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Rhythms of Value:

Tuareg Music and Capitalist Reckonings in Niger

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Ethnomusicology

by

Eric James Schmidt

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Rhythms of Value:

Tuareg Music and Capitalist Reckonings in Niger

by

Eric James Schmidt

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Timothy D. Taylor, Chair

This dissertation examines how Tuareg people in Niger use music to reckon with their increasing but incomplete entanglement in global neoliberal capitalism. I argue that a variety of social actors—Tuareg musicians, fans, festival organizers, and government officials, as well as music producers from Europe and North America—have come to regard Tuareg music as a resource by which to realize economic, political, and other social ambitions. Such treatment of culture-as-resource is intimately linked to the global expansion of neoliberal capitalism, which has led individual and collective subjects around the world to take on a more entrepreneurial nature by exploiting representations of their identities for a variety of ends. While Tuareg collective identity has strongly been tied to an economy of pastoralism and caravan trade, the contemporary moment demands a reimagining of what it means to be, and to survive as, Tuareg. Since the 1970s, cycles of drought, entrenched poverty, and periodic conflicts have pushed more and more Tuaregs to pursue wage labor in cities across northwestern Africa or to work as trans-

Saharan smugglers; meanwhile, tourism expanded from the 1980s into one of the region's biggest industries by drawing on pastoralist skills while capitalizing on strategic essentialisms of Tuareg culture and identity. These developments engendered novel cultural production, including several new festivals across the Sahel-Sahara and a guitar musical style that has evolved from protest anthems into popular songs. This dissertation draws on over fifteen months of ethnographic research in Niger, Mali, and the United States—grounded in participant observation, audiovisual recording, consultation of archived materials, social media engagement, and interviews—to demonstrate how a variety of stakeholders produce, manage, and curate Tuareg music as a resource in order to produce diverse forms of value and to create meaning.

The dissertation of Eric James Schmidt is approved.

Andrew Apter

Helen M Rees

Timothy Rice

Christopher Alan Waterman

Timothy D Taylor, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

*To my brothers, for modeling unapologetic ecstasy in music:*

*to John, for the nights listening to Tchaikovsky under the Christmas tree;  
and to Chris, for singing bols in the car and practicing tabla on the steering wheel.*

*And to the rest of my family, for their unflagging support for my journeys, no matter how far:*

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## GLOSSARY

“Tuareg” is a foreign term to describe people of the Sahel and Sahara who identify themselves as “Kel Tamasheq,” meaning “the people who speak Tamasheq,” or else as *imajeghen* (the masculine plural referring to Tuareg people and to a particular social class within Tuareg society). Yet even these terms suggest an overarching uniformity that does not account for the several Tamasheq dialects spoken in the region; while “*imajeghen*” is the masculine plural most widely used in Niger, in Algeria and Libya it is *imuhagh*, and in Mali and Burkina Faso, *imushagh*. I loosely follow the approach of Anja Fischer and Ines Kohl in their edited collection *Tuareg Society within a Globalized World: Saharan Life in Transition* (2010, xii and 231-234), in which they abide by recent convention in anthropology to use “Tamasheq” for general discussions of Tuareg society, opting for the more localized dialects only when the scope of one’s research is on a narrower subset of the population. Furthermore, because of my limited training in linguistics and the uneven degree of linguistic detail included among the Tamasheq transcriptions I use from various sources, I opt for the simplified transcription of Tamasheq terms rather than the accuracy of renderings that reliance on the International Phonetic Alphabet would better provide.

Because my frame of reference is primarily but not exclusively in Niger, the terminology included in this dissertation reflects Tamasheq vocabulary as commonly encountered in Niger. I specify exceptions here as French, Hausa, Arabic, Songhai, or a specific Tamasheq dialect (e.g., Tayert from the Air mountain region in north-central Niger, Tawellemet from the western Azawagh plains). Some definitions are adapted from Lecocq (2010a, xiv-xvii) and from Fischer and Kohl (2010, 231-234). For Hausa terms, I opt for anglophone renditions of Hausa (e.g., *adaidaita* rather than *adedeta*) in order to be consistent with most English-language scholarship; also note that “c” in Hausa is pronounced “tch” (e.g., *sonci*).

<i>adaidaita</i> (Ha.)	three-wheeled moto-taxi ( <i>tuk-tuk</i> )
<i>ahal</i>	gatherings of young Tuareg for interaction among members of opposite sexes, performance of music (especially <i>inzad</i> ) and poetry, and gallant behavior
<i>aggiwen</i> , s. <i>agiw</i>	members of class of professional praise-singers and instrumentalists (i.e., griots) from Niger River Bend in Mali who popularized <i>takamba</i> ; closely related to <i>inaden</i>
<i>akal</i>	earth, homeland, political territory (e.g., that belonging to a particular confederation or to all Tuareg people)
<i>Amazigh</i>	emic term for Berber (i.e., indigenous person of northern Africa)
<i>animateur</i> (Fr.)	master of ceremonies at musical performances, often of <i>griot</i> or <i>inaden</i> origin
<i>artiste</i> (Fr.)	musical artist, especially a professional performer
<i>asshak</i>	honor, pride, composure

<i>bellah</i> (So.)	Songhai term for <i>ighawelen</i> or <i>iklan</i>
<i>BNDA</i>	<i>Bureau Nigérien de Droit d’Auteur</i> , Nigérien Copyright Office
<i>CFPM</i>	<i>Centre de Formation et de Promotion Musicale El Hadj Taya</i> , El Hadj Taya Center for Musical Training and Promotion
<i>brassage</i> (Fr.)	mixing of ethnicities and cultures, particularly in the Sahel
<i>dandalin soyayya</i> (Ha.)	songs from or in the style of song-and-dance routines in Hausa films, mostly from Nigeria, which tend to feature synthesized instruments and high-pitch AutoTune modulated vocals
<i>ellelu</i>	honor, individual character of a free person
<i>essuf</i>	loneliness, solitude, nostalgia, desert; <i>Kel Essuf</i> : spirits
<i>ettama</i>	see <i>tezma</i>
<i>évolué</i> (Fr.)	“civilized,” Western-educated person from (former) French colonies
<i>fada</i> , pl. <i>fadodi</i> (Ha.)	predominantly male urban, public conversational groups; historically, public leadership forums in Hausa societies
<i>fadantché</i> (Ha.)	participant in a <i>fada</i>
<i>FPLSAC</i>	<i>Front Populaire pour la Libération du Sahara Arabe Central</i> (Fr.), <i>al-Jabha ash-Sha’biyya li Taghrir Sahara’ al-Kubra al-’arabiyya al-Wasta</i> (Ar.), Popular Front for the Liberation of the Greater Arab Central Sahara
<i>griotisme</i> (Fr.)	usually derogatory; references undignified behavior attributed to <i>griots</i> , such as singing praises with the expectation of a monetary or other reward
<i>idawanetan</i> (Tayert)	nighttime gatherings; see <i>takayt</i>
<i>ighawelen</i> (m.pl.), <i>eghawel</i> (m.s.)	members of class of freed slaves and their descendents
<i>iklan</i> (m.pl.), <i>akli</i> (m.s.), <i>taklit</i> (f.s.), <i>tiklatin</i> (f.pl.)	members of slave class
<i>imajeghen</i> (m.pl.), <i>amajegh</i> (m.s.), <i>tamajeq</i> (f.s.), <i>timajeghen</i> (f.pl.)	members of elite “noble” class; also, general term for Tuareg people
<i>imghad</i> (m.pl.), <i>amghid</i> (m.s.), <i>tamghid</i> (f.s.), <i>timghaden</i> (f.pl.)	members of class of free people who are not “nobles” (i.e., are not <i>imajeghen</i> )
<i>imojagh</i>	ideal of dignity
<i>inaden</i> (m.pl.), <i>enad</i> (m.s.), <i>tenad</i> (f.s.), <i>tinaden</i> (f.pl.)	members of class of artisans or smiths

<i>ineslemen</i> (m.pl.), <i>anselim</i> (m.s.), <i>taneslimt</i> (f.s.), <i>tineslemen</i> (f.pl.)	members of class of religious scholars
<i>inzad</i>	single-stringed bowed lute performed by <i>imajeghen</i> women
<i>ishumar</i> (m.pl.), <i>ashamor</i> (m.s.), <i>tashamort</i> (f.s.), <i>tishumarin</i> (f.pl.)	Tuareg, especially youth, who give up traditional nomadic lifestyles (and hierarchies) to seek employment in cities or neighboring states, crossing borders regularly
<i>jagwa</i>	dance and guitar music style originally from Mauritania
<i>mistaba</i> (Tayert)	nighttime gathering; see <i>takayt</i>
<i>molo</i>	plucked lute performed by Fulani, Hausa, and Zarma-Songhai, closely related to <i>tahardent</i> and used in <i>takamba</i>
<i>OCORA</i>	<i>Office de la Coopération Radiophonique</i> , Office of Overseas Radio Service
<i>ORTN</i>	<i>Office de Radiodiffusion et Télévision du Niger</i> , Office of Radio and Television of Niger
<i>piste</i> (Fr.)	cleared space for dancing, usually in front of performers
<i>SACEM</i>	<i>Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Editeurs de Musique</i> ; Society of Authors, Composers, and Publishers of Music
<i>saklo</i> (Tayert)	daytime gathering; see <i>takayt</i>
<i>samaria</i> (Ha.)	neighborhood political associations that flourished during the Kountché regime until the 1990s liberalization reforms
<i>soirée guitare</i> (Fr.)	“guitar evening party,” evening musical gathering featuring guitar, often as part of wedding celebrations
<i>sonci</i> (Ha.)	“desire to eat,” impromptu and undesirable words that interrupt silence or the thread of a conversation
<i>SORAFOM</i>	<i>Société de Radiodiffusion de la France d’Outre-Mer</i> , Broadcasting Society of Overseas France
<i>tactile</i> (Fr.)	touchscreen smartphone
<i>tagelmoust</i>	men’s turban and veil
<i>tagssir</i>	social gathering centered on tea, music, and conversation
<i>tahardent</i>	plucked lute performed by <i>inaden</i> and featured in <i>takamba</i>
<i>takamba</i>	dance rhythm and musical style associated with griots, <i>aggiwen</i> , and <i>inaden</i> featuring <i>molo</i> or <i>tahardent</i> with calabash
<i>takarakit</i>	shame, reserve
<i>takayt</i> (Tawellemet)	picnic (usually at night) often involving music

<i>tangalt</i>	allusive, indirect speech
<i>Tanekra</i>	“the insurgency,” Tuareg nationalist political movement developed among <i>ishumar</i> beginning in the late 1970s
<i>tawsit</i> , pl. <i>tawsatin</i>	descent group, fictive kingroup, clan, tribe
<i>tende</i> (or <i>tinde</i> )	wooden mortar, drum constructed from it, and the music and dance performed with the drum; sometimes describes the social gatherings in which it is performed
<i>tende n-goumaten</i>	spirit healing ceremony accompanied by <i>tende</i>
<i>ténééré</i>	desert, emptiness, wasteland, uninhabitable area
<i>tenet</i>	secret language of <i>inaden</i>
<i>teshumara</i>	“being unemployed,” Tuareg youth ( <i>ishumar</i> ) culture
<i>tezma</i>	force causing ill luck, particularly attributed to <i>inaden</i>
<i>tisiwit</i>	poetry sung to express love and to encourage warriors, either performed a capella or accompanied by <i>inzad</i>
<i>toumast</i> (or <i>temust</i> )	social identity, Tuareg nation
<i>zahuten</i> (Ar.)	<i>ishumar</i> parties, “entertainment”



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I first arrived in Niger in summer 2012 on relatively short notice, nervous and with few local connections; it was by luck that through volunteer work with the nonprofit organization Rain for the Sahel and Sahara I met Brian Nowak, who from the start imparted an infectious love and curiosity for Niger. Since then, I have been honored to meet many more companions who have helped me tremendously with their friendship, laughter, hospitality, intimidatingly large quantities of *shayi*, and thoughtful input on my research. It is impossible to name them all, and while many of them appear in these pages, I must at the least acknowledge my brother Kildjate Moussa Albadé and his family, Halima Aboubacar, Mohamed “Badede” Gado and Sani

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## VITA

### Education

- 2013 M.A., Ethnomusicology  
University of California, Los Angeles  
Paper: “Rock (Music) at Hard Rock Cafe: Articulating Texts, Experiences, and Ideologies in the Experience Economy”
- 2009 B.A., Music (Jazz Studies) with University Honors, *summa cum laude*  
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### Selected Professional Experience

- 2018– Assistant Director, African Studies Center, Boston University  
2018 Teaching Fellow, Department of Anthropology, UCLA  
2015 Graduate Student Researcher, Department of Linguistics, UCLA  
2015 Teaching Associate, Department of Ethnomusicology, UCLA  
2014–15 Coordinator, “Fowler Out Loud” concert series, Fowler Museum, UCLA  
2012–14 Teaching Assistant, Department of Ethnomusicology, UCLA  
2009 Intern, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution  
2009 Intern, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

### Selected Awards and Grants

- 2017 Honorable Mention, Ki Mantle Hood Prize (most distinguished student paper),  
Society for Ethnomusicology Southern California and Hawai‘i Chapter
- 2017 Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA
- 2016 Fulbright US Student (IIE) Research Grant – Niger, US Department of State
- 2015 Arnold Rubin Award, Fowler Museum, UCLA
- 2015 Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Summer Fellowship – Hausa, Center  
for African Studies, University of Florida
- 2014–15 Graduate Research Mentorship, UCLA
- 2014 FLAS Summer Fellowship – Hausa, Kansas African Studies Center, University of  
Kansas
- 2013, 14, 16 Herb Alpert School of Music Student Opportunity Fund (for research), UCLA
- 2013 Critical Language Scholarship – Arabic (Morocco), US Department of State
- 2012, 14 Graduate Summer Research Mentorship, UCLA
- 2012–14 University of California Regents Stipend, UCLA
- 2012–13 Dr. Hyman Eugene Oxman Scholarship, School of the Arts and Architecture,  
UCLA
- 2011–12 Graduate Division/Herb Alpert School of Music Fellowship, UCLA

## Selected Publications

- Forthcoming “Hausa Film Music” and “Tuareg Guitar Music.” *The Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, edited by John Shepherd, David Horn, and Heidi Feldman. London: Bloomsbury. Anticipated publication date: 2018.
- Forthcoming “Music of Tuareg.” *Music Around the World: A Global Encyclopedia*, edited by Matthew Mihalka and Andrew Martin. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. Anticipated publication date: 2019.
- 2016 “Attending to Localized Internet Practices in Fieldwork.” *Ethnomusicology Review Sounding Board*. <https://www.ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/attending-localized-internet-practices-fieldwork>.
- 2014 “Interview: Christopher Kirkley, Sahel Sounds, and Guerrilla Ethnomusicology.” *Ethnomusicology Review Sounding Board*. <http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/interview-christopher-kirkley-sahel-sounds-and-guerrilla-ethnomusicology>.
- 2014 Book Review: Andy Morgan, *Music, Culture, and Conflict in Mali* (Freemuse 2013). *Ethnomusicology Review Sounding Board*. <http://www.ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/book-review-music-culture-and-conflict-mali-andy-morgan>.
- 2012 CD Review: *Wallahi le Zein! Wezin, Jakwar, and Guitar Boogie from the Islamic Republic of Mauritania* (Latitude 07, 2010). *Ethnomusicology Review Sounding Board*. <http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/cd-review-wallahi-le-zein>.
- 2012 “Nigérien Radio on a Nigerian Radio.” *Ethnomusicology Review Sounding Board*. <http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/nigerien-radio-nigerian-radio>.

## Selected Conference Presentations

- 2017 “Creative Waiting: Everyday Musicking and Digital Sociability among Tuareg Youth.” Paper, African Studies Association annual meeting, Chicago, November 16.
- 2017 “Making *Purple Rain* in the Sahara: Sahel Sounds and the Telling of a ‘Universal Story’ in a Particular Place.” Paper, Society for Ethnomusicology annual meeting, Denver, October 26.
- 2017 “Reckoning with Value in the Global Circulation of Sahel-Saharan Music.” Paper, Society for Ethnomusicology Southern California and Hawai‘i Chapter annual meeting, California State University, Fullerton, February 18.
- 2015 “Tuareg Music and the Negotiation of Nomadic Identities in the Sahara.” Paper, Society for Ethnomusicology Southern California and Hawai‘i Chapter annual meeting, University of San Diego, February 28.
- 2012 “For Better Ethnomusicology and a Better World, Archive It!” Panelist, Society for Ethnomusicology Southern California and Hawai‘i Chapter annual meeting, Loyola Marymount University, February 25.

## INTRODUCTION

There is a story one often encounters about Tuareg music. It goes something like this: The sudden establishment of independent African nation-states around 1960 broke up the once-powerful Tuareg nomadic people of the Sahel and Sahara regions. They were suddenly minorities within several nations, scattered across artificial postcolonial borders that restricted the mobility that was so crucial to their way of life. Politically antagonized by the leaders of these new states—particularly Mali and Niger—and confronted with droughts in the 1970s and 1980s that wiped out their herds, many Tuareg fled to cities in West Africa and the Maghreb to find whatever work they could get. In the ghettos of Algerian and Libyan cities, these diasporic populations began to develop a new form of music that brought together Tuareg poetic and musical aesthetics with the guitar styles of Jimi Hendrix, of Bob Marley, of Dire Straits. This music quickly took on a political bent as young Tuareg migrants began to sing about their revolutionary vision for an independent Tuareg nation. They spread their messages via contraband cassettes and, in the early 1990s, took up arms against the state in Mali and Niger. After peace negotiations, Tuareg guitar became a popular music and began to circulate the globe in the 2000s, led by its original innovators, the members of the band Tinariwen.

The problem of this single story, to paraphrase the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), is not that it is untrue, but that it is incomplete. As ethnomusicologist Marta Amico (2013) has shown, “Tuareg music” is something that can refer simply to the music of the Sahel-Saharan people who identify as Tuareg, but it is also something that has been constructed through the labor of world music industry producers, musicians, and scholars:

One could affirm that “Tuareg music” is a signifier used to designate and exchange objects in the networks of the globalized music industry. It exists in a position in which it constitutes a cultural response to a need for identification and definition that emerges at

the moment when certain musical practices from the Sahara Desert are put into circulation. (Amico 2013, 39-40)<sup>1</sup>

That Tuareg music has been circulating globally to great acclaim throughout the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, with dozens of bands touring across six continents and regularly releasing new recordings, is testament to its appeal to many audiences—as both sound and story. Indeed, over the past twelve months spent writing this dissertation, I have seen multiple Tuareg artists perform in Los Angeles and on several occasions have worked in coffee shops whose stereos played one of Niger’s most famous guitarists, Bombino.

The global successes and the stories told about Tuareg music return in a feedback loop that informs musicians at the source, in the Sahel and Sahara. This is a familiar phenomenon for many scholars of music and globalization; it is also but one of many facets of a broader entanglement with global capitalism that has been reshaping Tuareg life since at least the beginning of the postcolonial era. While the political and economic pressures that engendered the displacement of young Tuareg in the 1970s and 1980s have been part of the narrative about Tuareg guitar, capitalism itself has rarely been a central thematic concern in discussions of Tuareg music, despite its transformative effects on Tuareg musical practice. The repercussions of this engagement stretch past the commodification of Tuareg music for global consumption. Many Tuareg may now aspire to become musical *artistes*, they may grapple with the precarity of neoliberal capitalism by organizing their social lives around music, and they work out for themselves new definitions of what it means to be Tuareg when many of them grow up in urban settings, never knowing the nomadic life of their rural relatives and ancestors.

With these observations in mind, this dissertation examines how Tuareg people in Niger reckon with their increasing but incomplete entanglement in globalized neoliberal capitalism. I

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<sup>1</sup> Translations throughout this dissertation are by the author unless otherwise specified.



argue that a variety of social actors—Tuareg musicians, fans, festival organizers, and government officials, as well as music producers from Europe and North America—have come to regard Tuareg music as a resource by which to realize economic, political, and other social ambitions. Often this notion of music as resource is an implicit attitude regarding culture; in some cases, however, it is explicit. In fact, some Tuareg culture brokers I have met—including festival organizers, radio journalists, and musicians—draw parallels between uranium, Niger’s most important export, and their culture, an altogether different sort of resource. Their discourses relate to a growing body of literature that demonstrates how, in the time of neoliberalism, individual and collective subjects are taking on an increasingly entrepreneurial nature by exploiting representations of their identities for a variety of ends (e.g., Yúdice 2003; Gershon 2006, 2011; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Leve 2011). In the course of this dissertation, I draw attention to some of the major tensions of value, meaning, and identity at play since Tuareg music became a form of popular music in the 1990s—that is, when it became more fully implicated in the compulsions of capitalism. I do not claim to provide a complete accounting for all aspects of this relationship of capitalism and contemporary Tuareg music; instead, I will be content if this dissertation simply succeeds in demonstrating the complexity of the stories that emerge out of this reckoning.

## **FRAMING TUAREG SOCIETY WITHIN AND BEYOND THE NATION**

One of the challenges of writing about Tuareg communities is that there is a tremendous allure to parts of Tuareg culture that has seduced scores of foreign observers from the past. Images and depictions of the “Blue Men of the Sahara”—as Tuareg have sometimes been described—veiled in indigo turbans and casting haughty, piercing gazes from atop imposing

camels have wound up in Europe and beyond since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although stories of these peoples have been around for many centuries before. The development of Saharan tourism and Tuareg nationalist movements in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have contributed to the calcification of this exoticizing imagery. A sort of blinding romanticism thus permeates much of the popular and academic literature about Tuareg life. I aim to provide a sober account of aspects of Tuareg life (though I should add that I am not alone in this endeavor). Such a chronicle cannot ignore the romanticism of Tuareg culture, however, for this in fact serves to partially construct Tuareg senses of identity among themselves. Furthermore, as discussed later with reference to the subjective, experiential ethnographic approach of record labels like Sublime Frequencies, there is also something lost in taking an ostensibly rational, level-headed tack (see Chapter Five). My goal is to cultivate some sort of vivid empathy within readers of what it feels like among the people with whom I work, to engender sensing without sensationalizing.

The word “Tuareg” is itself a foreign term derived from Arabic that is used to describe people of the Sahel and Sahara who identify themselves as Kel Tamasheq, meaning “the people who speak Tamasheq,” which refers to an Amazigh (Berber) language; they also refer to themselves as *imajeghen* (the masculine plural Tamasheq word referring to Tuareg people as well as to a particular social class within Tuareg society). These terms suggest an overarching uniformity that does not account for the several Tamasheq dialects and communities in the region, although this is a point of some disagreement among scholars of Tuareg society.<sup>2</sup> The “Tuareg question” centers on whether there was ever a cohesive Tuareg society before the advent of European colonialism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It became particularly heated in the 1990s during the Tuareg rebellions in Mali and Niger, when the notion of the *toumast* (the

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<sup>2</sup> See the Glossary for more information on the terminology and transcription used in this dissertation.

Tuareg nation or community) was key to justifying the uprisings (see Amico 2013, 41-42). Yet the broader world of Tamasheq-speaking people is organized into a variety of independent political units, including confederations (denoted by the word *kel*, e.g., the Kel Ewey people of the Air mountain region in Niger or the Kel Adagh people of the Adagh region in northern Mali) and *tawsatin* (descent groups or clans).

Although there are a number of variations across the confederations and postcolonial developments have led to significant changes, Tuareg society has generally been based on a structured hierarchy of inherited, usually endogamous social positions. Among these groups are the elite *imajeghen*, who historically owned herds of large livestock such as camels, controlled the trans-Saharan caravan trade, and raided neighboring peoples to extract tribute in the form of agricultural goods and labor; images of *imajeghen*, usually of men wearing the *tagelmoust* (turban and veil), constitute the vast majority of depictions of Tuareg people. Among other social positions are *imghad*, “free” tributaries who labor for *imajeghen* in exchange for protection and a share of traded goods. There are also *iklan*, who serve as domestic workers, herders, and gardeners in conditions of servitude or enslavement (despite slavery officially being outlawed); those *iklan* who have been freed, or the descendants of freed *iklan*, are known as *ighawelen*. Sometimes both of these groups may be referred to by the Songhai or Hausa words used to describe them: *bellah* or *buzu*, respectively. *Ineslemen* are members of a class of religious scholars. Finally, and of particular importance in the realm of music, are *inaden*, who occupy an ambiguous position and perform an array of services, acting as intermediaries between different parties, performing poetry and praise songs, and producing leather, metal, and wood crafts (see Chapter Two). It is particularly important that this structure of hierarchical relations involves members of multiple ethnic origins; although centuries of intermingling have led to blurring such

distinctions in many cases, there remains an element of racial politics that contrasts the predominantly lighter-skinned Amazigh *imajeghen* and the *iklan*, who often have origins among darker-skinned populations such as Zarma and Hausa, the largest ethnic groups in Niger (Lecocq 2010a; Rasmussen 2013).

The multicultural composition of Tuareg societies is often downplayed in accounts of contemporary Tuareg music. Although anthropologist Susan Rasmussen (2000, 2006) and ethnomusicologists Anouck Genthon (2012) and Marta Amico (2013) reference the transition of Tuareg guitar music to public spaces and emergence of multiethnic bands in the 1990s, studies of this style continue to privilege a perspective treating Tuareg as an object of global consumption and as somehow removed from everyday national soundscapes. I suggest that positioning Tuareg music within the national music scene of Niger, an objective I pursue in several chapters of this dissertation, contributes a more holistic and better historical accounting for Tuareg music as popular music; similar projects could be taken up in Mali and Algeria, among other locations. Throughout the Sahel, individuals draw on mixed ethnic heritages and may identify with more than one language or ethnic group, a phenomenon known in Niger as *brassage sahélien* (Fr.: “Sahelian intermingling”) (Alidou 2005; see Chapter One).

The cosmopolitan realities of *brassage* are checked by political and economic incentives for promoting a distinct Tuareg identity—part of what John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (2009) describe as “ethnopreneurialism”—including tourism and the nationalist movement. In the town of Agadez, for example, a particular form of *brassage* emerges from the mixing of the predominantly Tuareg and Hausa population, which some Tuareg refer to lamentingly as “Hausaization” (Seligman 2006a, 274-275n12, 275n18). Young Agadezian Tuareg grow up speaking only Hausa (and possibly French) in an environment inundated with media imported

from Nigeria's Hausa film industry, Kannywood. Regarding Hausaization as a threat to the preservation of Tuareg culture and language, some culture brokers make concerted efforts to combat the loss of Tuareg cultural heritage knowledge. The contradictions of *brassage* and ethnopreneurial reification of ethnic distinctions thus emerge in the Nigérien soundscape in a number of ways.

Tuareg people today are primarily situated within areas of Niger, Mali, Algeria, Libya, and Burkina Faso (see Figure 0.1). The bulk of my research was completed in Niger, a landlocked country within the arid lands of the Sahara and Sahel with a population of around 20



Figure 0.1. Map of historic region of Tuareg influence.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Image source: Martin Gamache, *National Geographic*. Accessed October 15, 2015. <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/09/sahara-tuareg/tuareg-map>.

million people. Although by land mass it is one of Africa's largest countries, it has a low population density, mostly grouped along its southern borders with Nigeria and Benin. About 19% of Nigériens live in urban settings, and most of the population (87%) engages in agricultural labor as a primary occupation, either as farmers producing cowpeas, cotton, peanuts, millet, sorghum, and rice, or as pastoralists herding cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and other livestock. Uranium, most of which is mined in the northern parts of the country predominately inhabited by Tuareg, is Niger's most valuable export, though the income generated from this industry does not support local development to the satisfaction of local populations, who are confronted with extreme environmental degradation and radiation pollution affecting the water and land on which they rely. About four-fifths of the population identifies as Muslim, although demographic data such as these tell simplified stories, especially with regard to spiritual practice that may integrate indigenous religious expression. The same can be said for census data on ethnicity, given that many sub-categories and creolized ethnic identities in Niger are not recognized in the available data; however, as a general sense of the population makeup of Niger, it may be useful to recognize that according to this data Hausa people make up the largest community (53.1%), followed by Zarma-Songhai (21.2%), Tuareg (11%), Fulani (6.5%), Kanuri (5.9%), and smaller populations of Gourma, Arab, and Toubou, among others (CIA 2018; UNSD 2018).

## **VALUE AND THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE**

I argue that artistic change and its relationship to capitalism is fundamentally a matter of value. Local cultural production clearly illustrates that many Tuareg regard culture as an "expedient" (Yúdice 2003) for attaining a variety of goals; from this perspective, it is something that can generate economic value or forms of value that can be made commensurable with it (cf.

Graeber 2013; Tsing 2013). But there are also social values—for example, honor, propriety, reserve—which may complicate economic impulses. The anthropological literature on value provides a framework for coming to terms with these capitalist entanglements. Multiple aspects of value scholarship lend themselves to making sense of this phenomenon; here I introduce five of the most significant ones for my thinking on the subject.

First of all is the recognition that there exist a multitude of value forms, some of which are economic—such as exchange-value—but many of which are not. These non-economic values tend to be difficult to quantify; for example, one may speak of aesthetic value, moral value, or fame value, among others. This observation is a product of the legacies of studies by Karl Marx ([1867] 1978) on capitalism and by Marcel Mauss ([1925] 2000) on non-capitalist societies, which later scholars have shown to not be as clearly distinguished as originally assumed (e.g., Gregory 2015; Graeber 2001; Tsing 2013).

Secondly, value theory has also provided insight on one of the core mechanisms of contemporary, globalizing neoliberal capitalism, which since the era of the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) affects Niger in more and more profound ways (Alidou 2005; cf. Mbembe 2001; Ferguson 2006): this is the assumption that the world in which we live can be reduced to economistic rationality (Foucault 2008, 243; Harvey 2007, 2). But one of the important contributions of anthropological studies of value is that they illustrate that not all forms of value are in fact commensurable to an economic framework (Graeber 2001, 2013; Lambek 2013; Tsing 2013). I therefore frame my research around analyses of both the production of non-economic forms of value and the economic aspirations—often unrealized and thus, in a sense, intangible—of musicians and other Nigériens invested in cultural production.

For anthropologists, the literature on value traces back to Marx and Mauss. One of Marx's groundbreaking insights, which has become fundamental to anthropological thinking since his time—and the third contribution of value theory I wish to raise here—is that value is about the importance of actions, not objects; objects are valuable insofar as they serve as mediums that store value (Marx 1978; Graeber 2005, 450; Lambek 2013; Taylor 2017a). Although Marx himself focused on labor as the activity that produces value, anthropologists from Marcel Mauss (2000) to David Graeber (2001) have pointed towards a more generalized understanding of value in both capitalist and non-capitalist societies. Value can be generated by a laborer manufacturing a commodity such as a coat (in Marx's classic model), just as it can be produced by exchanging *kula* shells in Polynesia (Mauss, among others), by transforming oil money into national culture in 1970s Nigeria (Apter 2005), or by curating and sharing music playlists on social media such as YouTube or Spotify (Taylor 2017a). Being grounded in action, particularly performance, intangible cultural forms like music are ideal subjects for any study of value that emphasizes action. As Christopher Waterman has argued with regard to *jùjú* music in Nigeria, performance “is a specialized mode of transaction . . . focused on the distribution of economic resources, the negotiation of status, and the management of meaning” (Waterman 1990, 217)—in other words, in the production of multiple forms of value. Remarkably, however, even as there exists a number of studies on visual arts (e.g., Baudrillard 1981; Myers 2002; Winegar 2006), scholars seem to be just beginning to address music in these terms (e.g., Shipley 2013, Taylor 2017a, and, less directly, Apter 2005).

A fourth notion from the value literature that merits preliminary consideration here is what Arjun Appadurai (1986) calls “regimes of value.” Appadurai is principally concerned with the exchange of commodities (more broadly understood than in Marx's sense), which he



recognizes can operate in different situations—both intracultural and intercultural—in which standards of value may not remain the same. In other words, within a particular regime, goods have a particular value or meaning for people; when they cross regimes and enter new situations, their valuations may not cohere, with some changing drastically while others may not change much at all. Furthermore, goods may exist in multiple regimes at a given time, and these regimes may co-exist and compete (Appadurai 1986; see also Myers 2001, 2002; Taylor 2017a).

Appadurai's approach identifies exchange as the source of value, not vice versa, which suggests that our study of commodities would do well to empirically observe things-in-motion in order to understand their human and social contexts (1986, 5, 56). While this study is not solely concerned with commodities, but with performative action, thinking in terms of regimes of value offers several advantages to the analysis of Tuareg music. For example, it provides a way to appreciate the shifting ways in which performances and the circulation of recordings generate economic and non-economic forms of value. It also helps to identify how Tuareg music is valued differently by Tuareg, Nigérien, and international listeners, which affects the aesthetic and pragmatic decision-making of musicians. And it facilitates considerations of how neoliberal capitalism affects Tuareg cultural production in its attempts to render non-economic values commensurable with economic forms.

Finally, as most clearly articulated by David Graeber, value is a key issue “if we see social worlds not just as a collection of persons and things but rather as a project of mutual creation, as something collectively made and remade” (Graeber 2013, 222). This is an understanding of society that draws from the German anthropological tradition rather than the French or British, which tend to claim that the goal for research is to understand how society, treated as an already-established fact, hangs together. If humans are understood to mutually

create each other, value can be understood as the way in which these projects of creation become meaningful to actors; the worlds we inhabit must be understood to emerge from these projects of meaning-making rather than the other way around (2013, 238). Terence Turner, whose work inspires much of Graeber's thinking (much of it unpublished, but see, e.g., Turner 1979, 2008), would also add that politics is ultimately not just about accumulating value, but:

to define what value is, and how different values (forms of "honor," "capital," etc.) dominate, encompass, or otherwise relate to one another; and thus at the same time, between those imaginary arenas in which they are realized. In the end, political struggle is and must always be about the meaning of life. (Graeber 2013, 228)

As Graeber claims, "it is value . . . that brings universes into being" (2013, 231). In many contexts, human actors may comfortably move from one social world to another, overlapping one—say, from one closely tied to Tuareg nomadic life to one that is urban and decidedly more capitalist—without any sense of contradiction. From this perspective, we can sense that Tuareg cultural production may be processes through which Tuareg work agentively to not only (re)produce particular visions of Tuareg society itself, but to give meaning to it—through the definition of values—in the context of political dynamics over which they ultimately have little control.

This dissertation thus consists of several related case studies, which I enumerate below, of how Tuareg music generates particular forms of value for different social actors, including musicians, festival organizers, radio hosts, agents of the state, and both local and foreign observers. Through these processes it mediates notions of ethnicity, nationality, gender, and religion, among others. By attending to such mediations of economic and non-economic value forms across competing regimes, it aims to more clearly articulate the complicated social world of Tuareg in Niger as they wrestle with pressures of globalizing neoliberal capitalism, cosmopolitan urban living, and national belonging.

## METHODOLOGY

As many ethnographers experience, the final form of this project is something quite different from what I had originally envisioned. When I began graduate school in 2011, I intended to build on my undergraduate thesis, which introduced me to Tuareg guitar music, and add an ethnographic component to researching music festivals and national reconciliation in Mali. The music press cast the rebellion as a thing of the past, resistance an integral history of Tuareg music but not so much its present. Yet in January 2012, as I prepared my first applications for grants to fund field research in Mali that summer, conflict returned and it immediately became apparent that fieldwork there was unfeasible. Disappointed, I hastily prepared a substitute proposal for a project among the Tuareg diaspora in Europe. I remained uncertain about my long-term dissertation plans, and with encouragement from Jacqueline C. DjeDje and funding in hand, decided to switch directions and travel to Niger for exploratory research. Compared to the rich array of Malian artists featured in the discourses of the world music industry that had first connected me to Tuareg music—Ali Farka Touré, Salif Keïta, Amadou and Mariam, and Rokia Traoré, among many others—Niger seemed to be an afterthought.

That first visit in summer 2012 was transformative. Two years later I returned for a second round of preliminary research, gaining clarity about my goals and confidence with cultural and language skills. During my first trip, I had pursued Tamasheq language lessons as well as French tutoring; however, failing to find either a professional Tamasheq teacher or substantive pedagogical sources for learning the language, I made little progress. Before my return, I decided to pursue formal training in Hausa language, a *lingua franca* in Niger. In the US, I was able to study Hausa in two summer courses at the African Flagship Language Institute

(AFLI) held at the University of Florida, to find a handful of books teaching the language, and to build on my studies with private tutoring in Niamey with Issa Ousseini, a professional language teacher and translator whom I originally met as my French tutor in 2012. I was thus able to get around Niger with two languages, though I remain frustrated that I was unable to acquire much skill in Tamasheq, restricting my ability to analyze Tuareg guitar song texts without the aid of translators.

In 2014 I was fortunate to secure an invitation from the Centre de Formation et de Promotion Musicale (CFPM) El Hadj Taya in the capital, Niamey, to come back as an affiliated Fulbright researcher in 2016, when I returned to live in Niger for twelve more months of research; all told, this dissertation draws on over fifteen months of fieldwork in Niger.

Throughout these sojourns I was based in Niamey, a cosmopolitan and fast-growing city of about two million people who are primarily speakers of Zarma-Songhai or Hausa and French, Niger's official language of education and government. Many Tuareg live in Niamey, especially after migrating from northern Niger or from Mali due to the conflicts that have erupted in these locations in recent history; however, the capital is not known as a center for Tuareg culture the way that the northern Nigérien town of Agadez is, where I wished to spend more of my time. I was able to visit Agadez on several occasions in 2016 and in 2014, but anxieties were high during these periods about security; I received incredibly mixed advice about the wisdom of making Agadez home, from fellow foreigners, from government officials, and from other Nigériens. "You must be prudent," some advised me; others told me "there is no problem."

Niger is unfortunately confronted with a time in which conflict, mass migration, and terrorism afflict its neighbors and its own populations. While not wishing to cast these factors as deterministic of Niger's fate—in fact, writing about music seems a welcome respite from the

continual framing of Niger in terms of its position within Sahel-Saharan conflict and trans-Saharan migration crisis—these were conditions that placed practical limitations on my research. While flying to Paris from the United States en route to Niamey, terrorists affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Al-Mourabitoun attacked a hotel in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; my Paris-Niamey flight, which was part of a loop that continued to Ouagadougou, was cancelled by the time I landed at Charles de Gaulle airport. Boko Haram regularly attacked villages in northern Nigeria and southeastern Niger, displacing tens of thousands of people around Lake Chad. Occasional attacks on local, United Nations, and Western targets in Niger and neighboring countries further heightened the pressure to be careful. Despite the fact that many Nigériens demonstrate tremendous hospitality toward foreigners who come to live among them as aid workers or in other capacities, especially for those who learn Nigérien languages and otherwise seek to integrate with the local community, this was no guarantee for safety from violence committed by terrorists beyond the community: in October 2016, an American aid worker named Jeffery Woodke, who was reportedly well-liked in the local community of Abalak in which he had lived since 1992, was kidnapped; two Nigériens accompanying him were killed (AP 2016).

Given this situation, I was restricted in visiting rural settings and in the amount of time I spent in Agadez; most of my time was in Niamey. I was also fortunate to briefly visit Bamako, where I met with a number of Tuareg musicians based in Mali and observed the preparation for and performance of a concert by a Nigérien Tuareg guitarist, whose travel experience I describe in Chapter Three. After returning from my year in Niger, I made two trips to Portland, Oregon, to observe and participate in recording projects by the independent label Sahel Sounds with Nigérien guitarists Mdou Moctar and Ahmoudou Madassane. Thus, although I primarily draw on

experiences in Niamey and Agadez, this project constitutes a multi-sited ethnography of Tuareg music.

I approach ethnography as an enterprise that is about much more than fieldwork, requiring multiple research methods to produce a holistic account of cultural phenomena. At CFPM, I spent my days consulting archival materials and scanning them for my own use and in order to provide the center with digitized copies of their materials; I also obtained library materials from the Institut de Recherche en Sciences Humaines (IRSH, the Institute for Social Science Research) at the Université Abdou Moumouni in Niamey and from the Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local (LASDEL, Laboratory for Studies and Research on Social Dynamics and Local Development). I also recorded performances at festivals, concerts, and weddings and hired help to translate some of the songs sung in them, as well as from extant recordings for which no translations yet existed.

Recalling Graeber's point that value "brings universes into being" (see above), however, my primary research concern was to understand Nigérien social worlds by learning how to participate in the production and circulation of meaningful social values within them. Most people are rarely able to articulate their values in any sort of coherent form when given the task, and when they do verbalize values, these are often inconsistent with their own behavioral tendencies. (Think: "Do as I say, not as I do.") It is often subtextual. Value, then, served as a conceptual framework for thinking through my observations, interactions, and personal practice; it was seldom nearly as productive to directly inquire about particular social values as it was to ask for people to provide examples of them at play in the real world. This was how I best learned, too. Walking down the street one hot day to find a taxi for my friend Halima, for example, I insisted on buying us a couple sodas and small sachets of drinking water (called *piya*

*wata*) to cool off with; as we continued walking through the dust, I bit into the corner of a *piya wata* bag and began guzzling water. When I asked why she kept her drinks in her bag, Halima cracked up as she explained that it was indecorous to drink and walk at the same time.

Most of my research thus involved participant observation—at times, apparently, as a complete barbarian—in one of several guises: attending and helping set up performances, observing and participating in social media exchanges (of conversations and of images, audio, and video), learning to make a good round of tea and be a good host, and simply *causant* (hanging out). Preferring to let observations trickle through, holistically, in these situations I kept a notebook at hand but aimed to not let it interfere with my presence and participation in a given moment. Similarly, I preferred to ask questions and sense out friends’ and colleagues’ perspectives on Tuareg music, Nigérien politics, and other matters in these informal settings. I was self-conscious about not wanting to present myself to my interlocutors as a journalist helicoptering in to collect as many recorded interviews as possible and then disappearing to write everything up without fully grasping the local situation; if one reads enough music journalism about Tuareg guitarists, it quickly becomes frustrating to encounter the same recycled tropes and misrepresentations. I still fear that, despite my caution, this will be the case for my own work. But some of my Nigérien companions did express their appreciation that I took my time before asking for formal interviews, getting to know them first before turning to more pointed questions. Of course, my ability to establish these kinds of relationships varied greatly according to the time I had available to know someone (more in Niamey, less in Agadez) and the conditions in which I met them—either through friends or prearranged with a “fixer” and therefore expecting monetary compensation for their time.

As I interacted with musicians, producers, and fans in Niger, Mali, the US, and via social media, the words of Steven Feld lingered in my mind: “To listen carefully to stories is to take local subjectivity seriously” (Feld 2012, 8). The promise of ethnography—the fundamental project of this dissertation—is, in my mind, in its commitment to strive for the recognition of the subjectivity of those people about whose lives we write. Ethnographers may not always succeed at this. However, I am not sure there is a better way to confront this challenge than through a process of dialogic editing. Ethnomusicologist Harris Berger makes a strong case for this point:

Assuming that people have a perfect understanding of their own experiences denies that interpretation is a kind of practice and decontextualizes it. To act as though people cannot misunderstand their own experiences is ultimately to dehumanize them by deifying them, to deny their capacity to grapple with the complex realities of social life. . . . Neither the scholar nor the research participant is an infallible observer of social life, and the richness of experience requires dialogic methods in ethnography. (Berger 2008, 73)

I have pursued dialogic work in a handful of ways. First of all, I present divergent perspectives of several social actors—for example, among Tuareg musicians, Tuareg fans, and American producers—in order to highlight the dialogues among them. I hesitate in these situations to make claims as an “infallible observer of social life” in drawing out these points of view. Secondly, in conversations and interviews I often directly discussed my research findings with collaborators or the observations other informants had made with which they may or may not agree. I look forward to opportunities to return to Niger in the future with this dissertation in hand in order to reckon alongside my friends and interlocutors with the disagreements and claims it makes—a task that requires further research funding and more time than I could manage for this project. While such dialogic processes cannot eliminate my ultimate, subjective influence on the production of this research, it will enable thicker descriptions of the phenomena at hand.



## CHAPTER OUTLINE

In Chapter One, I situate the genesis and early development of Tuareg guitar music within the cultural politics of the Sahel-Sahara and of Niger, which engendered this music of political and community engagement. In presenting this history, I emphasize how different forms of value predominated at particular historical periods. I loosely frame these in terms of regimes of value, while bearing in mind Achille Mbembe's (2001) claim that the postcolony is a "time of entanglement" in which multiple temporalities of past, present, and future overlap; together, these temporalities and regimes constitute what I would call rhythms of value. Through this framing I trace developments from the experience of displacement among young Tuareg in the 1970s-1980s, through the *Tanekra* cultural nationalist movement and the 1990s rebellions in Mali and Niger that it fostered, to the post-rebellion era when Tuareg guitar has become a public and global popular music. This brings us, more or less, to the ethnographic present of the remainder of the dissertation.

Chapter Two begins this ethnography of the present by focusing on the everyday musicking of youth who are grappling with the economic precarity and generational changes wrought by Tuareg urbanization in Niger. On one hand, this chapter is simply about what happens in between those infrequent occasions when more typical objects of musicological interest take place: public performances at weddings and concerts, or sessions at recording studios. However, the more important point emerges in framing mundane music-centered activities—playing music among friends, listening to music, discussing music, and exchanging recordings over social media—as "creative waiting." In doing so, I build on the work of Adeline Masquelier (2013) and others who regard "waiting" as an engaged mode of living by which youth generate meaningful temporalities that might otherwise be denied to them in the current

economy; that is, they produce forms of social value where they are unable to participate in conventional forms of productive labor. *Fada* youth social groups are one of the main settings for creative waiting, and in these and other social settings elucidated in this chapter, including music-centered social media groups that resemble *fadas* in their structures of belonging, young Tuareg and friends create new music and produce sociality.

In Chapters Three and Four I turn specifically to the music economy that has developed since the 1990s, with its unprecedented (in Tuareg society) proliferation of musical *artistes* trying to make a living from earning money for their performance. While early Tuareg guitarists were celebrated as heroes of a political movement seeking better living conditions for their people, as discussed in the first chapter, guitarists' turn to money after the rebellions has engendered societal anxieties about what the role of the *artiste* should be. These debates often tie more fundamentally to Tuareg values of honorable and dignified behavior, which many Tuareg perceive to be threatened and undermined in contemporary guitar culture. However, this perspective is far from unanimous. I introduce some of these values (e.g., *asshak*, *imojagh*, *takarakit*) and how they relate to social position in Tuareg and Nigérien society in Chapter Three. Then, I examine aspects of performance practice that foreground the reckoning of honor and money among musicians and audiences, paying particular attention to the spraying of money, to praise singing, and to dance and musicians' performance antics. In Chapter Four, I turn to the evolving intellectual property regime among musicians as another situation which raises these concerns about honor and money; to this end, I discuss copyright law in Niger and how, despite ostensible failures by the state to effectively enforce it among Tuareg musicians, *artistes* nonetheless make claims on one another's ethical integrity based on the performance of covers—what some musicians call theft.

