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Mali and Niger Tuareg insurgencies and the war in Libya: “Whether you liked him or not, Gadaffi used to fix a lot of holes’ – By Frédéric Deycard and Yvan Guichaoua

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(https://africanarguments.org/2011/09/08/whether-you-liked-him-or-not-gadaffi-used-to-fix-a-lot-of-holes-tuareg-insurgencies-in-mali-and-niger-and-the-war-in-libya-by-frederic-deycard-and-yvan-guichaoua/a-commander-of-the-niger-movement-for-justice-inspects-troops-in-the-desert-in-northern-niger/)In the early days following the rise of the insurgency in Libya, it was widely reported that Col. Gaddafi was making an extensive use of foreign mercenaries to defend his regime. Tuaregs from Mali and Niger, and, more specifically, ex-rebels, featured prominently among those suspected to enlist behind the Guide of the Libyan Revolution. Clearly, sensationalising Col. Gaddafi's recourse to mercenaries (http://goo.gl/BzBjj) was part of the insurgents' propaganda aiming at deny any support among nationals. No reliable estimates of the size of Gaddafi's mercenary troops have been

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circulated yet their use is acknowledged. That Tuaregs from Mali and Niger were among them is also true. In early March this year, elected representatives from northern Mali alarmingly reported (<http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20110302-cri-alarme-elus-maliens-sujet-touaregs-enroles-armee-kadhafi>) that youths from their community were joining Gaddafi's forces. At the same time, *Aïr-Info*, the well-informed newspaper based in Agadez, Niger, signalled that potential young recruits were offered a \$400, a gun and ammunitions (http://www.airinfo-journal.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=168:le-niger--un-grand-perdant-de-la-crise-libyenne&catid=41:conomie-societe&Itemid=61) to join the front. As researchers studying the region for several years, we also gathered anecdotal evidence through personal ties confirming the above statements. However, reports diverge on whether recruitment was primarily organised from the top or resulted from spontaneous initiatives from below among well-connected would-be combatants.


Evidence on the magnitude of pro-Gaddafi's mobilisation in Mali and Niger is uncertain. Several sources indicate that roughly 1,500 Tuareg fighters from these two countries have taken an active part in the six-month conflict. But most of them were actually already in Libya for several years when the rebellion kicked-off, whether being immigrants attracted by the economic perspectives of the oil-rich country or former rebels of Niger and Mali who had chosen to reside permanently in Libya after the failure of the implementation of the peace agreements in their country of origin. Those combatants had obtained rights to live and work in Libya and other privileges in the recent years. Hence, one important view we disagree with is that of Malian and Nigerien Tuareg recruits conforming to the archetypical image of ruthless mercenaries, whose loyalty is solely dependent on the immediate material rewards they extract. The profiles and behavioural logics of those among the Malian and Nigerien Tuaregs who supported Gaddafi's counterinsurgency effort illustrate more the centrality of Gaddafi's well-entrenched role in the political economy of the region than the alleged greed of its armed supporters. As a Nigerien ex-rebel pragmatically put to us in a recent interview: "'Whether you liked him or not, Gaddafi used to fix a lot of holes'. And Tuaregs were not the sole beneficiaries. Here are some of those holes Gaddafi's fixed since his coup, in 1969.

As soon as the early 1970s, severe droughts coupled with political marginalisation have affected the already scarce resources available for the Tuaregs of Northern Mali and Niger, forcing them into exile. Algeria and Libya, in part due to the presence of Tuareg populations on their soil, have become a destination of preference for this generation of youths in quest of employment. Taking the route to Libya has never since ceased to be a defining moment in the life of the so-called *ishumar* (derived from the French "'chí' meurs', the unemployed). Some of them have developed activities on both sides of the border, whether for seasonal employment or for informal, and sometimes illegal, trafficking (cigarettes, gas, and material goods among others). Those economic opportunities have permitted Northern Mali and Niger to survive difficulties through the financial and material flux allowed by the Libyan leader.

