Revolution: *Teshumara* and *Tanekra* (1968–1990)

This chapter describes the radical changes Tamashiq society went through between the late 1960s and the 1990s and their political translations. Of course, changes in Tamashiq life had occurred throughout the 20th century, but not on such a tremendous scale and in such a short period as the changes described here. The Keita Regime declared itself revolutionary and despite continuities with the colonial regime, in many ways it was. But the efficacy of that revolution was limited. Despite the use of military force in the Adagh, the Keita Regime was not able to alter Tamashiq society significantly during its reign, although the successful introduction of western style education would leave a particular legacy. The men of the *Tanekra*, the group responsible for the organisation of the rebellion of the 1990s, often refer to their work as *al-Thawra*, ‘the revolution’ in Arabic. Their goals were certainly revolutionary, but I will describe later how they were not attained. But the droughts that struck the Sahel in the 1970s and 1980s caused such devastation that radical change was simply forced upon Tamashiq society without any possible escape. The real revolution in Tamashiq society took place in the decades after the Keita period, and before the rebellion of the 1990s. In these decades Tamashiq society changed from a rural society to an
urban society; from an economy based on pastoral household self-sufficiency and direct exchange of a limited range of goods to one of wage labour and the introduction of new consumer items. It also changed from a society living in a geographically limited (if large) and coherent region, to a scattered diaspora of community pockets around West Africa, the Maghreb and Europe. These major changes in location and economy brought about shifts in gender relations; cultural forms of expression; education; and politics.

The first part of this chapter presents a descriptive analysis of the economic, social and cultural changes that occurred between the late 1960s and 1990s. The description I give here of the new Teshumara culture of these days is far from exhaustive. The subject merits a book on its own. I will here only highlight and exemplify some of the main social, economic and cultural changes to give an indication of the scale of change. The second part of this chapter describes the political reflexions within the Teshumara culture and the creation of the formalised nationalist movement that prepared for this 1990 rebellion. The Malian Kel Tamasheq generally refer to this movement as Tanekra, the uprising. Three elements will be central in the description and analysis of the Tanekra movement. The first element is the Tanekra conception of nation and state. Whereas the Kel Tamasheq community has been imagined—in Benedict Anderson’s meaning of the term—for centuries as a community of people related by (fictive) blood ties, the movement chose to imagine the nation as a community bound by territory. To some extent, I will invert Benedict Anderson’s argument that nations, through primordial kinship terms, imagine themselves as old, while they are in fact new constructions.1 In this case, social cohesion of the nation-to-be had always been expressed through kinship ties. However, the Tamasheq nationalists carefully avoided imagining their nation according to these ties as they perceived them as an obstacle to national political unity. Instead of through the language of kinship, national sentiment was expressed primarily through the language of territory. Despite nationalist discourse and ideas of territory, concepts of kinship, expressed through the tewsiten—the clans and tribes—kept structuring political practice, interfering with the ideology of Tamasheq unity. Political thinking along clan lines eventually led to the near collapse of the movement in the “Tamanrasset