Chapter Five is a case study of the “intercultural production” (Myers 2001, 2002) of Tuareg music intended for a global listenership. I examine the work of two American independent record labels, Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds, which position themselves as subversive alternatives operating separately from the market-oriented value regime of the mainstream world music industry. Instead, they pursue other forms of value as part of a broader underground culture of world music collectors, what David Novak (2011) describes as “World Music 2.0.” I present some of the Tuareg music projects produced by these labels, including several albums and a remake of the 1984 Prince film *Purple Rain* set in Agadez, to elucidate some of their aesthetic values and how the musicians and producers involved create them. Furthermore, in investigating the production process of some of these projects, I show how the unequally structured relations between Nigérien musicians and American producers calls into question the extent to which these labels may claim to differ from the mainstream music industry.

The brief concluding chapter revisits the broad themes of the preceding chapters and their implications for further research on Tuareg culture. I point to developments since the end of my fieldwork in early 2017 and reflect on related research I completed in Niger but did not include in this dissertation.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS**

This dissertation offers a number of contributions to ethnomusicology and African studies. Foremost among these—in light of the limited number of studies of Nigérien popular music—is to reframe Tuareg music so that it is better understood in its broader African contexts, breaking down the rather strict conceptual barriers of ethnicity that much scholarship ascribes it

even as it is widely recognized that ethnic identity in Africa is fluid and constructed. While I focus on the case of Niger, similar studies could provide parallel analyses of the relationships of Tuareg music to the popular soundscapes of Mali, Algeria, or France. It will also contribute a new African perspective to studies of value and music. Although the literature on this subject is a classic corpus in anthropology, from Marx and Mauss through Graeber and Myers, it remains patently materialist in its orientations. This may stem from the trickiness of identifying tokens of value in something immaterial like music, but the emphasis on action highlighted by Graeber (2001, 2005, 2013), Lambek (2013), and others provides musicologists a clear opening for contributing to this literature. Taylor (2015, 2017a, 2017b) and Shipley (2013) provide important models for the study of value in musical activity in Western classical and popular music, Irish music sessions, world music festivals, and Ghanaian popular music. Based on the edges of the Sahara rather than the Atlantic coast. and contending with the underdeveloped music industry of Niger, I provide a Sahel-Saharan, Francophone perspective on music and questions of value particular to the fringes of globalization and a familiar music industry. This is important given that the most notable studies of value in Africa are predominantly focused on coastal West and Equatorial Africa, and especially Nigeria: Bohannan's (1955) exploration of Tiv spheres of exchange (in Nigeria), Guyer's (2004) study of monetary transactions in Atlantic Africa, Apter's (2005) work on the production of Nigerian national culture during 1970s oil boom, and Shipley's (2013) research on Ghanaian hiplife. We can only anticipate that many of the theoretical claims based in ethnographies of other times and places—colonial Polynesia, 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, neoliberal Ghana—will face instructive challenges in a Nigérien setting.

## CHAPTER 1

### TUAREG CULTURAL POLITICS IN POSTCOLONIAL NIGER A BRIEF HISTORY

In order to make sense of the ethnographic present in which the remainder of this dissertation is constituted, it is necessary to provide an account of the genesis and early development of Tuareg guitar music. I situate this history within the broader Tuareg cultural politics of the Sahel-Sahara and particularly of Niger; these are the inseparable conditions which produced this music of political and community engagement. Drawing on the model of Taylor's (2016b) account of different regimes of value across periods of Western music history, I emphasize how different values predominated during particular historical moments as the vehicles for the circulation of the emerging guitar music. Recall from the introductory chapter that Appadurai theorizes regimes of value as a way to talk about the exchange of commodities, which he defines in loose terms as "*any thing intended for exchange*" (Appadurai 1986, 9; emphasis in original). While Appadurai is concerned with "goods" and material culture (thus his essay appears in the volume *The Social Life of Things*), I discuss Tuareg music in both its immaterial, performative instances as well as its material forms, such as in recordings. Furthermore, only at the end of the history presented here does music undergo a process more conventionally understood as commodification—that is, when it is not simply a thing intended for exchange (following Appadurai), but a thing intended for *capitalist* exchange in which one may accrue monetary profit (following Marx) (cf. Taylor 2007).

Periodization in these terms is ultimately a heuristic; it is important to bear in mind that these historic value regimes and the cultural production that occurred within them are not discretely bounded, but rather blend in from one to another. As historian Achille Mbembe (2001)

argues, the postcolony is not a point in a linear progression, but rather a “time of entanglement” in which presents, pasts, and futures interlock, a combination of several temporalities. These temporalities, as linked to regimes of value, thus constitute what I would call rhythms of value. Indeed, many of the songs developed in the earliest days of Tuareg guitar continue to play an important part in contemporary repertoires, creating meaning across different generations, not only different moments in time but also different age groups (cf. Rasmussen 2000). I present here, then, a series of general transitions in the development of Tuareg guitar music, from its role in building community among displaced people to a tool for political mobilization, and eventually, to a more commercial enterprise.

## **DISPLACEMENT AND THE GENESIS OF TUAREG GUITAR**

While France established the Third Military Territory of Niger in 1900, it was not until 1908 that the French military conquest of most parts of present-day Niger was complete—at least on paper. Yet colonial rule, best conceived “as a process rather than an event” (Fuglestad 1983, 189), was not more firmly established until about 1922, especially in the northeast. That same year, French power transferred from military to civil administrators. The complex structure of Tuareg society meant that despite the forceful resistance of many leaders against French conquest until 1917, some of the less powerful Tuareg populations, especially sedentary groups like the *bellah* (*ighawelen*, freed slaves and their descendents), collaborated with the French to help break the power of the *imajeghen* nomads. Once their power declined, however, the French administration mostly left Tuareg nomads alone, so long as they did not disrupt the flow of the colonial economy; in fact, fascinated by romanticized notions of Tuareg society, the French were interested in conserving their way of life (Fuglestad 1983, 107-115; Charlick 1991, 27-40;

Lecocq 2004, 89; Kohl 2007, 90-91). It is important to note that throughout many of the French and other foreign ethnographic accounts of Tuareg until recently (and often still today), there is a tendency to equate “Tuareg” with nomads, without recognizing the significant role of sedentary Tamasheq-speaking people in Tuareg society (cf. Badi 2010, Giuffrida 2010, Lecocq 2010b).

Nonetheless, nomadic populations faced pressure to settle into sedentary communities. With its capital first in Zinder, and later moved to Niamey, the French colonial administration favored the less mobile populations of Niger who were easier to integrate into the colonial economy, not on account of any particular acquiescence to French rule but because they were easier to monitor than nomadic pastoralist groups like Tuareg and Fulani. Hausa in southern Niger remained a strong force in the colonial economy, which was focused on groundnut exports, but it was the Zarma-Songhai who inhabited the southwest area surrounding Niamey who were most integrated into the colonial political economic structure through education and, as a result, participation in colonial administration as *évolués*. This configuration laid the preconditions for Zarma-Songhai (and to a lesser extent, Hausa) political dominance in postcolonial Niger, which—like many other French colonies in West Africa—was declared a republic within the French community in 1958 and gained full independence in 1960 (Fuglestad 1983, 107-115; Charlick 1991, 27-40).

While colonialism had already ushered in changes to Tuareg social structure, further drastic transformations took place in the postcolonial period. In this section, I emphasize cultural and political transformations among Tuareg leading up to the early 1990s. Many Tuareg were displaced from their homelands and the rural economy around which most of the society was organized; they moved into greater contact with an urban wage and cash economy. As a result, the value regime of the preceding generation—which upheld as social values such matters as

class hierarchy (presented in the introductory chapter), reserved and honorable behavior, and one's existence as a nomadic pastoralist with large herds—was called into question. As historian Baz Lecocq (2004) argues, this period was more revolutionary to Tuareg society than the major rebellions of the 1990s that I discuss in the subsequent section.

### ***Teshumara: The Culture of Displaced Tuareg in the 1970s–1980s***

The newly-independent states in the Sahel, including Niger and Mali, pushed for rapid modernization of their economies beginning in the 1960s. Whereas these states perceived nomadic pastoralism as an obstacle to this project, Tuareg viewed the modernization policies advocating sedentary settlement and the education of young nomads as “recolonization” and, in 1963, launched a rebellion against the Malian state. In its aftermath, the Malian government exhibited greater distrust of Tuareg, who were further marginalized. Meanwhile, in Niger, a 1976 coup attempt against President Seyni Kountché (r. 1974-1987)—who himself came to power through a military coup—counted among its organizers several Tuareg, Hausa, and Moors seeking to end Zarma-Songhai control of Nigérien politics. Although the coup failed, the influence of Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi (r. 1969-2011) as he maneuvered for influence in the Sahara was becoming apparent. Tuareg were cast as subversive destabilizers, further marginalized by the Nigérien state; some members of the community were imprisoned, while many of the Tuareg putschists fled to Libya. Compounding these challenges, major droughts struck the Sahara in 1969-1974 and 1984-1986, annihilating the herds that were at the core of the nomads' economy; the relief aid sent by the international community and managed by the state governments—whose members pilfered many of these resources for personal gain—provided insufficient support.



With little choice available to them, many Tuareg in both Mali and Niger left their nomadic lives to find work in the urban centers of the Maghreb and West Africa. Some of these displaced people settled, though most of them moved from one location to another often, a new form of mobility coming to define their lives.<sup>4</sup> They found temporary work as herders, agricultural laborers in Saharan oasis towns, and in construction, fishery, car repair shops, smuggling, and military service. Tuareg shantytowns thus developed around Sahel-Saharan urban centers and frontier posts, including Agadez, Arlit, and Niamey in Niger; Gao in Mali; and Tamanrasset in Algeria (see Figure 1.1). The Tamanrasset ghetto of displaced Tuareg in particular—called Tahaggart-shumera and predominately comprising Kel Adagh Tuareg from northern Mali—became key to developments in broader Tuareg culture and politics during the 1970s and 1980s. The young unemployed people there became known as *ishumar* (s. *ashamur*) and their emerging urban culture was called *teshumara*, both Tamasheq adaptations from the French term *chômeur*, meaning “an unemployed person” (Belalimat 1996, 2003, 2010; Lecocq 2004, 89-90, 95; 2010a; Kohl 2007, 90-91).

The Kel Adagh *ishumar* in Tamanrasset were stigmatized by the local community of Kel Ahaggar Tuareg who were indigenous to the area. Away from home but also isolated from their Kel Ahaggar cousins who were pursuing more formalized folkloric cultural practices as a tourist economy developed in southern Algeria, the Kel Adagh began to organize festive parties called *zahuten* (from Arabic). Meeting in open spaces outside town or in the interior of a household,

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<sup>4</sup> In much of the scholarship on this generation of Tuareg, they are described as “refugees” or “exiles.” Each of these terms bears particular semantic connotations, and “refugee” in particular invokes a particular legal status of a person who is outside the country of their nationality (see UNHCR n.d.). This describes Tuareg from Mali and Niger who resettled in the Maghreb, but it does not leave space for the frequent crossing of borders among them, nor does it account for the many Tuareg who fled their homes but remained within the borders of these states (called “internally displaced persons,” or IDPs). Thus, I prefer to describe these people as “displaced.” I thank Alyssa Mathias for her input on this issue.



Figure 1.1. Map of Niger and surrounding areas.  
Source: Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

young men and women came together to pass an evening singing, drinking tea, and flirting with each other (Belalimat 2003).<sup>5</sup> In these social dynamics, *zahuten* appear similar to the older *ahal* courtship gatherings in which Tuareg youth flirt with one another, men singing *tisiwit* poetry to the accompaniment of a woman playing *inzad* fiddle, or women singing with *tende* mortar drums (cf. Rasmussen 2000). In this way, *zahuten* were not only a way to build community among the *ishumar*, but also were a form of cultural reproduction (Belalimat 1996, 2003, 2010).

A key development in the *zahuten* of the 1970s was what anthropologist Nadia Belalimat (2010) describes as “neo-*tende*.” The *tende* is a drum constructed from a wooden mortar used by women to grind grain and spices, which is covered with goatskin that is strapped to two long parallel wooden pestles on which women usually sit to add tension to the drumhead (sometimes stones are used instead; see Figure 1.2). However, particularly among *ishumar*, it became increasingly common to use a plastic jerrycan (used to store water or gasoline) instead of the mortar. A number of genres of *tende* music exist according to performance context, played by women drummers in almost all traditions; these women are also featured singers, accompanied by responsorial choruses of either women or men. Among the various forms of *tende* music are *tende n-tagbast* (“dance *tende*”) in which pairs of men enter a circular dance space in front of the drummers and perform intense acrobatic steps, often from a crouched position; *tende n-goumaten* (“*tende* of the possessed”) spirit possession rituals in which an afflicted person, usually a woman, is surrounded by a crowd of singers during an all-night performance and led into trance states (see Chapter Three); and *tende n-emnas* (“camel *tende*”) at festivals during

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<sup>5</sup> *Zahuten* is a Tamasheq adaptation of the Arabic *zahu*, which refers to “entertainment.” It is interesting that *zahuten* appears to have similar semantic connotations to *tagssir*, discussed in Chapter Two, which also describes a festive gathering, is understood as historically linked to Tuareg who had spent time in the Maghreb, and—while my interlocutors attribute it to the Tamasheq *egssir* (“to be care free, to jam”)—is quite similar to the Arabic *taqṣīr*, which describes laxity and connotes distraction from religious duty.



Figure 1.2. Women perform *tende* at the Cure Salée festival. Ingall, September 24, 2016.

which men parade in a circle on their camels and flirt with women, some of whom sing praises about camels and men (Card 1982; Rasmussen 1995).<sup>6</sup> The following excerpt of *isswat*, *tende* songs accompanied by a chorus of men, illustrates these aspects of lyrics:

Oh, my soul! Oh, this *tende*!  
 Oh, I have never seen an animal that kills me like a camel with his saddle and dress!  
 Oh, my boyfriend with whom I share memories! I think about you even if I am praying!  
 Oh, my soul, even if I am sick, I don't miss your appointments.  
 Oh, this is where the misfortune and suffering gather to make my heart suffer.  
 Oh, my soul, however, I remember the time we were spending time in the dark at night  
 until the morning!  
 Oh, the camel that carries the business, when I see it my heart relaxes.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The camel parades are called *ilugan* or “fantasias,” and have parallels in many parts of northwest Africa, including in Morocco and in Hausa societies of Niger and Nigeria (see Apter 2005, Youngstedt 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Excerpt of lyrics for “Ahimana,” sung by Fadimoutou Wallet Inamoud and included on her album *Isswat* (2015). Translation by Mouhamadine Ag Ibrahim and Nadia Belalimat.

The neo-*tende* of the *ishumar* was stylistically similar to these other genres in that it was performed by women solo singers with a women's responsorial chorus; however, in these new songs, women were not singing the praises of camels and their riders, but rather were retelling the stories of the *ishumar* and their plight in exile. Recordings of *zahuten* were made on cassette and circulated among *ishumar*, bringing prestige to particularly talented neo-*tende* singers, the most famous of whom was Lalla Badi, host of many of these events in the 1970s and 1980s.

During this same period, the circulation of homemade cassette recordings was also contributing to the popularity of another music genre with roots in Mali and Niger, generally known as *takamba* or *khomeïssa* (which refer to specific dance rhythms). This music met wide criticism in Algeria and Libya, despite becoming a major genre in Mali and Niger beginning in the 1970s. It is performed on *tahardent* plucked lutes and calabashes used as percussion by *aggiwen*, griots or professional praise singers closely linked with *inaden* artisans who lived in southern Tuareg regions around the Niger River and who are widely disparaged for not observing ideals of honorable behavior expected of other members of Tuareg society (Figure 1.3; see Chapter Three). *Aggiwen* sought patronage from a broader public than they had in the past, their usual patrons unavailable or destitute due to the droughts and displacement; indeed, they were not a part of Kel Ahaggar or Kel Adagh Tuareg communities before *teshumara*. Furthermore, many of *takamba*'s detractors claimed that it mollified young people, discouraging their pursuit of any sort of productive action (Belalimat 2003, 2010; see Card 1982).

More significant at *zahuten*, however, was the guitar music that began to develop alongside the new *tende* repertoire. The jerrycans that stored water and gasoline for travel across the Sahara, and which substituted as *tende* drums when mortars were unavailable, were also sometimes converted into bricolage *guitares-bidons* (French: "can guitars"). By the late 1970s, a



Figure 1.3. Takamba performance featuring calabashes and amplified molo, a plucked lute closely related to the tahardent. Niamey, November 12, 2016.

Kel Adagh *ashamur* in Tamanrasset named Ibrahim Ag Alhabib (“Abraybone”) had acquired a standard guitar from a Sahrawi man who played the revolutionary songs of the Polisario Front, the Sahrawi group fighting since the 1970s for an independent nation of Western Sahara in the contested lands between southern Morocco and Mauritania. Ibrahim was soon joined by other *ishumar*, including Inteyeden Ag Ablil, Keddou Ag Ossad, Alhassane Ag Attuhami, and Mohamed Ag Itlal (“Japonais”), with whom he began to develop a new musical form known simply as *al-guitara* (Arabic: “guitar”) (Lecocq 2010a, 213-214).

They incorporated the poetic themes from the new *tende* repertoire and adapted *tende* drumming rhythms to guitar strumming patterns. The early guitarists broke from many of the compositional guidelines of *tisiwit* poetry—such as the following of its specific poetic meters—

sung to the accompaniment of the *inzad* fiddle; this repertoire is linked to the *imajeghen* elite and regarded by many observers as the most respected Tuareg music tradition, though it is less common than *tende*.<sup>8</sup> Yet while guitar melodies are generally more simplified than the melismatic voice and *inzad* parts of *tisiwit*, until recently *al-guitara* usually followed the style of *tisiwit* in that the guitar and the voice performed in a heterophonic relationship to one another (Genthon 2012, 123-131; see Chapter Four).

Like the songs of their displaced sisters, they sang of their circumstances—often critically, as this early song from 1978 illustrates:

The world changes and we sit in ruins.  
We keep camels in the desert  
Learning to hobble them and tie ropes.  
We play *tendes* perched on our mounts  
While the world rises up, climbing to the stars.<sup>9</sup>

Another song by Japonais, whose exact date of composition is unknown, speaks of the fundamental *ishumar* challenge of finding income:

Dear Mother, since the time I left for Libya with patient steps  
I arrived but I have been feeling aimless.  
I search for the money I need by any means necessary,  
But it refuses to accumulate.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Due to widespread alarm among Tuareg that the tradition is bound for extinction, the *inzad* was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Culture of Humanity in 2013, a designation shared by Algeria, Mali, and Niger. While it appears that a number of safeguarding activities are underway in Algeria, such as the development of the Dar El Imzad cultural center in Tamanrasset, my preliminary investigations in Niger turned up little indication that the ICH designation was leading directly to any such activity. However, other programming without clear connections to UNESCO, such as short-term *inzad* construction and performance camps for young Tuareg girls, occasionally take place. See <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/practices-and-knowledge-linked-to-the-imzad-of-the-tuareg-communities-of-algeria-mali-and-niger-00891>, accessed August 14, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt from a poem by Khaffi Ag Hanni from Ahaggar, Algeria, translated by the author from the French translation and Tamasheq transcription by Rachid Bellil and Dida Badi (1993, 108).

<sup>10</sup> Excerpt from “Ahimana,” recorded by Tinariwen on *Aman Iman* (2007). Translation by Ibrahim Ag Assarid and Andy Morgan with assistance by Nadia Belalimat, Issa Dicko, and Denis Péan. See also Belalimat 2010, 160.

Furthermore, many songs referenced *essuf*, the feeling of nostalgia and loneliness one experiences in the *ténééré*, the “wild,” the uninhabitable desert wastelands beyond the limits of Tuareg social space (Rasmussen 2006; Lecocq 2010a, 220-221). In “Imidiwane Win Akaline” (“To My Friends of My Country”), Inteyeden emphasizes the social distance created by his displacement:

My friends of my country, I live in exile.  
I am in a country where there is no maternal love.  
I am wounded in my soul.  
I struggle against my thoughts.  
I do not understand the life that surrounds me.  
I burn my heart with my cigarette, [but] that makes my real illness worse.  
My friends of my country, I live in exile.  
I am ill, so that prevents me from laughing.  
I am in a country where I have no maternal love.  
I am unhappy in my soul.  
I live where there is no maternal love.  
I see the world upside down.  
I burn my heart with my cigarette, [but] that makes my illness worse.<sup>11</sup>

As anthropologist Susan Rasmussen (2006, 642-643) emphasizes, invocations of *essuf* and metaphors like the “hotness” of illness recall songs from *tende n-goumaten* spirit possession rituals. Indeed, the spirits which possess an individual in these rituals are known as *Kel Essuf* (“people of solitude”) (see Rasmussen 1995).

Although it was popular at the same period, *takamba* music was mostly unrelated to the emerging guitar genre except as a competitor style, since they were played by members of different Tuareg communities and furthermore, as noted above, *takamba* was disdained by many Tuareg in the Maghreb. However, like *takamba* (and unlike *tende* and *inzad* music), *al-guitara* was performed almost exclusively by men, save for the participation of women audiences, who clapped along and sang responsorial choruses. Yet as a manifestation of “Saharan

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<sup>11</sup> Translation from Rasmussen 2006, 642.



cosmopolitanism and globalization from below” (Lecocq 2010a, 214), *al-guitara* also drew from popular regional and international styles, including Maghrebi *raï* and *chaabi*, Sahrawi political songs, stars from Malian *troupes artistiques* like Kar Kar (Boubacar Traoré) and Ali Farka Touré, and international celebrities like Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley, and the British rock group Dire Straits. These varied influences coalesced into the new sound of *al-guitara* (Lecocq 2010a, 213-214; Belalimat 2010, 159-165; see also Backer 2015).

A 1990 recording of “Nak Izaghagh Tinariwen” performed by Ensemble Stella de Tamanrasset illustrates some of these stylistic convergences and the typical form of many *al-guitara* songs (Figure 1.4).<sup>12</sup> The excerpt transcribed below begins about a minute into the recording, following an instrumental introduction by electric lead guitar—which serves to foreshadow the melody of the verse and refrains (in F major pentatonic)—and rhythmic accompaniment from an acoustic guitar, which helps set the harmony (by playing F major and, occasionally, G dominant seventh chords). The electric guitar and solo male voice (usually the lead guitarist, though it is unknown whether that is the case in this recording) then perform the verse melody heterophonically. The lead guitarist’s thumb strikes the lowest guitar string (on F or G) to provide a droning accompaniment, a feature common to many West African lute traditions (including those used in *takamba*) and to guitar styles adapted from them, such as the music of Ali Farka Touré. The refrain repeats the verse with a chorus of women joining the solo singer. Then, there is an instrumental interlude before the next verse that features the electric guitarist, who plays improvised variations on the verse melody. Other musicians begin to clap along to emphasize the first and third downbeats during the interlude, recalling the clapping

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<sup>12</sup> “Nak Izaghagh Tinariwen” appears as “Guitare Electrique” (track 18) on the collection *Hoggar: Musique des Touareg* (1994).

♩ = 156 **Verse**

Male Solo Voice

Electric Guitar

Acoustic Guitar

**Refrain**

Male Solo Voice

Female Chorus

Electric Guitar

Acoustic Guitar

**Interlude**

Electric Guitar

Acoustic Guitar

Clapping

Figure 1.4. Excerpt from “Nak Izaghagh Tinariwen” by Ensemble Stella de Tamanrasset. Continued on next page.

Figure 1.4. Continued.

Figure 1.5. Tende n-emnas drumming pattern.

accompaniment (*eqqas*) that typically accompanies *tende* music. However, the interlocking rhythms of the acoustic guitar and the electric guitar's drone string recall the drumming pattern of *tende n-emnas* ("camel *tende*") (Figure 1.5), particularly the strong downbeats on one and three (in the acoustic guitar patterns), the playing of the upbeat (in the lead guitar drone), and the tendency to play a pickup to the second downbeat (i.e., beat three, as seen in the acoustic guitar chords on the "and" of beat two in measures two and three). In many *al-guitara* songs, the accompanying guitar part follows the rhythm presented here, with the chords on the downbeats choked (cut short)—an important technique on the upbeats in reggae guitar, though not always used in this way in Tuareg music; the upbeat chords are often allowed to ring.<sup>13</sup>

Among the most important first-generation practitioners to help establish the early style and repertoire of *al-guitara*, Ibrahim Ag Alhabib ("Abraystone") and his companions formed a musical group named Taghreft Tinariwen (Tamasheq: "Reconstruct the Deserts"), which became simplified as Tinariwen ("The Deserts," the plural of *ténéré*). While today Tinariwen is known as a star of international world music and rock audiences, having performed at the opening ceremonies of the World Cup in 2010, won a Grammy Award in 2012, and toured on every continent save for Antarctica, in its early days the group was a loose association of highly mobile *ishumar* performing together when possible, whether in Algeria, Libya, Mali, or Niger. The circulation of cassette recordings from Tinariwen's performances at *zahuten* and other occasions, along with the mobility of its members who went on to teach other *ishumar* to play guitar, contributed to the rapid spread of *al-guitara* through the 1980s. They became, as Belalimat writes, "the voice of *ishumar* culture" (Belalimat 2010, 162; see also Lecocq 2010a).

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<sup>13</sup> For further discussion of stylistic innovations in this period, see Genthon 2012, 138-152, and Amico 2013, 285-305.

## ***Tanekra*: The Awakening of *Ishumar* Political Engagement**

Many *ishumar* nurtured deep-seated bitterness about how the Malian and Nigérien governments treated Tuareg. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, these resentments crystallized into a more focused political movement known as *Tanekra* (Tam.: “the insurgency” or “the awakening”), built off the failures of the 1963 rebellion in Mali and which directly led to the 1990s Tuareg uprisings in Mali and Niger. This was not an entirely unified movement, nor were all *ishumar* and displaced Tuareg who found themselves in Algeria and Libya to join the cause. Nonetheless, its effects were transformative. As Lecocq writes:

Participants in the Tuareg uprising against the Nigerien and Malian governments in the 1990s often refer to it as *ath-thawra*, which in Arabic means “revolution.” However, it can be argued that the “revolution” took place before the rebellion, and consisted of the changes society underwent prior to the uprising. The major changes were a partial shift from a pastoral nomad society and self-sufficient economy, to an urban existence of wage labor and the introduction of new consumer items. These major changes brought along shifts in gender relations, cultural forms of expression, education, and politics. It was also the change from a society living in a geographically limited (if large) and coherent region, to a diaspora around West Africa, the Maghreb, and, to some extent, Europe. (Lecocq 2004, 94)

The *Tanekra* movement began to imagine regaining independence for Tuareg communities of the Sahara, conceptualized in terms of *akal* (territory, homeland) and *toumast* (social identity, the Tuareg nation). These ideals drew attention to connections to Saharan land—in essence, to Tuareg indigeneity—rather than on blood relations, which are a particularly fraught way to conceive of a unified Tuareg society. First of all, there is the integration of diverse Tuareg social classes with different ethnic ancestry, such as the Amazigh heritage claimed by *imajeghen*, the Black roots of *ighawelen*, and the debated lineage of *inaden* (see Chapter Three). Secondly, there are the lateral political divisions of different Tuareg confederations (e.g., the Kel Adagh of northern Mali or Kel Ewey of Niger’s Aïr mountains) and *tawsatin* (clans, s. *tawsit*), which

posed obstacles to the unification of Tuareg people across the central Sahara's postcolonial borders (Lecocq 2004, 2010a).

To identify one's affiliation with a particular *tawsit* was abhorrent to many *ishumar*. New forms of social cohesion were necessary in order for them to secure housing, job opportunities, and monetary aid, not to mention the psychological and emotional benefits of belonging to a community. Indeed, one of the major shifts in social expression among *ishumar* was a relaxing of attitudes about the proper ways to wear the *tagelmoust*, the men's turban. The *tagelmoust* usually veils the nose and the mouth (Figure 1.6a), a way to observe the ideals of *imojagh* (dignified behavior), *asshak* (honor), and *takarakit* (reserved behavior); these are central values that *imajeghen* and members of most other class positions in Tuareg society—except for *iklan* (enslaved people) and *inaden* (artisans or smiths)—are expected to uphold (see Chapter Three). As part of their emerging political consciousness, however, many *ishumar* began to casually leave the *tagelmoust* off their face, or to not wear it around their head, symbolically casting aside those values that they saw as belonging to the Tuareg past (Figure 1.6b). Many *ishumar* also began to wear their hair in dreadlocks, a style known as *bob* (likely in reference to Bob Marley), which some observers perceived as a further sign of *ishumar* vagrancy, of being *iban asshak* (Tam.: “without honor”). Yet while they were cosmopolitan for their mobility, multilingualism (speaking Hausa, Arabic, French, or English in addition to Tamasheq), and transnational social networks, and were progressive in their emerging political ideology of social change, many *ishumar* often tended to continue congregating according to their regional and class origins (Lecocq 2004, 2010a, 2010b; Kohl 2007, 2010; Belalimat 2010). The *ishumar* ideals and the realities of social dynamics continue to contradict one another in contemporary Tuareg culture, a point to which I return in later chapters.



Figures 1.6a-b. Left: A man on a camel wears his tagelmoust in an older style at the Cure Salée festival. Ingall, Niger, September 24, 2016. Right: Members of Groupe Taflawiste show more relaxed modes of wearing a tagelmoust popularized by *ishumar*. Agadez, December 10, 2016.

The leaders of the *Tanekra* movement, responding to the current dynamics of Tuareg life in the postcolonial Sahel-Sahara and tending to their memories of the failed 1963 rebellion, saw the need for a new uprising in the future. One of the prerequisites for this development, the leaders felt, was to raise the awareness of displaced Tuareg about the political roots of their current situation. As *Tanekra* developed from the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, *ishumar* were no longer simply regarded as unemployed displaced individuals, but rather as militant, politically engaged, heroic figures aspiring for control of their Saharan homelands. Part of this development came from the help of Gaddafi, who sought to support global revolutionary projects, to maneuver for regional influence in the Sahara, and to attract cheaper labor for Libya's rich oil fields. The Libyan government supported *ishumar* and other *Tanekra*

participants—including Nigérien Arabs, members of an outlawed Nigérien opposition party (Sawaba), and agents of the failed 1976 coup attempt in Niger—who at the end of 1979 met in El Homs, Libya, and established the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Greater Arab Central Sahara (FPLSAC, Front Populaire pour la Libération du Sahara Arabe Central, or al-Jabha ash-Sha’biyya li Taghrir Sahara’ al-Kubra al-’arabiyya al-Wasta). At the beginning of 1980, the FPLSAC established a political office as well as a military training camp in Ben Walid, near Tripoli. These developments heightened tensions between the Libyan and Nigérien governments, and Niger soon broke off diplomatic relations. Although the FPLSAC closed by late 1981, many of the *ishumar* who had trained in its camp went on to join the Palestinian cause in the Lebanon War in 1982 and fought for Libya in its conflict with Chad during the mid-1980s (Lecocq 2004, 102-107; 2010a, 192-248; Belalimat 1996, 34-36; 2003). *Tanekra* militants recognized Gaddafi was more concerned with his self-interest than theirs; nonetheless, they were thus invited into pan-Arab causes, becoming, as Belalimat argues, “the first Tuareg generation to have entered ‘modernity’ by way of Arabness [*Arabité*]” (1996, 48).

While the FPLSAC was itself short-lived, it contributed to the development and spread of *al-guitar* as a means by which to raise awareness of the *Tanekra* movement. In fact, its leaders encouraged the members of Tinariwen and supplied them with guitars and equipment. Tinariwen and other guitarists used this material to perform and record songs of their own, as well as poems written by others that not only spoke to the experience of *teshumara* (as shown above), but also promoted the ideals of *Tanekra*. On cassette recordings of this era, musicians would recite their poems before performing the songs, so as to ensure the messages were clearly understood. They encouraged listeners to join the movement to change the Tuareg way of life and the plight afflicting them, as in this Tinariwen song from 1981:



Youth of the Sahara, we warn you  
Do not believe that we are unable  
To reverse the [course of action].  
This new world, we are crushed there  
Because it woke up first.  
I tell you: courage, courage, courage!  
Let us rise, do not let the time escape us.  
Together, let us rise and let us join up.  
Please, my brothers, let us unite in order to rise up.<sup>14</sup>

*Ishumar* musicians continued to sing of their emotional and spiritual sentiments, like *essuf* and *ténéré*. However, within the context of *Tanekra*, *ténéré* became increasingly synonymous with *akal*, the territory on which the movement's supporters imagined founding an independent state. One of the oldest guitar songs, in fact, co-opts the Malian national motto—"one people, one goal, one faith" (French: *un peuple, un but, une foi*)—in articulating this vision:

Friends, hear and understand me  
You know, there is one country  
One goal, one religion  
And unity, hand in hand  
Friends, you know  
There is only one stake to which you are fettered  
And only unity can break it.<sup>15</sup>

In another song, by Abraybone, the *ténéré* is not simply a place of hardship or an abandoned homeland, but a place to which he and his fellow *ishumar* aspire to return:

I live in the desert  
Where there are no trees and no shade.  
Veiled friends, leave indigo [turban] and veil  
You should be in the desert  
Where the blood of kindred has been spilled  
That desert is our country  
And it is our future.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Translation in Belalimat 2010, 162-163. See also Belalimat 1996. Minor edits made by the author.

<sup>15</sup> This English translation of a 1978 poem by Intakhmuda Ag Sidi Mohamed appears in Lecocq 2010, 220; a French version is in Belalimat 1996.

<sup>16</sup> This English translation of a 1979 poem by Ibrahim Ag Alhabib ("Abraybone") appears in Lecocq 2010, 220; a French version is in Belalimat 1996. It has been slightly edited by the author.

*Tanekra* led to a transformative awakening of political consciousness among the *ishumar* and other displaced Tuareg through the 1980s, a process through which *al-guitara* became one of the primary forms of Tuareg cultural expression. In this era, however, guitar music and groups like Tinariwen were oriented towards articulating the experiences of *ishumar* and promoting the vision of *Tanekra*. Making money from music was for the most part incidental, perhaps a way to earn a little cash to get by but not yet the profession that it would become in the 1990s and 2000s, when the musical *artiste* emerged as a new social position among Tuareg; performing for money remained primarily the purview of the *aggiwen* and *inaden* performers of *takamba* and related genres. Furthermore, the members of Tinariwen did not claim rights of ownership over their compositions (Amico 2013, 87-88; Belalimat 1996, 2010; Lecocq 2010a; see Chapter Three).

The mobility of *ishumar* nonetheless contributed to the spread of their cassettes and of their musical style. By the late 1980s, it was rare for even the most rural camps in the Malian or Nigérien homelands to not have at least one of their youth involved in *Tanekra*. Even when these individuals may be out of contact, cassettes recorded by members of the movement shared general news that filled in for the direct contact that in that era, before mobile phone access, was impossible (Belalimat 2003). The effects of cassettes among Tuareg, as in many societies in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, were transformative. As ethnomusicologist Marta Amico writes, “the introduction of a technology for recording and listening in the Sahara transformed the connection of Tuareg society to music” (2013, 287). Within the context of *Tanekra*, cassettes became “the media of the movement” (Belalimat 2003). Still, possession of these cassettes was dangerous, and *al-guitara* had to be enjoyed as an underground musical form. In Algeria, only folkloric performances of Tuareg were permitted, as they were perceived as contributing to the nascent

Saharan tourist industry. In Mali and Niger, youth were occasionally arrested when found with *al-guitara* cassettes on account of their subversive content (ibid.; see also Rasmussen 2006).

Those who played with Tinariwen wound up in different countries throughout the 1980s—in Algeria, Libya, Mali, and Niger, in the conflicts in Lebanon and Chad—and in these settings they would teach other *ishumar* to play guitar. This remained an incredibly productive period for the guitar repertoire. One of the most active teachers was Japonais, who in Libya taught Hamid Ekawel, an *ashamur* from Terbiya, a Nigérien village near Filingué and not far from the Malian border; he became an important singer among the first generation of Nigérien Tuareg guitarists. Perhaps the most consequential development of this era for Nigérien music was the formation of the group Takrist N’Akal (Tam.: “The Construction of the Country”) by *ishumar* from the Air region. It was founded around 1988 by Abdallah Ag Oumbadougou, who would come to be regarded as the forefather of Tuareg guitar in Niger. Takrist N’Akal would count among its members over the coming decade some of Niger’s other leading guitarists, including Hasso Akotey (who would go on to form his own group, Tidawt) and Rhissa Ag Wanaghli (who would form Atri N’Assouf, based in France) (Belalimat 1996, 2010).

## **REBELLION AND RECONCILIATION: GUITAR GOES PUBLIC**

*Teshumara* and *Tanekra* catalyzed the transformation of Tuareg society and called into question its predominant cultural values. At least for some *ishumar*, solidarity in the name of the common good became more important than upholding the social hierarchies of Tuareg people. In the 1990s, *al-guitara* began to speak beyond the Tuareg community and reach broader publics, heralding a new era in which guitar music became more commodified, more bound up with regimes privileging economic value. This was a fundamental transition for Tuareg guitar; while

many developments and changes have taken place in the past two decades, one could generalize and say that in the late 1990s those local regimes of value through which contemporary guitar circulates had taken shape.

### **Singing for the “First Rebellion”**

After the military regime of Nigérien President Seyni Kountché ended with his death in November 1987, the new president Ali Saibou (r. 1987-1993) ushered in a new period of national politics known as “*décrispation*,” a relaxing of tension through national reconciliation. At a general level, *décrispation* resulted in the 1989 adoption of a constitution allowing a single-party system to replace the military regime. Of particular relevance to Tuareg, however, Saibou also invited former political opponents of the military regime to return to Niger. He traveled to Libya in 1989 to meet with displaced Tuareg, where he promised support for their eventual return and reintegration in Niger and a general amnesty for all who were implicated as political opponents under the Kountché regime. Tens of thousands of Tuareg living in the Maghreb (by some estimates) subsequently returned to Niger, many of them settling in camps around Tchintabaraden, a town in the Tahoua region not far from the Malian border and about halfway between Niamey and Agadez.

It was not long before many *ishumar* became frustrated and disillusioned by the poor conditions of the repatriated, however. Those who resettled in Tchintabaraden were reportedly forbidden to leave the camps and thus prevented from finding work. Furthermore, often regarded as “Libyans,” these returned Tuareg faced discrimination and distrust by Nigérien police and *gendarmes* (national police). Hundreds of people were allegedly arrested on March 13, 1990 in Iférouane, Arlit, and Agadez for denouncing the embezzlement of some 1.5 billion FCFA

(roughly \$5.5 million in 1990 US dollars) allocated by the International Fund for Agricultural Development to aid the repatriates. Other arrests in northern Niger took place over the next couple months, tensions mounting until a fateful altercation in Tchín-Tabaraden on May 7, 1990. Young Tuareg assembled at the prison there to protest the arrest of their companions on May 5, but in the confrontation wound up killing one of the *gendarmes*. The response of the police was severe, bloody, and disproportionate to the original incident; according to the French press, in the immediate aftermath some seven other police and thirty Tuareg were killed. Entire Tuareg camps were allegedly massacred in the subsequent reprisals by the state, although in all of these cases it is difficult to discern reliable figures or narratives about the events (Saint Girons 2008, 35, 38; Amico 2013, 89; Belalimat 1996, 42-43; Genthon 2012, 64-66).

The Tchín-Tabaraden incident and its immediate aftermath set off the powder keg of political resentments that had been festering during the 1970s and 1980s. Many young Tuareg returned to Libya, and those who may have not yet been supporters of *Tanekra* began to join in the project of envisioning an independent Tuareg state. Just across the border, conflict erupted one month later, on June 28, between Tuareg and the Malian state in Menaka, a town due north of Niamey and east of Gao (ibid.; see also Lecocq 2010a). During this period, *ishumar* took their guitars with them into hiding in the mountains and rural areas away from government surveillance. The *al-guitarra* repertoire continued to speak to their experiences, now documenting the hardships of the rebellion and the existential anxieties about the future of their movement (Belalimat 1996, 2003). For example, in “Illilagh Ténéré” (Tam: “I Patrol the *Ténéré*”), Abdallah Ag Oumbadougou sings:

I patrol the *ténéré*  
Without water.  
I shelter in the cool shade  
Of the few shrubs.

My 4x4 and my Kalash[nikov] on my shoulder,  
I walk among my people,  
Who have been wounded for so long.<sup>17</sup>

While the Kalashnikov rifle was the weapon of choice for most Tuareg involved in the conflict, the traditional saber (*takoba*) was also invoked in songs of this era as a symbol of past Tuareg heroism. Indeed, one story about the rebellion era that would later on be shared in international press about Tuareg music was that Keddou Ag Ossad, an original member of Tinariwen, went on raids with a Kalashnikov in one hand, saber in the other, and a guitar on his back (Rasmussen 2006, 643-644).

In 1991, both the Nigérien and Malian states sought to resolve their parallel conflicts through initial negotiations with the leaders of the uprisings, which came to be known as the Tuareg rebellions— the first one to occur in Niger, the second insurgency for Mali (the first was the 1963 uprising mentioned above). That same year, Niger held a National Conference in response not only to the Tuareg conflict, but also to mass student demonstrations in the country, charting a path of transition to multiparty democracy. The Malian negotiations centered on similar demands for the demilitarization and political autonomy of the north, the opening up of government employment (including in the army) for Tuareg, and other promises for development in the north of both countries (see Amico 2013, 90-91; Lecocq 2010a; Saint Girons 2008, 53-54; Genthon 2012, 66). Yet on both sides of the Mali-Niger border, many of the Tuareg insurgents were dissatisfied with their respective negotiations. Conflict continued, the rebel groups splintering into several different factions, sometimes changing names or affiliations in what, in retrospect, appears to be a dizzyingly rapid turn of affairs. In Mali, conflict in its northern

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<sup>17</sup> “Illilagh Ténéré” by Abdallah Ag Oumbadougou, from the liner notes accompanying *Agamgam 2004* (2010) by Bombino. Translated into French by Moussa Bilalan Ag Ganta and into English by Julie Summersquash.

territories became particularly acrimonious among Tuareg, other local populations, and the state. Some members of Tinariwen, such as Abdallah Ag Alhousseini, encouraged their companions to remain united in their collective struggle; in “Toumast” (Tam.: “The Tuareg Nation”), written in 1994, Abdallah sings:

A divided people will never reach its goal.  
It will never cultivate an acacia tree with beautiful leaves.  
A divided people will lose its way;  
Each part of it will become an enemy in itself.

Friends! Look after its well-being. Out there the *ténéré* is thirsty.  
Its trees are desiccated. Women and children await its water.

In the time of revolt, we all rested under the shadow of its trees  
And drank from its gourds, which were full of water.<sup>18</sup>

In Niger, among the major armed groups that emerged in this time were the Front de Libération de l’Aïr et de l’Azawagh (FLAA, the Liberation Front of the Aïr and Azawagh), led by Rhissa Ag Boula (who would later become Minister of Tourism and, as of this writing, Minister of the Presidency); the Front de Libération Temoust (FLT, the *Temoust* [i.e., *Toumast*] Liberation Front) led by Mano Dayak; and the Armée Révolutionnaire de Libération du Nord-Niger (ARLNN, Revolutionary Liberation Army of North Niger) led by Attaher Ag Abdoumoumine. Notably, each of these leaders hailed from a different Tuareg confederation and region: Ag Boula from the Kel Aïr, Dayak from the Ifoghas, and Ag Abdoumoumine from the Kel Azawagh. Recognizing that negotiation was the only way to bring a satisfactory end to the ongoing conflicts, however, Ag Boula and Dayak established the Coordination de la Résistance Armée (CRA, Representative Committee of the Armed Resistance). The CRA signed the first of the more lasting peace accords that would resolve the rebellion in Ouagadougou,

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<sup>18</sup> “Toumast” written by Abdallah Ag Alhousseini and recorded by Tinariwen on *Aman Iman* (2007). Translation by Ibrahim Ag Assarid and Andy Morgan, with help from Nadia Belalimat, Issa Dicko, and Denis Péan.

Burkina Faso, in October 1994. Dayak later denounced these accords in July 1995, forming another organization coordinating several rebel movements in Niger, while Ag Boula regrouped other movements into the Organisation de la Résistance Armée (ORA, The Organization of the Armed Resistance)—the group that ultimately signed the final peace accords on April 15, 1995 in Ougadougou, and again on April 24 in Niamey (Saint Girons 2008, 53-54). (Dayak died in a mysterious airplane crash in December 1995 *en route* to sign other accords, since then becoming remembered as a martyr among Tuareg.) Thus, if within *Tanekra* the *ishumar* were displaced youth who advocated leaving behind older Tuareg institutions and hierarchies that were failing them in the 1960s–1990s, in the late 1990s and on to the present, many of them have secured status as a new Tuareg elite (Kohl 2010).

### **Musical Transformations of Reconciliation**

During the rebellions, and more especially following their official resolution, Tuareg guitar music underwent significant transformations. For example, although the fracturing of armed groups in Mali separated many members of Tinariwen in the early 1990s, it was in this time that some of the group's members made its first studio recordings. Amico notes that these releases—*Tenere* (1992) recorded in Abidjan, and *Bamako* (1993) in Bamako—were a radical transformation for Tinariwen in the status and function of its music. No longer were they solely recording politically engaged songs on illicit cassettes; they were now beginning to address a broader West African public that may not understand Tamasheq language or Tuareg politics (Amico 2013, 90-91; Belalimat 2003).