This intense cross-border activity had a strategic dimension, too. In the 1980s  English's pan-African projects expanded, his Islamic Legion trained militarily and sent hundreds of *ishumar* to various theaters of "'anti-imperial' struggle (mainly in Lebanon, then Chad). The expectation at the time in the *ishumar* ranks was that their newly acquired military credentials and Libyan support would help them start their own war of independence in Mali and Niger. But Gaddafi did not deliver the expected assistance. Poorly-equipped Tuareg rebellions were launched nonetheless in Mali and Niger in the early 1990s. Their vanguard was composed of fighters exiled in Libya who deserted the camps where they were kept on check. Low-intensity violence lasted almost a decade until Algeria and Libya intervened as peace-brokers. As the implementation of peace accords were dragging, Libyan authorities took critical measures to prevent the conflict from resuming. In Niger, they became a major sponsor of the UNDP-operated Programme of Peace Consolidation in the Aïr and the Azawak (http://www.pnud.ne/fich09_PCPAA.htm) (PCPAA), designed to accommodate economically the low-level combatants of the rebellion. In 2005, in a move typically illustrating the patronage system locally established by Gaddafi, those among the rebels who showed reluctance to participate in the PCPAA were offered Libyan nationality and integration in the Libyan Army (http://www.republicain-niger.com/Index.asp?affiche=News_display.asp&ArticleID=1806&rub=Br%C3%A8ves).

This only postponed the resumption of rebellion in Niger though: an insurgent movement, called the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ), was launched again in 2007 (http://www.microconflict.eu/publications/RWP20_YG.pdf). It only lasted two years, after Gaddafi summoned the rebel leaders in Tripoli and coopted the most opportunistic among them, hence blowing up the fragile cohesion of the rebellion. At the same time, a camp financed by Libya was hastily erected near Agadez that any youth loosely connected to the rebellion could visit to receive \$400 (<http://goo.gl/nMJD2>) in cash: the price of a temporary return to calm that Nigerien authorities were happy not to pay. Unsurprisingly, in the recent months, prominent leaders of the MNJ have been said to activate their rebel networks in Niger to recruit fighters in support of the Guide. The same names, such as Aghali Alambo, now circulate as notables of the overthrown regime seek refuge in Niger (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/05/gaddafi-security-chief-flees-niger>).

Throughout the years, the ties between the Tuaregs and Gaddafi have grown stronger in multiple dimensions. Gaddafi's Libya did play a stabilising political role for Mali and Niger through a series of favours it granted to Tuareg communities as well as central regimes. Gaddafi has been the banker of most political and relief campaign in critical times for those countries. As many Tuaregs now seem exposed to victimisation (<http://goo.gl/NtTfP>) by supporters of the National Transitional Council (NTC) in Libya, the enlistment of Tuaregs from Mali and Niger into Gaddafi's army of mercenaries resonates like a tragic bet

stemming from the inertia of historical necessities. The losses incurred by the  English those the winning side of the battlefield might exceed by far the losses incurred by those, in the West or elsewhere in Africa, who, after years of close compromise with the autocrat, swiftly jumped on the anti-Gaddafi's bandwagon.

Most of the Tuareg combatants have now returned to Mali and Niger (http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jOxPyZiQuQma3iET_HNy8ipehmiw?docId=CNG.5ff3f4fb659e435824af983bc4f58339.b1). They have most probably helped themselves substantially in the Libyan Army's arms stockpiles and even managed to divert part of the weapons parachuted by France (<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20110831103104/france-libye-mali-mouammar-kaddafimali-des-ex-combattants-kaddafistes-ont-mis-la-main-sur-des-armes-francaises.html>) to help the NTC. The political dynamics this situation will engender in the already complex Saharan political context may be nefarious. Al Qaeda in Maghreb (AQIM) has established durable bases in Northern Mali and may benefit from complicity among criminalised state actors interested in the lucrative business of hostage-taking, as well as the massive cross-border trafficking activities the region has become infamous for. In the same way Gaddafi imposed himself as a munificent patron in the area, AQIM is now buying loyalties among locals, including Tuaregs, which have little to do with fundamentalist activism. At the same time, some Tuareg political leaders have repeatedly called for means to fight terrorism and insecurity in the form of forces placed under decentralised command, which they were denied. While Gaddafi never was a benevolent Samaritan toward the Saharan countries, he occupied a strategic position in the region's subtle political interactions, a position now left empty at a time of high vulnerability.

By Frédéric Deycard (LAM (<http://www.cean.sciencespobordeaux.fr/>)) and Yvan Guichaoua (University of East Anglia, School of International Development (<http://www.uea.ac.uk/dev>))

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Magnus Taylor is a Horn of Africa Analyst at International Crisis Group, the independent conflict-prevention organisation.

