting, so we decided it was best to leave and not interrupt their business. Heading back, we drove past the Ouzina dunes, and we finished our day at Brahim's house in Taouz.

Our second day was a shorter, but equally eventful day. We drove about from Taouz to Rfi'ia, which is about thirteen kilometers from Merzouga. Brahim directed us to an area where there were a few nomad tents, but no one was there because they were herding their goats. Then, we reached a nomad family that Brahim was friends with. The camp itself was on a vast, flat terrain near the Algerian border. We were greeted enthusiastically by the father of the family, who invited us into his tent for tea and snacks. After our interview with him, he climbed into the car with us, and we drove

about two kilometers to the tents where the rest of his family lived. On the way, he pointed out the place where they formerly lived, and we learned from the man that Hmad's grandfather used to live as a nomad in that area. We arrived at the other tents and visited with the mother of the family, who was busy weaving a rug on a traditional loom. Hmad told me that this method of weaving rugs has been used for centuries by Amazigh women. As I sat across from the old woman weaving, I observed an eclectic collection of objects hanging from the walls and ceiling of the tent: bags full of papers, bags of food, clothes, car batteries, and meat drying on a stick. After more tea and generous hospitality, we headed back towards Merzouga. We encountered more tents on our drive back, but we did not stop this time because there were only children at these camps, and we did not see any adults present.

The third day of fieldwork was highly productive. Ali, Brahim, and Hmad picked me up from Merzouga— the small town I lived in during this period— and we set out north towards Errachidia. Before the towering dunes of Merzouga were out of sight, we turned off the main road onto a long stretch of barren land, where we found our first tents of the day. A middle-aged woman invited us to sit in a large tent for tea, and we conducted our interview with the company of her cat. Next, we traveled off road past small dunes to another camp; this one consisted of both tents and more permanent rock buildings. We were met by two young men, and we sat on the rocky ground near their tents. After conversing with them for about an hour, we set out for our next site. On our way, we passed through Oasis Sfsaf, which is where one of the first Aït Khbach tribes used to live and throw their date seeds after eating, producing a large palm grove. I was told by Hmad that the oasis is called Sfsaf because it used to be full of Eucalyptus trees (أو كالتوس), but due to desertification in the area, they have all died. Then, we stopped for

a delicious lunch and Brahim recounted the local history. Afterwards, we drove on the eastern side of the Merzouga dunes, where there is a large number of nomad tents; however, these tents are meant for tourist visitors, and the people who are in the tents are not truly nomadic because they live in houses in Merzouga. Since they do not accurately represent nomadic living, we did not stop at any of these tents. For our last interview of the day, we met with a family that Brahim knew well. We spoke with the grandmother of the family as she sat and washed clothes, and then we sat with her in a tent and enjoyed tea that was brewed by her daughter, but we did not conduct an interview with her. A powerful dust cloud carried by wind began to encroach from the south, so we decided to say our goodbyes and finish for the day.

On our fourth day of fieldwork, we set out on a long drive to the west for our final interviews. The trip was so lengthy on our final day because we already visited all of the nomads that were in close proximity to Taouz and Merzouga. For our first interview, we met with a nomad family of two women, a man, and a young boy about the age of three. They kept their goats in a corral close to their tents, and like many other camps we visited, their tents were made of various connected fabrics. We learned that the boy was not their child: the family adopted him because his mother died recently. We spoke with them for a while, and then continued deeper into the rocky, mountainous desert. Soon, we came to a place where Brahim anticipated to find a camp, but the nomads moved their tents to a different location that we could not find. Traveling to our next site, we passed a small white building in the middle of an expansive flat terrain. Hmad explained to me that the structure was a tomb of a man named Sidi Ali, and told me that the local nomads use it as a shrine to visit and ask his spirit for wealth and success. Again, he stressed to me that this practice does not correspond to strict Muslim beliefs. As the sun

started to set, we finally reached our next site, which was near the locality of Mharch. These nomads lived in stone structures because they stopped moving from place to place a few years prior. They were a large family of three generations: two grandparents, two middle aged women, and about six children. We spoke with the elders of the family, and Hmad interviewed the grandmother. She bore the traditional Amazigh tattoos on her forehead and wore large silver bracelets— both of these customs are less common among today's younger Amazigh generations. As dusk approached, we drove to the last encampment in Chouarf, where we met our final nomad family. The four of us spoke to the mother and father of the family, who explained to us that their older children moved to towns because they did not want to live nomadically. However, their younger children still lived with them, and they ran around playing during our visit. After the interview was complete, we drove back in the darkness through Rissani to Merzouga.