This development was further catalyzed when Tuareg guitarists were invited to perform at political rallies and other public events in the wake of the peace agreements in Niger (1995)



and in Mali (1996). In Niger, for example, the peace agreement was celebrated with a party at the Palais des Congrès in Niamey at which Abdallah Oumbadougou was invited to perform. Soon afterward, his group Takrist N’Akal began to regularly play at the headquarters of political parties in Agadez and other parts of the north. Other musicians followed suit, a new, public economy of Tuareg guitar quickly emerging as artists performed not only for political groups, but also at weddings, naming ceremonies (*baptêmes*), festivals, and bars; for development and public health campaigns organized by NGOs; and at concerts with paid admission. One of the most active political parties in this regard was UDPS-Amana (Union de Développement et des Progrès Sociaux, the Union for Social Development and Progress), which had been founded by Rhissa Ag Boula and—similar to the FPLSAC in Libya during the early 1980s—purchased audio and music equipment that attracted young musicians to come perform for them in Agadez (see Rasmussen 2006; Belalimat 2010). Goumar Almoctar “Bombino,” one of Niger’s star guitarists of the younger generation in Agadez, recalls that in that period,

[UDPS] was always in the middle because you couldn’t see a guitar or other equipment separate from this political party. They made a budget for buying material and brought it to their headquarters. If you wanted to play, you’d go to the office. It was always installed there. There were people, friends who played there. Sometimes the party would organize a *soirée* [evening party] that the artists would profit from a little bit, because a lot of people would come. And when there were a lot of people...the party sought people. (laughing) (personal communication, December 28, 2016)

These developments also characterized the music scene in Niamey; Kildjate Moussa Albadé, another guitarist who grew up in the capital, recalls that his first time performing in front of an audience was in 1999 at the headquarters of another political party there, where senior musicians invited him to play a few songs (personal communication, February 18, 2016).

With these changing settings for performance, and with new causes for which to sing, the guitar repertoire began to encompass new themes. The older repertoire was not completely

abandoned—especially not songs like those that encouraged unity among the *toumast* during the rebellion, or which advocated leaving behind old ways of life to embrace formal education or new forms of labor. Peace became a major theme, however, as Tuareg communities and their compatriots pursued reconciliation. For example, in “Ayitmanin” (Tam.: “My Brothers”) by Aroudeini Ismaguil—who is considered part of the second generation of Tuareg guitarists (the first generation being the *ishumar* involved in the 1990s rebellions, like Tinariwen; see Genthon 2012, 194-220)—he sings:

To all who seek what is good for their people—  
In particular those from Mali and Niger, but also in West Africa—  
Please my brothers, give your life  
To obtain the benefits of securing a peace long hidden.  
Dear brothers, you are divided like people at war.  
A people must always be united to resist and push the enemy.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas unity among Tuareg rebel groups was seen as a means to successful negotiations for peace with the Nigérien and Malian governments, “Ayitmanin” illustrates a post-rebellion perspective which saw the value in collaborating within the broader national and regional communities of West Africa. Furthermore, within the context of political party support, these songs became a way to encourage participation in the nascent multiparty democracy in both Niger and Mali.

The peace agreements promised greater regional autonomy to those areas in northern Mali and Niger that had received little state attention for economic aid and development and in which Tuareg were sizable parts of the population. Yet as the 1990s rebellions engendered significant changes in the relationships between Tuareg and the state, these developments

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<sup>19</sup> “Ayitmanin” sometimes also appears with the title “Win Egmay-nen Alhag Entusmast Id Tellah” (“To All Who Seek What is Good for Their People”). Translated from French by the author, from the French translation and Tamasheq transcription by Ahmoud Mawala available from the “Language of African Music” collection of the African Language Materials Archive at Michigan State University, accessed Jan. 28, 2018: <http://alma.matrix.msu.edu/the-language-of-african-music>.

coincided with a general turn toward the privatization of media and of development in Mali and Niger, tied to structural adjustment and democratic reforms in both countries (Rasmussen 2006).

Thus, many guitar songs began to share messages promoting development, public health awareness, and other social issues beyond the immediate goals of *Tanekra* and the rebellions.

“Tin-Nezelkey” (Tam.: “She Who has the Braids”), another song by Aroudeini Ismaguil, illustrates:

She who has the braids,  
We love you so much.  
We’re going to tell you some news  
About some men who wander the night,  
Who *karet-karet* [pinch or poke to get someone’s attention]  
With the millet stalk  
Behind the walls of the tents.  
Among those women is someone  
Who doesn’t urinate,  
Who doesn’t do anything except sob.<sup>20</sup>

Here, Aroudeini is accompanied by a chorus that sings “*yaale diyaye hama*,” a refrain of meaningless vocables, after each line, an adaptation from *tende* music. This serves to reinforce the point that the subject speaking the song text is a group of friends who advise their friend (“she who has the braids,” a common hairstyle for Tuareg women) about the risks of consorting with promiscuous men and contracting a venereal disease (i.e., the crying connected to urination).

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<sup>20</sup> “Tin-Nezelkey” (Tam.: “She Who Has the Braids”) by Aroudeini Ismaguil. Translated from French by the author, from the French translation and Tamasheq transcription by Ahmoud Mawala available from the “Language of African Music” collection of the African Language Materials Archive at Michigan State University, accessed Jan. 28, 2018: <http://alma.matrix.msu.edu/the-language-of-african-music>. See also Genthon 2012, 203.

## Urbanization and the Sounds of *Brassage Sahélien*

Apart from changes in song themes, the expansion of audiences and entry into official public settings by Tuareg guitar songs contributed to the formation of a new social position in Tuareg society, that of the professional musical *artiste*, a development I further explore in Chapter Three. It also encouraged many Tuareg youth in Nigérien towns to take up the guitar as a means to pass the time (see Chapter Two) or earn a little cash, much as the *ishumar* of earlier generations had done in the Maghreb. A new generation of guitarists thus began to emerge, looking to those who had come to prominence as part of *Tanekra* and the rebellions as models. As in many other forms of Tuareg music, young guitarists were often self-taught, learning in social isolation so as not to draw embarrassment from their lack of musical mastery (Borel 1988; Genthon 2012, 102-103). But opportunities for learning and playing with older musicians became more prevalent in towns like Agadez. Bombino and many other artists of the later generations learned from Abdallah Oumbadougou, who from about 1997 until 2002 would play nightly at a *maquis* (bar-restaurant) called La Belle Étoile. Occasionally, formal institutions for learning music would emerge: in Agadez, Oumbadougou had established a school in the early 2000s to which he recruited aspiring guitarists to learn; in Niamey, the El Hadj Taya Center for Musical Training and Promotion (CFPM, Centre de Formation et de Promotion Musicale El Hadj Taya) organized, with support from a French NGO, a course for Tuareg guitar music in 2004, beyond its own regular offerings in general musicianship skills related to Western and Nigérien music. These programs were ultimately short-lived, however.

Another result of the flourishing of Tuareg guitar in Niger after the rebellion was that it reinserted this music into cosmopolitan urban settings of the Sahel. Despite the diverse sources of inspiration that fed the genesis of *al-guitara*—Tuareg *tende* songs, Maghrebi *rai*, Jimi

Hendrix, among others—its development largely took place within the ethnic enclaves of the displaced Tuareg community in Tamanrasset or the militants of *Tanekra* and the rebellions, hiding in rural camps. Furthermore, the progenitors of guitar also disparaged the ethnic and class backgrounds of the *aggiwen* who performed *takamba* in those same settings of displacement. As Tuareg guitar became public popular music in the post-rebellion period, however, many Tuareg guitarists began to more regularly encounter and interact with performers of other popular styles.

In this way, Tuareg guitar began to index a crucial but often under-examined aspect of ethnic identity in Niger (and beyond): *brassage sahélien*. As linguist Ousseina Alidou (2005) notes, this phenomenon speaks to the widespread mixing of ethnicities and cultures throughout the Sahel and especially in Niger, such that ethnicity becomes an almost irrelevant analytical category. I emphasize “almost,” for the Tuareg nationalist movement presented above and the commodification of Tuareg identity that represent what Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (2009) call “ethnopreneurialism”—further discussed below—illustrate that ethnicity is a meaningful category for many Tuareg in Niger. Although European-derived census records in Niger identify only a small number of ethnicities—among them Hausa, Zarma, Tuareg, Fulani, and Arab—*brassage* manifests in a number of Nigérien creole communities, such as the Adarawa (people of mixed Hausa and Tuareg origins from the Ader region) or Agadessawa (“Agadezians,” Hausa-Tuareg people of Agadez), which are not represented in the census.

Furthermore:

It is indeed true that the notion of an ethnic group in “purist” terms has been relatively new to the relational universe of the people of Niger of old and new cities, and its articulations in the modern nation-state are often linked to the opportunistic politics of power stimulated initially by European colonial agendas and carried over, subsequently, into the postcolonial dispensation. The average Nigérien, especially in the urban and in the semi-urban spaces, embodies the many-in-one and, depending on the context, can be simultaneously Tuareg, Fulani, Hausa, Zarma, and so forth without implying a crisis or a confusion of identities. Furthermore, in most Muslim family formations where polygamy

is common, complex ethnicities for a single family must be expected for individuals within the family. (Alidou 2005, 9)

In Agadez, for example, *brassage* manifested in the early musical training Bombino was able to obtain by playing with Hadja Débé, an Agadessawa man he met in 1996. Débé had previously lived in Bamako and owned books on how to play guitar chords, which he had mastered and was able to teach to aspiring guitarists. He regularly performed at a *maquis* called Lallé Lallé (Hausa: “Welcome, Welcome”) with a band of Agadessawa, capitalizing on his harmonic mastery and drawing on the different rhythmic and thematic basis of the contemporary Hausa popular music than the *ishumar* guitar style. “With this apprenticeship, with proper chords, it really helped me to liberate certain sounds [that were not in Tuareg guitar before],” Bombino told me about his time with Débé (personal communication, December 28, 2016). This augmented harmonic training allowed Bombino to cultivate his own individual style of playing, which has become incredibly influential among young Tuareg artistes (cf. Genthon 2012; see Chapter Three).

Groups like that of Débé represent a parallel music scene in Agadez that is often ignored in the narratives about Tuareg guitar music mediated in scholarship and the world music press, or else is misleadingly conflated with the music emerging out of the *ishumar* lineage. These alternative groups—Groupe Oyiwane, Tasko d’Agadez, Albichir de Tchirozérine, and others—share performance space and play at the same occasions in towns like Agadez; as a result, their artists often engage with one another. However, these groups are rooted in a separate political history and draw on different aesthetic styles than the *ishumar* guitar of performers like Takrist N’Akal, Bombino, or Mdou Moctar.

Some of these alternative Agadezian *brassage* bands originated in schools. Groupe Oyiwane, for example, formed when its founder “Barmo” Balla Kader began composing for girls

at École Primaire Toudou (Agadez) during their school holidays. The group was celebrated for being one of the first to mix guitar with the girls' choral singing groups that had developed for the Festivals de la Jeunesse (Youth Festivals), organized by the Kountché regime in the 1970s and 1980s, and the *samaria* neighborhood political associations that flourished in Niger until the 1990s liberalization reforms (cf. Masquelier 2013, 476). Their repertoire, sung in Tamasheq and Hausa, addressed themes relating to cultural heritage (e.g., the picturesque dunes of Tenet, near Agadez; or Tifinagh, the Tamasheq alphabet), girls' education, forced marriage, and conflicts between herders and farmers ("Barmo" Balla Kader, personal communication, September 3, 2014; see also Rasmussen 2006). Tasko d'Agadez, another of the mixed groups, was founded in 1991 by Sani "Tasko," who named the group for his Quranic school near Agadez. Like Oyiwane, Tasko also mixes instruments like guitar with women's chorus (see Figure 1.7) (Kanta Amadou Babaye, personal communication, July 15, 2016).

It is interesting to note that the distinctions between these school groups and *ishumar* bands appear to parallel broader ideological differences among Tuareg who were displaced in the 1970s-1990s. As Lecocq (2004, 2010a) shows, not all displaced Tuareg in this period pursued *Tanekra* or became a part of *teshumara* culture; many of them instead pursued formal education in the towns of their home countries, places like Agadez. Through their schooling, these students developed into *évolués*—those who had obtained an academic education and identified with Western values—and envisioned a different future for Tuareg society, one less revolutionary than the self-taught *ishumar* "popular intellectuals." The more favorable engagement of the *brassage* groups with Nigérien national politics is illustrated in Oyiwane having won the Prix Dan Gourmou national music competition for best artist in 1988, and several times again over subsequent years. Furthermore, within the music economy of post-rebellion Agadez during



*Figure 1.7. Groupe Tasko performs at celebrations for the enthronement of Sultan Oumarou Ibrahim Oumarou of Agadez. December 14, 2016.*

which time development was increasingly privatized, groups like Oyiwane and Tasko would occasionally be hired to compose new songs dealing with specific themes at the request of NGOs and businesses (e.g., the transportation company SONEF, the SOMAÏR mining company of which the state is a co-owner along with French mining company AREVA); this was a practice that the *ishumar*-style guitarists tended to avoid.

### **MUSICAL STRATEGIES OF EXTRAVERSION: TOURISM, TOURS, AND RECORDS**

During our discussion of his training with Hadja Débé and Abdallah Oumbadougou in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Bombino told me: “They were crazy years in Agadezian music.”

He elaborated:



They were the best years in Agadez. Each day, you'd go—at that time, [Abdallah] had friends who helped him get good equipment. [...] When someone played in [*quartier*] Sabon Gari, if you were in [*quartier*] Daga Manet, you'd hear the guitar. It was powerful! I was there...it was—wow. [...] The people were happy. There was enough work. In that time, there was a bit of tourism, people were at the center of it—it was something that began in Agadez. (personal communication, December 28, 2016)

Tourism had become a major driver of the local economies of northern Niger and Mali by the early 2000s, profiting from post-rebellion political stability and the development of the sector by several Tuareg entrepreneurs beginning in the 1980s. The history of tourism in the Sahara dates to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, once the region had been pacified by European colonial powers. But because it is centered in the Tuareg homelands of the southern Sahara—in southern Algeria and Libya and in the northern reaches of Mali and Niger—Saharan tourism, as anthropologist Georg Klute (2012) argues, is essentially tourism among Tuareg. While the burgeoning tourist industry in southern Algeria during the 1970s and 1980s was one reason that *ishumar* cassettes were contraband around Tamanrasset, with only folkloric music performances permitted by authorities, in the post-rebellion period guitarists found opportunities to profit from tourism.

The first manifestations of Saharan tourism were the trans-Saharan driving circuits of European organizations such as the Touring Club de France, which relied on prepared tracks to traverse the region as early as 1931; visits to Tuareg camps, when done at all, were completed on camel. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, cars had advanced enough in speed and range that Western tourists could encounter this extreme terrain with little danger or need for camels (Klute 2012, 58-61). Tourism in northern Niger took off after independence as French and Italian entrepreneurs began organizing trips into the Ténéré Desert and Aïr mountains, employing local Tuareg first as guides and cooks, and later as drivers, mechanics, and accountants as well.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The Ténéré Desert is a specific area in northern Niger, though the Tamasheq term *ténéré*, as described above, has additional meanings.

During the uranium boom of the 1970s, many French workers based in Arlit would take weekend holidays into the desert (Scholze 2010).

Tuareg began establishing their own travel agencies in Agadez beginning in the early 1980s. Foremost among these original agencies was Temet Voyages, which was founded by Mano Dayak, one of the leaders of the 1990s rebellion in Niger (see above).<sup>22</sup> He had strong connections to the West: he was educated in Paris and New York, married to a French woman, and spoke several European languages (Scholze 2010). Exemplifying what political scientist Jean-François Bayart (2009) calls “strategies of extraversion”—the mobilization of resources derived from unequal relationships with the global environment, characteristic of postcolonial African leaders—Dayak capitalized on his close relationships with foreign journalists, photographers, politicians, and tour operators, exploiting “his cultural strangeness” (Scholze 2010, 175) to monopolize tourism in the region. Dayak tapped into mythic imagery of masculine Tuareg “noble savages” that had been cultivated by 19<sup>th</sup> century European travelers like Henri Duveyrier, 20<sup>th</sup> century novels romanticizing the Sahara by authors like Pierre Benoît, and travel brochures from the 1930s to the present (Scholze 2010; Klute 2012). Anthropologist Marko Scholze notes that “following this perception, Tuareg are idealized as archaic nomads roaming the hostile desert, as being full of courage and honor, thus resembling the knights of medieval Europe” (2010, 174).

Tourist organizations’ adaptations of essentialized representations of Tuareg and the selling of crafts and services (e.g., guiding tours) exemplify the expanding global phenomenon of entrepreneurial activity centered on cultural identity. As John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff argue in *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009), this development often occurs as a double process of

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<sup>22</sup> As Klute (2012) shows, many of those involved in the uprisings also participated in the tourist economy, given that they both relied on mastery of the desert environment.

incorporating identity (rendering ethnic populations into corporations of one kind or another) and the creeping commodification of their products and services, a sort of “ethnopreneurial” endeavor. If the ideology of *Tanekra*—driven by identification with the *ténéré*, *akal*, and *toumast* and critique of divisions among Tuareg confederations and clans (*tawsatin*)—was a major force in the incorporation of Tuareg identity, tourism was rooted in ethnopreneurialism. This represents another aspect of the transition into a new capitalist regime grounded in the production of exchange (economic) value that has characterized Tuareg society in the postcolonial era, as exemplified earlier on in the experience of *ishumar* who pursued wage labor in Maghrebi and West African cities. And while the production of economic forms of value has been important over the many centuries of trans-Saharan trade, what is new, following Comaroff and Comaroff and the comparatively short history of tourism, is that Tuareg culture itself has become a resource for producing exchange value (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 21, 26-27).

This value is generated, I would argue, through activities that not only produce difference from the lives of (primarily European) tourists, but also from other Sahel-Saharan people, so that Tuareg can retain monopoly ownership of their culture. In other words, the lived realities of *brassage Sahélien* are strategically contradicted because to do so leads to better control of tourism through exclusion. For example, at the 2016 Cure Salée festival in In Gall, a historic gathering of nomadic Tuareg and Wodaabe (Fulani) that has become increasingly institutionalized with government and NGO support since the 1980s, many of the organizers and featured speakers and performers on the main stage were Tuareg; the *animateurs* (emcees) spoke in Tamasheq, Hausa, and French, but not Fulfulde (the Fulani language); and Wodaabe staged a number of festive activities in their camp away from the official ceremonies. But Tuareg incorporation and ethnic exclusion is a discursive strategy that is not unanimously shared, both

because of the complicating realities of *brassage* and because of the hierarchies within Tuareg social organization: specifically, it is primarily the cultural practices of *imajeghen* that are resources for Tuareg representation, and the majority of people working in the tourist industry belong to the elite *imajeghen* and *imghad* social positions (Scholze 2010, 175-178).<sup>23</sup> Still, through ethnopreneurial commodification, cultural products and practices—including intangible culture—are treated as sources of economic value that cannot be separated from their owner-producers; in other words, Tuareg have a monopoly on this particular sort of intellectual property.

Indeed, while tourism supported musical production in Agadez more generally as an effect of the booming economy, as alluded to by Bombino above, it also directly created opportunities for musicians. Many guitarists, including Bombino, found work with tour companies performing various forms of labor—as cooks, drivers, and guides—which they would supplement by bringing a guitar onto the expedition to play for travelers in the evening. Some tours would also involve pre-arranged visits to villages in the Air region, where tourists would be welcomed with folkloric performances of *tende*, *inzad*, and other musical forms. Even in Niamey, beyond the heart of Saharan tourism, musicians occasionally take visitors, foreign aid workers, and tourists to have picnics with music in the rural areas outside the capital. Another crucial aspect of Saharan tourism—but also a part of national projects of post-rebellion reconciliation—has been the flourishing of festivals, at which both folkloric performances and guitar music share the stage. These include those long-standing traditional gatherings that have been institutionalized by governments and other organizations, like the Cure Salée, as well as

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<sup>23</sup> An obvious exception to this point is that Tuareg crafts, especially jewelry—produced by *inaden* rather than *imajeghen* (but see Klute 2012, 70-71; also Seligman 2006)—are an important aspect of the tourist economy and consumption of Tuareg culture.

more recently established events like the Festival de l'Aïr or, in Mali, the Festival in the Desert (see Scholze 2005; Amico 2013, 2014; Montague 2014).

Tourism is dependent on the security of would-be visitors, however, and in this regard Niger's industry has been hard hit by its conflicts. The 1990s rebellion temporarily brought tourism to a halt after a peak of about 3,000 annual foreign tourists in 1991 (Scholze 2010, 175-178). The combination of Mano Dayak's mysterious death in 1995 and the 1997 appointment of fellow rebellion leader Rhissa Ag Boula as Niger's first Minister of Tourism—part of the post-conflict reconciliation process—led to a restructuring of tourism in Agadez such that multiple agencies emerged. By 2000-03, forty tourist agencies were licensed; by 2007, when an estimated 4,000 tourists visited, there were sixty-two (Klute 2012, 58-61, 66-67; Scholze 2010, 171, 175-178).

That year, however, a new conflict erupted in Niger—what came to be known as the “second [Tuareg] rebellion” in the country. Aghali Ag Alambo, a former prefect in Agadez and head of the organization leading the new uprising, the Movement of Nigériens for Justice in the Aïr (MNJ, Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice dans l'Aïr), argued that the 1995 peace accords had not been met. Furthermore, they criticized Nigérien authorities for profiting from uranium mining in the region without suitably compensating the local, predominately Tuareg population, which was exposed to radiation pollution. Unlike the previous conflict, however, this new rebellion did not draw widespread support from the Tuareg community. It was widely perceived that this conflict was motivated by its leaders' personal quests for profit rather than an ideological cause benefitting all Tuareg; furthermore, its focus was on the situation of the Aïr Tuareg, excluding those of the Azawagh plains (Genthon 2012, 83-87; Saint Girons 2008, 64-69). Guitarist Mohamed Alhassane Karzo from Agadez conveys many of these popular critiques

in his song “Imajeghen Alherr Ni Mat’ham” (Tam.: “Tuareg, You Do Not Have Peace”), written in 2008:

*Imajeghen alherr ni mat’ham*  
*Ni mat’ham dagh wazzaman ner*  
*kigitanne*

Tuareg, you do not have peace.  
What are you doing in this tragic time?

*Imouzeren nissan bastindila*  
*Nak imouzarenne win azzaman*  
*warrkounighre*

There are no longer good leaders.  
I myself don’t understand the leaders  
of today.<sup>24</sup>

The former *ishumar* leaders who had been idolized during and after the first rebellion were now seen as irresponsible, selfish, *iban asshak* (without honor) (Kohl 2010, 458).

While the MNJ uprising lasted only two years and had less far-reaching effects than the first rebellion, it signaled a change of attitude in which many Tuareg and other Nigériens began to see leaders as morally compromised by international conflicts of interest and in pursuit of self-interested projects of enrichment through transnational trafficking of weapons, drugs, and people (Genthon 2012, 86-87; Saint Girons 2008, 64-69). Furthermore, centered in the Aïr, a popular tourist destination, the rebellion contributed to the deterioration of tourism in Niger, which has yet to recover. This process further accelerated when another conflict erupted in Mali in 2012, not only driven by Tuareg separatists but also soon overrun by terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar ad-Dine (see Lecocq et al. 2013). Despite interventions by the French military and an ongoing United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali, conflict and terrorist activity continues to afflict Mali and spill over its frontier into Niger. The result is that the tourism industry struggles to survive as potential travelers are confronted with negative press and governmental warnings against travel in many parts of the Sahel and Sahara.

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<sup>24</sup> “Imajeghen Alherr Ni Mat’ham” written by Mohamed Alhassane Karzo. Transcribed and translated into French by Mohamed Alhassane Karzo and Halima Aboubacar; translated into English by the author.

If tourism constitutes one (fragile) strategy of extraversion for musicians, as part of a broader economic orientation in the Sahara, then the entry of Tuareg guitar into the international world music market is another. The most consequential development in this regard was the relationship developed between French band Lo'jo and Tinariwen in the late 1990s.<sup>25</sup> Through their connection, first at a festival in Angers, France in 1999, they soon jointly established the Festival in the Desert, whose first edition was held in January 2001, in Tin Essako, Mali. In Kidal, Mali, the preceding month, they coordinated to record Tinariwen's first album bound for Western markets: *The Radio Tisdas Sessions* (2002). Before long, Tuareg bands effloresced in the world music and indie rock scenes throughout the 2000s; producers and managers were able to cultivate a diverse and enthusiastic global audience, emphasizing the enthralling mix of Saharan traditions and rock guitar, as well as the compelling history of rebel movements (see Amico 2013; Belalimat 2010). Among Nigériens in this period, Abdallah Oumbadougou came to prominence through albums under his name and as part of *Desert Rebel*, a French-Maghrebi fusion project that integrated Tuareg guitar with rap, reggae, and other styles (see Figure 1.8). Tidawt, led by Hasso Akotey, traveled to the US and Europe with support from the Ojai, California-based Nomad Foundation. Other groups that would emerge in the ensuing period include Toumast and Atri N'Assouf (based in France), Etran Finatawa, Groupe Inerane, Koudede, Bombino, and TisDass.

Belalimat (2010) argues that despite the success of *ishumar* guitar music abroad, in Mali and Niger it has no significant national reputation; that is, it circulates primarily within the

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<sup>25</sup> This relationship developed through an improbable series of misunderstandings retold by Marta Amico (2013, 93-102): Lo'Jo participated in a festival in Bamako in 1998, where they met a group of Tuareg guitarists who were billed as "Tinariwen," but who were not in fact involved with the famous *ishumar* group; Tinariwen was simply so mythologized that everyone knew their songs. The group that Lo'Jo encountered renamed themselves "Azawad"; Lo'Jo then invited "Azawad" to a festival in Angers, France, where, instead, some of the members of the "real" Tinariwen appeared.

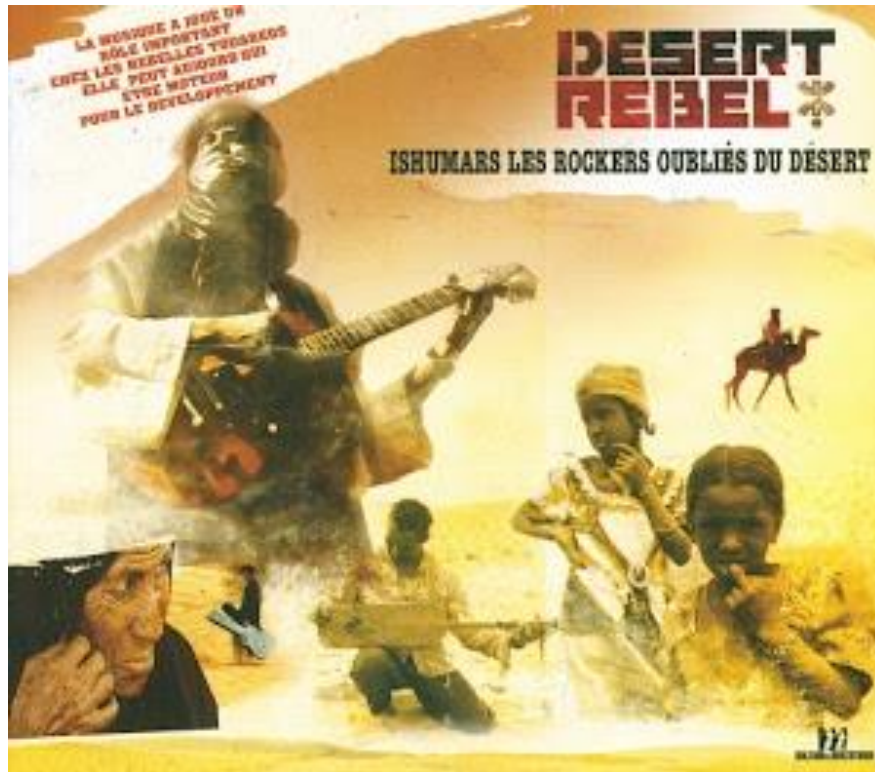


Figure 1.8. Cover for *Desert Rebel: Ishumars, The Forgotten Rockers of the Desert* (2006).<sup>26</sup>

Tuareg community. Furthermore, as Ghalitan Ghamidoune, a guitarist with Etran Finatawa, explained to ethnomusicologist Anouck Genthon, “the only opportunity that musicians have today to live and eat is to play abroad” (Genthon 2012, 161-162). This appears to be gradually changing in Niger as opportunities for the local production of studio recordings and remunerated performances grows—even just since the completion of my fieldwork at the beginning of 2017. Whether this creates sufficient opportunities for musicians to make a professional living without the recourse to international sources described by Bayart as “strategies of extraversion” remains to be seen.

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<sup>26</sup> The caption reads: “Music played an important role among Tuareg rebels. Today it can be a means for development.” Image source: <http://www.psychemusic.org/Africa2.html>, accessed November 8, 2015.



## CONCLUSIONS

The genesis of Tuareg guitar music is inseparable from the politics of environmental and economic decline, intergenerational tension, and displacement in the postcolonial Sahel-Sahara. Furthermore, the cultural productivity of *Tanekra* and the 1990s rebellions in Mali and Niger—and the value regimes through which *al-guitara* circulated—continues to reverberate in a contemporary guitar repertoire that not only resounds these older anthems and their themes of self-determination, but also is enriched by the stories told of this past. This does not mean Tuareg guitar music has become static or stuck in the past, however. Rather, the period of professionalization that characterizes the post-rebellion era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century engenders new anxieties. The role of music as social commentary and proponent of honorable behavior seems to be in contest with its commercial possibilities. Artists have become more concerned with intellectual property. A culture of celebrity has begun to flourish as musicians tour the world and make professional studio recordings. Born from displacement of the *ishumar* and cultivated in the rural hideouts of insurgents, guitar became the favored music for urban Tuareg—“the expression,” as Belalimat writes, “of being a modern Tuareg” (1996, 51). These contemporary debates about the meaning of Tuareg guitar in the period since the 1990s rebellions, whose legacies remain a palimpsest—overwritten with new values, but whose past significations cannot be fully erased—are at the core of the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 2

### CREATIVE WAITING WITH TEA, TALK, AND *TACTILE*

Should one wander around one of the urban areas of Niger, whether in Niamey or a regional center like Agadez, it would be hard to miss the groups of young men huddled together on the streets and sharing shots of tea, telling stories, watching television, listening to radio, or playing card games. Often, they sit together along an ochre banco (i.e., adobe) wall of a household compound or outside a member's kiosk for selling tea, cigarettes, or mobile phone credit. Sometimes these locations may be labeled with spray paint declaring a group name (Figure 2.1): Fada Abidjan, named for the Ivoirian city and a *quartier* of Niamey; Fada Amfani, a radio station; Fada Metafor, a hip-hop group; Fada L'Internationale des Chômeurs, "The Internationale of the Unemployed," riffing on the socialist anthem; Fada Sha Shayi, the Hausa



*Figure 2.1. Iboune Moujamani (center) with brother Ibrahim (right) and cousin Dariya Diallo (left; note the tea glass) sit at a fada meeting place in Niamey.<sup>27</sup>*

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<sup>27</sup> They are Wodaabe (Fulani) musicians who play Tuareg-style songs.

for “to drink tea”; Fada Bin Laden; Fada Brooklyn Boys; and so on (Youngstedt 2013, 129-130; Masquelier 2013, 472). These groups, known as *fadas*, are a central component of urban experience in Niger, especially for young men.<sup>28</sup> Although their origins are in Hausa communities, a fact which does not escape the Tuareg *fadantchés* (*fada* participants) I met, *fadas* began to flourish in Niger as multiethnic groups in the 1990s, a response to political and economic reforms of that era. Similar institutions exist across the Sahel, such as the *grins* of Ouagadougou and Bamako or the *attaya* groups of Dakar (cf. Schulz 2002; Kieffer 2006; Ralph 2008; Skinner 2015).

The distribution of *fadas* throughout towns and cities structures the social architecture of Nigérien urban *quartiers* (neighborhoods). This is in part because men spend little time at home, regardless of employment or marital status. The informal economy is dominated by outdoor labor, and many people pray at open-air mosques or sidewalk gatherings rather than indoors. *Fadas* thus constitute the social spaces in which Nigérien youth intensely experience the precarity of the contemporary moment; however, more than just being settings in which to pass the time, *fadas* are creative environments in which youth create sociality, meaning, and—sometimes—music. Walking through town, one will encounter several *fadas* with whom to exchange greetings, creating a public conviviality. As ethnomusicologist Ryan Skinner notes in discussing *grins* and the production of urban space in Bamako, “conveying words of welcome is a part of the antiphonal phenomenology of walking the city. ... City residents insist on greeting each other to keep their humanity intact” (Skinner 2015, 20-21).

*Fadas* are at the core of what anthropologist Adeline Masquelier (2013) describes as a “culture of waiting” among young men in Niger. When obtaining an education, steady job, or

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<sup>28</sup> Although the plural of the Hausa word *fada* is *fadodi*, I follow the examples of journalists, my interviewees, and Masquelier (2013) in opting to use the francophone rendering of the plural as *fadas*.

spouse proves difficult—as it often does within the precarious socioeconomic circumstances of contemporary Niger—young Nigériens are prevented from securing adult social status. Indeed, as in many communities in West Africa and beyond, among Tuareg age is not a matter of biological or chronological markers, such as years since birth, but of one’s social and ritual position in the life course (Rasmussen 2000; Kieffer 2006). Niger is already demographically one of the world’s youngest countries with a median age of 15.3 years (in the United States it is 37.9 years) (CIA 2018). This phenomenon is compounded by the many people who are trapped in prolonged, indefinite youth. For them, Masquelier writes, “temporality is essentially cyclical, largely devoid of the linearity that signals one is advancing in life” (2013, 486). Rather than consider this stagnation in social advancement as something passively experienced, she advocates attending to the agentive ways in which young Nigériens reckon with the boredom, alienation, and “diminished existence” of their daily realities. She signals this shift in attention by treating “waiting” as an engaged mode of living by which youth create meaningful temporalities (Masquelier 2013, 474-482). In a similar vein, Michael Ralph (2008, 17) argues that in the social ritual of consuming tea, youth in Dakar create work without labor; that is, they find ways to produce certain values and meaningfulness when they are otherwise excluded from the labor market.

This chapter situates everyday musicking of young Tuareg within the culture of waiting. In doing so, I argue that music plays a central role not only in structuring the rhythm and social space of everyday life for Tuareg youth, but also in the symbolic production of meaning and social values embedded in belonging, status, and sociability. Using music as a tool to deal with boredom is not new, neither in Niger nor in many other parts of the world, yet it takes on new forms and meanings as historical and geographic circumstances change. I focus here on the

experience of contemporary urban life for youth who have grown up in a time when the 1990s rebellions that popularized Tuareg guitar music are further in the past and fewer Tuareg know the rural nomadic life long identified with their culture. Music is a potent component of contemporary Tuareg youth culture because the local and international popularity of Tuareg guitar has provided models of celebrity success, inspiring some youth to pursue life as an *artiste* and allowing others to share in their aspirations as an escape from everyday ennui.

Waiting can also engender new musical creativity; there is a great deal of musical activity that takes place between the occasional performance and rare studio session. Young musicians spend most of their time with their *fadas*, where they often compose new songs. In these lived social spaces, young Tuareg are—like American youth—often glued to the screens of their *tactiles*, their smartphones. When they're not, they might snap photos or toss their phones into the center of the group to record a jam session. These various documents often serve to link individuals to other people through their circulation, whether by playing recordings on their phones for friends, by exchanging files via memory cards and Bluetooth, or by posting on social media. Thus, Tuareg youth produce through new means that same sorts of sociality and community solidarity that had been key to *teshumara* and the *Tanekra* movement as a response to the shared experience of displacement during the 1970s-1990s. In what follows, I discuss the lived and virtual social spaces most intimately related with music and waiting, pointing to the way youth are making sense of precarity, of good sociality, and of Tuaregness.

### **CREATIVE WAITING IN *FADAS***

One of the challenges of talking about the production of *fada* space is that it emerges from diverse social origins that include Hausa *fada* institutions, postcolonial radio clubs, and tea

consumption practices that first emerged among Tuareg. As a result, accounting for the histories of *fadas* among Tuareg youth in particular is challenging. The roots of this institution continue to inform understandings of *fadas* as Hausa: some Tuareg in Niamey and Agadez regularly describe their groups of friends as *fadas*, while others describe *fadas* as something that only occurs among Hausa. *Fadas* in their current manifestation are relatively new in Niger, but they build on an earlier institution in Hausa society, where the *fada* referred to the court of a *sarki* (emir, king) or council of a *mai gari* (village head). *Fadas* were occasions to discuss concerns of the community and mediate disputes, and many ethnic groups in Niger have similar gatherings.

Although these earlier customary community assemblies were undermined by social transformations ushered in by European colonialism, *fadas* took on new significance during the era of market liberalization and transition to multiparty democracy in Niger during the early 1990s (Youngstedt 2013, 125-127; Masquelier 2013, 472-477; see Chapter One). Prior to this period, the Nigérien state had drawn on the model of traditional associations to develop hierarchical youth associations known as *samaria* (Hausa: “young men, youth”). Since the 1960s, the *samaria* were crucial to political leaders relying on youth participation. But in the 1980s, the age of neoliberal structural adjustment policies dawned on Niger and contributed to the further erosion of social support. The *samaria* lost importance, a process that accelerated with the political changes of the 1990s. They were soon replaced by the contemporary *fadas*, which had emerged in Niamey in 1990 during the first Tuareg rebellion and the student and union strikes that pushed the state into establishing multi-party democracy. *Fadas* quickly blossomed in Nigérien towns as “privileged sites for the performance of citizenship” (Masquelier 2013, 476) in which young students, civil servants, and striking workers could socialize, share news, pass time, and debate societal changes.

Owing to this recent political history, contemporary *fadas* are often multiethnic spaces, emblematic of the interethnic and intercultural mixing common across the Sahel known as *brassage sahélien* (Alidou 2005). As anthropologist Scott Youngstedt shows (2013, 123-136), they are organized across a continuum of formality, from loose gatherings of young men who converse together to named groups (more frequently with middle aged or elder men) in which *fadantchés* (*fada* members) may wear uniforms, have leadership titles, establish regulations, or pool together financial resources as rotating credit associations.<sup>29</sup> *Fadas* allow members to form affective ties that may not be otherwise available to them. For example, many of the men that form the bulk of these organizations are migrant laborers from rural areas. Furthermore, most *fadantchés* are unemployed or underemployed, often unable to find the financial means to marry and thereby symbolically enter full adulthood; trapped with their peers in an extended state of youth, they refer to their *fada* as their “second family” (ibid.; Masquelier 2013, 475-480).

Indeed, for those who may still live with parental figures, escaping from domestic space is an appealing reason for many *fadantchés* to make their way to their regular meeting place soon after waking up or finishing necessary tasks (Masquelier 2013, 476). This freedom from parental surveillance has been a fundamental part of the migrant experience for Tuareg *ishumar*, too (Rasmussen 2000), which undoubtedly contributes to the particular culture of *fadas* with Tuareg members.<sup>30</sup> Distancing from domestic settings furthers the gendering of *fadas* as masculine spaces. Many women in urban Niger—especially among families of Sufi marabouts, aristocrats, and merchants—practice some form of *kuble*, or seclusion to domestic space. While *kuble* is

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<sup>29</sup> Youngstedt (2013) distinguishes between *fadas* and less structured *hira* (Hau.: “talking, conversation”) groups. In my fieldwork, which was predominately among Tuareg individuals, my interlocutors would only identify their groups of friends, if they described them using specific terminology at all, as *fadas*.

<sup>30</sup> I make this point not because labor migration is exclusive to Tuareg—it’s not—but because it was so foundational to the development of Tuareg guitar music.

most extreme in Hausa and Fulani communities, among other ethnic groups women may be afforded more mobility outside domestic space by permission of a male head of household (Alidou 2005, 33). Furthermore, poor families often rely on women's labor to earn additional income, limiting the extent to which *kuble* may be observed. Nonetheless, a consequence of this practice is that the street is a predominately male public space.

The masculinity of *fadas* is nonetheless complex, similar to the *vinyozi* barbershops of urban Tanzania discussed by anthropologist Brad Weiss (2009). He argues that both masculine spaces and feminine practices of rural Tanzania are symbolically invoked in the barbershops of Arusha as young men “inhabit the experience of their own displacement (that is, as junior men, subordinate to elders, scrambling to find a life in a tenuous informal economy)” (Weiss 2009, 84). Young men reckon with their precarious, delayed adulthood in part by assertively erasing women's presence from these social fields. But the removal of women from Tanzanian urban sociality is in fact a fantasy, given that women have long played an active role in urban commercial activities, such as by running hair salons (ibid., 84-86). In the case of contemporary *fadas*, although the vast majority are exclusively male, it is not unheard of for women and girls to participate. This has engendered some controversy: Many young men legitimize *kuble* and gender segregation by referencing the Quran; more generally, many Nigériens—especially the elderly—express concern about women being in these mixed-gender spaces. The fear is that the perceived *zaman banza* (Hausa: “worthless idleness”) of *fadas* contributes to women's engagement in illicit activities, like smoking cigarettes and prostitution (Youngstedt 2013, 127-133; Masquelier 2013, 472).



## The Ethics of Tea Time

The complex gendering of *fadas* is most evident in the ritualized preparation and consumption of tea. Central to Sahelian life today as *le carburant des jeunes* (French: “the fuel of the youth”) (Masquelier 2013, 472), tea consumption in the region has its origins among elites in the Maghreb and Sahara. It was first introduced to Moroccan leaders by European ambassadors in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and later to Libya and Egypt by British traders. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it became widespread among Tuareg and Moors, and later on among other Sahelian populations.<sup>31</sup> In rural and nomadic settings, as geographer Laurent Gagnol (2014) shows, demonstrating skill in tea preparation is an important part of this social practice. Although heads of household may prepare it, often it is lower status members of a household—a *forgeron* or *enad* (smith), *iklan* (member of the former slave class), or the youngest person present—who perform preparations.

Tea is eminently social; it is unfavorable to drink alone and it is key to demonstrating hospitality. For example, once tea is brewed it is first shared with visitors and elders, then other elites, and finally with *inaden* and *iklan*. Women generally only prepare tea in the morning with their children, or when together with their spouse; it is otherwise a masculine activity, and men rarely consume tea in front of women. This segregated consumption is a part of broader social value of reserve, restraint, and shame known as *takarakit*, which among other things prohibits men from removing their face veils in front of members of the opposite gender except with certain exceptions, such as those with whom they have joking relations (*adelen*; see Rasmussen 1995). Nonetheless, tea is strongly connected to aspects of the feminine domestic world: it is

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<sup>31</sup> Gagnol (2014) shows that while Tuareg in Air once resisted tea consumption, this changed during the 1916 anti-colonial revolt of Kaocen in northern Niger. Owing to Kaocen’s allegiance to the Sanusi brotherhood, which organized against Ottoman influence in parts of present-day Libya and consequently forbade consumption of coffee, tea became the only legal stimulant in the Air region during this period.

closely linked to food because it is often consumed either immediately after a meal or with a *boule* (cooked ball) of millet; furthermore, accoutrements of tea preparation like water, the teapot, glasses, and the brazier for heating are rooted in domestic space (Gagnol 2014).

Tea has become such a popular luxury that expenses for tea and sugar regularly surpass those for millet, the daily staple for many Nigérien Tuareg (ibid., 74). It has also become popular among all ethnic populations in Niger, especially at youth *fadas*. As one young *fadantché* told Masquelier, “Tea drinking caught us like a virus. [...] We were contaminated by the Tuareg” (2013, 483). The disease metaphor is noteworthy because it links youth marginalization to the relatively recent stigmatization and political repression of Tuareg in Niger (ibid., 484). Nonetheless, in urban *fadas*, the social practice of tea differs from rural and nomadic Tuareg settings. Tastes for particular teas change, and rural notions of proper interaction and individual conduct—such as *takarakit*—loosen in town. But for urban Nigériens caught in the indefinite and precarious status of youth, drinking tea offers practical significance. It is recognized for numbing feelings of hunger. It is a practice in which, as in rural settings, one’s command of proper tea preparation and consumption—what Gagnol refers to as “*savoir-boire*”—demonstrates sociability. And finally, it structures the temporalities of young men’s lives (Youngstedt 2013; Masquelier 2013; Gagnol 2014).

Although five daily prayers also structure the lives of most Nigériens, as for Muslims around the world (cf. El Guindi 2008; Eisenberg 2013), many young *fadantchés* do not heed the calls to pray at the mosque. Regardless of their relative diligence to prayer, however, nearly all *fadantchés* drink tea. “In contrast to idle time,” writes Masquelier, “teatime constitutes a purposeful temporality; it produces a particular experience of how time unfolds when one is engaged in an activity (rather than being stuck in a moment devoid of relevance)” (Masquelier

2013, 486). Infusing time with the meaningfulness of tea is not simply a matter of timing tea preparation within the course of the day; the preparation and consumption of each round of tea inflects the social space (whether of a *fada* or other gathering) with anticipation. A round begins by the slow, methodological heating of water in a small kettle on a charcoal brazier; the mixing of sugar and aeration of gently boiled tea to produce a thick mousse poured into small glasses, often only one or two available at a time; each person's few moments to drink their shotful in a series of small mouthfuls, neither too spaced out nor too hurried; and the passing of the glass back to the preparer to pour for the next person. The same tea leaves are typically reused to brew two or three rounds, each subsequent round sweeter and less strong than the previous; generally, the end of the second (or third) round marks the end of a social engagement.<sup>32</sup> Although Gagnol notes that to comment on the quality of tea or food—whether positive or negative—demonstrates a lack of *takarakit*, in my experience urban Tuareg *fadantchés* would occasionally express approval of “*un bon thé*.” Taste is secondary to tea's ability to bring satiety, strength, and health, however; this is partly why the third round of tea, the weakest, is not always consumed or else is shared with children (Gagnol 2014, 84-85).