8 COMMENTS



TOMMY MILES ([HTTP://BLOG.TOMATHON.COM](http://blog.tomathon.com))

8 SEPTEMBER, 2011 AT 17:48 ([HTTPS://AFRICANARGUMENTS.ORG/2011/09/08/WHETHER-YOU-LIKED-HIM-OR-NOT-GADAFFI-USED-TO-FIX-A-LOT-OF-HOLES-TUAREG-INSURGENCIES-IN-MALI-AND-NIGER-AND-THE-WAR-IN-LIBYA-BY-FREDERIC-DEYCARD-AND-YVAN-GUICHAOUA/#COMMENT-14141](https://africanarguments.org/2011/09/08/whether-you-liked-him-or-not-gadaffi-used-to-fix-a-lot-of-holes-tuareg-insurgencies-in-mali-and-niger-and-the-war-in-libya-by-frederic-deycard-and-yvan-guichaooua/#comment-14141))

This piece is very helpful, coming as it does amidst a sudden burst of press interest Toureg rebels and insecurity in northern Mali and Niger. Recognizing the complexity of the region and societies, but as importantly the individual agency of Toureg themselves is crucial here. My fear is that misguided analyses will lead to foreign and domestic “cures” which will exastrabate insecurity, poverty, and alienation in Kidal, Tomboctou, Gao, and Agadez. Please continue to promote more informed commentary.

As an aside, I worry much more about the instability which will dog Tchad following this crisis. Unfortunately, this seems little discussed.



LA GUERRA FINISCE QUANDO I CONTI TORNANO... « LAFIAM ([HTTP://LAFIAM.WORDPRESS.COM/2011/09/09/LA-GUERRA-FINISCE-QUANDO-I-CONTI-TORNANO/](http://lafiam.wordpress.com/2011/09/09/la-guerra-finisce-quando-i-conti-tornano/))

9 SEPTEMBER, 2011 AT 17:24 ([HTTPS://AFRICANARGUMENTS.ORG/2011/09/08/WHETHER-YOU-LIKED-HIM-OR-NOT-GADAFFI-USED-TO-FIX-A-LOT-OF-HOLES-TUAREG-INSURGENCIES-IN-MALI-AND-NIGER-AND-THE-WAR-IN-LIBYA-BY-FREDERIC-DEYCARD-AND-YVAN-GUICHAOUA/#COMMENT-14143](https://africanarguments.org/2011/09/08/whether-you-liked-him-or-not-gadaffi-used-to-fix-a-lot-of-holes-tuareg-insurgencies-in-mali-and-niger-and-the-war-in-libya-by-frederic-deycard-and-yvan-guichaooua/#comment-14143))

[...] Fonte: <https://africanarguments.org/2011/09/08/%E2%80%98whether-you-liked-him-or-not-gadaffi-used-to-fix-a-l> (<https://africanarguments.org/2011/09/08/%E2%80%98whether-you-liked-him-or-not-gadaffi-used-to-fix-a-l>)... [...]

[English](#)

"WHETHER YOU LIKED HIM OR NOT, GADDAFI USED TO FIX A LOT OF HOLES" « MARC F. BELLEMARE (HTTP://MARCFBELLEMARE.COM/WORDPRESS/2011/09/WHETHER-YOU-LIKED-HIM-OR-NOT-GADDAFI-USED-TO-FIX-A-LOT-OF-HOLES/)

15 SEPTEMBER, 2011 AT 09:01 (HTTPS://AFRICANARGUMENTS.ORG/2011/09/08/WHETHER-YOU-LIKED-HIM-OR-NOT-GADDAFI-USED-TO-FIX-A-LOT-OF-HOLES-TUAREG-INSURGENCIES-IN-MALI-AND-NIGER-AND-THE-WAR-IN-LIBYA-BY-FREDERIC-DEYCARD-AND-YVAN-GUICHAOUA/#COMMENT-14150)

[...] You Liked Him Or Not, Gadaffi Used To Fix A Lot Of Holes" An article on Tuareg insurgencies in Mali and Niger, by Frédéric Deycard and Yvan Guichaoua in African [...]



SCROLLPOST.COM - CARINA RAY: GADDAFI AND THE MERCENARY MYTH (HTTP://SCROLLPOST.COM/BLOG/2011/09/27/CARINA-RAY-GADDAFI-AND-THE-MERCENA)

27 SEPTEMBER, 2011 AT 21:31 (HTTPS://AFRICANARGUMENTS.ORG/2011/09/08/WHETHER-YOU-LIKED-HIM-OR-NOT-GADDAFI-USED-TO-FIX-A-LOT-OF-HOLES-TUAREG-INSURGENCIES-IN-MALI-AND-NIGER-AND-THE-WAR-IN-LIBYA-BY-FREDERIC-DEYCARD-AND-YVAN-GUICHAOUA/#COMMENT-14171)

[...] peace settlement in Niger and enlisted many of them in the Libyan army. It is among the Tuareg, according to Frederic Deycard and Yvan Guichaoua, that Gaddafi is likely to have secured troops to defend his [...]