V. Voices of the Aït Khbach Nomads

The interviews I collected with the help of Hmad provided fascinating insights into the nomadic Aït Khbach way of life. It should be noted, however, that the following data only addresses certain aspects of their life. The questions of the interviews were always contingent on the situation of the encounter; for example, Hmad chose not to ask certain questions that were not appropriate under certain circumstances, and he asked improvised, additional questions when necessary. Hence, interview questions in this research were not uniform, but went with the flow of the encounter. While this was the case, we pursued recurring topics in our interviews that were important to the nomads, including: their subsistence, local desertification, movement, and relation to the state.

The results from my interviews will be organized under these general categories, although they are all interconnected and often lead into each other.

Subsistence

The lives of each family were intimately connected to their animals, the land, and sometimes their connection to towns. Every nomad family we interviewed relied heavily on their animals for their subsistence; all of them had flocks of goats and sheep. Additionally, the majority owned chickens, and a few, like the family who lived near Mharch, owned camels. In addition to eating and drying meat from the goats or sheep, they also reported selling them in neighboring towns. For example, the woman in the first interview of the third day told us that her family takes some of their sheep to sell in Rissani, and they use that money to buy what they need in the town. Very few of the nomads we encountered used gas stoves for cooking, but instead relied on dead tree branches. Moreover, most families make mud ovens and use hot coles to cook their bread. Another source of energy is the sun: seven of the eight families used solar panels for various purposes. The exception to this was the family of our first interview on the fourth day of fieldwork, who had no electricity at all. The electricity produced from the panels is crucial because it is used for retrieving water from wells, and lighting inside tents, and charging phones (if they owned them). Their relationship to the land as subsistence— especially when it comes to water access— is severely challenged today by effects of climate change.

Desertification

When we asked what the biggest challenges of nomadic living were, we usually received similar responses: water access and desertification. This was clearly illustrated by the father of a family in our second interview. As we drank tea together, he told us about his predicament:

It's really a disaster here. People want wells. A long time ago we asked some people to give us a specific motor that sucks water from wells, but they said no. We as nomads need water the most. This place used to be full of nomads but they left due to desertification. Water and fodder are so essential, fodder used to be 40 Dirhams and now it has gone up to 85 Dirhams. Nomads really need water desperately and only a few benefactors helped us.

This family was not able to find good drinking water in their land, so they traveled to the nearby village of Lbgãa to buy it. The only nomads who did not express any problems with water were the family of our first interview; the rest reported having serious troubles finding drinkable water. For example, the two young men who we sat with on the third day of fieldwork said that they have to dig wells often to find water, and that the water is usable for washing and cleaning clothes, but “when it comes to drinking, it's bitter, and if you drink too much it will hurt you.” Many of the Aït Khbach nomads who reported experiencing water problems often cited how salty or bitter it was to drink. In our first interview on the final day of fieldwork, a woman told us that her family “only gets water from miners who work in mines near the area [...]. Years ago, we used to get it from a well over there, but a man came to us and told us it was his land, so we had to find a new way to find water.” Inability to locate drinkable water is not the only way desertification impacts nomad families, since it also limits the areas where their flocks

are able to graze. For the Aït Khbach nomads, access to water and land for grazing are two major factors that determine movement.

Movement

The way nomads move from one territory to another is different for each family, and their movement is always contingent on their situation. Several of the nomads we met moved semi-frequently. For example, the two young men we interviewed on the third day who had structures made of stones, told us that they leave to go to live in other places for work (usually mines), but they usually return to where they were. The ones who still move frequently sometimes use pre-existing roads– often made by their ancestors– and sometimes they will move without the use of roads. In several of our interviews, the nomads stressed their flexibility in movement: in our first interview, the woman told us, “We are free to do whatever we want,” and in our interview with another woman on the third day, she told us, “we are free to go anywhere we want.” However, for some Aït Khbach nomads, this flexibility comes at a cost.

Their movement often takes them to very isolated places, which consequently makes educating their children much harder. For example, when we asked if their children attend school in our final interview, the mother replied, “no, we are just wasting their potential and we wish to be able to provide education for them.” She added afterwards that their father helps them study. The children of the man we interviewed on the second day also did not attend school because of their isolated location. In two other cases, however, the nomads told us their children attend school.

Interestingly, some of the nomads we interviewed had not moved their tents in years because of several limitations on their movement. The man of our second

interview told us: “Currently, we have nowhere to go. We follow the water to be honest.” And since the water is so finite, it severely limits their movement. Additionally, the limitation of grazing space for goats and sheep forces nomads to remain in a certain area, which was the case for the family in our final interview. For this reason, Brahim told me, the number of nomads is sharply declining. Another prevalent limitation on spaces nomads occupy is the border between Algeria and Morocco. Many of the nomads we interviewed used to dwell near the border, but soldiers from military bases on the border forced them to vacate these areas. The first family we interviewed on our final day told us that they were originally “from Sfsaf near Bouzgagh, but the army kept on pushing us away from the borders till we ended up here.” The nomads’ limitation of space by the government is just one of several ways they are marginalized by the state.