If cultivating an ethics of tea is one aspect of the creative waiting of youth, another important aspect of the *fada* is conversation (*hira*). Indeed, the proverb *magana jari ce* (Ha.: “speech is wealth”) speaks to the Hausa appreciation for verbal art. In the less formal, principally Hausa *hira* groups with whom anthropologist Scott Youngstedt worked, the groups are an arena for open debate about contemporary societal issues and the cultivation of a sense of autonomy and self-respect, particularly by valorizing values like articulate speech, leisure, and male social

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<sup>32</sup> A common proverb among Tuareg, though encountered more often in the presence of foreigners and possibly developed as a performative expression for tourists, is that “The first [round of tea] is bitter like life, the second strong like love, and the third sweet like death.” Many variations of this proverb exist, sometimes contradicting one another (e.g., death may be linked instead to bitterness); see Gagnol 2014.

interaction appropriate to Islam that are felt to be undervalued in an encroaching Western culture. Individuals of even modest means can obtain some social distinction through their adept performance in *hira* (Youngstedt 2013, 99-100). Youngstedt emphasizes that

*hira* is not merely a matter of fun and games or “killing time.” It is serious, for much is at stake. Participation is not truly voluntary. While a man has a great deal of freedom to choose his *hira* partners, topics, times, and level of participation, every “normal” man must regularly participate in *hira*. A man who avoids *hira* groups is regarded as an outcast, as *rashin hankali* (“lacking sense”), or possibly a *mahaucaci* (“crazy man”). (2013, 106)

Meanwhile, for Tuareg, verbal mastery is also fundamental to good sociality. In the context of teatime and *fadas*, this manifests most remarkably in the notion of *sonci* (Ha.: “desire to eat”), an expression which refers to impromptu words that create an undesirable rupture in a silence or the thread of a conversation. Expressed by Tuareg in Hausa rather than Tamasheq, it references what Tuareg consider shameful stereotypes of Hausas: always thinking and talking about eating, complaining about hunger, being gluttonous. When someone commits a *sonci*, others in the social space respond by uttering *tangalt*—allusive speech whose meaning or intention is unknown (cf. Rasmussen 1992)—subtly signaling to the offender that they have committed a *sonci* and also returning the conversation back to the topic at hand. Of course, sometimes the *tangalt* is not understood by the person who spoke the *sonci*; if it is a guest or foreigner, others gathered will then explain it to them as a double humiliation, although this is usually a matter of joking and teasing. In the rural and nomadic settings where Tuareg values of *asshak* (noble, honorable behavior) and *takarakit* are believed to be most observed, Gagnol notes that the *sonci* phenomenon reveals how two inextricably mixed, incompatible acts come together in the consumption of tea: the act of eating or drinking, and the exchange of words. While the social space in which tea is enjoyed is one of conviviality, there is also the expectation that one remains reserved, that they observe *asshak* and *takarakit* by not expressing their desires,

sensations, or emotions, such as by expressing hunger or thirst, or by commenting on the quality of the tea or food. When one is handling his own shot of tea, he is expected to become silent (Gagnol 2014, 87-89). These codes of conduct are widely perceived to be relaxed in the towns. Indeed, *sonci* was a common topic for joking among the *fadantchés* that I met in Agadez—sometimes at my expense.

### **Music in *Fadas***

Beyond the sounds of percolating teapots and of conversations punctuated by laughter, *fadas* are full of music. This is not surprising given the history of contemporary *fadas*, as they emerged in close conjunction with the expansion of privately-owned radio stations in the early 1990s. Even before this period, radio was closely linked with public sociality through Radio Clubs, an institution developed by the Nigérien state in sedentary Hausa and Zarma communities since 1962, shortly after independence. Before radio sets became more affordable commodities, Radio Club participants would gather around together to listen to radio programs (Figure 2.2). In fact, developing Radio Clubs for Nigérien nomads proved a special challenge given their mobility, but was an important project for attempting to bring them within the project of national development (Sapin 1966; Ceesay 2000).

Contemporary *fadantchés* take pleasure not only in listening to radio or watching television together, but also in contributing to programming. *Fada* group leaders are sometimes interviewed by journalists, or their group proceedings may be broadcast, elevating their social status (Youngstedt 2013, 126). Even when not featured in interviews, *fadas* may gain recognition when radio hosts call out greetings to them. At Radio Nomade FM in Agadez, for example, I watched in amazement as the journalist Issouf Hadan announced, over a recording of Tuareg



Figure 2.2. Nigérien postage stamps celebrating Radio Clubs, issued circa 1965.

guitar songs, Hausa greetings to over one hundred *fadas*—each by name. He had the names written down on several sheets of paper dated for that week’s program. Often, *fadantchés* and other listeners would also send him SMS messages to make further announcements during his programs (Figure 2.3).

Radio listenership in urban areas has partly been displaced by the ease of digitally disseminating audio media via USB keys and mobile phones, especially *tactiles* (touchscreen smartphones). One evening while walking home from visiting with a friend’s *fada* in Niamey, I recall turning a corner and discovering another *fada* that had set up its poorly-lit street-side gathering space with a string of multicolored lights and a large stereo system blasting Afrobeats and *coupé décalé*—two hugely popular contemporary dance musics primarily produced in



Figure 2.3. Issouf Hadan reading SMS messages on air at Radio Nomade FM.

Nigeria, Ghana, and Côte d’Ivoire—as *fadantchés* took turns breakdancing for one another. Access to powerful stereos is something of a luxury, however; often, the music is played directly through the tinny, treble-heavy speakers of a phone that fills the soundscape of a much smaller space. Audio and video media is generally shared directly among friends and acquaintances via Bluetooth or on memory cards, but increasingly it is also shared via social media like WhatsApp, a point to which I return below.

Concurrent with the development of *fadas* in the 1990s was the movement of Tuareg guitar music into public space, as discussed in Chapter One. The end result has been that young Tuareg men throughout much of Niger are seemingly always with a guitar, and many musicians have noted the importance of *fadas* as a creative space. “One learns everything in *fadas*,”

guitarist Kildjate Moussa Albadé of Groupe TisDass once told me (personal communication, June 24, 2016). Indeed, *fadas* are often settings in which aspiring musicians learn tips from more advanced players; where all guitarists, novice and advanced, have the opportunity to practice and improve their technique; and where musicians can expand their repertoire by learning or composing new songs, thereby improving their versatility as performers who can sustain longer performances. Ibrahim Mohamed, one of the members of Groupe Zone Touareg in Agadez (led by Moussa “Tchingou” Eggour), explained to me that when friends get together with tea and guitar, they share ideas about songs: “We all try to create a new song. We play a rhythm, each person gives their ideas, and we share what we’ll say. Is what we’re going to say in the song *normal*? Or if there are problems, we try to fix that” (personal communication, September 21, 2016).<sup>33</sup> And Mohamed Karzo, another guitarist from Agadez, refers to gatherings with friends to make music as “practice.” He explains: “It’s the best thing for artists to better understand one another...and most of all to do their work better, too” (personal communication, December 13, 2016).

Thus, to *causer*—the French term for expressing the notion of hanging out, chatting, of participating in *hira*—at *fadas* can be productive not only of sociability, but can engender new compositions. Songs are often of an artist’s own inspiration, with group input, and while the age of the rebellion is in the past and romantic themes are common, lyrics may often include biting social commentary. At other times, musicians may be composing with a particular project in

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<sup>33</sup> *Normal* is a French term often used by Tuareg youth I met, and while its meaning is more or less the same as the English “normal,” its frequent use highlights the greater social value of proper behavior and community solidarity than the sort of adamant individuality fetishized in Western liberal cosmologies. Another popular slang term, the Arabic *wajij*, points to an opposite sense, of someone who is crazy or who behaves irrationally. Of course, these sentiments can be both a way to tease friends and to make serious social commentary; for example, one will as readily say something *c’est pas normal* (“It’s not normal”) or is *wajij* when discussing a companion’s humorous antics as when commenting on the behavior of a politician.



mind. For example, while I was visiting in Bamako with musicians from two northern Malian groups, Aratane N' Akal and the band of singer Khaira Arby, two of the guitarists were developing a new song to teach the Tamasheq alphabet to children, a project commissioned by USAID and other development organizations. As they experimented with melodies and lyrics among friends smoking, drinking tea, and making phone calls, they would turn to us and ask for feedback: is this phrase better, or that one? Should the melody go up instead of down? In this way, *causer* takes on its second French meaning, to cause, make, or occasion something. Through these forms of interaction, *fadantchés* thus create new compositions that are infused with social value (e.g., educational messages) and aesthetic value (e.g., a pleasing melody) that may in turn produce exchange value (e.g., commissions by NGOs).

## **MUSIC AND WAITING BEYOND THE *FADA***

Popular as they have become, *fadass* are not the only social spaces in which youth experience waiting, nor are they the only settings for compositional activity among musicians. In this section, I explore some of these alternative social spaces, illustrating how different arrays of social values circulate within them that perfuse the songs composed and performed there. As I show, musicians in particular have strong opinions about their preferences for one or another space for making music on account of their own ethical and aesthetic orientations.

### **Adulthood**

Because *fadass* are predominately youth spaces, older and more established musicians tend to not participate in them as frequently, at least with those primarily composed of youth. Recalling that age is about social and ritual position within the life course, “youth” can be

understood as referring to people who are either unmarried, recently married but childless, or who have children who are not yet of a marriageable age (Rasmussen 2000, 133-135; cf. Kieffer 2006, 68). Even relatively young musicians like Bombino and Mdou Moctar, who are in their thirties, have more adult status as married men and renowned artists than do fellow guitarists in their teens and twenties. In a discussion with Mdou about another Agadezian musician in his early twenties who often performs Mdou's songs, he clarified their relationship: "Well, he's a young kid, he's not my age. I can't hang out with him. He's too young for me to hang out with him alone and talk about music" (personal communication, February 10, 2017).

Yet elder renowned musicians continue to compose in other settings, a remarkable and somewhat novel phenomenon among Tuareg. As Tuareg age, they are generally expected to become more reserved, to retreat from participation in youthful gatherings where music is often played, and to abandon performance of certain musical instruments, like the *inzad* (bowed lute) (Rasmussen 2000, 135). The continuation of musical activity by older guitarists like Abdallah Oumbadougou and Hasso Akotey, however, has coincided with the emergence of social position of the professional *artiste* and the expanded cultural production and market for Tuareg guitar in both West Africa and Western countries. Examples of Tuareg musicians continuing to perform later in life are not exclusively in the domain of the guitar, however. As ethnomusicologist Caroline Card (1982) has suggested, the phenomenon of individuals gaining fame as musicians has taken off with the advent of recording technology and radio in the Sahara, long before *ishumar* guitar. The most famous example of a non-guitarist who continues to play late in life is the *inzad* performer Ajjou, who gained fame and prestige through recordings she made with Radio Niger (La Voix du Sahel) beginning in the 1960s.

## Solitude

Another important setting for musical activity—particularly composition—is in solitude. On one hand, this can be seen as a continuation of the tendency for Tuareg to teach themselves certain older musical forms in private, without guidance or an audience. Writing on the learning and transmission of Tuareg oral repertoire in the Azawagh of Niger, ethnomusicologist François Borel notes:

Effectively, for Tuareg, every adult man must observe *asshak*, which is to say a certain reserve, a strict conduct translatable as “nobility.” Furthermore, and most especially in the presence of blood relatives or strangers, he is held to a sense of modesty, of shame and respect, *takarakit*, which demands that he not externalize his feelings nor speak of certain subjects, notably of music. In short, a man can only sing in public when he finds himself in the company of an audience coming from the same age group and with whom he has joking relations. But above all else, a man only sings in front of an audience when he is in full command of his repertoire and believes himself capable of reproducing it while respecting certain aesthetic rules for vocal technique corresponding to those that have been passed on from generation to generation. (Borel 1988, 29)

Learners—both men and women, boys and girls—practice by imitating a master musician, but in their absence (although they may benefit from the use of recordings). They thus avoid reproach as well as shamefully positioning themselves beneath someone else (*ibid.*; see also Rasmussen 1995; Borel 2006). However, these proprieties are loosening. For example, facing a decline in the practice and performance of *inzad*, various institutions have made plans to organize programs in Niger to teach young girls to play; supporters of these efforts include the local association Takrist n’Tada, the tourist agency Croq Nature, the Nigérien Ministry of Culture, and UNESCO, which in 2013 inscribed the *inzad* on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.<sup>34</sup> And, as illustrated above, *fadas* are a place for communal learning among friends and companions of varying skill levels on guitar.

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<sup>34</sup> *Inzad* is inscribed under an alternative spelling, *imzad*, and is a cultural resource shared among Niger, Mali, and Algeria. See <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/practices-and-knowledge-linked-to-the-imzad-of-the-tuareg-communities-of-algeria-mali-and-niger-00891>, accessed August 14, 2017.

But aside from issues of *asshak*, musical activity in solitude is closely linked to *essuf*, the complex sentiment of nostalgia and loneliness, of the wild of the desert, that features prominently in *ishumar* songs (see Chapter One). Mohamed Karzo, who I mentioned above as someone who enjoys musical gatherings as an opportunity for practice, told me that he much prefers to compose alone. Since he does not own a motorcycle or 4x4, this sort of privacy is more likely to be found at his home in Agadez than in the open desert, which requires some form of transport to visit. But when the opportunity arises to be away from the chaos of urban life, the desert is a powerful font of compositional inspiration. For example, Kildjate Moussa Albadé related to me that his song “Inzggam” (Tamasheq: “Nostalgia”) came to him while visiting his mother’s natal village after she passed away a few years ago. He took his guitar with him into the desert to visit a nearby village, Widan, to play alone, reflecting on the pain of his loss:

*Ténéré ténéré  
hegh ténéré insegh  
nak id nizgam assine  
hanen oulhine assnine.*

I am in the desert—  
the desert, myself, and nostalgia,  
a nostalgia of two things that are in my heart  
and that hurt it.

*Hanen oulhine assnine  
edague ikegh narhine  
falaguadim iyan  
ehan oulhine assnine.*

These two things are in my heart.  
Everywhere I go, I feel awful.  
They’re there for someone who is in my  
heart and who stirs it.

*Takalahi Widan  
arrougue nassouf erghan  
warhen ichkan damane  
hant alchinane houlan.*

Widan is becoming for me a great forest  
where there are neither trees nor water  
but it is full of *kel essuf*.

*Ossegh laghtor higan  
wartilen issifran  
ad ziguzinad houland  
ghor allahou tillane.*

I went looking for a doctor for this [problem]  
who told me there are no medicines for it.  
Go, be patient,  
and have faith in Allah.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “Inzggam” (“Nostalgia”) composed by Kildjate Moussa Albadé and recorded by his group, TisDass, on the album *Yamedan* (Sahel Sounds, 2015). Transcribed and translated by Kildjate Moussa Albadé and the author.

Moussa’s encounter with solitude—understood in particular through the rich presence of *kel essuf* (“people of solitude,” similar to *djinn*)—thus not only inspired the insights and composition of “Inzggam,” but becomes part of its narrative. It is this exploration in solitude that provides an introspective, ethical solution to his emotional malady that no medicine can cure.

### **Excursions in the *Ténéré***

As “Inzggam” demonstrates, the *ténéré* (Tam.: “desert,” “wasteland”) continues to have great importance for musicians. Chapter One explored its significance in the songs of *ishumar* guitarists who recalled their connections to their *ténéré* homeland while away in exile, singing praises to its beauty and power while calling on fellow Tuareg to promote its development. It remains in such high circulation in Tuareg music today that Moussa—who begins “Inzggam” with an a capella intonation of the refrain “*ténéré téneré / hegh téneré insegh...*”—often jokes that every Tuareg song is just composed of the word “*ténéré*” repeated *ad nauseum*. But the desert is not just a place for finding solitude; for urban Tuareg—whether youth who may grow up learning neither Tamasheq nor the nomadic life of their cousins and ancestors, or those who grew up in rural areas and seek escape from the chaos of the city—leaving town to visit the open desert is an important social pastime and occasion for music-making. Unlike the casual day-to-day comings-and-goings of *fadas*, desert outings involve more planning. They are, in effect, informal events, and many logistical matters need to be at least somewhat arranged: how everyone will get there, where to meet, who is bringing what material (instruments, mats, tea-making gear, water), and so on.

These *pique-niques*, as they are often called in French, are known by more specialized terms in Tamasheq: daytime picnics are known in Tayert (dialect of the Air mountain region of

north-central Niger) as *saklo*, but nighttime gatherings are called *idawanetan* or *mistaba*; in Tiwillimat (dialect of the Azawagh plains of western Niger), nighttime picnics are known as *takayt*. Although excursions like the *takayt* do not always involve music, they resemble two older Tuareg institutions. First are *ahals*, nighttime youth courtship gatherings held outside rural camps or villages and accompanied by *inzad* or *tende* (mortar drum) (Genthon 2012, 118; cf. Card 1982; Rasmussen 2000; Borel 2006). Second are *zahuten* (Arabic: “entertainment”) gatherings that developed in the 1970s among Kel Adagh (Malian) *ishumar* who settled as drought and political refugees in Tamanrasset, Algeria. In these parties held outside town, which involved a new *tende* repertoire, young *ishumar* sought to transcend the hardship of their daily lives and the perceived conservatism of the Kel Ahaggar Tuareg native to Tamanrasset; this was the genesis of a particular *ishumar* music scene in Tamanrasset that soon birthed Tuareg guitar (Belalimat 1996, 30-31; 2010; see Chapter One).

Let me share an anecdote in order to offer a sense of how a *takayt* may unfold and to begin a discussion of what they mean for young Tuareg today:

*I'm visiting with a group of musicians in Niamey one afternoon when one of them, \*Rhissa, invites me to a midnight picnic.<sup>36</sup> Later that night, one of Rhissa's friends, a new acquaintance of mine named \*Zakaria, picks me up in his sedan. As we drive across town, Zakaria explains that he grew up playing in a band with Rhissa, but now can only play when he has finished his work; he is obligated to fend for his mother and sisters and will soon get married. Without inheriting wealth or having someone else to care for the family, he tells me, it's difficult to make music one's career. The community around a musician will assume that he is hanging out, drinking and smoking, an activity deemed to*

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<sup>36</sup> Pseudonyms used in this dissertation are denoted by an asterisk (\*) at the start of a name.

be haram and bring shame to the family. Most people are forced to quit making music as they grow older for reasons like these, especially when the government does not support music and few people have an opportunity to perform outside Niger.

*We arrive at Rhissa's place, a thatched hut in an open plot of land next to a couple large, two-story concrete homes in a newly developed neighborhood on the edges of Niamey. Several of Rhissa's other friends are there waiting with mats, mattresses, a calabash and djembe, all of which we stuff into the trunk of the car before squeezing the seven of us into five seats. We rumble along the neighborhood's dirt roads until turning onto a major paved thoroughfare, the road leading northwest to the town of Tillabéri and the Malian border. Before we reach the edge of Niamey, we stop over at a large boutique glowing in the cold bluish light of uncovered fluorescent bulbs. There's a Toyota Hilux pickup truck there with more of Rhissa's friends, who have loaded it with guitars, amps, and other gear, as well as cigarettes, tea, charcoal, and drinks: beers for those who drink, sodas and juice for the others, as well as the plastic half-liter bags of drinking water known, by way of anglophone Nigeria, as piya wata.*

*Finally all geared up, we continue in caravan down the Tillabéri road through the villages on the edge of Niamey—technically still within city limits—and turn off the main road onto a well-trod path of dirt just a few hundred feet before we would have reached the gendarmerie (national police) roadside checkpoint I know from a previous trip in this direction. With tensions high over security in Niger due to the conflicts in neighboring Mali and Boko Haram attacks in eastern Niger, not to mention a recent cross-border attack from terrorists in northern Mali further down this road, Rhissa and friends know that Nigérien authorities are anxious about Tuareg activities. It's simply best to avoid*

*police and other state actors when possible. Going off road is an obvious choice.*

*Within a few minutes of turning off the main road, we arrive at a flat, open space overlooking the Niger River, glimmering in the moonlight. The stillness and silence out in the darkness beyond the pale blue- and orange-tinted sky above Niamey is a welcome respite from the urban bustle. Empty beer cans littering the site indicate it is a routine destination for visitors. We sweep the area and begin to lay out mats and soft blankets to sit on. Everyone finds a task: popping in fresh AA batteries into a small, portable amp; opening drinks and lighting cigarettes; setting the tea to boil. Within moments, the individual notes of an electric guitar here and an acoustic there begin to coalesce into a familiar song, and the rest of us join in with clapping, responsorial singing, and encouraging calls of “aiwa!” (Ar.: “yes!”) when it really begins to groove. It’s the beginning of an ebb and flow of energy that continues into the early hours of the morning.*

Much like *fadas*, the temporality of a *takayt* is largely structured by the preparation of several rounds of tea. In between songs, guitarists or whoever had their hands full while playing will enjoy their turn to drink a shot of tea; there may be several minutes of conversation before the music-making resumes. Unlike *fadas*, however, where presence on the street often involves continual perforations of the social space by the exchange of greetings with diverse passers-by, picnics may generally be more selective. There are exceptions, of course; in the desert, it is not unusual for herders to stroll by and exchange greetings, perhaps sharing a shot of tea and sharing news. Save for the scores of goats, sheep, cattle, or camels that may accompany the shepherd, the traffic is nonetheless far lighter.



Furthermore, many Tuareg understand people living in rural areas to be more observant of values like *asshak* than people in the city, which enhances the appeal of visiting the *ténéré*. In fact, *asshak* becomes understood not just an aspirational code of conduct, but something which allows Tuareg to survive harsh living conditions in the desert. “When you’re in the bush, [*asshak*] is more practiced,” Bombino explained to me during an interview. “Because to live in the bush is not easy. It’s very rare. To live in the bush, you might have just a few animals, so you need *asshak* to support that” (personal communication, December 28, 2016). Youth who organize picnics are effectively transporting many of the dynamics of urban *fadas* to the *ténéré*, and do not necessarily observe more *asshak* because of this setting. While many picnics may not involve alcohol consumption like the anecdote above does, the irony that Zakaria spoke to me about how perceived musicians’ lifestyle of drinking and smoking brings shame to families while he drove us to a gathering where these were two prominent activities highlights the ongoing tension musicians confront with regard to Tuareg moral values. But, as Bombino emphasizes:

When you go in the bush or in the desert...you experience something. It’s hard to explain. It’s something that you don’t find in the city. Because there [in the city], there’s a lot that will tire you, there are a lot of people. [In the desert] there’s nothing, there’s a calm spirit. I think there you might even hear the sound of the acoustic guitar is a bit different than in the city. It’s freer. [...] And above all, when you play, there’s nothing that bothers you because everything’s in your head and it all depends on the tranquility in your head. [...] When you’re in the bush, it’s like when people go to the beach and they are relaxed. It’s the same in the bush. People bring a mat, find a good shady tree, makes their tea below it, reflect on the world—*tranquille*. The bush has its particularity. [...] It’s a desert that goes with the music. (personal communication, December 28, 2016)

Bombino is not alone in sensing that the guitar sounds different in the *ténéré* than in town. As a teenager in 1998 just beginning to learn to play, Moussa Albadé recalls the first time he played his acoustic guitar outside Niamey (where he grew up) while visiting family in a village. Realizing the guitar sounded more resonant, he was inspired to compose a song that

same evening:

*Iket tihoussaye awen tazoude*  
*imisslinine in guitar ehan ténééré*  
*Inhayaghiyat isstihoussay inet*  
*olahn at ittachdayte tassidalet*

Such beauty, it's too great—  
the sound of the guitar in the *ténééré*.  
I have never seen one in its beauty  
resembling the green shoot of a shrub.

*Kamoutanine kamidagh assguanegh* You, the one that belongs to me, it's to you I speak.  
*tihoussaye tinam lanat sirisamal* Your beauty amazes me more than anything.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the rural “particularly” that Bombino speaks of clearly shapes understandings of musical aesthetics and resonance. Youth may bring amplifiers and electric guitars, as in the late-night *takayt* described above, which might seem to suggest an inherent preference for urban style. However, the music tends to be less the frenetic sounds of contemporary Agadezian guitar—fast riffs, crashing cymbals and thundering drum sets—than a lilting, participatory sound that “goes with” the perceived slower pace of rural life. Putting it another way, Moussa Albadé refers to the music that was in vogue in an earlier generation as “a real blues, *tranquille*” and the contemporary style as “faster, a bit more rock” (personal communication, February 18, 2016).

The new as faster, from the city; the old as slower, rural: this is a chronotopic understanding of musical style. While the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) developed the notion of the chronotope (“time space”) to parse literary genres, it has since informed a range of ethnographic writing to account for the interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships (Folch-Serra 1990; Holloway and Kneale 2000; Samuels et al. 2010). Bombino’s comments illustrate that the chronotope that a musical style is understood to reference is not just marked by aesthetic preferences; it is inflected with notions about the circulation of moral values like *asshak*: more of it here, less of it there. Of course, the urban-rural and modern-traditional (as

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<sup>37</sup> “Imisslinine” (“The Sound of...”) composed by Kildjate Moussa Albadé and recorded by his group, TisDass, on the album *Yamedan* (2015). Transcribed and translated by Kildjate Moussa Albadé and the author.

well as local-global) dichotomies that shape such perceptions are powerfully entrenched and complicated oversimplifications, powerful tropes by which foreigners and locals understand West African life (as elsewhere) (cf. Waterman 1990a; Piot 1999). Contemporary debates about Afropolitanism, which has taken on many meanings but gestures toward a sort of African-territorialized cosmopolitanism, highlight that scholars of Africa continue to grapple with these epistemologies (cf. Mbembe 2007; Skinner 2015). Thus, rather than suggesting that there are inherent and necessary distinctions between music-making in town and in the *ténéré*—even if different tendencies constitute part of my analysis—I am emphasizing that Tuareg musicians chronotopically understand musical meaning and value. This is why some contemporary musicians may express stylistic preferences, such as for the “blues.” These are ways by which musicians distinguish themselves from others, effecting different position-takings within a social field (Bourdieu 1993).

In a conversation about the Tuareg clan to which he belongs, the Dabákar—an offshoot of the Kel Ansar in Mali, known as religious leaders—Moussa told me that they are known for their honesty, their piety, and their observance of *asshak*. He explained that in villages where Dabákar live, like Terbiya (in the Filingué region, next to the Mali border),

our music was never rock, reggae...it's always blues, it's always slow. It was never a fast music with drum sets and all that. Even if one plays electric, it's not really dance music like people do today. For example, in Terbiya, you saw how they played? It's not like all the musicians in Agadez. You have seen their percussion that makes the people dance quickly. One would say it comes from the orchestral groups of Zarma and Hausa, in contrast to us, who always listen to Tinariwen and invite them. And Hami Ekawel [one of the first-generation guitarists], who is also Dabákar from our family, he never played fast music, because we don't know the orchestras. We always knew *tende*, Tinariwen, Ali Farka Touré...who are blues groups. (personal communication, November 14, 2016)

Moussa thus emphasizes his preference for the “blues” aesthetic in Tuareg music using language that speaks to notions of authenticity and ethnic purity. He links Dabákar musicians to the

Tuareg *tende* tradition, to the founding fathers of Tuareg guitar, and to one of West Africa's most legendary guitarists (Ali Farka Touré was not Tuareg but frequently sang in Tamasheq), while distancing them from the multiethnic orchestras. Positioning Dabákar as separate from the Agadez music scene is important, too, for emphasizing their superior morality.

### *Tagssir*

If *fadas* can best be understood as social spaces that assemble daily in urban settings, usually at the same, marked physical location, then picnics are something of an escape not only from town but from the mundane everydayness of *fadas*. This all gets complicated with another term for social gatherings among Tuareg musicians: *tagssir*. At its most simple, *tagssir* refers to a jam session or gathering around tea, music, and talk. In this sense, *tagssirs* resemble the *zahuten* parties of the *ishumar* communities in Algeria and Libya in which Tuareg guitar first emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (see Chapter One). Yet multiple Tuareg I spoke with link the term *tagssir* to Tamasheq language. It is the noun form of the verb *egssir*, meaning “to be care free”; more loosely, it is also understood to mean “to jam”: one might say “*nagassaret*” (“let’s jam”) or “*niglak tagssir*” (“let’s attend a jam session”). But it also likely ties to Arabic language by way of Libya (and Algeria, where it is also popular), since it is principally Tuareg who had traveled to Libya who are known for participating in *tagssir*; notably, it was not in Niamey but in Agadez, the gateway to the Sahara and to Libya, that I would frequently encounter this term. Some of my interlocutors describe *tagssir* as Libyan slang that describes when one is turned away from responsibility and focused on having fun. This etymology makes sense given that the Arabic *taqsir* can be glossed as “slackness,” “laxity,” and “negligence” (Wehr 1994, 900). These and many of its other translations suggest that, at least in its original meanings, *taqsir* was

intended to describe negative characteristics. Indeed, *taqsir* is an important subject of discussion in Islamic law, where it appears to be invoked in diverse but ill-defined situations, such as failure to live up to *Shari'ah* or to financial contracts (Naim et al. 2016).

More research, particularly in Libya, would be useful to clarify the history of this terminology, which has mostly been described to me by way of speculation. I asked Mohamed Karzo, a guitarist who resides in Agadez and briefly lived in Libya, about when people started organizing *tagssir* and whether it was part of Tuareg culture before the *ishumar*; he is old enough to remember the days before the peace accords that brought guitar more freely into Nigérien public spaces. He linked it specifically to the guitar: “It’s with the guitar that I hear this sound [i.e., this word]. *Tagssir, egssir*—that’s concerning music, guitar” (personal communication, December 13, 2016). Meanwhile, Ahmoudou Madassane, another Agadezian guitarist who is in his early twenties, says “We woke up with it” (personal communication, March 6, 2017).

In discussions about the nuances of the meaning of *tagssir*, Mohamed compared it to the *fada*. Yet while *fadas* often but do not always involve music, for *tagssirs* it is a constitutive element. Ahmoudou further outlines their distinctions:

Among us, the *fada* is just a little gathering of friends. People come to your place, you make tea while hanging out. That’s the *fada*. But you can also play in the *fada*. If you play in a *fada* like that, with a guitar, one would say you’re doing a little *tagssir*. A friend could come by your place and say, “Tomorrow I’m going to come, we’ll have a little *tagssir*, a *fada*.” It’s the same thing. (personal communication, March 6, 2017)

The same thing, but different—not to mention that one might interchange *tagssir* and the various terms for a picnic, which also do not necessarily include music. The blurriness by which Ahmoudou and Mohamed describe *fadas* and *tagssirs* attests to the complexities of Tuareg daily life in hausaphone Agadez, the multiple spatial-temporal and cultural trajectories articulating in contemporary musical life: the trans-Saharan labor migration of *ishumar* by which Arabic slang

was integrated into Tamasheq, the proliferation of *fadas* in a democratic and liberalized Niger, the “Hausafication” of Tuareg youth who grow up in a Hausa town rather than in the desert. The cosmopolitanism and similarities of *fadas* and some *tagssirs* became clear to me during an informal *tagssir* in which I participated in September 2016:

*It’s approaching sunset on a dusty Agadezian day. I’ve been riding through town on one of the ubiquitous yellow adaidaitas (mototaxis or tuk-tuks) that have overrun town since my last visit in 2014, and disembark at a gas station in the Misrata quarter where I’d agreed to meet my friend \*Alhassane, a Tuareg guitarist in his early 30s. After exchanging greetings, he guides me to his nearby home, left to him by his deceased parents. He opens the steel door to his compound, which is a large open space of dirt—no plants or trees—and a rectangular concrete building divided up into living quarters. I step through and call out a Hausa greeting to a group of women and girls laying on a mat in the shade; they don’t seem to understand. Alhassane and I turn to a side entrance to his living quarters, where he later explains that he rents out parts of his home to migrants, often from Côte d’Ivoire, who are passing through Agadez en route to Libya, from where they will attempt to cross the Mediterranean to Europe.*

*His personal living quarters are comprised of a small space with four sparsely furnished concrete rooms; a small solar panel next to the door is propped up to collect the waning afternoon sun and charge his phone, and an acoustic guitar lays on the floor. We sit to causer and catch up since our last meeting in Niamey, sharing tea, biscuits, and dates. “I’m very glad you called,” he tells me, explaining that the Facebook app on his phone wasn’t working and without my phone number, he wasn’t able to message me. This often happens, a result of data corruption caused by dusty conditions and because people*

*frequently exchange apps on their smartphones via Bluetooth.*

*Once the intense sun has set, we move outside, where a light breeze keeps it cooler than indoors. Alhassane drags out the cot and sits, insisting that I take the padded driver's seat salvaged from a Toyota Land Cruiser that he keeps outside. On several occasions throughout the evening, his phone rings as friends call to greet him or to arrange a visit; from when I arrive after 5pm until I leave around 1am, about twelve or so different visitors stop by. Save for one or two of them, almost all are imajeghen, from the traditional elite of the Tuareg social hierarchy. Most are young men, but occasionally young women stop by—four in total throughout the evening, including Alhassane's younger sister and her friend—removing their head coverings once they leave the street.*

*Among Alhassane's friends is an energetic and impish guitarist named \*Alyad. The two of them take turns playing the guitar on hand, each with a very different style: Alhassane's more akin to the cleanly articulated, picked notes of earlier generation masters like Abdallah Oumbadougou, and Alyad's looser style, in the vein of the younger Bombino. Alhassane is eager to show me dozens of songs, many of which are his own compositions. His friends know them well and accompany him by singing and clapping, sometimes drumming on the lid of a gallon-sized thermos used to store drinking water. Most songs are in Tamasheq, although he has composed one or two in French; none are sung in Hausa, even if conversation often switches to this Agadezian lingua franca. As Alhassane plays, the others toss their tactiles into the middle of the group, screens glowing red as they record the audio to listen to later or to share via social media. The glimmer of stars above provides the only light; it's too dark to record video now.*

*Alyad plays a song that he composed for the upcoming Agadez Sokni festival. He*

*explains that he more or less improvised it during an interview on Télé Sahel, the state-owned television channel, when a government official had noted that no festival song had been previewed for listeners.<sup>38</sup> Later in the evening, he plays another song that he had created with his fada. I do not recognize it, but after a minute or two he begins singing, in English: “Fuck the Police!” Following my utter surprise, he laughs and bids us farewell. He’s off to visit other friends in town and—this, he now tells us in French—“to search for a young woman for tonight.” Not much later, I explain to Alhassane that as much as I wished to stay late into the night with everyone, I need to leave so as not to offend the family hosting me in their compound across town. It’s become too late to find an adaidaita here on the edge of town, but another of Alhassane’s friends generously drives me home on his motorcycle. As we chat over the humming motor about his own musical experiences, his performances in Europe and with local stars, we pass through quiet streets where the occasional group of young men is huddled around pots of tea and glowing tactiles.*

What mixes up the lexicon even further is that *tagssirs* are not just jam sessions that happen in the informal contexts of *fadas* and picnics; they can also refer to much more involved occasions, as parties with invited guests. In December 2016, for example, during a week when several major events were occurring in Agadez—Republic Day (hosted in 2016 in Agadez and called Agadez Sokni), the coronation of the Sultan of Agadez, and others—I attended a more formal *tagssir* (Figure 2.4):

*I arrive on the back of a friend’s motorcycle at a house where a gathering that clearly*

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<sup>38</sup> Another song composed and recorded for Agadez Sokni by the musician Bibi Ahmed wound up gaining more popularity.





Figure 2.4. Attendees at a more formal tagssir in Agadez. December 2016.

*involved much more preparation than Alhassane's tagssir is being hosted. As I walk through the compound and greet dozens of other guests, I see that they have already shared large communal plates of mechoui (barbecued lamb) and rice; now they are enjoying tea and sodas. Furthermore, while most of us wear our everyday clothes at informal tagssirs, most attendees at this event are dressed in festive outfits often worn for weddings and other special gatherings: men's boubous and women's dresses made of shimmering bazin cloth. The crowd is almost exclusively Tuareg, but I make eye contact with a couple tourists.*

*Some people are gathered outside to smoke cigarettes or chat, but most of the action is in the front room of the house. Participants lean on couchins positioned along*

*the walls or else sit on the floor in the middle of the room, which also serves as the cramped dance space. At one end of the rectangular space, the musicians sit together on the floor or on their amplifiers, taking turns at the guitar. Among them are Mohamed Karzo and Ahmoudou Madassane, but the featured host for the evening is Rhissa Ag Wanaghli—one of the former members of Takrist N’Akal (founded by Abdallah Ag Oumbadougou) and now the leader of France-based band Atri N’Assouf—who is visiting Agadez for the festivities. Crowded together in the tight room and inundated with the intensity of the amplifiers and a djembe drum just a few feet away, my fellow guests and I bump elbows as we clap, sing, dance, and laugh.*

Like the weddings, naming ceremonies, and *soirées guitares* that constitute the most presentational performances of Tuareg guitar music, *tagssirs* can thus be understood not simply as musical social spaces, but as events outside the everyday flow of time.

### **THE SPIRIT OF THE FADA, DIGITIZED**

Often during the music-making of a *fada*, *tagssir*, or other gathering, participants will toss their phones into the center of the group to record as the guitarist plays and sings and the others clap, sing along, and otherwise provide accompaniment. Sometimes, someone will record video or snap photographs. These various documents often serve to link individuals to other people and networks through their circulation, whether by presenting recordings on their phones to other groups they may socialize with, such as another *fada*; by transferring files to others’ phones via memory cards, USB keys, and Bluetooth; or by posting on social media. Internet access and digital media circulation has facilitated connections across Nigérien communities and

the diaspora for some time now, whether to cultivate Tuareg ethnonationalist sentiment during the 2007 rebellion (Alzouma 2009) or facilitate the spread of Islamic reform movements (Sounaye 2011, 2013, 2014). But these technologies and the sharing practices they engender are also central to the ethics and meaning of waiting. Here I explore digital media exchange as an array of social practices that expand and mediate social space, circulating social values and the imagined boundaries of belonging well beyond the face-to-face interactions of *fadas*, *tagssirs*, and other settings for musical activity introduced above.

### **Images of Celebrity and Fantasy**

As Ibrahim Mohamed from Groupe Zone Touareg explained to me, “recording or filming on phones is just for pleasure, to remember what we did when we were somewhere. [...] We show it to people who weren’t there” (personal communication, September 21, 2016). Sharing memories (*souvenirs*) of *tagssirs*, *fadas*, and picnics in many ways parallels the sharing of photographs from Irish traditional music sessions described by Timothy Taylor (2015). Arguing that performance and rituals store value in material forms (tokens, fetishes) as well as in ideas, practices, and deities, he suggests that the musical sociality generated in a session is a value stored primarily in photographs, rather than recordings. In the case of Tuareg music, youth often will eagerly assemble to get a photo with a star musician after a performance or during some other encounter. In Agadez, where many stars perform regularly, this is not a particularly difficult task; however, some musicians are more available than others, or may not be local. While visiting friends in a *fada* in Agadez, a new acquaintance of mine pulled me to his side to show me a series of photos on his phone that he had taken with Bombino on a picnic the previous day. Bombino had been touring a lot recently, so there was a lot of excitement about

him being back in Agadez to play for weddings and the Agadez Sokni festivities. Similarly, when Tinariwen played a concert in Niamey in November 2016—the first time performing as a group in Niger in over a decade—Tuareg social media networks were awash with photos of youth posing with their idols, the founding fathers of Tuareg guitar. “It’s just a pleasure,” Ibrahim explained when I asked about why people take photos with artists. “It’s a way to say so-and-so took a photo with such-and-such artist.”

But circulating artist photos can be both a pleasure and point to a nascent sort of celebrity culture among Tuareg artists. Rooted as it is in different cultural and infrastructural regimes, this sort of celebrity is neither the same celebrity culture as in, say, Los Angeles, nor the same as in other West African settings, such as the Ghanaian hiplife scene described by Jesse Weaver Shipley (2013). Shipley argues that hiplife musicians operate on an understanding of celebrity as a sort of currency that transforms aesthetic value (sometimes called “musical value”) into economic value. He sees celebrity as a promise of future value, a fetish, a non-material form of desire that is a substitute for labor and material wealth (Shipley 2013, 280).

The photographs that young Tuareg share of themselves hanging out with an artist at a *fada*, concert, or picnic—understood, in the words of Ibrahim, as a “pleasure”—speak to a similar desire. However, unlike hiplife and many other West African popular music forms that draw heavily on the foreign modernities and signs of wealth observed in many diasporic black popular musics (cf. Shipley 2013, 78), the celebrity of Tuareg artists is less often linked to conspicuous consumption and other signs of material wealth. This is not to say that displays of wealth don’t factor into Tuareg music—they do, as I show in the next chapter. But the desire I would attribute to this Tuareg youth fascination with celebrity is primarily a yearning for meaningfulness, significance, and dignity. Famed and respected artists have attained these

qualities, which have long been denied the Tuareg community through marginalization by the postcolonial state. Indeed, the late Mano Dayak, a tourism entrepreneur and leader during the first rebellion in Niger, famously asked: “Must one die to be Tuareg?” (*Faut-il mourir pour être Touareg?*) (Alzouma 2009, 493). For Tuareg caught in prolonged youth, however, these characteristics take on added significance as aspects of an unattainable adult social status.<sup>39</sup>

Like the sharing of tea in a *fada* or the organizing of a *tagssir*, encounters with famous Tuareg musicians disrupt and reorganize otherwise cyclical youth temporalities. Photos, as stored memories of these moments, contribute to the spirit of generous sociality that is important both in face-to-face social gatherings like *fadas* and in online social spaces like social media pages and groups. But they are not merely tokens of the valuable sociality produced at musical gatherings; they also symbolically link their subjects to the greatness of star artists. Here I draw on Marcel Mauss’s claim that “to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself” (Mauss 2000, 12). As David Graeber (2001) notes, celebrities are in the habit of engaging in this sort of gift-giving when they share personal tokens like clothing, jewelry, and so on; I would add to this list the act of posing for photos. Graeber writes: “In cases like this one might well say the giver gives a fragment of himself, in the way Mauss proposes; one that the recipient will then keep as a way of vicariously participating in the giver’s identity” (ibid., 212). Unlike the Maori gift exchange through which Mauss theorizes the spirit of the gift (the *hau*), however, recipients of celebrities’ gifts do not become more like the recipient, nor are

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<sup>39</sup> Wealth, of course, profoundly facilitates one’s ability to marry and construct a family. Furthermore, the culture of *grandes personnalités* (often described in anglophone literature as “Big Men”) across much of West Africa hinges on the redistribution of wealth through patron-client networks, which serves as a rational investment in symbolic and social capital (cf. Apter 2005, 39). However, among Tuareg youth, an interest in wealth appears to be secondary to displays of generosity or greatness by other means.

they obligated to reciprocate the gifts.<sup>40</sup> The celebrity's identity is not transferred onto the recipient, Graeber continues, "because it [is] seen as having been derived from *inside*, from interior essence or capacity (which we usually label 'talent') rather than from anything he or she *owns*" (ibid., 213). Rather than talent, however, I would suggest that among Tuareg artists and fans, it is the dignity of a guitarist afforded by fame and recognition that circulates via photos.

Circulating photos via display on phones and sharing on social media subsequently ensures that there is an audience, which anthropologist Terence Turner argues is necessary for realizing the values produced in an activity or stored in some token. This is a point Turner develops over several published and unpublished works (e.g., Turner 1979, 1995) and that anthropologist David Graeber synthesizes in *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (Graeber 2001, 74-78; see also Turner 2003, 2008; Fajans 1993; Taylor n.d.). "Concrete media of circulation," as Turner describes tokens of value, are characterized by at least three important qualities. First, they are measures of value, comparing the importance of the creative energies required to produce them in terms of presence or absence (e.g., having or not having a particular value, such as a beautiful name), ranking (e.g., some tokens are viewed as superior to others), or proportionality (e.g., money). Some musicians are more highly regarded than others, for example, and photos with them will be more cherished; this was clear from the deluge of photos youth shared of themselves with members of Tinariwen during the time of their historic Niamey concert in 2016 (mentioned above). Second, they are media of value, material means by which value is realized. Compared to something like a printed photograph, digital media like images have an unusual materiality, of course; but data "fills space," such that digital files are not fully

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<sup>40</sup> Later scholars of Maori culture have shown that Mauss's understanding of the *hau* and Maori gift exchange is riddled with ethnographic misreadings, but his analysis has been so influential on anthropology that his readings cannot simply be discarded. See Graeber 2001, 151-228.

immaterial and, I argue, can still be understood as tokens (more on this below). Third, concrete media of circulation are almost always understood as ends unto themselves, even seen—like the commodity fetish—as the origins of particular values. Ibrahim’s comments about capturing *souvenirs* for pleasure illustrate that it is indeed an important pursuit for young Tuareg.

There is value to escapism, then, and sometimes it produces remarkable results. For example, some youth pass time by using smartphone apps to create photomontages that they then share on social media. Such montages come in a variety of genres. For a few years, the vogue was to create a grid of photos featuring several different artists, each labeled with a number, and to post it on Facebook or to a WhatsApp group (Figure 2.5). Other group members could then comment on the photo with the number of their preferred artist. This seems to have faded in popularity by 2017, however, perhaps owing to public disfavor; some interlocutors expressed to



Figure 2.5. Photomontage grid for voting on prominent Tuareg artists.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> They are: (1) Bibi Ahmed of Groupe Inerane; (2) Bombino; (3) Ibrahim Ag Alhabib of Tinariwen; (4) Sadam Ben Abderrahman of Imarhan; (5) Rhissa Ag Wanaghli of Atri N’Assouf; (6) Ousmane Mossa of Tamikrest; (7) Abdoukader Ag Mohamed Kaoucen (“Kader Tanoutanout”); and (8) Nabil Baly Othmani.

me their disapproval of these montages because they are overt popularity contests that divide the Tuareg community, rather than promote solidarity. Similarly, one could also argue that it stirs resentments among musicians; some of the people who lamented this practice most vociferously to me were artists who were not always included in the montages. Nonetheless, such public expressions of preference enter a grey area with regard to whether or not they contradict the respectful reserve expected of Tuareg who uphold *asshak*. Not all grid montages are for voting, however; they may juxtapose great artists as an homage or to memorialize those who are deceased, or in other cases a young musician may insert a photo of himself into the grid.

Another popular montage genre is to juxtapose someone's portrait with a particular location. Moussa "Tchingou" Eggour of Groupe Zone Touareg, a young guitarist born in 1994 in Tizerit (about 70km west of Agadez) and now living Agadez, is a remarkable exemplar of this practice. He often inserts images of himself into photos set in places that are clearly not in Niger: in a lush, green forest with waterfalls and snow-capped mountains; on a billboard in a subway station in East Asia (Figure 2.6a); or on a jumbo screen at an outdoor event in what is likely North America or Europe (Figure 2.6b). For the trained eye of someone familiar with the possibilities of photomontage software, these images are very clearly doctored. Not every viewer is privileged with this knowledge, however. On one of Tchingou's images (Figure 2.6c), in which he has added a photo of himself playing guitar in front of a snow-covered house, viewers on Facebook ask if he is abroad: "Cool, so Tchingou you're in Europe or what?" Another participant advises the original user: "Look closely." But another viewer privy to the doctoring, guitarist Ibrahim Gadjil, writes a benediction that speaks to the significance of such fantasy images: "May Allah realize our dreams."





*Figures 2.6a-c (clockwise from lower left). Montages by Moussa “Tchingou” Eggour.*

In recent work on selfies and the use of social media among Ghanaian artists, Shipley (2015, 2017) argues that there is an intimate relationship between parody and identity emerging in the time of digital media circulation, where humor, ambiguity, and contradiction are critical tools and modes of knowing. Furthermore, selfies are particularly important as modes of self-making; they are images in which subject and object, the curated image and the curator, are collapsed into one another, regardless of whether the photo is ultimately captured on camera by the featured individual. In other words, with selfies one uses their phone to both extend the body

and abstract the self (Shipley 2015, 404-405; 2017). Tchingou is not simply abstracting himself through photomontaged selfies; he is involved in a project of self-making through the mimesis of photographs of those few Tuareg artists who manage to tour abroad, in which they bask in the limelight of international stages.