CARINA RAY: GADDAFI AND THE MERCENARY MYTH | BNEWSWORLD (HTTP://BNEWSWORLD.COM/CARINA-RAY-GADDAFI-AND-THE-MERCENARY-MYTH/)

28 SEPTEMBER, 2011 AT 10:10 (HTTPS://AFRICANARGUMENTS.ORG/2011/09/08/WHETHER-YOU-LIKED-HIM-OR-NOT-GADDAFI-USED-TO-FIX-A-LOT-OF-HOLES-TUAREG-INSURGENCIES-IN-MALI-AND-NIGER-AND-THE-WAR-IN-LIBYA-BY-FREDERIC-DEYCARD-AND-YVAN-GUICHAOUA/#COMMENT-14175)


[...] peace settlement in Niger and enlisted many of them in the Libyan army. It is among the Tuareg, according to Frederic Deycard and Yvan Guichaoua, that Gaddafi is likely to have secured troops to defend his [...]



MALI: WE'VE SEEN THIS MOVIE BEFORE (REPRISE) | GUY DEBORD'S CAT (HTTP://BUDDYHELL.WORDPRESS.COM/2013/01/16/MALI-WEVE-SEEN-THIS-MOVIE-BEFORE-REPRISE/)

17 JANUARY, 2013 AT 11:27 (HTTPS://AFRICANARGUMENTS.ORG/2011/09/08/WHETHER-YOU-LIKED-HIM-OR-NOT-GADDAFI-USED-TO-FIX-A-LOT-OF-HOLES-TUAREG-INSURGENCIES-IN-MALI-AND-NIGER-AND-THE-WAR-IN-LIBYA-BY-FREDERIC-DEYCARD-AND-YVAN-GUICHAOUA/#COMMENT-17466)

[...] peace settlement in Niger and enlisted many of them in the Libyan army. It is among the Tuareg, according to Frederic Deycard and Yvan Guichaoua, that Gaddafi is likely to have secured troops to defend his [...]

 English

MALI: DRAGGING THE WEST BACK IN TO THE WAR ON TERROR | SOMALI NATION :: ENGLISH LANGUAGE
([HTTP://ENGLISH.SOMALINATION.ORG/MALI-DRAGGING-THE-WEST-BACK-IN-TO-THE-WAR-ON-TERROR/](http://english.somalination.org/mali-dragging-the-west-back-in-to-the-war-on-terror/))

6 FEBRUARY, 2013 AT 04:54 ([HTTPS://AFRICANARGUMENTS.ORG/2011/09/08/WHETHER-YOU-LIKED-HIM-OR-NOT-GADAFFI-USED-TO-FIX-A-LOT-OF-HOLES-TUAREG-INSURGENCIES-IN-MALI-AND-NIGER-AND-THE-WAR-IN-LIBYA-BY-FREDERIC-DEYCARD-AND-YVAN-GUICHAOUA/#COMMENT-17731](https://africanarguments.org/2011/09/08/whether-you-liked-him-or-not-gadaffi-used-to-fix-a-lot-of-holes-tuareg-insurgencies-in-mali-and-niger-and-the-war-in-libya-by-frederic-deycard-and-yvan-guichaoua/#comment-17731))

[...] Muammar Gaddafi, and proved instrumental in his fall from power in 2011 – an operation that some analysts have blamed for causing a flood of weapons to reach the Malian rebels, thus making their [...]



MALI: DRAGGING THE WEST BACK IN TO THE WAR ON TERROR ([HTTP://WWW.FLETCHERFORUM.ORG/2013/02/13/TAYLOR/](http://www.fletcherforum.org/2013/02/13/taylor/))

13 FEBRUARY, 2013 AT 05:06 ([HTTPS://AFRICANARGUMENTS.ORG/2011/09/08/WHETHER-YOU-LIKED-HIM-OR-NOT-GADAFFI-USED-TO-FIX-A-LOT-OF-HOLES-TUAREG-INSURGENCIES-IN-MALI-AND-NIGER-AND-THE-WAR-IN-LIBYA-BY-FREDERIC-DEYCARD-AND-YVAN-GUICHAOUA/#COMMENT-17851](https://africanarguments.org/2011/09/08/whether-you-liked-him-or-not-gadaffi-used-to-fix-a-lot-of-holes-tuareg-insurgencies-in-mali-and-niger-and-the-war-in-libya-by-frederic-deycard-and-yvan-guichaoua/#comment-17851))

[...] about the second- and third-order effects of intervention in this complex region. Indeed, some analysts have blamed the fall of Qaddafi's regime for causing a flood of weapons to reach the Malian rebels (some of whom worked as mercenaries for [...])