Relation to the State

When we asked the Aït Kbach nomads if they received any support from the government, they all replied with a resounding no. Although most of the families we interviewed said they had government papers or identification cards, it was apparent they had very little contact with the state. By the nature of their remoteness, the nomads encounter very few government officials, and when they do, it is only because politicians are asking for their vote. The grandmother with tattoos in our second to last interview vented her frustrations to us, exclaiming, “I have had enough of elections. Literally all my life I have been voting and no one helps or does a thing for us in this area, and one day I told them to stay away from me. I do not want to vote.” The woman who was our first interview on the third day echoed this sentiment: “They just put restrictions on people to stop them from building houses. They say, ‘Don't do this, don't do that,’ and

when we ask for help, nobody helps.” The grandmother with tattoos told us about a rumor that in the nineties, soldiers dug a well for nomads near Msisi, but we could not find evidence of government aid other than this rumor.

By chance, we learned another dimension of nomad marginalization by the state. During every month of Ramadan, the Moroccan government annually provides its citizens with a bag of food that consists of 5L of oil, 2 large sugar bars, 25kg bag of flour, and 2 bags of tea. When we asked the two young men on the third day what challenges they face, they told us the following:

We did not receive the bag of food given by the government every month of Ramadan, the mayor in charge here or whoever told us that it was not given this year (which was a lie). We get it one year, and the next year no, it goes like this. People in charge of it tell us that it was not given or any other reason. Every time we receive it they tell us to split it with another tent, a different family than ours and we didn't know that it's for each tent.

After hearing this, Brahim was appalled, and told them that he would talk to the authorities on their behalf. In the rest of our interviews, we asked the families if they received the bag of food. The grandmother with tattoos told us that her family was not given the bag of food for several years, and so she had to travel into town and shout at the authorities who distribute them. Now, she said, they get it every year. Conversely, the family of our final interview reported that they never received the food. The mother of the family said, “Our neighbors get it every time, and I happened to ask a man a few weeks ago to go to Tafraout and talk to the mayor about us. We do not receive anything and we have to earn everything ourselves.” In all of our interviews, it was clear that the nomads were neglected by the state.

VI. Virtual and Actual Nomads

Now that this paper has spanned the domains of nomads as conceptual personae and as actual people, we have the foundations for a discussion on their connection. To reiterate my basis, these realms of virtual and actual may run parallel at times, but do not touch directly with each other on a plane of reference—whence the distinction between philosophy and social science. The concepts reference each other, such as nomads refer to smooth space; the data refers to the Aït Khbach, such as their different kinds of movement. Thus, it is imperative to acknowledge this relationship between virtual and actual. Since this project straddles the line between philosophy and anthropology, its objective is to present complementation over correspondence. This section superimposes the referential onto the self-referential in order to find the latter's relative functionality. With this groundwork, I will use my findings to explore Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of smooth space, nomadism, and the state apparatus.

The area of the Sahara Desert that the Aït Khbach nomads reside in lends itself to a discourse on the notion of smooth and striated space. The continuous variation and differentiation of terrain is an essential aspect of the desert; in fact, if you look at satellite images of the terrain, the dunes and mountains form patterns that resemble a rhizome. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “The variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature of smooth spaces of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography. The nomad, nomad space, is localized and not delimited” (382). The desert is vast and largely unincorporated which makes it possible for the Aït Khbach to go wherever they want. However, since smooth space is “directional rather

than dimensional or metric” (479), it is constituted by the movement of the Aït Khbach nomads who inhabit it. Moreover, “It is a space constructed by local operations involving changes in direction” (381). As my research has shown, the trajectory of the Aït Khbach nomads sometimes takes them into space which is striated by the state: namely, areas of the border and private property. The areas of the border and private property are a striated space, since their functions are “to parcel out a closed space to people, assigning each person a share and regulating the communication between shares. The nomadic trajectory does the opposite: it distributes people (or animals) in an open space, one that is indefinite and noncommunicating” (380). The movement and operation of the Aït Khbach nomads in space is a pertinent illustration of smooth and striated spaces in the Sahara.

The flexibility or determinism of movement that the Aït Khbach experience is also an important theme in Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptions of nomadism. Recalling the earlier discussion of the Greek word *nomos*, their conception relies on self-determination of land and laws (in a broad sense). This kind of determination manifests itself in an important passage:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay (380).