Born from an aspirational imagining of greatness in a career to come—of becoming like Bombino, Tinariwen, and other stars—Tchingou’s fantasy montages point to a yearning for what anthropologist Nancy Munn calls an expanded “intersubjective spacetime (Munn 1986, 9). The Gawans in the island chains around Papua New Guinea that Munn studies seek to generate “positive value,” understood as a general, relational measurement of the potency to yield particular outcomes desired by a social actor. Gawans produce such value by circulating or transferring food or shells to others and by demonstrating hospitality to visitors, thereby expanding spatiotemporal relations and control beyond the individual. This spacetime can be contracted through “negative value,” however, which can be produced by defamatory action or witchcraft. In other words, Gawans pursue fame, which Munn describes as “both a positive value product (an outcome of certain positively transformative actions) and an evaluation of the actor by significant others” (ibid., 15).

This is foundational to the celebrity sought by the hiplife artists Shipley describes, just as it is desirable among emerging Tuareg musicians like Tchingou as well as established stars like Bombino. Tchingou’s images provoke, as selfies often do, in order to engineer their own circulation, the circulation of the self (Shipley 2015, 403). But artists also use images to promote their careers and upcoming performances through more straightforward photographic representations. Just as “celebrities make themselves famous by announcing their own success” (Shipley 2013, 82) in Ghana, so too among Tuareg musicians. Those who are on tour abroad can

share photos that provide unequivocal, un-doctored evidence of their expanded spacetime: socializing with friends in Europe around a pot of Sahelian tea, performing someplace most Nigériens will never have an opportunity to visit, and so on. But when special performances are scheduled in Niger, such as a festival or a ticketed concert, artists and promoters routinely create graphics to circulate with details about the event date and time, cost of admission (for concerts), and announcements of invited guest artists (Figure 2.7). These images are then posted, shared, and forwarded on Facebook pages and in WhatsApp groups; compared to event organizing in the United States, special event pages like those available on Facebook are only occasionally created or utilized.

Artists do not participate equally in this sort of self-promotion. Mdou Moctar’s social media presence is largely administrated by Western management. Mohamed Karzo rarely posts promotional material about himself. Tchingou’s Groupe Zone Touareg, Kader Tanoutanoute, Groupe Taflawiste, and others in Niger—especially younger musicians—are very active. So, too,



*Figure 2.7. Invitation for a Niamey concert celebrating Tabaski in 2017.*

are artists based in Europe, like Anana Harouna of Kel Assouf (in Brussels), who capitalizes on the benefits of a more robust promotion industry (music blogs, news media, and so on). The discrepancies among artists' engagement with advocating their careers is a convoluted social calculus informed by the different promotional regimes of music scenes in Niger and elsewhere, the technological savvy of individual artists, as well as each individual's own understanding of how *asshak* may inform self-promotion.

### **The Open Reciprocity of Audio Media Exchange**

As these examples demonstrate, images are powerful tools in the phone and social media cultures in which Tuareg musicians participate. Taylor's discussion of how performers of Irish traditional music often share photos of their session; at the sessions Taylor describes, participants almost never turn to audio recordings (and only rarely to video) to share memories of these gatherings. He attributes this to the fact that recordings don't reveal who is present or absent, and thus don't capture the sociality of these moments, even if tunes are recorded and shared as a sort of gift exchange by which musicians expand their repertoires (Taylor 2015, 114-115). This is quite different than the Tuareg music world, where audio recordings circulate as frequently as do photos. For one, the musical aesthetics and performance practices of Tuareg guitar differ from the Irish traditional music: Irish sessions tend to involve medleys of instrumental dance tunes performed heterophonically by instrumentalists who may each add their own ornaments and variations, but, ultimately, they strive to observe tact, to lose themselves in the sound rather than stand out as a virtuoso (ibid., 106-113). While group sociality is also crucial in Tuareg guitar, it also involves more individualized, polyphonic musical roles; even as vocal lines and lead guitar parts play heterophonically, these are generally performed one person to a part, often

accompanied by rhythm guitar, percussion, and responsorial group singing. As a consequence, the performers of a Tuareg guitar performance can generally be identified more readily in a recording; even when they cannot, they are routinely identified by name when shared via media or played in person off of a phone.<sup>42</sup> For example, in the WhatsApp group *\*Fans de Musique Touareg* (“Fans of Tuareg Music”), should someone share an audio recording without naming the performer, other participants will quickly pepper the sender with questions about their identity. At other times, group members will request particular recordings: a particular song as performed by a particular artist, or even a whole new album that has just been released.

Thus, like tunes at an Irish session, audio recordings circulate in a gift exchange system of their own. Like photos discussed above, to call an audio file a “gift” may seem unusual due to the rather unique materiality of digital media; while a vinyl record or mixtape is clearly a material object, an mp3 is ultimately a string of data that in almost all cases immediately is duplicated when given away, stored within a material object like a hard drive, memory card, or cell phone. Digital files are not completely immaterial, however: data “takes space” on a storage device, a file can be *lourd* (Fr.: “heavy”) because it takes a long time to transfer, and when circulated via the internet, data uses up bandwidth—which costs money. Indeed, although users on WhatsApp and other social media services generally can choose whether or not to download media that has been shared, this is an option that must be selected in an individual’s software settings; sometimes files are downloaded automatically. Members of *Fans de Musique Touareg* thus discourage the occasional overzealous participant from sharing too many photos or recordings at one time because it will use up members’ data bandwidth, which can be expensive.

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<sup>42</sup> To clarify, I am not suggesting that individual performers cannot be aurally identified in Irish traditional music; on the contrary, trad musicians often speak of how individual musicians are exponents of a particular regional style. The point is only that in sessions the goal is not to draw attention to the singularity of any one musician.

This reinforces the value of identifying recordings shared on the network: it is not just a matter of contributing to group knowledge and recognition of artists' performances, but an economic consideration as users decide whether or not to spend data opting into downloading a particular file.

Media sharing in the group can, in some respects, be described by what Marshall Sahlins calls “pooling” or “redistribution” (Sahlins [1972] 2017, 170-172). In Sahlins’s account, pooling is one of the two fundamental types of economic transactions—the other being reciprocity—and is based on the collective action of a group that contributes goods to a social center, from where these goods are redistributed among members. Drawing on an extended analysis of ethnographic writings across a range of stateless societies, Sahlins suggests that redistribution generally involves some sort of leader (e.g., a chief) responsible for directing the flow of goods. In social media groups there is an administrative role assigned to at least one member (a requirement of the software for managing membership, which is important during disputes, as I discuss below), but one particularity of WhatsApp is that media shared in a group is immediately available to all members; thus, redistribution is automatic.<sup>43</sup> Sahlins elaborates on the significance of this process:

Redistribution by powers-that-be serves two purposes, either of which may be dominant in a given instance. The practical, logistic function—redistribution—sustains the community, or community effort, in a material sense. At the same time, or alternatively, it has an instrumental function: as a ritual of communion and of subordination to central authority, redistribution sustains the corporate structure itself, that is in a social sense. (Sahlins [1972] 2017, 172)

Circulating media on groups like *Fans de Musique Touareg* provides a practical function in that it distributes recordings across its membership. On one hand, it is otherwise difficult to

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<sup>43</sup> On Facebook groups, administrators can enable a setting which requires them to review and approve any postings; this is a sort of curatorial authority not offered on WhatsApp at the time of this writing.

obtain new recordings: the number of boutiques selling music recordings has allegedly diminished significantly since the advent of cellphones, and the means to legally obtain recordings online are limited for several reasons. But there is also the added benefit that circulating recordings ensures that when someone's phone is stolen or breaks—which happens frequently in the punishing heat and dust of the Sahel—those recordings may be obtainable again from another individual. There is usually little objection when a group member requests a recording be shared that has already been sent to the group, as long as it had not been shared too recently.

For Sahlins, pooling is in fact a system of reciprocities, based on dualistic vice-versa exchanges. He identifies three core examples along a “continuum of reciprocities,” from the most self-interested exchanges to the most altruistic. At this latter point, what he calls “generalized reciprocity,” that the WhatsApp sharing practices most resemble. These are exchanges made along the logic that assistance given will at some point be returned, but the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite and rarely articulated. Indeed, Sahlins writes that “the expectation of a direct material return is unseemly. At best it is implicit. The material side of the transaction is repressed by the social: reckoning of debts outstanding cannot be overt and is typically left out of account” (ibid., 176).

Sahlins, along with scores of other anthropologists, have invoked the notion of reciprocity since Mauss's famous 1925 essay on the gift. Mauss claims that exchanges and contracts in many societies are enacted through the form of gifts, asserting that although “in theory these are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily” (Mauss 2000, 3). But David Graeber (2001), in an essay revisiting Mauss's work and the literature building on it, finds that the assumption of reciprocity as an essential part of gift-giving is an overstatement:

gifts don't always have to be repaid. Indeed, the gift/countergift scenario proposed by “reciprocity” is more akin to market exchange than Mauss would have intended, because it only creates social relations that are minimal and temporary, readily cancelled out. Graeber suggests that thinking about reciprocity in terms of degree rather than in kind. At one end of this continuum of relatively “open” and “closed” forms of reciprocity is the gift/countergift scenario, the most closed form; “open reciprocity,” at the other end, keeps no accounts because it implies a relationship of permanent mutual commitment (Graeber 2001, 217-220).

Social media groups generally do not keep individual accounts of what one member or another contributes, as they are grounded in fairly open relations of reciprocity. But that “permanent mutual commitment” of Graeber’s open reciprocity recalls an important point by Sahlins about generalized reciprocity: it is most common among close kin (Sahlins [1972] 2017, 178-184). This reinforces the impression that social media groups like *Fans de Musique Touareg* reproduce many of the dynamics of the *fada*, which as Masquelier (2013) noted (above), can be like a second family for its young members. I do not wish to overstate this point—just because social media groups act like *fadas* does not mean they can replace them. However, in thinking about how youth structure their lives, the analogy is helpful.

### **The Possibilities and Limits of Membership**

Exchange on social media groups like *Fans de Musique Touareg*—of photos, of audio, even of greetings—is significant not just because it allows members to share the greatness of star artists or circulate tokens of sociality (like the *craic* in Irish sessions), but because they create even more sociality in a virtual social space. There is a good deal of discussion, in this particular group centered on music but occasionally involving telling jokes and riddles or sharing news.



Most of the conversations are carried out in written French, but occasionally users send audio messages or communicate in one of many Tamasheq dialects, in Hausa, or in Arabic. Group participants will occasionally “share” a shot of tea via social media by sending greetings and a photo of a teaglass. During Ramadan, the group becomes especially active as users send greetings for the breaking of the daily fast, noting their location: “Greetings from Timia [in the Aïr].” “Wishing you a good breaking of the fast [*Bonne rupture*] from Agadez.” “Good evening from Bamako.” Recalling Munn’s discussion of how Gawans seek to expand their intersubjective spacetime, the *iftar* (meal breaking the fast during Ramadan) greetings illustrated an expanded *fada* spacetime via the deterritorializing possibilities of social media. Greetings were not only spatially situated (from Timia, from Agadez), but the time for *iftar*—based on Muslim leaders’ prayer calls at the setting of the sun—could vary over a span of several minutes (even hours) because of these differing locations across the Sahara and Europe, a manifestation of the geographic spread of Tuareg across the *Ummah* (global Muslim community).

Occasionally, this expanded membership can also motivate members to organize action in solidarity with particular communities that might otherwise be left to fend for themselves. When flash flooding during a storm in June 2016 decimated herds and destroyed dozens of homes in the town of Ingall, young Tuareg participating in *Fans de Musique Touareg* and other social media groups organized a benefit concert at the Alliance Française in Agadez. The concert, “*Agir pour Ingall*” (“Act for Ingall”), raised money through ticket sales and cash donations from invited dignitaries that was sent to help citizens in Ingall repair damages (Figure 2.8). Enthusiastic organizers sought to further fundraise by designing and printing t-shirts for the



Figure 2.8. “Agir pour Ingall” performers, organizers, and supporters. July 9, 2016.

concert with the silhouette of a map of Niger above the words “*Nous sommes tous Ingall*” (“We are all Ingall”), appropriating the “#JeSuisCharlie” social media craze, which aimed to demonstrate solidarity with victims of terrorism and other tragedies following the 2015 shooting of staff for the French satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*.<sup>44</sup> Some WhatsApp group members outside Agadez organized for shirts to be sent to them in Niamey and beyond. Benefit concerts like “*Agir pour Ingall*” are rare and remarkable; according to several musicians I spoke with in Agadez, only one other such event had been organized, to benefit refugees in 2011 who had fled the conflict in Libya and resettled in Agadez when Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was ousted.

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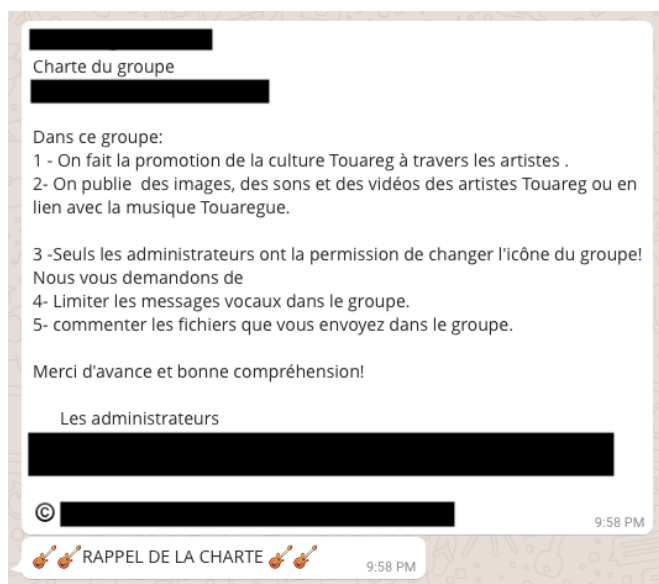
<sup>44</sup> On January 7, 2015, twelve people were killed in a shooting at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, sparking outrage among supporters of free speech and free press, who expressed solidarity via social media using the hashtag “#JeSuisCharlie.” Given *Charlie Hebdo*’s depictions of the Prophet Mohammed and other publications offensive to many Muslims, this was extremely controversial among Muslims around the world, including in Niger, where protests against the #JeSuisCharlie movement involved violence. Nonetheless, this formula has been repeated around the world since then as a response to many other tragedies, such as terrorist attacks in Paris later in 2015 (“Je suis Paris”) and the 2016 mass shooting at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida (“Je suis Orlando”).

Even with the more mundane day-to-day activity of the group, however, there is an organizing sense of purpose as well as administration of the group similar to more formal *fadas*.

This manifested most clearly in a heated disagreement that erupted when a user shared a hit song by Nigerian pop star Skales, “Shake Body.” Exemplary of the Afrobeats music from Nigeria that draws omnivorously from the many electronic dance music forms that have taken West Africa by storm in the past decade—*azonto*, *coupé décalé*, and so on—it begins with a tight, popping synthesizer riff before a drum machine and Skales’s Pidgin lyrics join in, his voice sometimes modulated by AutoTune: “Oya shake body, oya move body.” The refrain proclaims, “They want hold me for ransom ‘cause I’m young and I’m rich and I’m handsome,” and invokes Skales’s Afropolitan world when he explains that where he comes from “runs from Lagos to London.” And although “Shake Body” was ubiquitous during my 2016 sojourn in Niger, it was out of place in *Fans de Musique Touareg*. When it was shared with the group, several group members, including \*Nasser, a student at Niamey’s Université Abdou Moumouni who founded the group, asked the sender to not send such songs, arguing that the group was exclusively for Tuareg music.

The discussion died down without issue until a few days later, when “Shake Body” was shared again. This time, when some individuals asked that group members not send “this type of sound,” other users protested. They insisted that people should be able to send whatever they want, invoking notions of music’s universality, that it didn’t matter if it was Tuareg or not. The argument continued with dozens upon dozens of messages being sent back and forth, sometimes degenerating into personal attacks. Seeking order as users’ phones erupted in a constant assault of new messages, some members insisted, in Tamasheq, on “listening to the *inzad*”—even sending images of the Tuareg bowed lute to the group. Listening to *inzad* is an important trope in

Tuareg poetry because of its close connotations of *asshak*; in *tende* songs, for example, individuals may be admonished for their lack of honor or reserve when a singer says that they do not listen to *inzad*. And when Tuareg warriors returned from battle in the past, one of the great fears was that if they did perform honorably, they would not be welcomed back to the sound of *inzad* (Card 1982, 76). Yet as the argument raged on in the group, the absolute authority technologically afforded to group administrators—only they could add or remove users to the group—was reluctantly invoked. After several warnings that they would be removed, the offending users who refused to heed the group’s Tuareg music-only policy were ejected. Nasser then recirculated a group charter, signed by himself and the group’s other administrators, that outlined the group’s goals of promoting Tuareg culture and its artists and specified guidelines for participation (Figure 2.9). A few members responded with expressions of affirmation, often in the form of “thumbs up” emojis. And then the discussion quickly calmed down, order restored among *les fans*.



Group Charter  
“Fans of Tuareg Music”

In this group:

- 1 - We promote Tuareg culture through its artists.
- 2 - We publish photos, audio clips, and videos of Tuareg artists or related to Tuareg music.
- 3 - Only the administrators have permission to change the group icon!

We ask you to

- 4 - Limit voice messages in this group.
- 5 - Comment on the files you send to the group.

Thank you in advance for understanding!

The administrators

© Fans of Tuareg Music Group on Whatsapp

Figure 2.9. Charter for WhatsApp group Fans de Musique Touareg.

This scenario points to the ways in which the WhatsApp group operates as a sort of digital *fada*, as a virtual social space. The “Shake Body” scandal brought to the surface the competing ethical codes of membership, where different visions of the ethnic boundaries of permissible musical exchange were in contest; where disagreeing members sought to save face and assert their right to their perspectives *and* group membership; and where there was disagreement on the degree to which the WhatsApp group was understood to have or not have executive leaders, in this case who had absolute authority on the inclusion or exclusion of group members (through the ability to eject members and add members with the press of a button, and whose authority is invoked through daily requests by members to add new members—as unknown phone numbers). *Fans de Musique Touareg* is but one of many WhatsApp groups; other groups exist to coordinate festivals, to mobilize for social action such as official state recognition of small Tuareg clans, and to discuss other themes. And *Fans de Musique Touareg* even has a parallel group in Facebook, which differs from the WhatsApp version in that it is more frequently a forum for sharing YouTube videos than for conversation, and thus does not reproduce the dynamics of *fadas* quite so clearly. But the working out of social contracts during the “Shake Body” episode reveal that the proper ethics of social media produces meaning and status just as important to the creative waiting of Tuareg youth as the making of tea. Where these groups most profoundly differ from *fadas* is in the ultimate authority of the group administrators, who act as gatekeepers where the urban social space of the *fada* can easily be penetrated by passers-by, neighbors, cousins, and others, even if these have their own understandings of (in)formal membership.

## CONCLUSIONS

*We may say that ordinary daily experience takes place in a world of actual time. The essential quality of music is its power to create another world of virtual time.*

– John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (1973, 27)

Many scholars of performance since Blacking have discussed the temporal world-building capabilities of music. Christopher Waterman, for example, argues that one of the most important aspects of the performance of Nigerian *jùjú* music is “the ability of competent musicians to establish a special flow of lived time” (Waterman 1990b, 214-215). A.J. Racy, describing the emotional and ecstatic efficacy that is central to Arab *tarab* music, notes the importance of producing a sense of “time split from time,” made possible by “the existence of two alternate modes of temporal awareness, one pertaining to ecstatic time and the other nonecstatic time, or time proper” (Racy 2003, 125). In situating music within the phenomenon of Tuareg youth waiting, however, this chapter reminds music scholars that it is not performance alone among the many forms of musical activity that can shape worlds of time; and it reminds scholars who study youth cultures of waiting that music is an especially potent means to mold temporalities.

The waiting turn, as it were, leaves one with the impression that it is a new phenomenon. Without wishing to downplay its intimate relationships to the neoliberal policies at state and international levels that have exacerbated global socioeconomic precarity, however, I would emphasize that waiting has its local histories; for Tuareg youth, it is far from new. As demonstrated in Chapter One, Tuareg guitar was born from the *ishumar* generation’s waiting in displacement since at least the 1970s. Indeed, the *ishumar* treatment of experience in exile and in combat (during the 1990s rebellions) as substitutes for traditional rites of passage exemplify

creative tactics of waiting (Rasmussen 2006). What has been more lasting from this generation, however, has been the array of practices that continue to produce values of sociality, brotherhood, and community solidarity: the sharing of tea, skillful conversation, participatory jamming, and the exchange of media (cassettes in the past, digital media today).

By and large, these take place within sorts of youth social spaces discussed in this chapter, from *fadas* to picnics, *tagssirs*, and social media groups. Because of the rootedness of Tuareg guitar in the cause of securing dignity for a marginalized ethnolinguistic community and the multiethnic makeup of urban settings where young Tuareg find themselves, ethnicity cannot be ignored in accounting for youth social space. This requires some sensitivity; as linguist Ousseina Alidou (2005) argues, *brassage*—the process of ethnic and cultural mixing common across the Sahel—is a reason why ethnicity can be an overplayed, even irrelevant category in social research. This is a point which informs Youngstedt's (2013) analysis of *fadas*; indeed, both he and Masquelier (2013) mention the multiethnic makeup of *fadas* without making much of it as an object of discussion. Yet their work is largely based in Hausa communities, among Hausa migrants in Niamey and in the Hausa-speaking community of Dogondoutchi. Encountering contemporary *fadas* through research on Tuareg music clarified for me the extent to which these ubiquitous social spaces have not fully been divorced from their Hausaness. By tracing the multiple Hausa and Tuareg roots of the *fadas* I socialized with in Niamey and Agadez, and the limits of artistic belonging that manifest on WhatsApp, I show that these multiethnic social spaces are produced not by ignoring ethnic affiliations, but through them. If discussions of *fadas* rarely account for Tuareg participation in them, so too do accounts of Tuareg music largely ignore *brassage*, limiting discussing of ethnicity to how it informs political tensions during the rebellions and between the Tuareg community and Sahelian states.

Waiting with tea, talk, and *tactile* creates sociality, temporarily straightens out the cyclical passing of youths' time, and engenders musical composition and participatory performance. Like Masquelier,

In exploring the generativity of waiting, I have been inspired by approaches that privilege creativity at the expense of crisis. When mobilized to capture the experience of Africans, the concept of crisis—Makhulu et al. (2010, 26) write—“oversimplifies and flattens the complexities of the lived world.” Understanding how young Nigérien men live means paying attention to how they carve out spaces of material and existential possibility for themselves within contexts of anomie and scarcity. (2013, 487)

This chapter has privileged a discussion of musical waiting not only because there is great deal of time that passes between the sorts of performance and recording occasions that take pride of place in ethnomusicological research, but because the popularization of guitar in the Sahel-Saharan and abroad has expanded “material and existential possibilit[ies]” for many Tuareg youth. Social media exchanges and the circulation of celebrity, for example, extend youth spacetime much as kula exchange does for Gawans (Munn 1986). There is a degree of temporality-making here that no round of tea can accomplish. In the next chapter, I turn to more conventional performance and recording settings, where the circulation of money promises new material possibilities while engendering existential controversies about what it means to be a good Tuareg musician.



### CHAPTER 3

#### ECONOMIES OF HONOR AND MONEY, PART I TUAREG *ARTISTES* IN PERFORMANCE

While discussing developments in the post-rebellion Tuareg music economy, guitarist Kildjate Moussa Albadé commented on one of the fundamental changes among musicians: “People don’t ask for honor alone anymore—they want money” (personal communication, November 14, 2016). Though it may at first appear to be a straightforward, matter-of-fact statement, Moussa’s remark indexes a rich array of symbolic and practical debates about music in the contemporary Tuareg community. First of all, the notion of honor is often positioned in tension with the transparent pursuit of money, which before the guitar era was only permitted among musicians from the *inaden* (artisan) social class. Secondly, honor is cast as a thing of the past; guitarist Ahmoudou Madassane noted that “we’re not totally in the years of *asshak* [Tamasheq: ‘honor’] anymore” (personal communication, March 6, 2017), an expression shared by many others. Younger generations are furthermore perceived to lack the honor of elders, in society in general and in guitar practice in particular. Finally, as shown in Chapter One, Tuareg guitar has expanded from an expression of the communitarian, oppositional politics of the *Tanekra* resistance movement to become a public popular music from which musicians can make a profit, contributing to the professionalization of music-making in Tuareg society.

Although *artistes*, as a new social position of individuals who identify the performance of music as one of their major duties in society, became more numerous among Tuareg beginning in the late 1990s, when liberalizing reforms ushered in by the democratic movements and by structural adjustment had taken effect, I would argue that this development is more coincidental with globalizing neoliberalism than its direct result. That is, it was first and foremost the

changing status of Tuareg within Nigérien national politics and culture following the first rebellion that made it possible for Tuareg musicians to become *artistes* in the vein of other Nigérien popular musicians (Rasmussen 2006). To the extent that particular values common to neoliberal capitalism—for example, entrepreneurship, consumerism, individualism—have made their way into Tuareg guitar culture, these arrived later. I thus invert the emphasis of the story of live performances of Bollywood-style dance in 1990s-2000s India presented by Anna Morcom (2015), who traces this development as an effect of neoliberal policy there. Treating neoliberalism not only as a form of capitalism but also as a form of liberalism, she shows both straightforward and unexpected effects on Indian performing arts: on one hand is the rise of these Bollywood-style performances at legitimate, middle-class occasions like weddings, where they are spectacles of consumer culture and of new values of fitness and “stress-busting”; on the other hand, more surprising and illicit, are similar forms of dancing performed by young women at bars.

In Morcom’s reading, this is neoliberal capitalism shaped by Indian histories of performing arts and of national politics. As she writes:

Capitalist economic exchange does not reach a totality in a capitalist society, but rather a hegemony. Other economic logics always exist. Thus, to see a cultural phenomenon arise under the intensively capitalist transformative process of neoliberalization that is not cleanly neoliberal or capitalist in character should not be any surprise or contradiction; rather, it can be generally seen as in line with the contradictions, unevenness, and limits of capitalism’s presence in society. (Morcom 2015, 303; see also Tsing 2015, Taylor 2016b)

In the case of Tuareg music in Niger, then, the ideologies of an ever more entrenched neoliberalism must be worked out with the logics of other (often older or indigenous) music economies. The changes in the circulation of money in Tuareg music since the 1990s illustrate that the flourishing of established and aspiring young *artistes* in the past two decades is not

simply because it is a tactic of “creative waiting,” a means to produce meaning and sociality among unemployed youth, as explored in Chapter Two. Rather, it is the flip side of the same coin, of cultural and political-economic change ushered in through neoliberal policies and post-rebellion integration of Tuareg into the urban publics of Niger. As Tuareg of the *ishumar* and later generations became more integrated in urban Nigérien life and more entangled in global capitalism, the histories of griots and *artistes* in Nigérien popular culture began to more directly affect understandings of Tuareg musicians. During this process, however, established (albeit evolving) attitudes about *inaden* also shaped and continue to inform the reckoning of the young social position of the Tuareg *artiste*. These diverse historical trajectories—of griots, of the popular music *artiste*, and of *inaden* in Niger—bear particular relationships to the Tuareg code of honor, and it is through these strands of class dispositions and connotations that contemporary Tuareg guitarists grapple with what makes an ethical, honorable *artiste*.

This chapter thus examines the ways in which musicians and audiences are reckoning with the post-rebellion Tuareg music economy in these terms by examining the Tuareg social values often glossed as “honor” (e.g., *asshak*, *imojagh*). It considers how the emergence of the new social position of the professional *artiste* and the circulation of money in performances promise new material possibilities while engendering existential controversies about social values connected to Tuareg notions of honorable behavior. I show that understandings of honor based on historic social hierarchies and on religion inform the way the ethics of musicians are evaluated at the same time that developments in the music economy demand Tuareg to forge new notions of ethical behavior. The subsequent chapter continues these concerns with regard to nascent intellectual property regimes engendered by the concomitant establishment of new copyright laws in Niger and rise to prominence of Tuareg *artistes*. Although there is general

consensus on appropriate behavior in many aspects of Tuareg music, it would be a mistake to believe these matters are settled; as many examples in these paired chapters demonstrate, contrasting convictions about proper behavior can be an important way by which musicians distinguish themselves from one another.

## **HONOR AND THE SOCIAL POSITION OF TUAREG *ARTISTES***

The flourishing of the professional musician, or *artiste*, as a social position, is one of the most important developments in post-rebellion Tuareg music (see Chapter One). In this section, I argue that to understand how musicians and listeners come to terms with the meaning and role of the *artiste* in Tuareg society in Niger, one needs to attend to historic attitudes about professional music-making among Tuareg and in Nigérien popular culture—two separate historical trajectories that come together in the figure of the Tuareg *artiste*. I begin with a discussion of vocabulary and discourses about honor that closely relate to Tuareg social hierarchy (and thus the position of musicians), which does not easily translate to European and American capitalist class structures.

### **Honor in Tuareg Society**

Honor—together with shame, often cast as its opposite—has played a prominent role in much of the anthropology of the broader Mediterranean region and of nomadic societies in West and East Africa. Thus the “honor/shame” complex often appears in ethnographies of Arab, Amazigh (Berber), Fulani, and Tuareg communities, among many others (see, e.g., Abu-Lughod 1986, 1993; Bourdieu 1977, 1979; Riesman 1977; Moritz 2008; Claudot-Hawad 1993; Rasmussen 1997, 2007). In many of these studies, honor and shame are not only matters of

personal emotion, but also appear as the fundamental concern for entire societies (Rasmussen 2007, 235). For example, in formulating his theory of practice through ethnographic examples, Pierre Bourdieu argues that the logic of practices among Kabyles (an Amazigh population in Algeria) is guided by a sense of honor (Bourdieu 1977, 14-15). Lila Abu-Lughod, meanwhile, shows how social status among Awlad ‘Ali Bedouins in Egypt is achieved by upholding a “code of honor” (Abu-Lughod 1986, 78-79).

Honor and shame are not simply matters of tradition, the past, or the local, though they are often imagined as such both in scholarship and in the everyday language of Nigériens; nor is their lack uniquely tied to modernity and globalization (Rasmussen 2007, 237; Mirdal 2006).

Furthermore, as Bourdieu writes,

the driving force of the whole mechanism [of honor] is not some abstract principle . . . , still less the set of *rules* which can be derived from it, but the sense of honor, a disposition inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group, that is to say, from the aggregate of the individuals endowed with the same dispositions, to whom each is linked by his dispositions and interests. (Bourdieu 1977, 14-15)

“Enacted rather than thought,” he argues, “the grammar of honor can inform actions without having to be formulated” (Bourdieu 1979, 128). Thus, honor is not an explicit, rational code; rather, one develops a “sense” of honor:

What is fundamental remains implicit, because [it is] unquestioned and unquestionable—what is fundamental, that is to say, [is] the totality of the values and principles which the community affirms by its very existence and which underlie the acts of jurisprudence. (ibid., 129-130)

The sense of honor, then, is the habitus that emerges in relation to—but not wholly determined by—the economic system. It is no small wonder that many studies characterize honor as something operating within a system of exchange, much like the gift (e.g., Bourdieu 1977, 1979; Abu-Lughod 1986; Claudot-Hawad 1993).

While Tuareg, given their Amazigh origins and historic links with Bedouins, have a lot in common with Kabyle and Awlad ‘Ali societies discussed by Bourdieu and Abu-Lughod, adapting the theories of honor outlined above to Tuareg guitar culture requires finessing, as they would in any ethnographic project. Indeed, in sharing the stories of Bedouin women, Abu-Lughod shows that the specificity of particular communities and individuals demands thinking through more culturally-specific terminology than the broad categories of “honor,” “shame,” and other English glosses (Abu-Lughod 1993, 175-208). “The existence of a convenient term for a complex entity,” warns anthropologist Paul Riesman, “risks creating the false impression that in knowing the term we know the entity which it designates” (Riesman 1977, 136).

There has long been—at least as documented since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and through much of the 20<sup>th</sup>—a rich array of terms and phenomena informing Tuareg social practice that could be characterized as constituting a “code of honor.” At the broadest level, this code revolves around two main social values: *imojagh* and *takarakit*.<sup>45</sup> Many Tuareg reproduce the simplifying francophone vocabulary of *l’honneur* (“honor,” for *imojagh*) and *la honte* (“shame,” for *takarakit*) when discussing these values with outsiders. *Imojagh* describes the dignity expected of an individual man or woman of the elite social class, one who neither speaks openly about their wishes, desires, or personal plans for the future, nor asks directly for something from someone else; one should not express anger or complain loudly, disrespect elders, leaders, Islamic scholars, or parents-in-law, nor eat in public or dress immodestly. *Takarakit*, on the other hand, conveys a complex of shame, respect, modesty, reserve, and embarrassment, according to the context of a particular situation or one’s social relationship to others (Rasmussen 2013, 16-18; Claudot-Hawad 1993, 13-20).

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<sup>45</sup> One challenge in writing about Tamasheq terminology is that there is quite an array of synonyms which vary according to dialect and whose usage is not always clear in the scholarship.

Although these two values provide an overarching structure to the Tuareg code of honor, *imojagh* is but one of three categories of honor that inform action according to different scales of social relations, from the personal to the collective. *Imojagh* (also described by *atéjagh*) ties to the broadest social field, including one's political confederation (known in different regions as *ettebel*, *tégehé*, or *taghma*) and the community it represents; it can also refer to the whole of Tuareg society. Seen as a moral good that is often described as pure, clean, or white, one is expected to protect it from any sort of blemish. Next, *asshak* narrows the scope of honor to one's clan (*tawsit*), lineage, or camp (*aghiwen*, what might be also understood as immediate family). It is "a symbol of tradition or one's tribe," as Moussa Albadé explained (personal communication, November 14, 2016), and failure to uphold *asshak* is understood as a breach through which the credibility of the group and its members is drained. Finally, *ellelu* refers to the individual character of a free man (*elleli*), to the honor upheld through one's nobility, greatness of spirit, and excellence (Claudot-Hawad 1993, 13-20). The proverb "*ellelu ulhe*," meaning "nobility comes from the heart," emphasizes that it is a value derived from one's disposition, not their birth (Lecocq 2010a, 223).

While most closely identified with the elite social category among Tuareg, the *imajeghen*, these forms of honor are expected to be observed by people belonging to most other social categories, including *imghad* (tributaries), *ighawelen* (freed slaves and their descendants), and *ineslemen* (religious scholars). They are generally linked to the lives and behaviors of men, but women are also expected to uphold them; as witnesses and judges of men's honor, women play a crucial role in protecting the honor of the community. This is a duty performed, for example, in the singing of *tisiwit* poetry accompanied by *inzad* fiddle to hail the bravery of warriors, or the performance of *tende* drums during camel festivals to encourage men's gallant behavior.

Excluded from the code of honor are the *inaden* (pl.; masc. sing. *enad*; fem. sing. *tenet*, fem. pl. *tchinaden*), members of the smith or artisan class who derive much of their power in Tuareg society precisely through their freedom from the expectations of the code of honor, as well as—much like among the Bedouins described by Abu-Lughod (1986, 1993)—dependents like *iklan* (slaves) and young children. Of course, this schematic suggests greater rigidity in Tuareg class *habitus* than is often observed in practice. Social mobility can be achieved in part by honorable behavior that may not be expected given one’s status: before the outlawing of slavery under colonial and postcolonial governments, for example, *iklan* who observed *ellelu* could be freed; meanwhile, some *imajeghen* and *ighawelen* have turned to the lucrative trade in artwork and jewelry with tourists and foreigners that was once exclusively reserved for *inaden* (Claudot-Hawad 1993, 13-27; Scholze 2010; Grégoire and Scholze 2012).

### ***Inaden* Artisans and Professional Music-Making**

The relationship of honorable behavior and social position to music in Tuareg society has often been pronounced, as ethnomusicologist Caroline Card emphasizes in her dissertation “Tuareg Music and Social Identity” (1982), though these relationships have not been static over history. Music and poetry is generally performed by Tuareg of all social positions, although certain instruments and musical forms are strongly linked to particular social cohorts, such as the *inzad* fiddle with *imajeghen* women and the *tahardent* plucked lute with *inaden*. But until the popularization of guitar in the post-rebellion era, professional music-making among Tuareg—in the sense of performance in exchange for some form of compensation—was generally limited to *inaden*.



Members of this class perform one or several forms of work, including metalworking, woodworking, serving as messengers for elites, engaging with spirits through mystical power known as *tezma* or *ettama*, and performing the *tende* mortar drum or *tahardent* plucked lute.<sup>46</sup> Until the social changes ushered in during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century by declining *imajeghen* power in a shifting Saharan economy, the growth of tourism (which benefitted *inaden* in particular), and the 1990s rebellions which further eroded traditional social hierarchies, *inaden* were often linked to *imajeghen* families in more or less exclusive patron-client relationships. In exchange for their labor, *inaden* would generally be remunerated with millet, cuts of meat from an animal slaughtered for certain celebrations, and other foodstuffs. As these patron-client relationships break down in contemporary urban life, *inaden* not only expect payment in the form of money, but also serve a broader range of clients than in the past, including some non-Tuareg (Bernus 2006; Seligman 2006a, 2006b; Rasmussen 2013, 43-44).

Although through their music performance and service as messengers *inaden* perform many of the same duties as griots in other West African societies, they are not synonymous social positions; for one, not all *inaden* perform these musical duties. In Nigérien towns, some Tuareg will call on both (non-Tuareg) griots and *inaden*—sometimes for the same event (Rasmussen 2013, 61).<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, many *inaden* feel they have more in common with other

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<sup>46</sup> The particular forms of music and instruments identified with *inaden* vary by region. For example, the *chiluban* genre of *tende* is one of the few *tende* styles performed by *inaden* men (most of the time it is performed by women) and is found in the Aïr Mountains of Niger; the *tahardent* plucked lute appears to be more common among southern Tuareg in Mali and Niger—closer to the Niger River and other societies that perform closely related instruments like the Mande *ngoni* or Zarma-Songhai and Hausa *molo*—than in northern areas such as Algeria. See Card 1982, Rasmussen 2013.

<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, Card (1982, 161-163) notes that some artisans who perform music disavow identification as *inaden*, preferring instead to be called *aggutan* (s., *aggu*), which closely resembles the Moorish term for griot, *igiw* (Charry 2000, Hale 2007). This suggests not only there is a strong historical connection between Moorish and Tuareg musical artisan lineages, but also that many Moorish *igiw* were part of the extensive mobility of Saharan people during the droughts of the 1970s.

ethnic groups than with other Tuareg, which together with their diverse origin stories (linking to either Quranic and Biblical stories or to an ancestral matriarch, similar to but different than *imajeghen* origin stories) may perhaps explain why there is some limited debate about whether *inaden* should even be considered Tuareg at all (Card 1982, 161-181; Rasmussen 2013, 25-45; Borel 2006; see Gardi 2006; Montague 2014).

What is clear here is that, with their uncertain origins, mystical capabilities (*tezma*), a secret language (*tenet*), and the fact that they do not observe *takarakit* or other components of the Tuareg honor code, *inaden* occupy an ambiguous position within Tuareg society (Seligman 2006a, 2006b; Bernus 2006; Rasmussen 2013). Geographer Edmond Bernus, paraphrasing Guy Nicolas, pithily sums up the general Tuareg view of *inaden*: “indispensable yet useless” (Bernus 2006). But as Susan Rasmussen argues, the power and social function of *inaden* largely derive from their relative freedom from the restrictions of the honorable behavior, and indeed, it is because of this freedom that they can accept remuneration for their work and perform duties that other Tuareg cannot, thereby becoming invaluable members of society. Furthermore, because *inaden* are understood as potent wielders of *tezma*, a force causing ill luck that is unintentionally activated most often when an artisan’s request for a gift or compensation is rejected, it is considered taboo to deny them what they request. *Inaden* thus are historically associated not only with poverty, but also with begging (Rasmussen 2013). This is a crucial aspect of contemporary Tuareg music-making in Niger, where many artists of any ethnolinguistic background are ridiculed for engaging in “*griotisme*”—that is, of performing without dignity for the sake of money—a point to which I return below.

## Musical *Artistes* in Nigérien Popular Culture

While “griot,” as a broad etic term, is an imperfect way to describe *inaden*, it has been useful to describe a longstanding social position of praise singer, historian, and diplomat among other Nigérien communities, particularly Zarma, Songhai, and Hausa (Hale 2007).<sup>48</sup> Much as in other parts of West Africa, the griot position in Niger has undergone significant transformation in the past century. The late Nigérien ethnomusicologist Mahaman Garba (1994, 2001; see also Mariko n.d.) identifies several causes for these changes, including the spread of Islam and colonialism, modernization and technological development, natural disasters like famine and drought, and the use of music for political interests. For example, as French colonial rule undermined the power of local leaders, griots began to link themselves with new patrons emerging within the colonial apparatus, such as the *chefs du canton*. This major shift in the patronage of performers at the expense of traditional leadership accelerated in 1946, when political parties formed in colonial Niger and griots opted to sing for these new leaders. The singing of praises within a political cult of personality continued through Nigérien independence in 1960 until the military dictatorship of President Seyni Kountché (r. 1974-1987), who forbade the singing of praises for military leaders in the regime and oversaw the destruction of many recordings from the preceding fifteen years.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Each of these ethnolinguistic groups include social roles that are described as “griots”: the Zarma *nyamakaale*, *jasaray*, or *nwaarayko*; the Songhai *jeséré* (pl. *jeserey*); and the Hausa *marok’a* (m.s. *marok’i*, f.s. *marok’iya*), among other positions. See Hale 2007, 350-356.

<sup>49</sup> My Hausa language teacher Issa Ousseini recalls that Kountché also forbade griots, *balani* (*balafon* xylophone-based music) musicians from Mali and Guinea, and popular contemporary Senegalese dance music from Nigérien weddings in the name of fighting corruption and protecting the economy, since these events often involve exorbitant expenditures of money—as they do today, now that those earlier restrictions have been lifted (personal communication, August 18, 2016).

This came to an end after Kountché's death in 1987, when President Ali Saibou (r. 1987-1993) ushered in a period known as *décrispation* (Fr.: "easing of tension"), during which "everything was liberalized, economy like song" (Garba 2001, 199). Unlike the earlier period of political song, the multiparty democratization of the 1990s saw each party securing its own griots, who began to focus on denigrating others more than they had in the previous eras. Concerned with their own advancement and enrichment, Garba argues, they would switch political allegiances frequently; for political leaders, meanwhile, "the musical artist is only viewed as a producer of praises" (Garba 1994, 9). These behaviors added more fuel to the longstanding ambivalence with which griots have been viewed in Niger, as across West Africa. This attitude is palpable in Garba's own words: "With regard to democracy, it made of the griot a professional slanderer, an apostle of malicious gossip, a double-tongued reptile" (Garba 2001, 200).

Coinciding with these changes in the status of griots in Nigérien popular culture was the development of popular music in Niger, which saw the rise of new professional musical *artistes* who did not necessarily relate to griots and other traditional musical occupations. This history is not well documented save for in an unpublished essay (probably from the early 1990s) by the late Nigérien veterinarian and anthropologically-minded scholar Kélétigui Abdourahmane Mariko (n.d.). As he notes, French armies introduced European music to Niger in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through organizations like the *nouba* (brass band) of the Third Battalion of Senegalese *Tirraillieurs* based in Zinder (the colonial capital until 1926), whose 100-120 members from France and across its colonies played military marches. Various organizations developed in the 1930s for brass band music and for dancing to phonograph records, but it was not until after World War II that music from abroad became more popular in Niger. In this period, soldiers,

*fonctionnaires* (civil servants), workers, and students began to return from abroad (whether in Europe or in other West African colonies), where some of them had learned to play European musical instruments. They began forming ensembles in Niamey and Zinder, and—despite facing prejudices against seeing non-griots singing and playing instruments—these Nigériens (along with fellow French Africans, particularly from Dahomey, Sudan, and Guinea) popularized mid-century global instrumental dance music styles in Niger, including tango, rumba, the waltz, and the foxtrot.

From 1950, music ensembles (*orchestres*) would perform for sporting and cultural events with subventions from the colonial administration. Governmental support for popular music orchestras continued after independence in the 1960s, when Niger's first ruling party (the Parti Progressiste Nigérien–Rassemblement Démocratique Africain, or PPN-RDA) formed youth organizations that would practice music, theater, and sports. Furthermore, from 1975, the Semaines de la Jeunesse (Youth Weeks) of the Kountché regime encouraged further development of new popular music compositions. However, as Mariko laments, the quality of training among musicians in these settings was unsatisfactory; for example, few musicians knew solfege.

In Mariko's historical overview, there is no explanation of when the term “*artiste*” began to circulate among Nigériens as a descriptor for musicians, and a thorough investigation of this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, Ryan Skinner's (2015) examination of *artistiya* (Bamana: “artist-ness”) in postcolonial Mali illustrates some likely parallels to the Nigérien experience. As he shows, the concept of the *artiste* emerged there following independence in 1960, and in this period *artistiya* referred to a community of urban musicians and related musical practices that were not bound by lineage or clan-based patron-client

relations, like *jeliya* (the Mande griot tradition that predominates in Mali). However, if *jeliya* and *artistiya* are rhetorically opposed—as tradition and modernity, respectively—they have both become commoditized practices that are not mutually exclusive of one another (Skinner 2015, 47-76). This is much the same in Niger, where some musicians may identify as both griot and *artiste*, and where non-griot *artistes* may be accused of *griotisme*.