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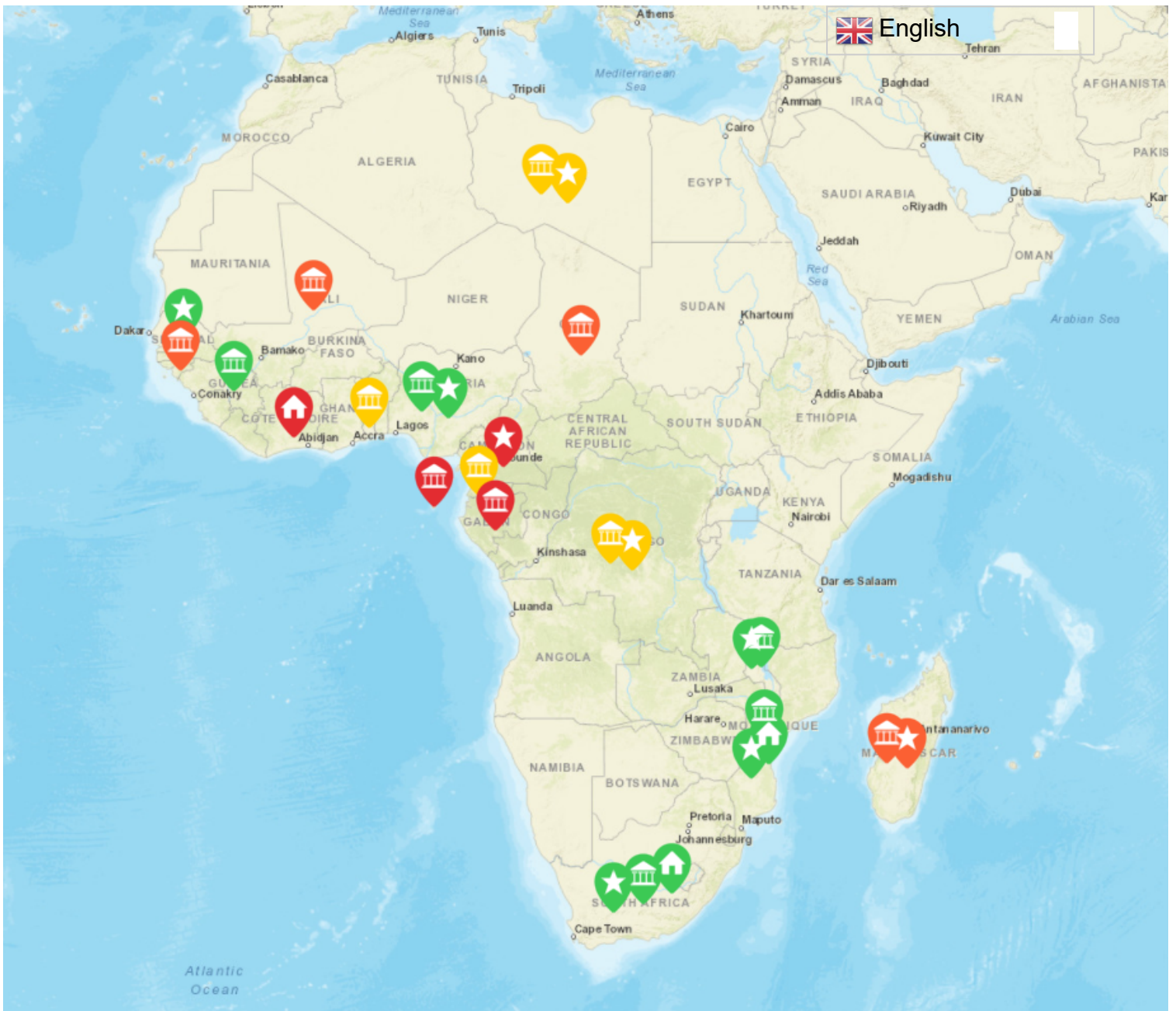
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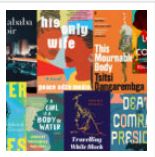


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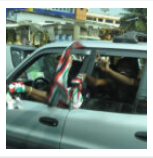
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