The quote is helpful for two reasons: it describes how nomads are continually displaced in their movement, and how points determine the paths they take. The flexibility of

movement stems from being able to leave one point to move to another. This is also played out by the Aït Khbach nomads. For example, the two young men on our third day of interviews moved from point to point, leaving to work and finding places to dig wells. On the other hand, desertification placed determinism on the movement of the second family we interviewed, who obtained drinking water from the town. Their trajectory was determined by the water point, and paths to other points were subordinated to the water point. As the father put it, “Currently we have nowhere to go. We follow the water to be honest.” Climate change is largely responsible for the negation of points to relay for the Aït Khbach, which takes the form of wells drying and grazing spots dying out. When this relay or displacement between points becomes impossible, nomads have no choice but to move into towns; this framework can attest to the dramatic decrease of their population.

The previous notions of space and determinism are key elements as to why nomads have an antithetical relation to the state on both conceptual and actual levels. As we observed, the state striates space through, gridding, measuring, and closing off space. The space that the Aït Khbach occupy is through their own determination and navigation of the area. In an illuminating passage of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the state apparatus in the following way:

In retaining given elements, it necessarily cuts off their relations with other elements, which become exterior, it inhibits, slows down, or controls those relations; if the State has a circuit of its own, it is an internal circuit dependent primarily upon resonance, it is a zone of recurrence that isolates itself from the remainder of the network, even if in order to do so it must exert even stricter controls over its relations with that remainder (433).

This description is deeply useful for approaching the problems Aït Khbach nomads encounter with the border and Ramadan food bags. At the heart of both problems is the state's relation to the exterior. In the case of the border, the Moroccan state closely monitors and controls its relation to the outside (Algeria), and in order to do this, it striates space and closes the area to the Aït Khbach. Additionally, by the nature of their solitude, the Aït Khbach nomads are externalized by the state, since the local municipalities operate in large towns. If these municipalities function through an "internal circuit" that "isolates itself from the remainder of the network," this would attest to why they do not distribute the food bags to the peripheral Aït Khbach nomads. Hence, the issue of exteriority that is inherent to the operation of the state apparatus can be a useful way to conceptualize the marginalization of the Aït Khbach nomads.

VII. Conclusion

Navigating the tension between anthropology and philosophy necessitated a discussion on how to proceed in their application. The search for a useful philosophical framework led to an exploration of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the nomad, which provided context for Miller and Ghambou's criticisms. By summarizing Holland's response and addressing these criticisms, I found a basis to advance from: virtual concepts are self-referential, but they are still useful in engaging actual problems in the world. This foundation was the condition for employing Deleuze and Guattari's concepts later in the paper.

Brahim and Hmad's grandmother supplied a historical account that contextualized the area and people of this study. Through stories about the origins of towns, pre-colonial nomadic life, and the horrific colonial period, they told me about their heritage. These accounts outline the backdrop of the Aït Khbach tribe and nomadism in the Drâa-Tafilalet region today.

The results from my fieldwork contained five recurring topics: subsistence, desertification, movement, and relation to state. The nomadic families' subsistence was primarily linked to their animals, land, and in some accounts, nearby villages. Desertification of the area impacted all nomadic families of this study, and nearly all of them experienced problems accessing drinkable water. The movement of each family varied, with some moving frequently, and others staying in the same place for years. In addition to water access and private property, the state restricted the movement of some Aït Khbach nomads. There was no indication of support from the state, and three of the families reported not receiving the annual ramadan food bags.

Engaging with the concepts in *A Thousand Plateaus* and the stories of the Aït Khbach in combination proved to be a productive undertaking. The discussion on smooth and striated space was useful for thinking about the nomadic families' relation to the spaces they operate in, and also the spaces they are excluded from. Additionally, Deleuze and Guattari's description of displacement between points lent itself to conceptualizing limitations on nomadic movement and their consequent drop in population. Their description of the state apparatus functioning through externalization is also helpful in understanding how the Aït Khbach nomads are marginalized. Hence, philosophy provides us with a tool box; one which opens up new ways of thinking so as to approach a problem from new angles.

VIII. Limitations of Study

This study was limited in three key ways. I do not speak Tachelhit, so the language barrier prevented me from conducting interviews and made me reliant on Hmad for translation. My inability to speak the language of the participants disallowed me from picking up on nuances in their testimonies. Additionally, my position as a foreigner made the Aït Khbach less likely to trust me, and they are more likely to share important information with people in their inner circle. Finally, my time frame for this study was not long. A longer period of research would produce more comprehensive data and cultivate a deeper relationship with the Aït Khbach nomads of the area.

IX. Recommendations for Further Study

There are several directions this study points towards. Firstly, and most generally, I recommend future researchers to investigate more connections between philosophy and the social sciences. Although the combination of philosophy and social sciences is by no means a new one, there seems to be less interdisciplinary, holistic research due to increasing specialization in all fields of study. Secondly, I recommend considering research on social relations between nomadic communities in Southern Morocco, since there is little information in this domain. Finally, I recommend researchers to inquire deeper into the government's apparent indifference to nomadic communities, particularly from inside local governance.

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