Conspicuously absent from extant accounts of early Nigérien popular music history are Tuareg, whose relationship to griot practices is—as explored above—complicated. Garba (1994) makes passing references to “the music of nomads” as unaffected by developments in griot culture in Niger until the Kountché regime, when they start to see some changes in style and in being performed outside their earlier contexts, but he does not offer any specific details or distinguish among Tuareg, Fulani, and other Nigérien nomadic groups. What is crucial to this story is that, as shown in Chapter One, the linkages of Tuareg musical genres to particular social cohorts (*imajeghen*, *inaden*, or otherwise) have blurred with the *ishumar* generation, in part through their critique of long-standing Tuareg social hierarchies and the popularization of the guitar. Yet the foundation of guitar music in the *ishumar* experience and 1990s rebellions, powered by notions of *toumast* (the Tuareg nation or community), links it to the elite *imajeghen*; indeed, the majority of contemporary guitarists are *imajeghen*. But some of the historic divisions of music labor in Tuareg society continue to shape Tuareg guitar music: for example, many drummers in guitar bands are *inaden*. Guitarist Ahmoudou Madassane, from Agadez, explained that this “because even in the past it was they who played the Tuareg drum. So, it’s a rhythm they have in their blood still. It’s a gift for them” (personal communication, March 6, 2017). This racialization of *inaden*—not only are they closely connected to other ethnic groups, they have a “gift” in their blood—factors into the general anxieties that surround the role of griot and

*inaden* practices in guitar music. It also shows that identity as an *artiste* does not replace or erase other social positions; rather, it is one of many affiliations a musician may take, in addition to family, clan, ethnicity, nation, religion, and so on.

## SPRAYING

Much of the debate regarding the proper behavior of Tuareg *artistes* centers on either their performance practices or their attitudes regarding intellectual property. While I address intellectual property in Chapter Four, in the remainder of the current chapter, I examine three aspects of guitar performances around which discussions of honor revolve: spraying money on musicians and dancers, the primary source of income for most performers; praise singing, which is closely connected to spraying; and changes in acceptable movement by audiences and musicians, including both dance and guitarists' comportment while playing. Each of these themes bring out particular tensions about money and honor in the contemporary Tuareg music economy.

The practice of presenting musicians with bills of money mid-performance, often by placing them directly on artists' foreheads, showering it over them, or stuffing it into their clothes or even into their mouth, is a phenomenon found in many parts of Africa, including the Sahel and Sahara.<sup>50</sup> While this phenomenon is described by diverse local terminology, scholars tend to describe it as "spraying" (Waterman 1990, White 2008), "tipping" (Askew 2002, Skinner

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<sup>50</sup> It is found in the griot and related praise singing cultures of the Sahel and Savannah in West Africa, most notably within the Mande world but ultimately stretching from Mauritania, Senegambia, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau east through Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ghana into Benin, Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon (Charry 2000, Hale 2007); in the Yoruba cultural nexus centered in Benin and Nigeria (Waterman 1990); in *taarab* music on the Swahili coast of East Africa, especially in Tanzania (Askew 2002); and in the Congolese dance music that came to not only define Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire (present-day Democratic Republic of Congo) but shape popular music across much of Central, East, and West Africa (White 2008). There are undoubtedly many more examples one could name.

2015), or as one aspect of “gifting” (Charry 2000, Skinner 2015) or the giving of “rewards” (Hale 2007). When describing it in French, Nigériens tend to use *jeter* (“to toss, throw, chuck”) or *inverser* (“to invert, reverse”). These glosses index both the phenomenology and the functionality of publicly presenting money to musicians.

In many West African societies, the history of spraying is closely linked to an endogamous social class, known generally as “griots” but also by specific local terminology. Since at least the time of Ibn Battuta, the 14<sup>th</sup> century traveler whose writings provide the earliest descriptions of these bards, griots would be rewarded by political and community leaders for singing their praises and telling narratives of their families’ accomplishments by giving gold, clothing, animals, and jewelry. Although the underlying social structures and economies that supported the patronage of griots since that time have changed significantly in the past century, literary scholar Thomas A. Hale argues that “these artisans of the word must be viewed today as professionals rather than human artifacts of a dying folklore” (Hale 2007, 291). Contemporary praise singers have more diverse sources of patronage than their predecessors who relied solely on noble families, and may be rewarded with everything from cash to cars and even, in at least one case, an airplane. It can be a lucrative profession for many individuals, though this is not the experience of all; gift-giving may have more to do with a particular performer’s patronage networks than to their particular talents. For example, sometimes the wealthiest griots are those who tour abroad, but their success depends more on savvy promotion than on their traditional expertise, which is not fully appreciated beyond local audiences (ibid., 288-310).

Furthermore, spraying money draws attention to the giver, an important factor in how—and how much—one gives. At weddings, naming ceremonies, and other gatherings where money will likely be sprayed, it is often in the interest of more affluent audience members to obtain



small bills ahead of time so as to prolong their participation in the spectacle of exchange. During one particularly memorable incident, I watched as one man not only used his cellphone to film dancers at a Tabaski (Eid al-Adha) celebration, but also recorded *himself* dragging CFA bills over the faces of the dancers. Thus, as anthropologist Kelly Askew writes of *taarab* music, tipping is “the audience’s medium of participation” (Askew 2002, 141).<sup>51</sup>

This money exchange is generally not understood as a transactional payment for labor performed, however. In the Mande world, for example, it is a gift cementing the interdependence of giver and the praise-singing receiver (Charry 2000, 98). In Mobutu’s Zaire, singers, dancers, and instrumentalists all could receive money, not only from political leaders but also from fans, who in these settings “are spraying more than money; they are spraying love, adoration, and their desire to be a part of the show” (White 2008, 129). Even less affluent fans, especially during more difficult economic times, routinely spray enough for an artist to afford a beer (in Zaire) or provide coins and flowers (in rural Tanzania). In Tanzania, tipping is not only about giving a gift to someone after they successfully accomplish something, but about audience members laying claim to song texts to negotiate interpersonal disputes in an indirect, culturally accepted manner (Askew 2002, 139-142).

At *àrìyá* social gatherings in Nigeria where *jùjú* is performed, spraying cash is perhaps the most transactional of these examples, serving as a way to repay debts incurred at previous ceremonies. But there, too, it also serves to symbolically express and reinforce family or patron-client relationships and to negotiate social status through public displays of wealth. This is a double-edged sword, for the interdependence between patrons and musicians—one group needing public affirmations of their social status, the other needing gifts to survive—affords

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<sup>51</sup> Of course, audience participation in *taarab* or a great many other music traditions is not limited to tipping, nor is the audience/performer dichotomy always a useful point of analysis.

artists power to extract from their audiences; as one wealthy person told anthropologist Christopher Waterman, “You should never go to an *àrìyá* without cash, especially when you are wearing lace [i.e., expensive cloth]. They will slander you!” (Waterman 1990, 187).

This point recalls the Tuareg taboo regarding denying *inaden* their requests for gifts. However, despite the participation of *inaden* in many Tuareg guitar groups (primarily as drummers), among the performers it is most often the lead guitarists—usually *imajeghen*—who are the recipients of spraying (Figure 3.1). Dancers, who are not members of the guitar band, are the objects for an equal if not greater share of the spraying. Regardless of where the money is thrown, however, it is collected off the ground by one or more assistants, often friends of the band but sometimes the *animateur* (the emcee who makes announcements during the performance, often an *enad*) or staff at a festival or concert (Figure 3.2). The money is then



Figure 3.1. A man sprays Bombino at a wedding organized by members of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO). Niamey, December 30, 2016.



*Figure 3.2. Staff collect bills sprayed on foreign ambassadors and government officials at a concert by Abdallah Alhousseini and Kader Tarhanine at the Cure Salée festival. Ingall, September 23, 2016.*

stuffed into a bag to be distributed among band members and anyone else owed a share at a later time (Figure 3.3). As with seemingly all things involving money, this, of course, can sometimes be a contentious affair. A performance may feature a star performer accompanied by other musicians who show up to play, rather than a pre-formed group, and when the money is given to the leader, he might depart without splitting the earnings. At concerts where audiences pay for admission, an organizer or promoter might take their cut before leaving a paltry remaining sum to be divided among the performers, who may travel great distances.

Indeed, one guitarist, \*Aboubacar, shared an eye-opening account with me about the finances involved in his travel from Niger to Bamako in order to perform a concert. He was sent 70,000 CFA by the organizer of the concert, \*Hassane, to cover the roundtrip bus tickets between Niamey and Bamako, by way of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. But Aboubacar was furious about the demands for bribes from several police officers that he encountered on the



*Figure 3.3. Men tallying sums of money donated directly on behalf of dance groups or sprayed at a takamba gathering in celebration of Tabaski (Eid al-Adha). Niamey, September 13, 2016.*

route, especially in Burkina Faso; there, police checkpoints have allegedly proliferated in response to the increasing frequency of terrorist attacks in the country. Furthermore, Tuareg are regarded with particular suspicion due to the involvement of some Tuareg in terrorist groups that have been implicated in these incidents. Aboubacar told me that police asked him for a total of 10,000 CFA over the two day journey, when he had only brought 3,500 CFA for food; his money depleted early on and unable to pay later fees, Aboubacar had little choice but to let some police instead take a piece of the *kilishi* (Hausa jerky, a delicacy in Niger) that he was bringing as a gift for Hassane. By the time he arrived in Bamako, Aboubacar had one piece remaining. Then, after the concert for which attendees paid admission fees, Hassane divided up the payment for musicians: 15,000 CFA for each accompanist (all based in Bamako, since Aboubacar's Nigérien

accompanists did not join him on the journey), and 30,000 for Aboubacar. I never learned what demands Aboubacar encountered from police on his return trip to Niamey.

This example and the other sorts of “money trouble” (Skinner 2015, 131-153) described above are familiar tropes for professional musicians across many corners of the world. However, recall that as Tuareg guitar music was first developing in the 1970s around Tamanrasset, Algeria, among the *ishumar* exiles and refugees from Mali and Niger, early groups like Tinariwen formed as associations to serve the needs of the *teshumara* political movement, not to be professional musicians (see Chapter One). *Ishumar* cassettes with political messages and songs circulated in this period at the same time that *takamba* instrumental dance music, rooted in the *tahardent* and closely related plucked lutes played by *inaden* and *aggiwen*, became popular among Malians and Nigériens around the Niger River bend. Yet *ishumar* musicians and recorded speeches from Libya in the 1970s and 1980s disparaged *takamba* and related musics for distracting young people from political consciousness and involvement in the *ishumar* cause (Belalimat 2010); these criticisms also reproduced negative attitudes toward *inaden* elucidated in the previous section, as lacking honor.

Three decades later, *takamba* has waned in popularity as guitar has entered the realm of public popular performance in Mali and Niger. It continues to be performed at weddings, naming ceremonies, and other celebrations, particularly among poorer Tuareg communities, refugees from Mali living in Niger, and the middle aged and older generations who grew up with it as the dominant popular style of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Niger Bend (Figure 3.4). Paradoxically, however, some of the people I spoke with about *takamba* attribute its weakening popularity to the decline in wealth among Nigériens. Paying *inaden* and griots, and heeding their potent demands for remuneration that are risky to ignore, is expensive. Guitar events, by contrast, are often perceived



*Figure 3.4. Takamba performance featuring molo (a lute closely related to tahardent) player Souleymane Seydou and dancers of Groupe Faisal at a wedding in Niamey. August 28, 2016.*

as less expensive: they are not governed by griot practices to the same extent, given their rootedness in political causes and the values of *imojagh* and *asshak*.

Nonetheless, contemporary Tuareg *artistes* earn much of their money from spraying, as well as from payments for admission to formal concerts or when hired to perform weddings and naming ceremonies. Praise singing and a variety of performance antics encourage audiences to dispense more money through spraying and other means, as I show in the next subsections. These strategies are not met with universal approval; some *artistes* express preferences for being paid a set wage. This seems to especially be the case with musicians who are experienced performing abroad in Western settings where spraying is not part of the way artists are compensated for their work, and where proceeds from sales of tickets and merchandising—in

other words, from the commodification of musical performance—are more extensive, reliable forms of remuneration.

An anecdote from when Tinariwen played a packed concert at Niamey’s Jean Rouch Franco-Nigérien Cultural Center (CCFN) in October 2016—their first public performance as a group in Niger in over a decade—illustrates this point. Audience members had to buy tickets ahead of time and squeeze in through the bottleneck at the front gate to get in. The energy was electric, the outdoor amphitheater overflowing with crowds of Tuareg young and old, as well as other Nigériens and Western expatriates. Indeed, in response to youth crying out in enthusiasm during the performance and others dancing on stage, Abdallah Alhousseini made an announcement between songs. Speaking in Tamasheq, which only part of the audience could understand, he advised: “Thank you. Ibrahim [Ag Alhabib, co-founder and leading member of Tinariwen] is going to join us now. I know that if he comes on stage everyone will be happy. Youth, keep your cries down a bit, your elders are here and you must respect them. There are many grand personalities here. Excuse me for saying this, but it’s better that way.” Yet as the evening progressed, these appeals to dignified behavior appeared to have little effect. More and more individuals came up on stage to dance, cry out or ululate in enthusiasm, and spray money on Abdallah and other Tinariwen members. Although I had been filming the concert from the sound booth, Moussa Albadé later related to me an illuminating interaction he had backstage with Eyadou Ag Leche, Tinariwen’s bassist: “Eyadou found me backstage...and the first thing he told me was: ‘Please save me from these people with their money. We don’t have need for money like this, we can’t accept money like this. It’s not our job’” (personal communication, November 14, 2016).

In conversations with musicians who disapprove of spraying, their attitudes are explicitly conveyed in terms of honor. Moussa, for example, opined that

in Agadez, besides Abdallah Oumbadougou and Hasso [Akotey], nobody plays music because he has love for the music or because he wants to do his work. It's something commercial. You play, people give you money, that's your salary. Among us, normally among the Tuareg, it's *iban asshak* [without honor]. It's not good, it's shameful. (personal communication, November 14, 2016)

Moussa, like several other guitarists I spoke with, often laments that musicians rarely play publicly for free anymore: people come to play in order to earn money, not to celebrate or contribute to the community (but see Chapter Two). However, most musicians—even those who most strongly critique it—acknowledge that spraying is often the only income musicians may earn, that being a professional musician is not a sustainable career in Niger. Ibrahim Mohamed and Moussa “Tchingou” Eggour, young Agadezian musicians in the band Groupe Zone Touareg, contrast their performance opportunities with groups that have regular gigs:

Sometimes we go one month, two months, without playing. We wait to be invited, for people to come invite us. [Other groups] play each night at bars, centers, somewhere. For us, it's not like that. They live with music, each night they play and they make gestures [...] to get people to spray money. Us here, we wait for people to invite us to play. If there's spraying, it's not a problem. If there isn't any, it's not a problem. (personal communication, September 21, 2016)

Bombino expresses another perspective on spraying, emphasizing how it distracts from musical experience:

It's true it's good for the artists, for us it's good when people spray money, but there is also the side that is not interesting. Because it removes the taste, the love of the music, things like that. You'll tell yourself that someone doesn't dance for the music, but just to spray something. (personal communication, December 28, 2016)

Like many others, he identifies spraying as a newer development, one that is interfering with the appreciative experiencing of music that he feels was more valued in the past.



A final dimension of anxieties about spraying that is not mentioned as frequently among musicians is the role of Islamic religiosity. It is difficult to separate Islamic practice from any aspect of Tuareg notions of honor, given the long history of Islam among Tuareg. Within this mix, *inaden* and griot practice straddles an awkward contradiction: their asking for money, for example, is socially tolerated, often described as “in their blood,” yet it is also seen as *haram*, contrary to Islamic teaching; to ask for *sadaqah*, charity or benevolent giving, is considered inappropriate unless one is truly suffering poverty. Thus, the practice of spraying among contemporary *artistes* who are not *inaden* can be understood as contrary to devout behavior. Although Islamic piety in Niger tends to be quite important, given the mix of an overwhelming Muslim majority population, of public street-side sermons and of popular Islamic reform movements such as Izala (see Alidou 2005; Sounaye 2014; Youngstedt 2013), many of the guitarists I have met—particularly youth—do not regularly participate in certain expressions of their faith, such as five daily prayers.

Moussa Albadé is a notable exception in this regard; he is one of the more pious musicians I met in Niger, and we often interrupted interviews or social visits so that he could pray. One important reason for his religiosity is likely his affiliation with the Dabákar *tawsit* (clan), who are part of the Kel Ansar Tuareg confederation that is known for its religious devotion and claims a direct line of heritage to the Prophet (Montague 2014, 208-209). His tendency to refer to honor in terms of *asshak*—the category of honor tied to one’s clan, lineage, and camp—rather than by another term (e.g., the broader “*imojagh*”) further suggests this point. Although Moussa is by no means alone in expressing great concern for honorable behavior among *artistes*, his reactions were at times remarkable, especially given his experience as a

musician touring internationally as a solo act and with Bombino, in which capacities he has entertained audiences with no awareness of *asshak*.

One evening in 2016 I arrived with Moussa and his wife at a wedding held among a particularly wealthy crowd at a Niamey amphitheater owned by the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO; see Figure 3.1). He and a handful of other popular Tuareg *artistes* had been invited by Bombino, who was the headliner, to join in on the performance—a common enough practice. Soon after our arrival, Moussa and I joined Bombino, Bibi Ahmed (of Groupe Inerane), and a handful of other musicians and groupies on the stage, dancing, singing along, or swapping in on various instruments (Figure 3.5). After several songs, some of the audience members who had been observing or dancing in the space in front of the raised stage mounted the bandstand and began showering Bombino with money. While Moussa had previously been



*Figure 3.5. Bombino (center left, turquoise) leads at a wedding in Niamey, accompanied by Moussa Albadé (center, grey), Bibi Ahmed (far right), and others. December 30, 2016.*

enthusiastically participating in the performance, as the bills came raining down—these were coming from bankers, so it was *quite* a lot of them—he discreetly left the stage.

During an interview, he elaborated on some of the reasons why spraying is problematic:

The first reason: it's the absence of *asshak*, the lack of respect for money. You understand? The second thing: the person, if he sees someone else spray money—even if he has 100,000 [CFA] that he reserved for buying a sack of rice for his family or for doing something good for himself—there will be the excitement that will lead him to spray all of his money. And the next day, he will go tell lies. [...] It's also possible that when people are spraying money, there will be a poor person who has nothing, he is sitting there and watching the money found all over. That also is not a good idea. Perhaps he has just need for 200 CFA, but he sees 100,000 CFA descending on the musician. That is not good.<sup>52</sup> (personal communication, November 14, 2016)

In this final point, Moussa's commentary reveals concern about the evil eye or evil mouth, a widespread belief among many Muslims that negative effects may arise from envy, coveting, or desire.<sup>53</sup> The forces of the evil eye share many commonalities with *tezma*, the power identified with *inaden* that punishes those who do not share their surpluses or who do not justly compensate people (like *inaden*) for their work (Rasmussen 2013, 1-24). Confronted with such excesses of wealth as observed at a bankers' wedding, it is no wonder that *artistes* would react in different ways: some withdrawing out of concerns regarding *asshak*, others profiting from what can be a rare opportunity to earn significant pay from professional performances.

## PRAISE SINGING

Spraying is a complicated way for audiences to participate and interact with musicians and dancers, serving many purposes for givers. But it is nearly synonymous with the practice of

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<sup>52</sup> As of this writing, the exchange rate of West African CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine, e.g., African Financial Community) francs to US dollars is 530:1.

<sup>53</sup> The evil eye is called *togerchet*, *imigurcha*, or *tehot* in various Tamasheq dialects; see Rasmussen 2013.

praise singing, which in discourses about *artistes* is clearly the most egregious and shameful practice. More than spraying, it is the aspect of performance that most clearly recalls *griotisme* and the behavior of *inaden*. And although making performance decisions to encourage patrons and audiences to spend their money is common, to sing praises remains relatively rare among Tuareg guitarists.<sup>54</sup> As more *artistes* seek income through their music and pursue more diverse, multi-ethnic audiences in Niger, however, it appears poised to take on greater significance in Tuareg guitar culture.

Besides praise singing among *inaden* and griots, a common feature in *tende* music (among other older Tuareg music genres) is for women to sing praises for camels and for men during festivals as well as during youth courtship parties called *zahuten* (Belalimat 2010, Rasmussen 2000). *Tende* songs rarely enter the guitar repertoire nowadays, despite the early influence of *tende* on guitar, but a notable exception is the song “Chaghaybou,” recorded by Tinariwen on their albums *Emmaar* (2014) and *Live in Paris* (2015). While the album liner notes credit the song to Abdallah Alhousseini, it is in fact an adaptation of a *tende n-goumaten* (spirit possession) song attributed to a woman from Ingall, Niger and which he learned while attending the Cure Salée festival there.<sup>55</sup> The lyrics describe a woman’s love for a particular man, Chaghaybou (or Chaïbou), a way to try to allay the sort of mental-spiritual afflictions that are cured through *goumaten* possession rituals (see Rasmussen 1995):

God can bear witness when I think of Chaghaybou  
The pain in the stomach that takes hold of me  
Has no other remedy than a heart-to-heart with him late at night.

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<sup>54</sup> I am speaking specifically of Tuareg guitarists following the lineage of *ishumar* musicians, which is stylistically separate from the multiethnic Agadessawa groups like Groupe Oyiwane, Groupe Tasko, and others that have origins in school ensembles with women’s choruses. This point requires careful consideration and is sometimes confused in other scholarship on Tuareg guitar; see Chapter One.

<sup>55</sup> The *tende n-goumaten* version appears as “Chaïbou,” recorded in Inteïllalen (near Agadez) in 1963 and featuring a soloist named Lattou, on *Anthologie de la Musique du Niger* (1990).

I love him and I love those he loves, into the life beyond.  
I pine for those handsome and brave wearers of double turbans!  
Among them Ahmad, Hamad Ahad and their friend, Chaghaybou:  
The same who dine on grilled ram.  
When I glimpse him dressed in his beautiful robes  
Smelling of a mixture of perfumes...  
His headdress crested, giving him the air of gazelles  
That race through dunes strewn with desert gourds.  
If only I could become a stand in his mother's tent,  
That way I would never miss a moment he inhabits  
Especially those when his mother is teaching him Tifinagh in the sand.<sup>56</sup>

While Abdallah brought the song back to his homeland in Mali and later recorded it, the journalist Issouf Hadan noted to me during a conversation that Nigérien guitarists never seem to play “Chaghaybou.” He speculated that perhaps the reason many guitarists in Agadez don’t adapt *tende* songs is because they don’t speak Tamasheq; most young Tuareg there grow up speaking Hausa. Tamasheq remains the dominant language for guitar songs, however, so a more likely explanation is that *tende* has become less common in urban settings like Agadez. But another important factor is that “Chaghaybou” is a praise song for a man. Abdallah Oumbadougou, the founding father of Tuareg guitar in Niger who has served as a role model and provided training to many younger guitarists, refused to sing praises for anyone else; he would sing for the resistance, for the mountains and desert, and so on, but to sing for an individual could be perceived as a form of *griotisme*. Thus, he did not even sing praises for the Tuareg hero Mano Dayak, who was a prominent leader of the first rebellion from Niger and tragically died in a plane crash in 1995.

Abdallah Alhousseini, on the other hand, composed a song commemorating him:

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<sup>56</sup> Tifinagh is the alphabet used to write Tamasheq. “Chaghaybou” lyrics appear in the liner notes for Tinariwen’s album *Emmaar* (2014), translated into French by Anara El Moktar, Asalekh Ag Tita, and Aboubacrine Ag Rhissa, and into English by Andy Morgan.

## Introduction

<i>Nak ibda wo 'tenere izay tamadalt</i>	I come from a <i>ténéré</i> well used to sandstorms
<i>Izayarh ikaly daou anna ed tadjart</i>	I take my rest under the shadeless <i>anna</i> and <i>tadjart</i> bushes
<i>War izayegh ichkan awadnin tafaraout</i>	I have never seen enough trees to make a forest
<i>Akalin Tamesna malat tazarat</i>	My home is the Tamesna, white, naked, and empty
<i>War tadin tass war diss tadin tarhat</i>	It affords pasture to neither goat nor cow
<i>Akal imtalant salatata tawarayt</i>	It is the land of the young camel, who wanders after its mother

## First Verse / Chorus

<i>Tenere tan afala ebouss</i>	I come to a <i>ténéré</i> which lies to the north of Bouss
<i>Tenere rhass malet takiss</i>	A desert which is totally naked
<i>Warhen akshan wala sekouss</i>	Without a single tree, or even a twig
<i>Sastatadjan medan takouss</i>	And when men travel there, it's always hot

## Chorus

<i>Iket nanhey ahidjarzan</i>	Now I've seen something that fills me with joy
<i>Wo 'Tamashek rhass idaran</i>	A Tamashek who's living well
<i>Harsewal derh jihazten</i>	And communicating through a satellite phone
<i>Warnen ahshek ikla daoussan</i>	Tied to the tree under which he rests
<i>Ratek tabsit etan wohazen</i>	The buds fall all around him
<i>Mano Dayak ati tadjan</i>	All of that is thanks to Mano Dayak <sup>57</sup>

The introductory phrases are sung freely, without a regular tempo and full of melismas—a style recalling men's *tisiwit* poetry, usually sung for love and to encourage warriors. Although there is light instrumental accompaniment in the introduction, it is not until the first verse (about one minute and twenty seconds into the recording on *Aman Iman*) that a regular tempo is established with guitars, bass, percussion, and handclapping. Yet during the verses, Abdallah's singing does

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<sup>57</sup> Lyrics from "Mano Dayak," which appear in the notes for Tinariwen's *Aman Iman* (2007). Translated by Ibrahim Ag Assarid and Andy Morgan, with help from Nadia Belalimat, Issa Dicko, and Denis Péan.

not follow the guitar line heterophonically, as is typical in guitar songs; furthermore, a women’s chorus also sings regular responses of “*yahimanine*,” vocables usually sung in *tende* songs. Stylistically, then, “Mano Dayak” is less representative of conventional Tuareg guitar music than a creative homage to older musical forms that are understood as invoking heroism and community.

An important distinction is that this is a song of commemoration, not sung for a living person who can spray the artist in exchange for their praises. Even so, songs like “Mano Dayak” and “Chaghaybou” can lead audiences to react with pleasure and spray more money, whether or not performers intend for them to do so. Thus, Abdallah opened his performance at the 2016 Cure Salée with “Mano Dayak,” in effect offering respects to his Nigérien hosts gathered in Ingall and eliciting tremendous enthusiasm from the crowds; there was a similar salutatory gesture when Tinariwen performed “Chaghaybou” at their historic concert in Niamey (see above). However, neither of these songs elicit much controversy.

This is not the case for praise songs for the living that are performed more squarely within the style of Tuareg guitar. One major controversy in 2016 surrounded a song recorded by Bibi Ahmed, the lead guitarist of Groupe Inerane from Agadez. While armed conflict simmered between Tuareg and Toubou (another predominately nomadic ethnic group inhabiting parts of Niger, Libya, Chad, and Sudan) in southern Libya, Bibi released a song naming and praising many Toubou leaders:

<i>Bismillahi ar-rahman ar-rahim</i>	In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful [standard Arabic invocation at any sort of beginning]
<i>Hada cassette zikra</i>	[in Hausa] This is a very important cassette
<i>Souvenir Aboubacar Zahim</i>	[in French] It’s a souvenir of Aboubacar Zahim
<i>Rajal maxtaram</i>	[in Tamasheq] The courageous man
<i>Bismillahi as ofara</i>	I invoke Allah before starting
<i>Ibrahim tijeria</i>	Ibrahim the kind

*Ibrahim wiliya*  
*Zayim Ibrahim Gatron*  
*Ramadan Aboubacar wa n nana*  
*[etc.]*

Ibrahim the brave  
The courageous Ibrahim Gatron  
Ramadan Aboubacar, our friend  
[etc.]<sup>58</sup>

An added dimension to this song is that it integrated certain studio production practices more commonly encountered in *dandalin soyayya* (Hausa film songs), including some use of AutoTune to modulate the voice as well as a drum machine and synthesizers for accompaniment.<sup>59</sup> Praise songs and griot practices are more common and accepted in Hausa culture, and as more Tuareg settle into predominately Hausa urban settings like Agadez, older generations of Tuareg express concern for Tuareg cultural reproduction, for the fact that youth may grow up speaking only Hausa and not learning Tamasheq—that is, for the “Hausafication” of Tuareg culture (see Seligman 2006a). In fact, the exact same song was reproduced, with new lyrics, as a praise song for the Agadez Sokni festival held in 2016 for the December 18<sup>th</sup> Republic Day celebrations; in that version, Bibi sings praises for the president and prime minister of Niger, among other leaders. Thus, Bibi’s Toubou song can be heard as indexing griot practices through its blending of Hausa studio aesthetics with Tuareg guitar and predominately Tamasheq lyrics.

This in itself is not a source of major controversy compared to the lyrics which listeners could interpret as showing allegiance to Toubou over Tuareg in the conflict. For example, on a social media group dedicated to Tuareg music (see Chapter Two), one user asked administrators to eject group members who had shared audio clips from Libyan Tuareg “dedicated to Bibi.” His rationale was that these negative comments could insult members of Bibi’s family. But a group

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<sup>58</sup> Transcribed and translated into French by Amina Mohamed, with assistance by Brian Nowak. Translated into English by the author.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter Five for background and discussion of *dandalin soyayya*.



administrator involved in the discussion refused, exasperated that members could be upset by just about anything and reminding them that Bibi had not sung insults. While not a defense of praise singing per se, this reaction revealed a reluctance to comment directly on the conduct of specific individuals. In doing so, the administrator himself modeled one aspect of Tuareg honor outlined above, of not publicly conveying strong opinions or emotions. Indeed, in some conversations about praise singing and other newer innovations in Tuareg guitar with those *artistes* that appeared most committed to ideals of *asshak*, they would express their opinions indirectly: “it’s not my style,” “it’s not my preference,” and so on. When I asked him about the controversy surrounding Bibi Ahmed, Bombino responded more directly:

Normally [...] it’s the praise singers who sing like that. When you sing someone, their name, it’s not known in Tuareg guitar music. [...] You can sing for a big family, but it’s not about calling their name. We call that *griotisme*. (laughing) So, of course, I understand that people get angry. [...] It has nothing to do with the reality of Tuareg music. (personal interview, December 28, 2016)

Beyond any issue of ethnolinguistic affiliation in a conflict situation, then, praise singing in guitar music raises more general concerns about what makes Tuareg music Tuareg. This hinges on the reworking of Tuareg senses of honor among *artistes*.

## **DANCE AND PERFORMANCE ANTICS**

Another aspect of guitar performance that has changed significantly over the generations is the non-verbal comportment of musicians and audiences. Although the first generation of Tuareg guitarists often sang of the pain of solitude and exile—a sort of cathartic release that did not model the ideal stoicism expected within the code of *imojagh*—artists, dancers, and listeners tended to observe far more reserved and elegant behavior than is common today. Guitarists remained relatively poised, without too much movement, as they played and sang (Figure 3.6); audiences might dance and gesture modestly with their elbows or hands. Dancers who entered a



*Figure 3.6. Abdallah Alhousseini performs with tagelmoust and relatively reserved gestures that are more representative of the older generation of artistes. Ingall, September 23, 2016.*

designated dance area (*la piste*) in front of the musicians stood in two rows facing one another across a short distance, usually men on one side and women on the other; their movements mostly consist of taking small, gentle steps with the rhythm, elbows pumping or hands rotating elegantly at waist or chest level. Periodically, the rows of dancers would move toward one another and occasionally flip sides. This resembles *takamba* dance in many ways (see Figure 3.4), although particular dance motions differ.

More extroverted expressions of emotion were permitted through particular idioms, however. For example, women ululate (*aghlelu*) and men let out long, strident cries of “aiiii!” (*tégherit*) to express joy. Listeners were often exhorted to clap along as well, encouraged by calls

of “*Eqqas! Eqqas!*” These continue to be important forms of expression in contemporary guitar, but more generally, musicians and dancers all tend to move and reveal emotions with far less restraint than before. The ethnomusicologist Anouck Genthon refers to this difference as a new form of listening that values an ecstasy that is “external, infectious, and cohesive” rather than internal (Genthon 2012, 107-108, 228). Younger generations of artists—emulating in particular the models of Bombino and Mdou Moctar and invoking notions that contemporary Tuareg music is more like rock than the earlier style, which is sometimes described as blues, as *tranquille* (Fr.: “calm”)—dance freely, waving their guitars, bouncing to their songs played at significantly faster tempos. Audiences cry out, throwing up their hands or pumping their fists; although they tend to still dance in opposing lines, dancers occasionally form chaotic mobs (Figure 3.7).



*Figure 3.7. Dancers throwing up their hands while Bombino strikes a dramatic pose on stage at a public concert during the Agadez Sokni celebrations. Agadez, December 15, 2016.*

Male performers and audience members, continuing the trend ushered in by the first *ishumar*, often do not veil their faces with the *tagelmoust* but instead drape the cloth around their shoulders, or do not wear it at all. Some artists explain that part of the reason for this development is that the *tagelmoust* interferes with their ability to hear; even if they wear the *tagelmoust* wrapped during performance, they may conduct sound checks without it. This nonetheless remains a matter of context and of personal preference and style. In more rural settings and in performances where age groups are more mixed, for example, performers tend to be more conscientious of *asshak* and *takarakit*, of the need to remain veiled in front of particular kin. Meanwhile, for performances abroad, artists seek to balance goals of appealing to international audiences' desires for unconstrained dancing (shows are often billed on independent rock circuits) and of representing Tuareg culture, which is often symbolized by the *tagelmoust*.

Some guitarists engage in remarkable performance antics. These are not universal practices, given the extreme ways in which they depart from the reserved comportment of earlier generations and even the dancing and less ostentatious gestures that are increasingly common among young guitarists. However, this kind of showmanship is another way to elicit pleasure from audiences and encourage spraying. At a concert at a Niamey restaurant, for example, Bibi Ahmed lifted his guitar up behind his head and continued to play; his bassist shortly followed suit. In another song, as he stepped away from the band towards a dancer on the dance *piste* in front of him and lay his guitar on the ground. As he knelt down and began to fret with his toes and strum with his hand, a man from the audience walked up and began spraying him with cash. A minute later, he picked up the guitar and held it to his mouth, strumming with his teeth—and

the bills continued to fly. These are antics in which *inaden* and griots at *takamba* gatherings also partake, to similar effect (see Figures 3.8, 3.9).

While this relaxing of the restrained composure that models *asshak* is a newer trend in Tuareg guitar, musical performance has been an important locus of inverting societal restrictions and treating psychological ailments through emotional release over many generations. *Tende n-goumaten* rituals, mentioned above, often take place outside rural camps where the afflicted person (almost always a woman) is treated through all-night *tende* drumming by *inaden* and singing by a chorus of women. These events may revolve around the *gouma* (the spirit that possesses the afflicted person during the ritual, and the term for the possessed person), whose head and face is covered with a white cloth, but these rituals are festivities through which participants who might be ashamed to consort together during the day have license and



Figure 3.8. *Idé*, a calabash player in Niamey, flips his leg back and forth over his calabash during a *takamba* performance at a naming ceremony in Niamey. November 12, 2016.



*Figure 3.9. Souleymane Seydou plays his molo behind his head while standing, a bill stuffed under his turban by a member of the audience, at a naming ceremony in Niamey. November 12, 2016.*

temporary freedom from the restrictions of *takarakit* governing kinship and class interactions. Men and women flirt, joke, and dress to impress one another in these carnivalesque contexts without losing face. Furthermore, the *gouma* may express personal preferences for songs and individuals during the festival in ways that run counter to *asshak* expected in daily life. Despite the general acceptability of these rituals, they nonetheless elicit disapproval from some Islamic scholars, and a woman (or family) may develop an ambivalent reputation for frequently becoming afflicted (Rasmussen 1995).

Spirit possession is almost never a part of guitar music, although Genthon mentions encountering the use of guitar in spirit possession ritual (Genthon 2012, 121) and guitar is (very) occasionally performed with *tende* accompaniment. At *takamba* gatherings, I encountered dancers who would faint after intense periods in which they were “touched” by spirits. Another

remarkable episode unfolded at a wedding performance by Hama Moussa at the home of a wealthy customs officer in Niamey, where attendees were primarily Tuareg and Arab. Hama performs Tuareg guitar-style instrumental music on a Yamaha PSR-64 keyboard—a 1990s model developed to include microtones and instrumental settings for use in Arab music—and uses the device’s built-in drum machine for accompaniment; he also sometimes creates tracks on a laptop using FruityLoops and plays them at performances, although on this particular day he did not bring the computer because of rain (see Appendix B). As he played along to the cyclical rhythms of his keyboard, projected through a PA system, crowds of predominately young women and girls (dozens of them all dressed in matching purple and pink *pagne* dresses) would get up to dance, sometimes cycling counterclockwise in a circle. Despite the static rhythmic accompaniment, Hama was able to build intensity in his playing through repetitive phrases.

At one point, a young woman completely covered her head and face with a veil and began to undulate in the middle of the dance *piste*. Her arms stretched out and writhed while her head rolled under the fabric, recalling the “head dancing” and aesthetic preference in *tende n-goumaten* rituals for movement that resembles swaying tree branches (see Rasmussen 1995). An older woman walked around the dance *piste* shooing myself, other spectators, and dancers who had all been filming on cameras and phones without problem until this point; while the earlier celebrations and dancing were publicly acceptable, we were observing a more sensitive episode in which recording and allowing the forthcoming incidents to be seen publicly, out of context, might bring embarrassment to the possessed woman or to her family. Some dancers began to rhythmically hiss “*tss!*” to reinforce Hama’s playing; others held up the enshrouded woman so that she would not fall (though at one point she was seated). One woman walked into the group

of dancers and began spraying perfume in the air around the possessed woman, a practice in many spirit possession practices in Niger said to please spirits.<sup>60</sup>

We were in the heart of a wealthy domestic compound in the capital, surrounded by expensive cars and intermingling with a pair of peacocks who strolled through the compound, but as Hama noted to me, the music and dancing reminds urban people of the past and of rural areas, of the bush (*la brousse*); the possession at the wedding, from Hama's perspective, was a manifestation of the intense nostalgia the crowd was feeling in this moment. That this nostalgia was goaded on by keyboard and drum machine seemed to be of little importance. In Hama's view, Tuareg and Arabs particularly enjoy dancing to his music. Indeed, later during the wedding performance, many of the girls and young women began intensely dancing in a clump by throwing their arms up, bouncing back and forth almost violently towards and away from dance partners, or leaning forward and flipping their hair in circles—movements quite different from the earlier possession dancing or the separated lines of *takamba* (Figure 3.10).

Hama, like others with whom I spoke, attributes these developments in dance in large part to Arab influence, coming not only through the traffic of people, goods, and music between Niger and its northern neighbors Algeria and Libya, as well as with Mauritania. "I've played in a lot of Arab weddings, and they dance like lunatics [Fr.: *comme des fous*, terminology sometimes used to describe the possessed]!" Hama exclaimed with delight (personal communication, August 14, 2016). While he identifies dance forms among his audiences coming from other

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<sup>60</sup> Although sharing in these ways aspects of *tende n-goumaten* ritual, Hama attributed this circle dancing to *taggut*, a form from Mali and from Niger's Torodi area (a Tuareg-Fulani settlement south of Niamey) that is usually accompanied by *molo* lute or *tende* (personal communication, August 14, 2016). Based on his descriptions, it appears to be similar *tende n-tagbast* ("dance *tende*") or *arokas*, forms of *tende* dance often accompanied by handclapping performed by *inaden* or non-elites (see Card 1982). It appears little research on these forms has been completed since Caroline Card's 1982 dissertation, when she also observed a lack of substantive research on these musical styles.





*Figure 3.10. Youth dancing to Hama Moussa's music at a wedding in Niamey. July 30, 2016.*

origins as well (see note 60, above), most Tuareg with whom I spoke about recent developments in guitar music comment on the influence of Arab dance.

Of these, the Mauritanian dance style known as *jagwa* is becoming particularly popular in Niger. Emerging in Mauritania in 1976 and named for the French Jaguar fighter jets used in the Western Sahara War between Morocco and the Polisario Front (comprised of Sahrawi people seeking an independent state, Western Sahara, which remains contested territory), it is an instrumental dance music that features frenzied guitar riffs—often played with a maximized flanger pedal effect—accompanied by pounding *t'bel* kettle drums; it is also known as *banjey*, although this name does not appear to have carried over among Tuareg in Niger (Schmidt 2012). Within Tuareg guitar repertoire it is—to the best of my knowledge—unique for being specifically identified with a non-Tuareg community. Set to a thumping two-beat 6/8 rhythm, in Tuareg settings it is a principally instrumental style that also features repetitive guitar riffs

(without a flanger) to build intensity as well as coordinated breaks in which the entire ensemble (guitars and drum set alike) suddenly pauses, performs a few coordinated hits, and then resumes with the same tempo.

*Jagwa* is sometimes performed as an independent dance, and at others may be mixed in with another song to form a medley. What is most remarkable is that it is a favorite dance among Tuareg and Arab women, especially in Agadez but increasingly in Niamey as well. At weddings, for example, where the groom's and bride's parties have separate festivities during the afternoon (but together in the evening), women at the bride's party often request *jagwa*; sometimes a separate Mauritanian band performs *jagwa* after a Tuareg guitar group, incorporating their pedals and keyboards as is common in Mauritania. But in most cases, Tuareg groups perform *jagwa* themselves, particularly versions by Bombino and Mdou Moctar.<sup>61</sup>

In *jagwa*, women sometimes imitate Mauritanian dance by completely covering their heads, faces, and upper bodies with a large shawl, the Mauritanian *mehlafa* style of dress that obscures the wearer's figure and, in completely covering the face, their identity. Those without the same wardrobe might hold a piece of fabric out from the waist or from their head covering. Yet despite the modest clothing style that many women choose to wear or imitate in these settings, the *jagwa* dance movement itself centers on the provocative swaying of the hips, particularly in consort with the band's hits during the breaks; this may be accompanied by outstretched arms and the taking of small steps, either independently while spinning in a circle or else as one dances in one of the twin lines that usually form at guitar performances (Figure 3.11). Reproducing gender segregation in Arab weddings, it is most commonly only danced by women, without men, to which many (male) musicians I spoke with attribute its appeal. Yet they also

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<sup>61</sup> E.g., see "Iyat Ninhay/Jaguar (A Great Desert I Saw)" on Bombino album *Azel* (2016), which transitions to *jagwa* at about 4:38. Bombino's bassist for international tours, Youba Dia, is Mauritanian.



Figure 3.11. A woman in a Mauritanian mehlafa dancing jagwa during a concert by Bibi Ahmed at the Lebanese-owned Palais de Chawarma restaurant. Niamey, October 30, 2016.

argue that women love it as a way to show off their figures, and that because of its sensuous movements, people love to spray money on *jagwa* dancers.

Many of the concerns and critiques of contemporary Tuareg guitar as something that has abandoned *asshak* and *takarakit* converge in discussions of dance, and *jagwa* in particular.

Agadezian guitarist Mohamed Karzo, for example, insists on the value of the agreeable correspondence of dance steps (*takoult*), clothing, and music:

Normally, dance for Tuareg music works with the rhythm. And you can also call that *asshak* because you're speaking of culture. Today, a Tuareg who is well dressed, who has his turban, like that...there is *asshak*. [...] [Imagine] that you have your turban, you're well dressed, and find on stage that they are playing reggae. How are you going to play that? If you look at the image, yourself—or if someone plays *dandalin soyayya* [Hausa film music]—it doesn't match. So, you must have *asshak* to conserve this culture. (personal communication, December 13, 2016)

I brought up the elegance of *takamba* dancing as a contrast from guitar, to which he responded: “Normally, in the dance for guitar, too, you shouldn’t dance like in a night club.” I noted that more and more people play *jagwa*. “For me, it’s useless. [...] It’s not a Tuareg style, not at all” (ibid.). Moussa Albadé also critiqued *jagwa* on the grounds of not being of Tuareg origin, but beyond just a matter of commitment to older values of *asshak*, he expressed this in terms of a musical commitment:

[I don’t play *jagwa*] because it’s not Tuareg, and I don’t know it. I could not play it. When you play a song, you must know it, really know it. You are already performing a cover—and if you perform it poorly, it’s not good.<sup>62</sup> (personal communication, February 18, 2016)

The people who play *jagwa*, in his view, only do so to encourage spraying by inviting women out to dance.

Mohamed and Moussa express some of the more conservative perspectives I have encountered regarding the ethics of guitarists and audiences in how and for whom they sing, perform, and dance. Their references to *asshak* cast it as a thing linked to a more honorable past, and furthermore, of something linked to ethnic purity, recalling the ways in which *imojagh* is perceived as a thing that must not be blemished. This is not surprising given their social positions as *imajeghen*, of being from among the classes most invested in (and with) the Tuareg sense of honor. Yet to cast this as a matter of race is complicated; recall that in Tuareg history, *iklan* (slaves) and *ighewalen* (descendants of freed slaves) were mostly people captured from predominately Black non-Tuareg communities in the Sahel and were, furthermore, those said to not observe honorable behavior. With *jagwa*, however, Tuareg anxieties focus on an Arab cultural form, a new iteration of the adaptation of Arab culture that began with the influence of

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<sup>62</sup> I return to the issue of performing covers in Chapter Four; suffice it to say for now that this is a practice that elicits ambivalence among many artists.

Maghrebi popular music (i.e., Algerian *rai*) on early *ishumar* guitarists, who Belalimat describes as “the first Tuareg generation to have entered ‘modernity’ through the door of *Arabité*” (Belalimat 1996, 5).

Although Mohamed and Moussa speak to existential concerns about Tuareg society and culture, they do not hold a monopoly on the meaning of honorable behavior in the Tuareg musical world. Mdou Moctar, for example, acknowledges—indeed, embodies—many of the changes in performance practice:

Before, the artist was really poised. He plays gently, gently. You see? And now, it’s not that. An artist plays some notes really quickly, he dances himself, he makes gestures. Before, that didn’t exist. So, it’s because of that that people say there’s a change in the music regarding shame. The youth today have no shame. But it’s not shame per se; it’s like they are bold [*c’est comme ils n’ont pas froid aux yeux*]. That’s not shame. [...] When you look at it, it’s not shame because normally, shame is to do something that’s not good. But making gestures in music is nothing. (personal communication, February 10, 2017)

Perhaps the boldness of today’s young *artistes* and dancers may not be the same as that of the *ishumar* who first developed Tuareg guitar, fought in the 1990s rebellions, and articulated a focused critique of long-standing Tuareg social hierarchy, as explored in Chapter One. But the ostentatious gestures they make, dances they step, and song they sing are certainly not “nothing”; they are the means by which Tuareg shape the culture of a new music economy.

## CONCLUSIONS

Guitar performance practices and discourse surrounding them, as this chapter shows, bring to the fore more general anxieties about social reproduction in an increasingly urban and cosmopolitan post-rebellion era in Tuareg society. Recall Ahmoudou’s remark that “we’re not totally in the years of *asshak* anymore.” The current period sees more musicians identifying as professional *artistes* and turning to the overt—in some eyes, quite literally shameless—pursuit of

money as the preeminent value form in the contemporary music economy. It is no wonder that *artistes* and audiences are sensing an existential conflict based on Tuareg senses of honor. These concerns are articulated principally in terms of *asshak*, but also by reference to *imojagh*, *ellelu*, and the related notion of *takarakit*.

