

Interpenetrations: Recasting Nomad Tactics at the Centre of the Fringe.

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Sedentary nomads inhabiting the marginal areas of Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania, apply increasingly subversive *nomad tactics* to tackle the experience of drought-induced displacement and settlement in the wake of five decades of turbulent socio-cultural transformations manifested in the entanglement of disequilibrium environment, nomad-sedentary interpenetrations and politico-ideological confusion.

In 1969, 80 percent of the population in The Islamic Republic of Mauritania lived as nomadic pastoralists in the rural areas, relying predominantly on mobile livestock rearing strategies. Today 85 percent live in and around the major cities. The capital city of Nouakchott exploded from 500 to 800,000 inhabitants in the same period - an urbanisation rate unparralled anywhere in the world. The reasons for this extraordinary transformation are manifold, but can be largely attributed to the particularly severe 'Great Sahelian Droughts' which swept through West Africa in 1968-1973 and 1982-1985, largely decimating the livestock of vast numbers of nomadic pastoralists, thus causing a veritable exodus from the rural areas. Many families lost their means of subsistence, causing them to give up their nomadic livelihood and settle in the cities, where they found themselves marginalised and impoverished.

This paper explores how former livestock rearing nomads, who inhabit the the dusty labyrinths of the *kébé*, i.e. bidonvilles or shanty towns, and the vast, windblown *gazras*, i.e. illegally inhabited areas, at the fringes of Nouakchott, feel increasingly unsettled in the process of settlement; how they narrate their transition to sedentariness, and how they adapt to the urban setting. More significantly, the paper investigates the difficulties inherent in the transition process from a mobile to a sedentary livelihood – the nostalgia for the past and the *nomad tactics* employed in the anticipation of a better future. What emerges is a complex mosaic of nomad-sedentary interpenetrations or assemblages that point to new directions in contemporary African urbanism at the center of the fringe.