Indeed, Issouf Hadan, a journalist with Radio Nomade in Agadez, hosts a weekly program called “*Elanes N’Asshak*” (Tam.: “The Years of Honor”) to educate and promote the value of Tamasheq language and Tuareg traditions. From Radio Nomade’s Studio Mano Dayak, he shares Tamasheq-language local and international news, announces greetings, and plays recordings of *inzad* music, *tisiwit* poetry, and *tende* drumming; he hosts other programs during the week featuring other content, such as a Tuareg guitar program. But as I sat in with Issouf on an episode of “*Elanes N’Asshak*,” he showed me a text message he received from a listener who was grateful to have a program dedicated to social values like *asshak*. It read: “You are our last hope.” When the program ended, he turned the broadcast over to Hausa-language news rebroadcast from the Voice of America. Rather poetically, it began by discussing a scandal of Ivanka Trump having plagiarized a speech by Michelle Obama.

An emerging development in Tuareg guitar that complicates the account of honor I have presented in this chapter is the rising prominence of women guitarists. Women have been highly respected musicians in Tuareg society for performing *inzad* fiddle and singing poetry while playing *tende* drums, but have rarely been guitarists. The musicians I spoke with rarely articulated any specific rationale for the dominance of men in guitar—their explanations generally came down to “that’s the way it is”—though some linked guitar to *takamba* and other lute traditions associated with *inaden* and griots; it is also likely that the Tuareg guitar music’s

genesis in Libyan military camps and among *ishumar* fighters during the first rebellions is the major reason for the masculine gendering of guitar.

In Niger, the guitarist Fatou Seidi Ghali from Illighadad, a village near Tchintabaradane, has drawn enthusiastic responses from audiences at home as well as internationally, in which context she appears with her cousins Alamnou Akrouni and Mariama Salah Assouan as the ensemble Les Filles de Illighadad (“The Girls from Illighadad”; see Appendix B).<sup>63</sup> At the beginning of 2018, Les Filles de Illighadad added another woman guitarist from Agadez, Amaria Hamadalher, to their lineup for an international tour. Ahmoudou Madassane, who is a relative (technically, their uncle) of Alamnou and Mariama and who often plays accompanying guitar on their tours, notes that the dynamics of touring with them are very different than when he travels with Mdou Moctar; as relatives of opposite gender, Ahmoudou and his cousins observe relations of *takarakit*, unlike between Ahmoudou and Mdou. Furthermore, recalling Rasmussen’s (2005) own observations on the Tuareg (predominately) women’s ensemble Tartit and the challenges its female members faced in obtaining permission from men in their communities to travel apart from their husbands, Ahmoudou feels a familial responsibility to protect Les Filles while abroad (personal communication, March 6, 2017). Further research on the experiences of women guitarists, in their own words, will no doubt provide exciting insights on how their entry into Tuareg guitar culture—especially if more women begin to play guitar, perhaps inspired by the model of Fatou and others—is engendering a reckoning of guitar, honor, and the social position of Tuareg *artistes*.

In Chapter Two, I showed that music serves as a focal point for creative waiting among young Tuareg who are caught in the precarious experience of the post-structural adjustment era

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<sup>63</sup> Aminatou Goumar is another female guitarist who has been part of the France-based duo Toumast for many years, but appears to receive little recognition, perhaps owing to her being based in Europe.

in Niger, similar to many other parts of West Africa and the broader world. By discussing *fada* and social media groups, as well as in *tagssir* and *takayt* musical gatherings, I emphasized the ways youth produce space, establish fictive kinship connections, and more generally cultivate sociality. These are the same youth who are often said to be abandoning honor in the present, indulging unreserved behaviors at guitar *soirées* like ecstatic dancing and praise singing in order to get audiences to spray cash.

Yet if these seem to be a turn towards the embrace of pleasure and money in public settings like weddings, naming ceremonies, and concerts, musicians also continue to recognize the value of events in which they can focus on playing together rather than entertaining audiences. Ahmoudou, for example, explained that he preferred playing in *tagssirs* rather than weddings and concerts because

it's our music. [...] I always find new things. [...] I find that there's a lot of exchange. I feel good and I like to play with the elder artists [who may be there]. It's not too intense, you're at ease, and there's not too much energy. For weddings, you have to have energy—and most of all concerts. (personal communication, March 6, 2017)

At *tagssirs*, important elders and relatives (including musicians) are more likely to attend because they often happen by invitation, while at *soirées* anyone can come—relatives of the bride and groom, youth and neighbors in the neighborhood who hear the festivities and decide to join in without personal invitation. In places like Agadez and Niamey, this also means that audiences at *soirées* and similar public events will not all be Tuareg, and thus will not be expected to observe *imajagh* or *asshak*. In the next chapter, I build on the reckoning of senses of honor in the new Tuareg music economy that I touched on in Chapter Two and have explored more directly in the current chapter by turning from performance practices to emerging intellectual property regimes. As I show, changing notions of copyright, authorship, and the right



to perform covers of songs written by others raise additional debates about the role of *artistes* in Tuareg society and how they may or may not uphold honorable ideals.

## CHAPTER 4

### ECONOMIES OF HONOR AND MONEY, PART II INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY REGIMES

Concomitant with the development of the social position of the *artiste* has been an increase in the practice of identifying and crediting the individual author-composers (Fr.: *auteurs-compositeurs*) of Tuareg songs. Recording technology and radio appear to have been fundamental to this process; one of the first Tuareg musicians to gain widespread recognition in independent Niger was the *inzad* performer Ajjou, who in the 1960s, as part of the state's efforts to record artists from across the country, made recordings for airplay on national radio (Radio Niger, later known as La Voix du Sahel; see Card 1982). The copying and circulating of *ishumar* cassettes during the 1970s through 1990s further contributed to the emergent guitar music by establishing a sort of canonical repertoire of songs that continue to be performed today and which continue to be identified with their original authors and performers, such as Keddou Ag Ossad, Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, and Abdallah Oumbadougou. As access to recording technology increases due to urbanization, integration within Nigérien and global cultural production, and cheaper, more portable equipment (e.g., cassettes, cell phones, and USB flash drives), Tuareg musicians and audiences are in the midst of an evolving intellectual property regime.

A great deal of scholarship has addressed the complicated place of music in intellectual property policies around the world. Copyright laws, for example, are around the world rooted in international accords like the Berne Convention of 1886, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade of 1947, and the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement adopted by World Trade Organization members in 1994; they generally focus on authorship, duration of rights, the originality of works, and how a work can be “fixed” or documented for

copyright (Seeger 2004; Perullo 2008). Copyright protections first developed among European book publishers and are rooted in many assumed characteristics of the publishing industry, such as the fixation of a work in a material form and the existence of an identifiable author (Collins 1993; Seeger 2004). As a result, a great deal of writing on music copyright focuses on popular music in European and American settings. Ethnomusicologists have responded with examples of how folk musics and oral traditions (among other practices and forms of knowledge) have been disadvantaged by this bias in the legal sphere, often ripe for exploitation by European and American producers and musicians. Indeed, as John Collins writes, “although the practice of treating anonymous works of folklore as freely available or a common heritage for the general public is reasonable within any particular nation, in the international context of North–South inequalities, it can justify the ‘plundering’ of the ‘free’ folklore of the developing nations by the industrial ones” (Collins 2006, 165).

The literature concerning these inequities in legal protection show that authorship is complicated and best understood socially, in local terms (Rees 2003, Perullo 2008). It may come from divine inspiration, for example, revealed to an individual or group (Seeger 2004); it might develop from collective collaboration of a group, perhaps over time (Collins 1993, 2006; Dor 2004); and it could be more a matter of acknowledgement and sociality within a gift exchange than about ownership and the right to profit (McCann 2001). Furthermore, if music can be owned—an assumption in most discussions of copyright—who should own it: the individual, the community, the state? (Perullo 2008, 2011). One can also question the assumed dichotomy of Western and non-Western composition often presented in these critiques (Scherzinger 1999): Are the compositions of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Viennese composer who draws on the vocabulary of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms really created in a fundamentally different way than the *tende*

singer who adapts generations of drum and poetic idioms to create a new piece that in Western copyright regimes would likely be labeled “traditional”?

In her work on Kabyle (Amazigh or Berber) women’s songs in Algeria, Jane Goodman finds that “the presumption that indigenous people are necessarily and exclusively disadvantaged by copyright law” overlooks how laws may lead people to reshape their own discourse and performance (2005, 148). Kabyles, for example, appropriate notions of public domain and produce new conceptions of authorship among village repertoires (which in their case are recognized as belonging to Kabyle women as a group). The moral character of Kabyle songwriters, producers, and editors is evaluated not so much by their creativity but by their perceived honesty with regard to claims of authorship. Tuareg musicians similarly draw on evolving notions of intellectual property to appraise the ethics of their colleagues.

The contemporary Tuareg guitar scene in Niger thus constitutes what Skinner (2015) describes as a “nongovernmental music culture,” an art world that is not necessarily anti-governmental, but which “routinely refuses the neoliberal dichotomy of anarchy and control, without, however, altogether refuting its governmentality” (2015, 151-152). In this chapter, then, I begin with a brief discussion of copyright policy in Niger as it pertains to music and how musicians understand its efficacy in delivering on its promises. Given the widespread skepticism or lack of engagement with the official copyright regime, however, in the second part I examine what is more pertinent to most of the musicians I worked with in Niger: the unwritten ethics of authorship. In most cases, the operative concerns expressed in discussions of musical authorship hinged on honor, propriety, and respect, rather than money; in other words, they were rooted in debates about Tuareg codes of honor—introduced in the previous chapter—in a changing culture.

## **COPYRIGHT POLICY IN NIGER**

Many contemporary ethnographic writings on copyright in African music focus on the effects and meanings of piracy in music economies (e.g., Larkin 2008; Perullo 2008, 2011; Skinner 2012, 2015). This is no doubt tied to the general rise of studies of popular music in Africa since the 1980s, but more specifically responds to the broader trend in the 1980s and 1990s for nation-states worldwide to adopt intellectual property rules. While the 1947 GATT oversaw the standardization of intellectual property code among signatories, the TRIPS agreement of 1994 involved a much larger number of countries, who were required by the WTO to establish updated intellectual property laws to be recognized as potential trading partners (Seeger 2004, 159; Perullo 2008, 47). In the late twentieth century, many non-Western countries developed new legislation promising stronger copyright protections for artists, composers, and in many cases—with encouragement from the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)—folklore.<sup>64</sup>

In Niger, one result was that the Prime Minister issued a decree in 1993 establishing protections for copyright; performance, production and broadcast rights; and folklore. Niger had been a signatory of the Bangui Agreement of 1977 that established the African Intellectual Property Organization (OAPI, Organisation Africaine de la Propriété Intellectuelle)—whose members are predominately francophone countries—and assigned it the responsibility of promoting and protecting intellectual property rights, effective from 1982 (Government of Niger 1993; African Intellectual Property Organization 1977). But it appears that until 1994, when the Bureau Nigérien de Droit d’Auteur (BNDA, Nigérien Copyright Office) was established as a

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<sup>64</sup> For case studies of particular countries, see, for example, Rees 2003 on China; Goodman 2005 on Algeria; Collins 2006 on Ghana; Perullo 2011 on Tanzania; and Perullo 2008 for a general view of Africa.

result of the 1993 decree, the Nigèrien state had limited copyright legislation or means for administering it. WIPO—known in French as l’Organisation Mondiale de la Propriété Intellectuelle (OMPI)—cooperated with the Nigèrien state to organize the National Seminar on Copyright and Related Laws in November of that year. There, WIPO and Nigèrien officials met to present and discuss perspectives on the Berne Convention, copyright law in Niger, African folklore, musical life in Niger, cultural industries, piracy, and related issues.

At the seminar, Djibo Mounkaïla, then the Director of the BNDA, introduced the goals for the institution, whose establishment was yet forthcoming (Mounkaïla 1994). Among its aims were to contribute to national creativity, echoing the goals of early European copyright policy to promote creative production; to oversee the public management (*gestion collective*) of rights and royalties related to musical and literary works, as well as other rights as approved by the Minister of Culture; and to manage rights related to Nigèrien folklore. This mission was intended to represent and defend the interests of Nigèrien authors and artists both in Niger and abroad. Authors and editors of musical, literary, graphic, and plastic works of art could affiliate with the BNDA, as could producers and performing artists. Theoretically, through their affiliations, members could register their works with the BNDA and collect royalties twice per year, which would derive from payments by radio and television stations, foreign institutions, and other organizations or individuals to obtain authorization from the BNDA to reproduce or publicly circulate registered works. No more than 10% of these collected fees would be diverted by the BNDA for supporting the promotion of culture and social security, although what this means is vague in Mounkaïla’s presentation.

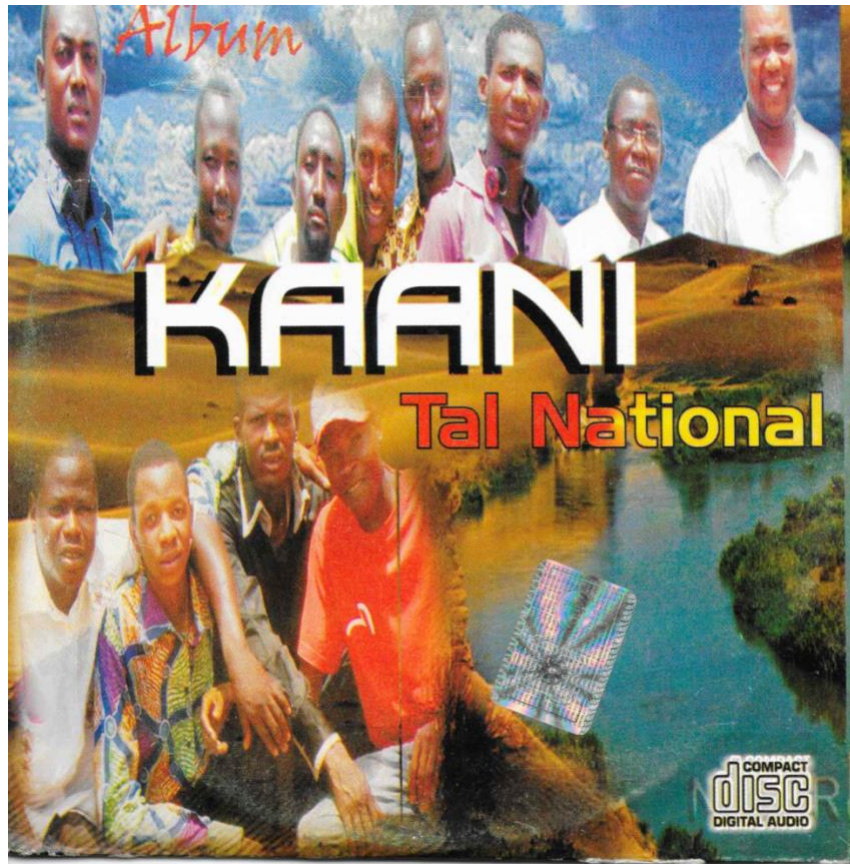
Yacouba Adamou—a reggae artist known by the stage name Black Mailer who is the Secretary of the National Union of Music Professionals (Syndicat National des Métiers de la

Musique—“Tangame”) as well as an employee of the BNDA who works with royalties—noted many challenges to cultivating a culture of copyright in Niger where none had existed before.<sup>65</sup> “You know,” Yacouba told me, “the BNDA is like the AIDS question in medicine. When AIDS began, I worked in health a bit, and not all doctors knew about AIDS. We had to teach that” (personal communication, September 6, 2016). The BNDA has thus organized communications and outreach campaigns to educate the public as well as institutions regularly using musical works, such as hotels, bars, transportation companies, radio and TV stations, and telecommunications companies.

Among its interventions, the BNDA developed a banderole program for recordings, so that albums can be sold with difficult-to-duplicate holographic stickers indicating that they are originals rather than pirated copies (Figure 4.1). It also collects copyright fees for performances at live concerts. However, as in much of West Africa, enforcement is a major challenge; many people and organizations fail to sign any licenses with the BNDA and compensate artists, whether they are a major corporation or the owner of a single kiosk selling mp3s in an urban market. As Yacouba explained, the BNDA has representatives who are responsible for monitoring piracy and copyright abuses in only a few Nigérien cities: Niamey, Maradi, and Zinder. Thus, even were the BNDA to effectively enforce copyright laws where it has representatives, in the Tuareg guitar capital of Agadez there is no means to collect licensing fees, address piracy, or pay royalties.

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<sup>65</sup> “Tangame” is a Zarma word referring to “struggle.” There is much more that can be said about professional institutions related to music in Niger; apart from the BNDA and the union, there is also the National Association of Authors, Composers and Performers of Music (l’Association Nationale des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Interprètes de Musique, ANACIM). According to Yacouba (personal communication, September 6, 2016), the organizations were reorganized in 2010 so that the union and ANACIM now fall under the purview of the International Federation of Musicians (la Fédération Internationale des Musiciens, FIM).



*Figure 4.1. A BNDA holographic banderole sticker adorns a legal album purchased in Niamey.*

Beyond these challenges with enforcing the payment of licensing fees for the use of copyrighted works by consumers, however, are musicians' own relationships to the BNDA. Many musicians were affiliated with France's Society of Authors, Composers, and Publishers of Music (Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Editeurs de Musique, SACEM) before the establishment of the BNDA. Many musicians continue to register their works with SACEM, expressing greater confidence in its abilities to protect their copyright claims than with BNDA. This is not unusual among former French colonies, given the continuing influence of French law in these ostensibly postcolonial settings. Goodman, for example, notes that the Kabyle singers she works with bypass Algeria's copyright organization to register with SACEM alone, which they deem to be more "honest" (Goodman 2005, 152). Indeed, according to Aboubacar



Goumandakoye Zaki (1995), copyright fees for radio play in Niger were largely handled through French institutions well into the first decades of independence: when the Office de Radiodiffusion et Télévision du Niger (ORTN, Office of Radio and Television of Niger) was established in 1958, its copyrights were managed through the Société de Radiodiffusion de la France d’Outre-Mer (SORAFOM, Broadcasting Society of Overseas France), then from 1964 by the Office de la Coopération Radiophonique (OCORA, Office of Overseas Radio Service), and from 1972 by the Ministère Français de la Coopération (French Ministry of Overseas Service). Beginning in 1977, ORTN managed its copyrights but distributed its sums to SACEM, which then diverted them to the Nigérien Ministry of Culture, which was expected to ultimately pay registered artists (Zaki 1995, 28).

If ostensibly the establishing of the BNDA would take over management of copyright from French institutions, then, in practice the degree to which Nigériens rely on local institutions to protect their legal rights—if they rely on any institutions whatsoever—remains slim. Moussa Albadé, for example, told me: “I don’t have confidence with the BNDA.” Recalling his group that he had formed as a teenager, Ennor, he explained their relationship to the organization:

We recorded our music, we made CDs, we brought about four CDs to the BNDA. We heard our music heard on the radio and everything. But from 2002, 2003, 2004 until today, there has not been a cent from that. Nobody has ever called us to explain. For example, sometimes the BNDA invites all the musicians to discuss everything that’s going on with them and all that. But we’ve never seen anything like that. (personal communication, November 14, 2016)

This is not to say royalty payments are never made by the BNDA; during a *gurimi* (a Hausa plucked lute) lesson at the Center for Musical Training and Promotion (CFPM), where the BNDA office is located, my teacher Mahaman Sani suddenly burst out laughing. When I asked why, he marveled at how Niger’s biggest musical acts all seemed to be showing up to the compound that day for the first time in months—they had been contacted to collect their

royalties from the BNDA. Yet if some Tuareg artists in Niger, such as Abdoul Salam, are integrated into what might be called the “governmental music culture” of *artistes* who are more involved with CFPM and the BNDA, most Tuareg guitarists remain apart from this. Indeed, Moussa, who used to accompany Bombino on bass, doesn’t recall him collecting royalties at the BNDA despite being one of Niger’s most well-known stars. And although he has his own recent album (*Yamedan*, 2015) produced and distributed by Sahel Sounds and frequently tours in Europe, Moussa has also not registered with SACEM. He explained:

I was in a position to register there in France. You had to do a lot of things. You had to have four concert contracts, plus the songs, and the songs written out too. After that you had to pay 100 Euros or something. I had the contract, I wrote the songs, I did all the things, but in my opinion, I come from Niger and do my tour to earn something to live on...I couldn’t spend 100 or more Euros. I had the dossier and submitted everything, but I await the day when I’ll have the money for declaring myself there. For the moment, I’m not on the list. But I know that there, you can have confidence in them. They don’t work 100%, but nonetheless you’ll know you that you’re registered. (ibid.)

On the other hand, Moussa recalls that the album *Paris-Portland-Niamey* (2014) that he recorded with French-American guitarist Eric John Kaiser in Portland, Oregon was registered for US copyright.

These examples demonstrate that musicians complete a sort of informal cost-benefit analysis regarding whether it is worth paying registration fees for copyright protections that may not reward them. Indeed, Moussa is not alone in voicing skepticism of the BNDA. In November 2017, for example, the Nigérien rapper Barakina released a video on Facebook—with 26,000 views by early December 2017—lambasting the BNDA for what he felt was its theft from artists. “*Trop c’est trop!*” he declares. “Enough is enough!”

## THE ETHICS OF COVERS

Tuareg musicians in Niger began to more broadly discuss copyright in the mid- to late-1990s, when *artistes* like Abdallah Oumbadougou, Hami Ekawel, and Zami (from Terbiya) started recording songs and videos at the ORTN and receiving BNDA royalty payments (Kildjate Moussa Albadé, personal communication, November 14, 2016). Despite the evident limitations of copyright policy in Niger, the notions of authorship and of rights over one's compositions are important factors in evaluations of the ethics of Tuareg musicians. As Genthon (2012) shows, this is part of a trend in which the development of individual style is becoming increasingly important among younger generations of Tuareg artists. Guitarist Arudeyni Ismaguil notes that this poses for musicians a sort of conundrum: how to “respect this tradition of anonymity [i.e., of the *ishumar*] that contributes a common heritage while at the same time recognizing an artist for his own style” (2009, quoted in Genthon 2012, 247). Genthon argues that the challenge posed by copyright is its potential restriction of the organic circulation of songs; a composers' rights over the diffusion of their works requires that those who would play them get permission to do so (ibid., 251). But as the preceding section shows, there is not a sufficient institutional infrastructure to manage these rights in Niger. Thus, as ideas about copyright become more pervasive, the ways in which they shape the actions of Tuareg musicians and audiences do not follow the prescriptions or best intentions of the law. Instead, participants in Tuareg nongovernmental music culture work out their own unwritten sense of honor and rights, drawing on *imojagh* and *asshak* (Chapter Three) as well as the governmentality of neoliberal control (see Skinner 2015, 151-152).

Many of these issues coalesce in attitudes regarding the performances of covers, by which I simply mean the performance of songs by someone other than the original author. Many

Tuareg musicians refer to this practice as “*interprétation*” (Fr.: interpretation, performance), reproducing the vocabulary of francophone copyright laws that specifically identify performing artists as “*artistes interprètes ou exécutants*.” The “common heritage” of *ishumar* songs described by Arudeyni continue to be performed regularly by Tuareg artists across the Sahel-Sahara, as do more recent compositions by younger musicians like Mdou Moctar. Genthon notes that before notions of copyright began to spread among them, Tuareg musicians would be proud that their songs diffused among the community; to perform the song of someone else was to honor them (Genthon 2012, 251). Indeed, Rasmussen notes that *imajeghen* have been credited as authors in older poetic traditions, granting them certain rights over their compositions, which could be performed by the *inaden* connected to them (Rasmussen 1995, 90-91). Imitation as flattery is a familiar trope in many parts of the world, of course; to name but one example, Helen Rees notes that among literati painters in China, to copy an admired predecessor has long been an explicit gesture of deference (Rees 2003, 151n13). Yet if a culture of honor and respect in the circulation of Tuareg songs was once the norm, the Western conception of copyright and its emphasis on money, in the words of Arudeyni, “kills this spontaneity” (2009, quoted in Genthon 2012, 252).

Performing covers is nonetheless very common and, for the most part, an accepted practice among musicians and audiences. However, a number of musicians are frustrated by the culture of performing covers because they perceive it to be the product of artistic theft and laziness. Mohamed Karzo, for example, perceives an *artiste* not simply as a performer, but as an *auteur-compositeur*: “Me, I say that an artist is someone who will always create. *Interprétation* doesn’t convey or contribute anything here [*L’interprétation ne rends pas ici*]” (personal communication, December 13, 2017). He elaborates: “Why do I say that? Because if you always

keep working on someone's song, each second, each hour that passes as you go over it, you lose your time. You've decided you're going to work. Why don't you take your time arrange your own work, *normal*, just for you?" (ibid.). For him, a musical artist ideally should strive toward working on an album; to be an *artiste* is to be committed to a particular sort of labor, and often during our conversations Mohamed expresses his preference for *le bon travail*, good work.

Bombino generates a lot of controversy among fellow musicians because he performs and records a number of covers and, as Niger's most famous Tuareg guitarist, accrues considerable money and fame in the process. One source of critique regarding Bombino's repertoire is that several of his popular and well-known songs are arrangements of pieces composed by others. Apart from the interpersonal and representational politics of covers becoming more famous than original recordings—an issue in much American popular music as well—there is the added dimension that the original authors are often not credited in the liner notes of Bombino's US-produced albums. In some cases, these songs are listed simply as “traditional, arranged by Goumour [*sic*] Almoctar [Bombino]”: one such example is “Tebсах Dalet” from the album *Agadez* (2011), which is by Abdallah Oumbadougou. Other tracks are credited to Bombino as the author, either explicitly or by claiming that all tracks on an album are his; these include “Tigrawahl Tikma” (by Abdallah Oumbadougou) and “Tar Hani” (Hasso Akotey) on *Agadez*, “Her Ténére” (Abdallah Oumbadougou) on *Nomad* (2013), and “Akhar Zaman” and “Tamiditine Tarhanam” (both by Hasso Akotey) on *Azel* (2016).<sup>66</sup>

I have yet to determine the reasons for these oversights, or to what degree the producers of these albums made good faith efforts to identify the authors of these songs; however, in light

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<sup>66</sup> All but three tracks on *Agadez* are described as written and arranged by Bombino, published by Cumbancha Music Publishing (BMI); the other three are described as traditional and arranged by Bombino. For *Nomad*, all tracks are claimed to be written and composed by Bombino, and published by Cumbancha Music Publishing (BMI). *Azel* does not state any claims to the authorship of any of its tracks.

of the many famous cases of exploitative world music practices that are by now familiar to many producers (and are classic case studies for ethnomusicologists, e.g., Zemp 1996; Feld 2000; Guy 2002), more thorough research on authorship clearly needed to be completed by the producers.<sup>67</sup> This is a challenging, but not impossible, demand: *Agadez*, *Nomad*, and *Azel* are Bombino's most recent releases and attracted considerable press attention in the US and Europe, produced, respectively, by Ron Wyman (a filmmaker who produced a documentary on Bombino and his music in Niger) on Cumbancha, Dan Auerbach (of indie-blues band The Black Keys) on Nonesuch, and Dave Longstreth (Dirty Projectors) on Partisan Records. In other words, they could afford to complete this work. Indeed, Bombino's first album, *Agamgam 2004*, was released by the small French label Reaktion in 2010 and, with the research aid of Anouck Genthon, identifies the author of each track—including securing a license from Tapsit Publishing for “Intidgagen,” written by Keddou Ag Ossad and recorded by Terakaft (*Akh Issudar*, 2008).<sup>68</sup> Most egregious in the Bombino cases are when later releases fail to correctly identify the authors when they have already been identified in earlier recordings: “Her Ténéré” appears on *Agamgam 2004* rightly attributed to Abdallah Oumbadougou, while on the later *Agadez* it is described as traditional; “Akhar Zamane” is attributed to Hasso Akotey on *Agamgam 2004* while there is no attribution whatsoever on *Azel*.

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<sup>67</sup> This point echoes Rees's (2003) appeal for ethnomusicologists to be more diligent in working within shifting intellectual property legal and cultural landscapes.

<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, in the other early Bombino release *Guitars from Agadez Vol. 2* (2009), with Sublime Frequencies, producer Hisham Mayet does not include any discussions of authorship nor copyright, rather consistent with the label's general aversion to intellectual property regulations. See Chapter Five.

If artists like Mohamed Karzo insist on the importance of composing, then, Bombino represents an alternative perspective. When I asked him whether there are ways to play songs composed by others without creating problems between people, he explained:

Well, that all depends. In my opinion, it's possible. Because when you look at Tuareg music, it needs to be made known in the world. [...] There are others who create, create, create. But they don't have others to make it known. [...]

What is necessary is to bring what is already here that people don't know, what even the people here don't know. To work, to find good sounds...to integrate and improve, not to change but to evolve a piece that comes from you. (personal communication, December 28, 2016)

Thus, Bombino is an advocate for the value of arranging existing songs as a way to reach broader audiences. Ahmoudou Madassane, too, believes that covers are an effective way to bring old, forgotten songs back to life. In his view, even if a listener may first understand a piece to be by a contemporary artist, through the circulation of lore about songs, younger audiences will come to learn the true histories of authorship (personal communication, March 6, 2017).

From this perspective, then, the work of arranging covers is a creative act no less worthwhile than composing new songs. Part of what makes Bombino remarkable, for instance, is that during his youth in Agadez, he learned how to play an expanded array of guitar chords from a musician named Hadja Débé. Débé was an Agadassawa (an Agadezian with mixed Tuareg-Hausa heritage) and had experience performing in Bamako. Back in Agadez in the mid-1990s, he had a band in which Bombino would serve as an accompanying guitarist; their music was not the *ishumar* style of Abdallah Oumbadouogu or Hasso Akotey, but rather the *brassage* style of other Agadassawa groups like Groupe Oyiwane or Tasko d'Agadez. They incorporated a broader number of guitar chords than the two or three that feature in most *ishumar* songs. This training, Bombino recalls, thus “freed certain sounds” (ibid.); he now tends to integrate a wider range of chords in his songs and arrangements. Furthermore, his performances often involve him playing

lead guitar lines that are independent of sung melodies—often at break-neck speeds to encourage ecstatic dancing—a move away from the heterophony that characterizes the earlier generations of Tuareg guitar. He identifies these stylistic developments as means to not only “modernize” Tuareg music, but to facilitate musical exchange across cultures by relying on a common base (Genthon 2012, 221–232).

Mdou Moctar has a different perspective on the performance of covers. In an interview on a drizzly February day in Portland, Oregon, I asked him if it is theft to perform someone else’s songs. He replied:

Well...there’s something that one calls “theft” [*vole*]. There’s something that one calls...well, it’s just a song that he likes, he plays it. You see? Now, when I take the songs of Hasso, I change that. If you want you can say I stole it. But if I play Hasso’s song in the same way Hasso played it, well that’s just because I like the song, or people at weddings want me to play it, so I will play it for them. There’s no problem with that. Because me, too, there are many people who play my songs like that. But when I take songs, I do them in my own version, that’s theft. It’s different. (personal communication, February 10, 2017)

I pushed back, noting that other artists claim the opposite. Mdou responded:

That’s *false!* That doesn’t make sense. [...] *That’s* what one calls theft. For example, look at me when I take this jacket. [He gestures to a black Nike down jacket folded on the table next to him.] It’s cold out. I’ve arrived, you have a jacket like this, and I take it and I put it on against the cold. I finish, I return it. Is that the same thing as me wanting to take it and change the color? You see? (laughing) Is that the same thing? I take that and I change the color. Before it was a black jacket; now it’s violet. Even you, when you come, if I set it here, you’ll say it’s your vest. But Mdou, he’s added violet color. So, you see? I’ve brought my contribution. So, it’s a theft. You see what I want to say? (ibid.)

He then pulled out his phone and began to flip through it while turning the conversation from metaphors back to music. He brought up Moussa “Tchingou” Eggour, a young guitarist also based in Agadez, who like many musicians in Agadez often plays Mdou’s songs (see Chapter Two). After a few minutes of searching, Mdou found a music video on his phone of Tchingou performing a studio recording of “Tahoultine,” Mdou’s hit song from 2008 (see Chapter Five). For Mdou, the problem is that an artist who performs their own cover version, rather than



replicate the style of the original, is making it seem that a song is theirs. “It’s a theft. There’s not even any hide-and-seek in it!” (ibid.)

A crucial distinction here is whether a song is covered in a live performance or recorded in a studio. There is a practical benefit to performing covers: as in many musical traditions, a common repertoire allows musicians to play together who may have never met before. In many West African musics, including Tuareg guitar, musicians may cycle in and out of playing lead or accompanying parts. This is an important factor in *tagssirs*, where musical sociality is crucial (see Chapter Two), and is also a central means by which maturing musicians gain experience. For paid performances (e.g., at weddings or naming ceremonies), however, the common repertoire enables artists to be flexible and available for gigs on short notice, including when they or their preferred accompanists may be traveling and unavailable.

Making a studio recording is a special occasion for most Tuareg musicians, however. Unlike some live performances, they are most likely recording in a band that has extensive experience rehearsing and playing together in preparation for the recording session. “For us Tuaregs, there’s no problem [with performing covers live],” Mdou explained. “But recording at a studio—that’s like a phone number. You see? Recording at a studio is a sign that says the song is yours. Normally, someone should only record their own works, not what he doesn’t have” (personal communication, February 10, 2017). The distinction between the acceptability of performing covers and the inappropriateness of recording them maps easily onto the foundation of the Western copyright model, in which the materiality of recordings serves to fix songs as copyrightable works and also facilitates disputing unauthorized use (even if under Nigérien law licenses are technically required for performance, too).

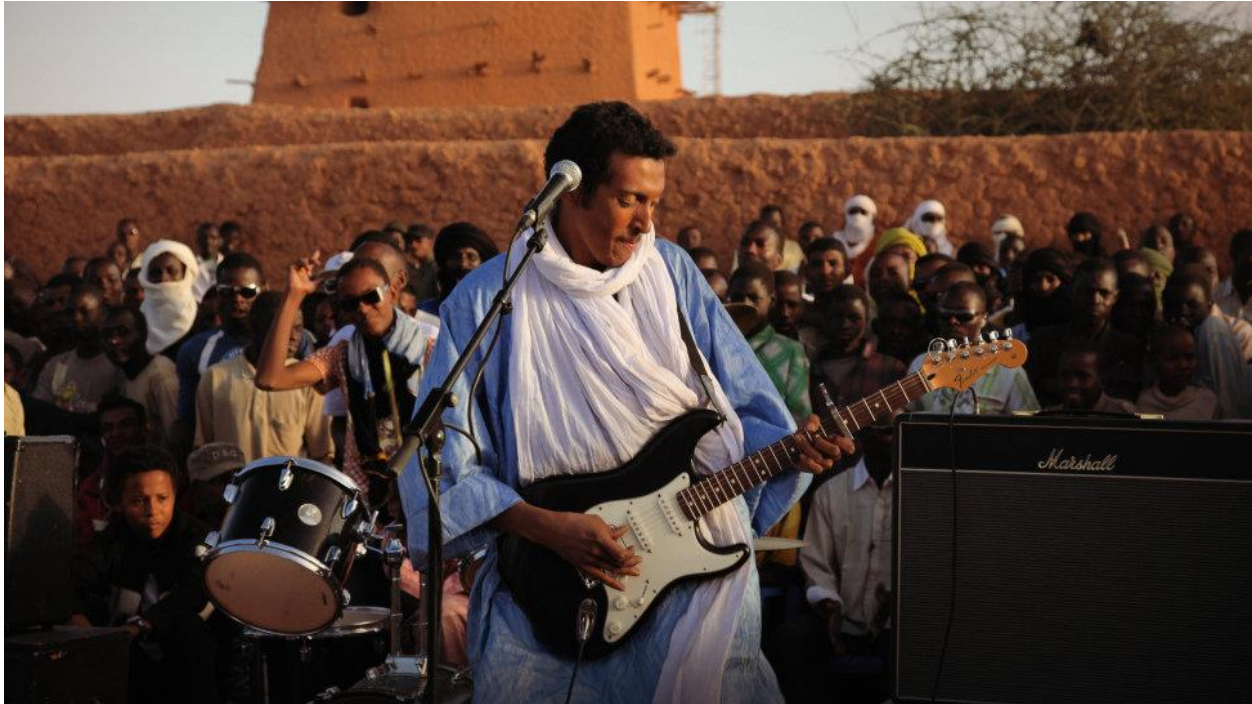
A telling example for the situational evaluations of appropriate and inappropriate performances and recordings is the song “Chet Boghassa” (Tamasheq: “the young women of Boghassa”). Written and composed by Abdallah Alhousseini of Tinariwen, it recalls an important battle from the 1990 rebellion in Mali and became a well-known song of the *ishumar*, later appearing on one of Tinariwen’s earliest international studio albums, *Amassakoul* (2004).<sup>69</sup> On January 17, 2010, Bombino performed a blazing fast version of “Chet Boghassa” outside the Grand Mosque in Agadez as part of a public concert that served as his homecoming celebration following several years of exile in Burkina Faso. It was captured in a memorable scene of Ron Wyman’s documentary *Agadez: The Music and the Rebellion* (2010), which has since circulated on YouTube and other social media (Figure 4.2); another live audio recording by Bombino is included in the Sublime Frequencies album *Guitars from Agadez, Vol. 2* (2009), an almost identical performance except at a somewhat slower tempo.<sup>70</sup> Bombino’s version has become one of the most popular pieces in Agadez, and young guitarists often try to show off their chops by playing its main pentatonic riff as quickly as possible.

It is no surprise, then, that “Chet Boghassa” appears on the Sahel Sounds album *Afelan* (2013), a compilation of field recordings of live performances in Niger by Mdou Moctar. What is important in this case, for Mdou, is that it is not a studio recording; from his perspective, there is no implied claim of authorship. “In the studio, it’s you yourself who decides [what to record]. At weddings, many people can come record with their devices; it’s not the same thing” (personal

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<sup>69</sup> “Chet Boghassa” speaks of the bravery of the members of the Mouvement Populaire de l’Azawad (MPA), one of the Tuareg rebel movements that in 1990 had one of its first skirmishes with the Malian army near the village of Boghassa, on the border of Mali and Algeria. It invokes the young women of Boghassa, whose judgment of the rebels’ valor was meant to be a call to arms and morale boost after the battle led many *ishumars* to abandon the cause and flee for Tamanrasset, Algeria (Belalimat 1996, 63, 122-124; 2003, 12).

<sup>70</sup> As of this writing, the scene is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzWBow0OAeA>.



*Figure 4.2. Bombino performing in front of the Grand Mosque of Agadez at his homecoming concert on January 17, 2010. Photo by Ron Wyman.*

communication, February 10, 2017). Furthermore, in live performances, musicians are often expected to play requests—which may in many cases not be of songs composed by the performer. Indeed, a running joke between Chris Kirkley and Mdou is that Kirkley will call out requests for “Chet Boghassa” during Mdou’s concerts, riffing on its intense popularity in Agadez.

While litigation over copyright disputes may be a familiar and accepted avenue for redress among American musicians, for Tuareg artists in Niger the matter of confronting those who make improper use of compositions remains complicated. Asked to compare his experience of how copyright in Europe and the US works with how it works in Niger, Bombino was matter-of-fact: “Here [in Niger], if you want to make a new album tomorrow and you copy me, who’s going to take you to the judge? Nobody. Because everyone has copied” (personal

communication, December 28, 2016). But this is not simply because of the limitations of the BNDA.

Notions of *asshak* remain tightly bound up with disputes over respect and money. For example, to return to my conversation with Mdou about Tchingou, he told me:

We have our copyright among us. You know, us Tuaregs, we consider ourselves like we're all family. I can't take Tchingou to copyright because he played my song—that's impossible. I can't even talk to Tchingou because he played my song. [...] To say, "Why do you play [my songs], why do you take my songs, why do you such-and-such?" It's shameful for us. We don't say it, we only leave the person. You see? So, we don't talk about copyright. (personal communication, February 10, 2017)

Meanwhile, when I would discuss authorship and copyright with Mohamed Karzo, he expressed strong opinions about the importance of composing one's own songs, but never would name specific artists as examples of those who tend to perform covers. Hoping to identify some concrete examples of problematic covers in order to gain clarity on the politics of covers, I brought up the complaints I had heard about Bombino. I anticipated a spirited response, but while Mohamed didn't contest the perspectives I raised, neither did he add to or elaborate upon them. The attitude that one should not speak in detail about copyright disputes also manifests in an important scene in the film *Akounak*, the adaptation of Prince's *Purple Rain* made by Christopher Kirkley and featuring Mdou Moctar (see Chapter Five). During a *takayt* (picnic) featuring Mdou, his friends, and his love interest Rhaicha along with his rival guitarist Kader Tanoute and his companions, Kader shames Mdou by playing a song he stole from Mdou; Mdou and his bandmates had yet to record or publicly perform it, as they were preparing it for a later music competition against Kader. But rather than shame himself by verbalizing an accusation that Kader had committed theft, Mdou storms away from the *takayt* in a rage.

Besides the matters of *asshak*, of not debasing oneself publicly by showing concern for issues of ownership (or authorship), another dimension of Mdou's relationship to Tchingou is

their differences in age. As discussed in Chapter Two, it would be unusual for Mdou to consort with Tchingou in the social environments where much musical discussion takes place, such as a *fada*, because he is of an adult status. It is not simply a matter of belonging to different age cohorts, however; as I emphasized in the previous chapter, there is a generational shift understood as a move away from the “time of *asshak*.” Moussa Albadé recalls, for example, that during the heyday of the elder *ishumar* musicians like Abdallah Oumbadougou, Hasso Akotey, and Hami Ekawel, “nobody spoke of jealousy. Nobody spoke about ‘he stole the other’s music’ and so on—no. But if there will be talk about Mdou, and [...] of this jealousy, I’m in agreement. It’s the new generation. It’s normal, it’s what they do” (personal communication, November 14, 2016).

## CONCLUSIONS

The anecdotes and statements presented in this chapter illustrate that evaluations of the ethics of covers are highly charged and do not have a clear consensus of opinion. Yet they are all informed by the recognition of ownership and a sense of honorable and dishonorable behavior. These do not operate in particularly different terms between Western copyright regimes and those of contemporary Tuareg musicians, even if the practicalities of how ownership should affect creative action may not be identical among Nigérien and non-Nigérien musicians, nor even among all Nigériens. *Artistes* like Mohamed Karzo identify *interpretation* as a sign of laziness, while Bombino sees arranging as a way to make songs well-known and Mdou Moctar sees it as a form of theft. These concerns are not directly tied to money, however, for in their basis in Agadez all are beyond the scope of the BNDA, working in a nongovernmental music culture.

As *artistes* continue to increase engagement with foreign copyright regimes through the global circulation of their music, whether as touring performers or through the production of albums, international (i.e., principally European and American) copyright ideologies will likely increasingly shape *artistes*' senses of honor. Arudeyni's fears of a stifling of free exchange of a "common heritage" due to copyright may not be fully realized unless the state secures the capacity to better enforce its copyright laws, which seems unlikely in the near future. However, if record producers and talent managers in the US, Europe, and elsewhere who work with *artistes* are called to do their research on the authorship of the songs they release, as some of the Tuareg musicians I spoke with wish, musicians may well see increasing value in composing their own songs so as to avoid the legal and moral ambiguity of arrangements and covers. In the next chapter, I take up some of these issues in exploring the intercultural production of Tuareg *artistes* and independent US record labels.

## CHAPTER 5

### INDEPENDENT RECORD LABELS AND THE CIRCULATION OF TUAREG MUSIC

Tourism, international tours, and recordings in which Tuareg musicians participate—what I called “musical strategies of extraversion” in Chapter One—largely rely on the exploitation of representations of Tuareg identity. If Tuareg culture has thus come to be understood as a resource, what happens as it circulates internationally? Culture is not raw material; although material resources may take on symbolic significance, they are unlike cultural goods or phenomena because this is not their primary importance. For example, Karl Marx ([1867] 1978) famously argues that the value of cotton is most notably transformed through a worker’s labor that turns it into a coat. Arjun Appadurai (1986), on the other hand, suggests that the more relevant issue is how value is transformed as it moves through contexts, or “regimes of value.” Yet throughout this dissertation, I have shown how entangled Tuareg value regimes have become with a global capitalist regime; there are no clear-cut boundaries, even as there are real and perceived differences in the orientations of various historic and cultural settings.

Understanding the treatment of culture as a resource that can be put into circulation demands attention to what anthropologist Fred R. Myers calls “culture making” and “intercultural production” (Myers 2001, 2002). As a case study of the intercultural production involved in the global circulation of Tuareg music, this chapter focuses on the work of two American independent record labels prominently involved in this process: Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds.

Myers argues that researchers can better understand circulation among different regimes of value by focusing on the making of meaning and the social relations within which it occurs. Such intercultural production does not happen in simple dichotomies like “us” and “them” (or as

often appears in discourse about Tuareg music, “Tuareg” and “Westerners”), but rather “through historically and institutionally specific mediations” (Myers 2002, 351). Ethnomusicologist David Novak (2013) makes a related point when he argues that analyzing circulation is not about showing how a cultural form enters into production in one place and emerges, changed, in reception somewhere else. If the cultural output of circulation connects back to input in “transformative cycles of feedback” and “always provokes something else,” then, it needs to be understood as “a nexus of cultural production that defines the things, places, and practices within its loops” (Novak 2013, 17–18). Novak writes specifically about the noise music culture shared by a network of North Americans and Japanese, in which artists rooted at both geographic ends of its circulation (i.e., North America and Japan) are producing performances and recordings. Unlike noise, however, in Tuareg guitar music there is a division of artistic labor more familiar to observers of world music: its principle performers are African, its curators North American and European.

I thus turn specifically to Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds as examples of institutions that curate Tuareg culture in particular ways. Rather than operating as labels within the market-oriented value regime of the mainstream music industry, they position themselves as subversive alternatives. Indeed, Novak (2011) has elsewhere described Sublime Frequencies as part of an underground network of music collectors who have developed a new model of world music circulation, sometimes referred to as “World Music 2.0.” I begin this chapter by showing how both Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds situate themselves against the market regime of the music industry through discursive claims and by developing their own value regime, a point which manifests most clearly in their work salvaging extant recordings for remediation. However, I show that new recording projects also serve these ends by involving direct



collaboration with Tuareg artists. In the last section, I examine how meaning and value is made for Tuareg music through curation. When some projects by these labels strive to be egalitarian collaborations as a critique of the exploitation involved in much world music production, unequal intellectual and material infrastructures in Niger and the United States seriously limit the agentive participation of Tuareg in making meaning of their artistry.

### **SALVAGING ARID FIDELITY**

Recent scholarship by Marta Amico (2013), Nadia Belalimat (2010), and Susan Rasmussen (2005), among others, analyzes many challenges and confrontations in mediating Tuareg music for global consumption, particularly in the global north. Amico, for example, shows that rather than having been a pre-existing object picked up for export, “Tuareg music” as an object of inquiry and consumption has been constructed in the past half-century through ethnographic field recordings, albums released for world music and rock audiences, and performances with international musicians on stages worldwide. This work provides excellent insights on processes by which Tuareg music is rendered legible for audiences who may know little, if anything, about Tuareg culture.

However, I suggest here that more can be done to understand the unique ways in which Tuareg music is mediated by attending to the particularities of global circulation and intercultural production, as Myers suggests. Preceding chapters have already demonstrated how the “Tuareg” category is itself full of political, ethnic, and other internal distinctions. Similarly, consumers and producers of Tuareg music in the global north are not a monolithic crowd of world music aficionados, but rather work within their own particular social fields. Indeed, as explained by Andy Morgan, former manager of the preeminent Tuareg band Tinariwen, the group was able to

transition from a predominately world music listenership in its first releases and later tap into rock markets as well (Amico 2013, 102). Thus, to speak simply of “Tuareg” and “Western” regimes or categories of analysis obscures a lot of the intersubjective production of meaning and value at play.

Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds are among the growing cohort of small labels that produce world musics while consciously working against the values of the mainstream record industry. The separation between Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds, on one hand, and other producers of Tuareg music, on the other, is not a simple matter of differentiation between “major” corporate labels and independent labels; the implied orientating poles in cultural production—what might be reduced to art/commerce—are incredibly complicit. Furthermore, many prominent releases by major Tuareg artists have been released by independent labels.<sup>71</sup> Timothy Taylor’s (2016) examination of the independent label Burger Records, based in Southern California, is a helpful model for thinking through the work of Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds. His case study shows that social actors outside the mainstream music industry negotiate their relationship to capitalism by attempting to create value in regimes other than the industry’s dominant economic regime. Through restricted production of cassettes and the creation of its own scene, Burger Records strives to escape the ever-expanding net of contemporary capitalism. Yet labels like Burger Records are not simply working in the sort of artistic field of cultural production that Pierre Bourdieu (1993) describes as the “economic world reversed”; rather than there being two sorts of social fields that exist in a relationship of dominance and subordination, as Bourdieu proposes, a more amorphous structure is emerging in

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<sup>71</sup> For example, Bombino’s *Azel* (2016) was released by Partisan Records and Knitting Factory Records, while several Tinariwen albums (between 2002 and 2009) were released by World Village before its acquisition by PIAS Records in 2015.

which large-scale cultural production becomes increasingly monolithic while restricted fields (like the Burger Records scene) proliferate (Taylor 2016b, 170-173).

While Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds share many positions and values with Burger Records, they are best understood within the recent shift in the circulation of world music identified by Novak (2011). Grounded in internet culture, this new generation of world music (“World Music 2.0”) is generating a new listenership aligned with the “hegemonic frameworks of intellectual property” that characterize both academic and music industry categories of world music (Novak 2011, 604). It is based on an underground redistribution, primarily in North America, of existing recordings of world popular musics as “new old” media. Recordings often made and circulated on old media formats (e.g., vinyl, cassette, as well as radio) are redistributed via the internet, although they may also be released via older media forms that have seen a resurgence among independent labels, such as cassettes and vinyl records. Drawing on the work of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000), Novak highlights how this “remediation” process, incorporating older media forms into new technologies, works in an interdependent media environment (Novak 2011, 605n2). Remediators in this new mode of circulation emphasize “discovery of unknown [and obscure] gems,” valorize open source culture, fetishize distorted sound, and celebrate their “aural ethnography” as a critique of the inaccessibility, privileging of traditional musical forms, and obtuse liner notes they see as characterizing academic field recordings. In essence, “regional music cultures are filtered through the wow and flutter of an unlabeled cassette, the obscuring static of an ephemeral radio signal, or the chains of quasi-anonymous speculations about sources in the comments of a YouTube video” (ibid., 605-607). Although not expressed in such terms, by describing the practices and ideologies of a new

phase of world music circulation, Novak begins to outline a core value regime for this scene.<sup>72</sup> In the following sections, I explore two separate projects by Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds to clarify some of the dominant values of these labels.

### **Sublime Frequencies**

Sublime Frequencies is principally the work of Hisham Mayet and Alan Bishop (a member of the experimental post-punk group the Sun City Girls), who are rooted in a DIY (do-it-yourself) community of record collectors, amateur ethnographers, and avant-garde musicians in Seattle, Washington.<sup>73</sup> Over several years, Mayet, Bishop (and his brother Richard Bishop), their friend Mark Gergis, and other like-minded explorers would regularly get together to show materials they found and produced during travel abroad, whether self-made field recordings and films or records collected from a variety of sources. Mayet tells *Indy Week* that, after some enthusiastic responses to public screenings they organized around Seattle, “we decided to go on a suicide mission and start a label dealing with obscure and esoteric music and video from the far reaches of the globe” (Toenes 2007). Their “suicide mission” took shape with the official

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<sup>72</sup> The practices and values attributed to the “World Music 1.0” implied by Novak (2011) have not disappeared; nor has this fundamentally economic regime remained static. These older and newer regimes coexist, feed into each other, and mutually construct one another. As media studies scholar Matt Stahl argues, “no mode of production exists in any pure state”; contemporary capitalism is characterized by a sort of “nonsynchronicity,” in which multiple forms of capitalism that emerged in different periods overlap (Stahl 2013, 17). Major labels distributing world music releases selectively appropriate certain elements of the new generation even as they continue to privilege certain aesthetics of the earlier model; major releases of Tuareg music, such as Bombino’s *Nomad* (2013) on Nonesuch Records, feature clean audio recorded at state-of-the-art studios, but were made available on vinyl. As these corporate practices shift, so too must the countercultural approach of the independent world music scene, the “2.0” group, reconfigure its modes of subversion.

<sup>73</sup> The history of Sublime Frequencies presented here synthesizes information from several published interviews and secondary sources: Toenes 2007; Novak 2011; Tonry 2011; Superfly Records 2015; and several contributions to the volume edited by Michael E. Veal and E. Tammy Kim, *Punk Ethnography: Artists and Scholars Listen to Sublime Frequencies* (Veal and 0016b): Beta 2016; Masters 2016; Tonry 2016; Veal and Kim 2016a.

launching of Sublime Frequencies in 2003, at which point they declared an ethos of aesthetic curiosity and institutional critique in an ambitious manifesto posted on the label's website:

SUBLIME FREQUENCIES is a collective of explorers dedicated to acquiring and exposing obscure sights and sounds from modern and traditional urban and rural frontiers via film and video, field recordings, radio and short wave transmissions, international folk and pop music, sound anomalies, and other forms of human and natural expression not documented sufficiently through all channels of academic research, the modern recording industry, media, or corporate foundations.<sup>74</sup>

Building on the travel and musical interests of Mayet, Bishop, and other collaborators who would come to contribute recordings and films for the label, Sublime Frequencies soon developed a catalog with strong representation of Southeast Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel.<sup>75</sup>

Not much later, in 2004, Mayet traveled for his first visit to Niger, a place that would become a prominent fixture of his Sublime Frequencies oeuvre. He had been introduced to sounds from Niger through his long-term collecting of ethnographic recordings, particularly by the Discques Ocora label founded by French musicologist Charles Duvelle, and through volunteer work at the University of Washington. However, that first voyage was more driven by an interest in visual exploration than in aural possibilities:

My motivation to go to Niger in 2004 came about from my exposure to the films of Jean Rouch as well as Werner Herzog's film *Herdsmen of the Sun* on the Wodaabe. Rouch's film *Les maîtres fous* was utterly startling for me at a young age and made a permanent impression. I was fascinated with what was going [on] at this mythical and remote corner in West Africa. (personal communication, May 5, 2017)

For that voyage, Mayet accompanied anthropologist Adeline Masquelier to Dogondoutchi, a town in southern Niger known for its vibrant practice of indigenous Bori spirit possession rituals, which are widely perceived as in decline (cf. Masquelier 2001). After nearly two weeks in

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<sup>74</sup> <http://www.sublimefrequencies.com/pages/about>, accessed April 9, 2017.

<sup>75</sup> Appendix A lists Sublime Frequencies' releases from West Africa and the Maghreb.

Dogondoutchi, Mayet “ran into some complications with some of the local sorcery,” and decided to head north to Agadez. At that time, “Agadez was truly the end of the earth. I had no idea what to expect when I arrived, but was happy to be somewhere else for a spell” (personal communication, May 5, 2017). While principally focused on film, Mayet’s ears remained open and his audio recorder at hand to document any compelling sounds he encountered.

One eventual result of this omnivorous listening sensibility was the 2013 album *Radio Niger*, featuring recordings made by Mayet as he tuned in to various radio stations in Niger. It follows one of the archetypical album genres that Sublime Frequencies is known for producing, the radio collage, in which Mayet, Bishop, or other contributors record local radio transmissions abroad and re-arrange them as new aural experiences that may blend songs, advertisements, talk shows, news presentations, and other radio phenomena.<sup>76</sup> Like other releases in the *Radio* series, such as *Radio Java* (2003) or *Radio Morocco* (2004), *Radio Niger* is presented with provocative track titles like “Sahel Drum-Machine Gun” and “Death on the Back of the Neck.” No explanation is really provided of what the titles mean for individual tracks, although the liner notes provide a cursory overview of the sounds encountered in Nigérien radio culture. The sparse notes are less invested in thorough ethnographic explanations than in extending the poetic seduction of the track titles:

DJs bring an improvisational element to local radio: singing along with tracks live on air; creating live multichannel compositions and avant-collage cutups; and generally preserving the human element that has long since disappeared from corporate western radio. In short, Radio Niger is outlaw radio, broadcast with freedom and spontaneity, and bathed in an arid fidelity that reveals the region’s character and landscape.

It is remarkable that these very same liner notes reveal that Niger’s official government radio station, begun in 1958, was once called Radio Niger—the very antithesis of “outlaw radio.”

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<sup>76</sup> See Veal and Kim 2016b for more on the radio collage series by Sublime Frequencies.

Although the state-run station has been known as La Voix du Sahel (“The Voice of the Sahel”) since the 1970s, the shared name of the album (which follows the naming pattern established by other Sublime Frequencies radio releases) and of the station muddies the fact that *Radio Niger* includes recordings made from several different radio stations that have operated legally in the country since liberalization of mass media in Niger during the 1990s. Adding to the confusion is the fact that the notes also refer to the 1979 founding of the Broadcasting Corporation of Niger State (BCNS), a misleading statement here since the BCNS was established by the government of Niger State in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Differentiating between the Republic of Niger, the Niger River (and Niger Delta), and Niger State in Nigeria—all with differing pronunciations according to their competing francophone and anglophone colonial legacies—is, admittedly, not always an easy task. Nonetheless, the inclusion of obfuscating cultural information reveals a casual attitude toward the conventional carefulness of academic research.

The album’s eight tracks are collected from a variety of radio sources, some of which are identified in the track titles: the privately-owned Radio Ténéré in Niamey in “Radio Tenere: Goudel Molo Swagger,” and the private Agadezian stations Nomade FM and Sahara FM in “Nomad/Sahara FM.” But it is not clear if these tracks document sounds only from the identified stations; other tracks on the album clearly integrate recordings from these stations, as well. “Auto-Tune Your Own Scene!” for example, begins with the regal strumming of the Tuareg *tahardent* lute, the slow and stately booming of the *tende* drum, and women singing “*afous d’afous*” (Tamasheq: “hand in hand,” an expression invoking peace, solidarity, and justice). A few moments into the track, the voice of the radio DJ (Issouf Hadan of Nomade FM, although he is not identified) cuts in over the music, gently intoning “*afous d’afous*” along with the women before making announcements in Tamasheq. His voice is clear, but in the background one can

hear the women's voices skip and repeat, the immediately recognizable digital noise of a faulty CD ripping job predestined by a media infrastructure in disrepair and at the mercy of extremes of dust and heat. After nearly two minutes, there is a moment of quiet interrupted by a low, fuzzy blip—perhaps the sound of a needle dropping on vinyl. Then the rapid beating of *ganga* barrel drums and wailing of *algaita* shawms performed for Hausa rulers fades in. Two or three seconds later, the crackling distortion of changing a radio tuner signals the transition to a new song in the track. It is the call of a solo woman's voice and response of a women's chorus accompanied by a heterophonic electric guitar line and rollicking drum line—the signature sound of Agadezian Hausa-Tuareg *brassage*, in this case Groupe Tasko. Much of the rest of the track continues in a similar fashion, and it is not until the beginning of the next track, “Moussa Poussy Galore!” (named for the late Nigérien pop star), that we hear the Auto-Tuned voices and synthesized instrumental sounds that immediately identify *dandalin soyayya*, the music of Nigeria's Hausa film industry. The collage that Mayet pieces together in “Auto-Tune Your Own Scene!” thus comes off as a sort of declaration of resistance to the domination of the Nigerian Hausa film industry in Agadez: don't Auto-Tune *our* music, Auto-Tune your *own* scene!

This example shows that *Radio Niger* is not simply a project of remediating “new old media,” one of the cornerstones of the new world music circulation model identified by Novak. Much of the material heard on radio in Niger, particularly of folk traditions, was indeed recorded decades ago by ORTN. Copies of the original tapes have been made and reproduced by private stations, sometimes digitized for even easier distribution, so that recordings that could have once been imagined as once belonging to the ORTN are now available at dozens of stations across the country.<sup>77</sup> But local popular musics like *dandalin soyayya* are newer media productions; so are

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<sup>77</sup> To consider this “piracy” would falsely characterize this as principally a process of taking, rather than an exchange in which ORTN employees have been complicit, sometimes taking personal monetary



the musical advertisements, the announcements filtered through artificial audio effects like reverberation and echo, and the contributions of DJs singing along to the media. Perhaps by accident, some of the material that appears in these collages also comes by way of remediation that the local stations have themselves performed, such as by playing recordings from European world music releases: The *tahardent-* and *tende-*accompanied singing of “*afous d’afous*” at the beginning of “Auto-Tune Your Own Scene!” is by Malian Tuareg group Tartit, and appears on their album *Ichichila*, released by the German label Network in 2000. Layers upon layers of remediation are at play here, the old and the new blurred in what Mayet describes as “an astonishingly diverse sonic patchwork.”

In the sounds, track titles, and liner notes of *Radio Niger*—as in the collective work of Sublime Frequencies—the notion of ontological clarity, of the rational ethnographic explanation of Nigérien radio soundscapes for listeners’ comprehension, is treated with skepticism. Whether the details of Nigérien radio history in the liner notes is accurate or conflated with other histories, and whether listeners grasp the nuances of Mayet’s resistance medley in “Auto-Tune Your Own Scene!,” is ultimately of little consequence. As Michael Veal and Tammy Kim show, Sublime Frequencies often invokes academic ethnomusicology as a sort of “straight man” to which the label’s producers are opposed as “ethnographic Robin Hoods” (Veal and Kim 2016a, 6). Claims of righting injustices of scholarship are dubious, however, given that they ignore several decades’ worth of new ethical considerations and standards among ethnographers, developed following the 1980s–1990s crisis of representation (cf. Clifford and Marcus 1986). The label has also been subject to sharp critiques and questions about its compensation of artists, who may be

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contributions in return for copies of their media. As anthropologist Brian Larkin shows with regard to media in northern Nigeria, in many cases piracy is not so much a pathology as it is the prerequisite of media circulation (2008, 240).

unidentified or powerless to protect their work through intellectual property claims (Veal and Kim 2016a, 2016b; Paul 2016, 112).

Nonetheless, through their collagist records, conventional field recordings, films, and other projects, they offer experimental sound ethnographies that purport to right some of the power imbalances of conventional ethnography. For example, in an article reviewing *Radio Java*, ethnomusicologist Andrew C. McGraw writes: “That Sublime Frequencies does not attempt to label or explain any of the tracks on this disc reminds us of the ways in which ethnomusicologists (and ethnographic filmmakers, art curators, and anthropologists, et al.) consolidate their position through the power to name” (McGraw 2016, 335). “Instead of studying and learning minutiae,” one *Radio Java* listener writes in *Blastitude*, “I’m just FEELING it” (quoted in McGraw 2016, 336). The label thus purposefully downplays the sorts of mediation and rational cultural exegesis practiced by the Western academy and music industry.

I caution against overstating this point, however; much of the scholarship about Sublime Frequencies leaves readers with the impression that this is an absolute, unyielding position made by the label, when in fact it plays an active role not only in remediation (discussed in Novak 2011) but in contributing its own narratives about the music it shares (discussed in the final section of this chapter). Furthermore, ethnomusicologist David Font-Navarette observes that

the goal of sharing a “raw, impressionistic and wholly subjective ecstatic” experience is not at odds with ethnography; on the contrary, a considerable and growing body of scholarship emphasizes precisely these goals. The more important and interesting questions explore various ways that media—recordings, images, and texts like those published by Sublime Frequencies—simultaneously enable *and* limit transmissions of experience. (Font-Navarette 2016, 159)

Regardless of whether it holds up to scrutiny, the critique of conventional ethnographic practice allows Sublime Frequencies to claim a subversive identity befitting its avant-garde roots.

These origins inform some of the core aesthetic values in the work of Sublime

Frequencies: rawness, distortion, the sights and sounds of the unfiltered. Novak notes that the by-products and accidental effects of analog media exchange, such as those distortions and blips heard in “Auto-Tune Your Own Scene!,” have become aesthetic icons of the fair use and open access practices at the core of World Music 2.0 (Novak 2011, 624). This is one side to the “arid fidelity” of Nigérien radio Mayet describes in the liner notes of *Radio Niger*. But rawness is not only an icon of DIY culture and the new mode of world music circulation; it is also the condition creating the simulacrum of an authentic, “unmediated” recording.

In the world of African art traders, as anthropologist and art historian Christopher Steiner shows in his research in Côte d’Ivoire (Steiner 1994, 1995), the perceived authenticity of an object has tremendous bearing on its value. This is because the closer to its context of creation the object appears to be, the less likely it is fake; art dealers, understanding this, frequently manipulate not only the placement of objects but the objects themselves (e.g., by artificially aging them) in order to create an illusion of discovery for Western art buyers. African traders will deliberately keep art objects in the back of their shops, tucked away from the commodity-saturated streets of markets so that they may appear to be untouched by extensive trade networks. Furthermore, Western art consumers are rarely interested in the identities of the artists or object histories of local ownership in the same way they would be with Western objects; African objects are generally worth more if perceived to have been created by a departed or unknown artist and to have come directly from a remote village community. “The mystique of ‘direct’ contact,” writes Steiner, “elevates the value and authenticity of the piece” (Steiner 1995, 157). A sort of “paradox of authenticity” emerges, then: an object must be marked as authentic in order to be experienced as authentic, yet that very marking is itself a mediation, belying any sense of authenticity as being untouched (ibid., 159).

Granted, ethnographic recordings are not subject to the same evaluations as art objects; although there are undoubtedly many commonalities, they operate in different regimes of value. Authenticity is determined and understood differently. Even if distortion in sound is one analog of the patina of a metal art object, Steiner's observations are nonetheless helpful for thinking about the work of Sublime Frequencies. To mark their productions as raw, unfiltered, and authentic requires the label's producers to make deliberate choices. Indeed, for the collages in *Radio Niger*, Mayet could have easily opted to exclusively remediate the cleaner sounds of BBC and RFI transmissions in Niger if he so wished.

The visual presentation of Sublime Frequencies productions is another important mode of evoking rawness. The cover art for many album and film releases feature unpolished collages, recalling not only the handmade zines of the punk and independent music scenes but also the rough-hewn copy-and-pasted digital art of the contemporary Sahel-Saharan internet world (compare Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2). Many of the releases in the *Guitars from Agadez* series have covers displaying a low-key photograph (i.e., one with primarily dark tones and high contrast) produced from the poor lighting conditions of nighttime Tuareg guitar performances, settings in which a better equipped or professional photographer would be able to produce more balanced exposures (Figure 5.3). Not all releases present this same visual aesthetic; the covers of many more recent releases by Sublime Frequencies, for example, are stamped with the label's globe logo and feature cleaner fonts. Nonetheless, many releases are characterized by the aesthetics described here, displaying an affinity for DIY, a disdain for the sheen of professionalism.

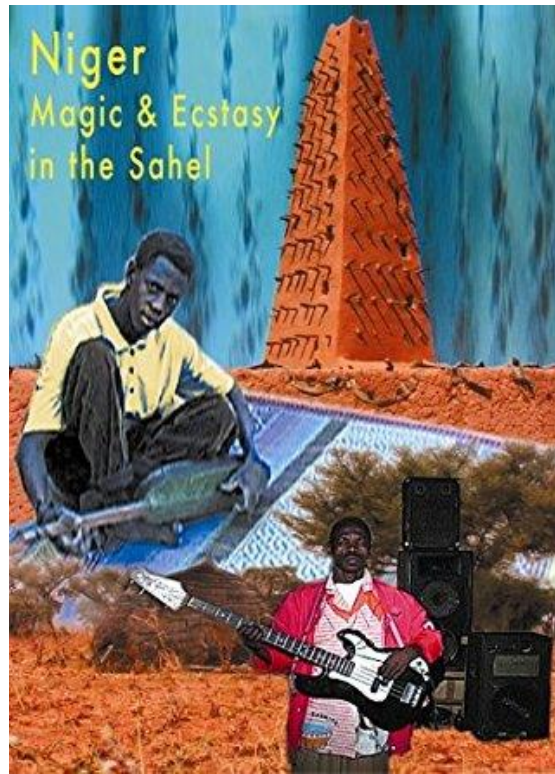


Figure 5.1. Front cover of *Sublime Frequencies DVD Niger: Magic and Ecstasy in the Sahel* (2005).

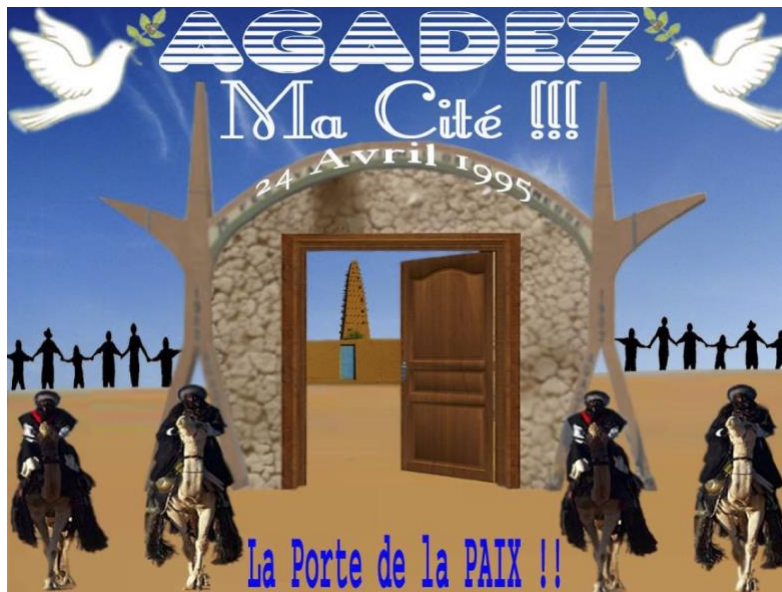


Figure 5.2. Digital art (author unknown) commemorating the peace settlement ending the first Tuareg rebellion in Niger, recirculated on social media ahead of the Agadez Sokni festival in December 2017.



Figure 5.3. Front of Sublime Frequencies album Group Inerane: Guitars from Agadez, Vol. 4 (2011).

As an exemplar of the new mode of world music circulation, then, Sublime Frequencies trades on mystery, on the guerrilla tactics of refusal (i.e., refusal to be pinned down by the scientific rationality), on contradiction, on surprise. One reviewer of *Radio Niger* highlights the appeal of this approach: “While there are many fine reasons to love Sublime Frequencies, their latest album highlights a personal favorite: their unwavering willingness to release superficially absurd, financially doomed, or utterly uncategorizable projects solely because they are interesting and unique” (d’Amico 2014). “Financially doomed” releases are less than ideal in a regime grounded on economic value; indeed, the label frequently limits pressings of its releases, contradicting its open culture premise that music wants to be free, their “corrective to the failures of industry” (Novak 2011, 619). For the artistic regime in which Sublime Frequencies is situated, the pursuit of economic value has been replaced by values of raw aesthetics and the perceived suspension of ethnographic omniscience.

## Sahel Sounds

Sahel Sounds began in 2009, not as a label but as a blog and art project, a way for founder Christopher Kirkley to explore West Africa through sound and writing. The label's website elaborates on his work:

Sahel Sounds is the project of Christopher Kirkley, gentleman explorer/music archivist/artist/curator/and occasional dj. His work examines contemporary popular musics in an evolving technological landscape from the interplay of localized traditions with transglobal influences to new media models of cultural transmission.<sup>78</sup>

Prior to his travels in West Africa, he had spent a year in Brazil exploring and writing, an experience that informed his later projects. He had been living in New York before that voyage, immersed in an artists' scene that prided itself on its DIY ethos, on its lack of access to money, materials, or formal education. As he explains: "I was surrounded by a lot of artists who were like, 'You don't need to study this stuff. You don't need to go to art school. You want to make art? Make art. You want to play in a band? Get some instruments'" (personal communication, March 6, 2017). Now living in Portland, Oregon, where he grew up, Kirkley remains grounded in an artistic community that is largely dismissive of academic convention. Although he rarely makes as combative statements about academia as Sublime Frequencies has, he proudly presents himself as a "guerilla ethnomusicologist."<sup>79</sup>

Kirkley more explicitly critiques extant academic and commercial recordings of West African music in a 2013 episode of the radio program and website Afropop Worldwide that features Sahel

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<sup>78</sup> <http://sahelsounds.com/about/>, accessed April 10, 2017.

<sup>79</sup> Both Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds have collaborated with academic ethnographers, so it should be noted that their critiques appear to be mostly discursive and about methodology, rather than dismissive of ethnographic work as a whole. Hisham Mayet has assembled a book presenting photographs by the French musicologist Charles Duvelle, who co-founded the Ocora label and recorded a number of music traditions in West Africa (Duvelle and Mayet 2017). In the case of Christopher Kirkley, his release *Harafin So: Bollywood Inspired Film Music from Hausa Nigeria* (2013) is one example in which he collaborated with scholars Brian Larkin and Carmen McCain, specialists in Hausa film, to publicize this artistic world and make recordings accessible to listeners outside Nigeria.

Sounds:

The effort of the label is to capture what is actually happening on the ground in Mali right now or in West Africa, to showcase some of the pop music that people are actually listening to.... I think that a lot of the world music that we hear right now in America or in the West is not really representative of what people are listening to in West Africa. (Backer 2013)

Capturing “what is actually happening on the ground” takes many forms in Kirkley’s work: he has generally spurned the aesthetics and recording studios tied to mainstream world music labels in North America, Europe, and West Africa, preferring instead to release recordings he obtains via digital media exchange, digging in archives, and field recordings. Unlike most of the releases on Sublime Frequencies, this is achieved by privileging new media and electronic music, with albums celebrating cell phone culture, hip hop, film soundtracks, and synthesizers, contemporary cultural production largely ignored by the world music industry.

About six months after returning from his eighteen-month first trip in West Africa, Kirkley met up with the team at Mississippi Records, a record store and label in Portland that offered to put some of his recordings on an album. He was hesitant at first:

I was really reluctant to turn [Sahel Sounds] into a label. You know? Because I had that idea too—that it crosses over into commercial territory, and that’s not what I’m about. I’m not about selling these things. But that first record, you know, it kind of twisted my arm, because, well, look—I recorded all this stuff, and everybody I recorded was a friend, and I know their financial situation—and now there’s money that’s going to be offered to them. (personal communication, January 20, 2014)

In 2010, Sahel Sounds and Mississippi Records released the first album of the new label: *Ishilan n-Tenere: Guitar Music from the Western Sahel*. Much of the Sahel Sounds catalog, especially early on, was jointly produced with independent record stores and labels like Mississippi Records and Little Axe.<sup>80</sup> The label began to attract more widespread attention and enthusiasm in 2011, however, when it released *Music from Saharan Cellphones*. Drawing from a collection of recordings acquired during

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<sup>80</sup> Appendix B lists Sahel Sounds releases available as of this writing.



Kirkley’s 2009–2010 stay in Kidal, a town in northern Mali, the compilation album captured the fascination of listeners throughout North America and Europe. Many of the tracks had been previously released on cassette in 2010, with a handful of tracks unidentified; Kirkley turned to the blog to provide a dynamic track listing that would be updated as he learned more about their identities. He also provided links to websites with more information about the artists, including MySpace and Facebook accounts and links to music blogs Awesome Tapes from Africa and Ghost Capital (where more downloads, including of the digitized cassette, were available).<sup>81</sup>

For the LP and digital release of *Saharan Cellphones* in 2011 (Figure 5.4), Kirkley tracked down the artists and track names—the track selection is not quite the same as on the cassette—and (according to his website) promised them 60% of the proceeds.<sup>82</sup> In face-to-face encounters and breathless

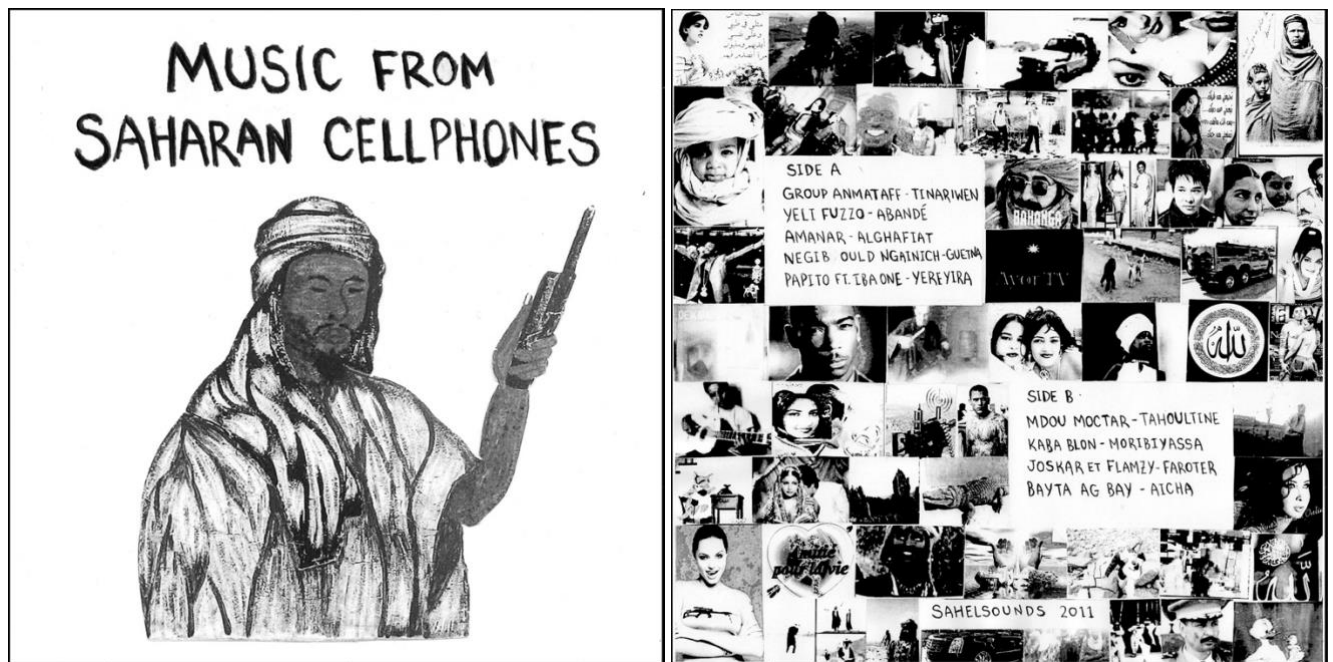


Figure 5.4. Front and back covers of *Music from Saharan Cellphones*.

<sup>81</sup> <http://sahelsounds.com/2010/10/tracklist-from-music-from-saharan-cellphones/>, accessed April 10, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> <https://sahelsounds.bandcamp.com/album/music-from-saharan-cellphones>, accessed April 10, 2017.

journalistic features, Kirkley was showered with positive feedback for what he later described as a rather mundane production:

[*Saharan Cellphones*] got a lot of attention, and I think a lot of attention was like, “Wow, people are listening to music on their phones!” It provided a contrasting image, but that contrasting image is just...the mainstream image in West Africa. It’s kinda weird. It’s like coming over and saying like, “Hey, so, this is what’s happening here.” I’ve been saying that to people and they’re like, “Wow! That’s amazing! The project!” And it’s like, well, it’s not really that amazing—it’s just what’s happening, you know? (laughing) (personal communication, January 20, 2014)

Yet in his earliest dispatches about Sahel-Saharan cellphone culture, Kirkley’s excitement is just as palpable as those of his audiences. His January 18, 2010 blog post “Home taping is killing music,” sprinkled with audio and video recordings and interviews collected via cellphone, illustrates this point:

On a near moonless night, the bus rumbles to a halt. The passengers all debark along the side of the road — a vast clear plain clouded in by the shadows of the Dogon cliffs [in Mali] — somewhere on the national highway between Douentza and Hombori. As all the weary passengers sit, they all are pulling out cellphones, and soon the mass is illuminated by little square blue screens. There is no cellular phone reception here — this is not important. They are not making calls. Rather, what ensues is an orchestra of tinny digital audio, a menagerie of sound, beamed out like starlight over the plain.<sup>83</sup>

African encounters with young technologies have fascinated Westerners for a long time; Brian Larkin (2008), for example, draws attention to how British observers were perhaps projecting their own notions of the awe-inspiring sublime more than local meanings when reporting the completion of railways, first uses of electrical lighting, and projections of film reels in northern Nigeria during the colonial era. This fetishism of technology permeates *Saharan Cellphones* and the Sahel Sounds oeuvre. In the Afropop Worldwide program mentioned above, a brief segment is dedicated to the sound of Kirkley clicking through his phone to play a few highlights from his collection. Contributors to a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign to fund the vinyl release of *Music from Saharan Cellphones: Volume 2* could be rewarded with their own cellphone from West Africa pre-loaded with mp3s. Meanwhile, the liner notes for the first volume (Figure 5.5) list the names of artists and track titles,

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<sup>83</sup> <http://sahelsounds.com/2010/01/home-taping-is-killing-music/>, accessed April 10, 2017.

supplemented with brief explanations of their origins: Tuareg groups from Algeria, Mali, and Niger; synthesizer music from Mauritania; Malian hip hop; Ivoirian coupé décalé. But they also include the original and often cryptic filenames (e.g., “Baye AHMED.mp3,” “Dimi 2M.mp3,” “ISFOU.63.mp3,” etc.), id3 tags that provide metadata about the mp3 files (some are just “Track” or “Titre inconnu,” and others are mysterious strings of numbers: “6555768”), and bit rates (from 64kbps to 192kbps). The song title “Tinariwen” is spelled according to English conventions, but the idiosyncratic francophone spelling “Tinariouin” from the id3 tag remains in the notes. Meanwhile, these notes are typed up in a mono-spaced font that recalls the old materiality of typewriters and signifies the DIY culture in which Kirkley is rooted. Heavily compressed digital audio, made available on vinyl, printed as if from an analog era with inconsistent spellings: the paradox of rawness and authenticity permeates the work of Sahel Sounds, too.

The role of writing is an important element in considerations about the ways authenticity is instrumentalized by Sahel Sounds. There is a long tradition of travel writing, particularly in African settings, serving to authenticate traders’ claims to have acquired genuine cultural objects; the prevailing logic has been that the more difficult the search for the objects, the more authentic the find (Steiner

#### **Tracklist:**

Group Anmataff - Tinariwen  
filename: Baye AHMED.mp3  
id3 tag: 01 Tinariouin  
bitrate: 128 kb/s

Group Anmataff is a young group of Tuareg musicians from Tamanrasset, Algeria. This song was composed using a Groovebox - a programmable drum machine - to replicate the common rhythm used in Ishumar guitar. It was recorded as a demo and transferred to a few friends.

*Figure 5.5. Detail of liner notes of Music from Saharan Cellphones.*

1995, 152-153). The intersection of discourses of authenticity and exploration (among others) has an “immense inertia” (Taylor 1997, 30): when he describes himself as a “gentleman explorer,” as he does on the Sahel Sounds website and on his business cards, Kirkley positions himself within the lineage of predominately white, masculine adventurers valorized in African travel accounts by Europeans and Americans since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see, for example, Hanson 1991; Young 1995; Barrett-Gaines 1997; Scholze 2010). He also fits within similar tropes that have shaped world music productions at least since the 1980s, in which Western artists like Paul Simon, Mickey Hart, or Stewart Copeland have traveled to far reaches of the globe and returned with fresh musical material (Taylor 1997, 28-31).

Furthermore, descriptions of nighttime bus rides and stories about tracking down performers encountered via cellphone recordings allow readers to recognize Kirkley’s adventures in the Sahel-Sahara, sometimes flirting with danger. Writing is less central to Sublime Frequencies, but even their releases like *Radio Pyongyang: Commie Funk and Agit Pop from the Hermit Kingdom* (2005) and *Choubi Choubi! Folk and Pop Songs from Iraq* (2005) suggest riskiness and distance by way of their origins in countries identified by President Bush, around the time of their release, as the “Axis of Evil.” Although visitors to these and other countries might hear local radio transmissions, mp3s traded via cellphone, or synthesizer-infused hip hop just by turning on a stereo or walking down the street, everyday sounds are seemingly excavated from greater distances because they evade mediation by the mainstream Western music industry. In this sense, then, claims to capture what is “actually happening on the ground” serve to heighten the perceived global distance between listeners and musicians, enhancing the reputation of producers like Kirkley.

## RELUCTANT CAPITALISTS AND STUDIO LABOR

Novak's study of noise music circulation between Japan and North America (Novak 2013) reveals some of the dynamics of media exchange that fed into the newer generation of world music circulation. Noise, he shows, was rooted in the cassette culture that proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s. The flexibility of cassettes—the way they could easily be used to reproduce, remix, and distribute recordings—enabled users to escape the passive consumption mandated by older media formats, to step outside the control of the music industry. People could easily create mixtapes to share their favorite music with friends, fans, collectors, and, of course, romantic partners. In the internet age, as the format on which noise was founded is threatened by the ease and rapid rate of digital exchange, noise artists fiercely valorize the cassette medium. For them, its “obstinate form” revitalizes the person-to-person barter exchange of physical media out of which the noise network emerged; furthermore, cassettes gifted in this artistic network are imbued with social forces that surpass their magnetized audio content (ibid., 201-204, 221-223).

The independent music networks in which Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds are grounded had developed in the 1990s out of this broader cassette culture.<sup>84</sup> The histories of these labels show how they came to life informally, as creative projects among like-minded friends and artists that manifested as film screenings, mixtapes and CDs, and writing. In developing their projects into labels, however, they became directly involved in a commodification process, jeopardizing their credentials as artists and explorers. What is tricky here is that Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds, as I have argued, cannot be understood as simply two among a whole array of music commodity-makers that are indistinguishable in terms of their embrace of

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<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the proliferation of internet access at the turn of the millennium offered music aficionados new means to listen beyond Top 40 pop stars, extending the base of world music fans that had grown rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s (see Kim 2016).

capitalism. If their histories tell a story of art projects transforming slowly into commodifying businesses, it would be inaccurate to consider the labels protocapitalist; they are not inevitably and powerlessly moving towards some form of capitalism. Instead, they operate self-consciously both within and outside capitalism, dancing anxiously on its fringes—what Anna Tsing characterizes as “pericapitalist” (Tsing 2015, 63).

There is, for starters, some resistance by the producers—both material and discursive—against becoming large-scale capitalists. Mayet has claimed that the reason Sublime Frequencies stopped working with Syrian wedding singer Omar Souleyman, who has gained fame in Europe and North America through tours and several album releases, was because “he was too big for us” (Superfly Records 2015). Meanwhile, the successes and the expansion of Sahel Sounds have led to increased demands on Kirkley; it has become unsustainable for him to remain an essentially one-person operation. Seeing no alternative, he has begun tapping into the various members of a music industry he had long critiqued:

I’m a reluctant capitalist. I’m very reluctant about these kinds of decisions. [...] The more work you start doing and the more you see this record and you really want it to succeed, then you’re hiring distributors, you’re hiring PR, you’re hiring managers, tour managers, web site designers—you know? And you start filling all these pockets of people who don’t really anything to do with the music—though they do, you know? Because it’s required. And I started off doing all this stuff—everything by myself. And as it becomes bigger, I can’t do it all. (personal communication, March 6, 2017)

One of the fundamental problems of capitalism, as Marx ([1867] 1978) shows, is that through commodification it alienates labor and obscures social relations. Alienated labor and masked relations suggest a sort of loss of connection, of alienation not just from our labor but from each other; the social connection afforded by gift exchange, in other words, is effectively taken out of the commodity (Tsing 2013). This process invites intervention. In her study of global matsutake mushroom commodity chains among the US, Japan, and beyond, Tsing (2015)

points to supply-chain capitalism and translation (when lives and products move across value systems) as key processes through which capitalism reckons with these disconnections. For example, she highlights the work of Japanese mushroom wholesalers who act as “matchmakers,” connecting their fungal commodities to discerning consumers. This curatorial activity serves to reinscribe aspects of the gift in the mushroom commodity. Taylor argues that cultural goods undergo similar processes, whereby consecration and promotion (e.g., branding) heighten the fetishism of commodities by dressing them up as gifts, replacing the real but unperceived social relations of production with social relations manufactured by advertising agencies (Taylor n.d.b).

To grapple with their capitalist engagement, Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds similarly must find ways to combat alienation and the concealment of social relations in their work. They pursue this in a number of ways. For one, they rely on signs that index the earlier person-to-person exchange of their pre-label days, aural and visual manifestations of their raw aesthetic values described in the previous section. In this section, I explore how producing an aura of direct mediation from and within recording studios further enables Sahel Sounds in particular to retain its claim to a social position separate from the corporate music industry.

### *Anar*

Following *Saharan Cellphones*, Sahel Sounds has released dozens more albums of new material and reissues on vinyl, cassette, and for download and internet streaming; organized tours in Europe and North America for some of the label’s recording artists; and produced ethnographic and fiction films. One of the most prominent musicians on the label is Nigérien guitarist Mdou Moctar, whose song “Tahoultine” (Tam.: “My Girlfriend”) on *Saharan Cellphones* introduced listeners to something then unheard of in the Tuareg music circulated by

Western labels: drum machines and high-pitched Auto-Tuned vocals accompanying the familiar pentatonic droning of Tuareg guitar. Along with other tracks from *Saharan Cellphones*, “Tahoultine” inspired producers and musicians to create remixes from a number of artistic perspectives, compiled on the cassette and digital album *Music for Saharan Cellphones: The International Re-Works* that was released by the Portland-based label Boomarm Nation in 2011.<sup>85</sup> That same year, Sahel Sounds and Boomarm Nation co-released a 7” vinyl single of “Tahoultine,” the original Mdou Moctar version on the A side and a remix by Portland producer Gulls on the B side.

The recording of “Tahoultine” included on *Music from Saharan Cellphones* originally appeared on the 2008 album *Anar*, recorded at Ahmadia Multimedia Sound Studio in Sokoto, Nigeria. Primarily in the business of creating Hausa film music (*dandalin soyayya*), Ahmadia Multimedia Sound was part of a network of studios run by music laborers with fairly standardized practices and aesthetics. Songs inserted into Hausa films are usually first written by a lyricist, then brought to a studio musician who composes a melody and accompaniment on a keyboard synthesizer programmed to approximate the timbres of indigenous Hausa instruments like *bandiri* (frame drum), *ganga* (barrel drum), *goge* (fiddle), and *sarewa* (flute). Drum machines figure prominently in these songs, and since the early 2000s, Auto-Tune software is almost always used, modulating both men’s and women’s voices to create an immediately recognizable, high-pitched sound. Particularly with women’s vocals, *dandalin soyayya* clearly borrows from the aesthetics of Bollywood film songs which inspired the development of the genre (Adamu 2008, 2010; Larkin 2003, 2004, 2008).

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<sup>85</sup> <http://www.boomarmnation.com/releases-2/mfsc/>, accessed May 10, 2017. In addition to a limited-release cassette and digital download availability for Western consumers, thirty hand-numbered MicroSD cards with the album were slated for shipment to Kidal, Mali for insertion in the Saharan media network.



Although Hausa films are widely available in Niger, it was unusual—if not completely unprecedented—in 2008 for stylistic borrowings from *dandalin soyayya* to emerge in Tuareg guitar. Yet this was the result of the meeting of musical worlds recorded on *Anar*: Tuareg guitar of Niger mediated through the production aesthetics of Hausa film in Nigeria. Contrary to what Kirkley and many others first assumed upon hearing “Tahoultine,” the high Auto-Tuned voice and drum machine rhythms accompanying Moctar’s twanging guitar was not an intentional statement by the artist about an identity linked to *brassage*, of the ways in which Hausa and Tuareg affiliations often blur in the Agadez region. Instead, it was something of an accident; the producers at Ahmadia Multimedia Sound simply did not have experience recording Tuareg music, and drew from the studio repertoire with which they were familiar during the production process.

It is in part for this novel synthesis of local popular music styles that Mdou Moctar’s songs like “Tahoultine” traveled so far in the Sahel-Saharan mp3 exchange network. But it speaks even more to the way it captivated consumers and fans of Sahel Sounds elsewhere in the world, who were already familiar with Tuareg guitar but only recently introduced to Hausa film music (if at all) via Kirkley’s blog posts and 2013 compilation *Harafin So: Bollywood Inspired Film Music from Hausa Nigeria*. In 2014, Sahel Sounds released *Anar* for the first time since its 2008 debut in Nigeria, billed as “spaced out autotune from Niger” and “a monumental record sonically, but also as one of the first modern electronic adaptations of Tuareg guitar” (Figure 5.6).<sup>86</sup>

Mdou Moctar’s releases on Sahel Sounds draw attention to the ways in which recordings are evaluated not simply by the qualities of mediation, but by who does the mediating. The

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<sup>86</sup> <https://sahelsounds.bandcamp.com/album/anar>, accessed May 10, 2017.

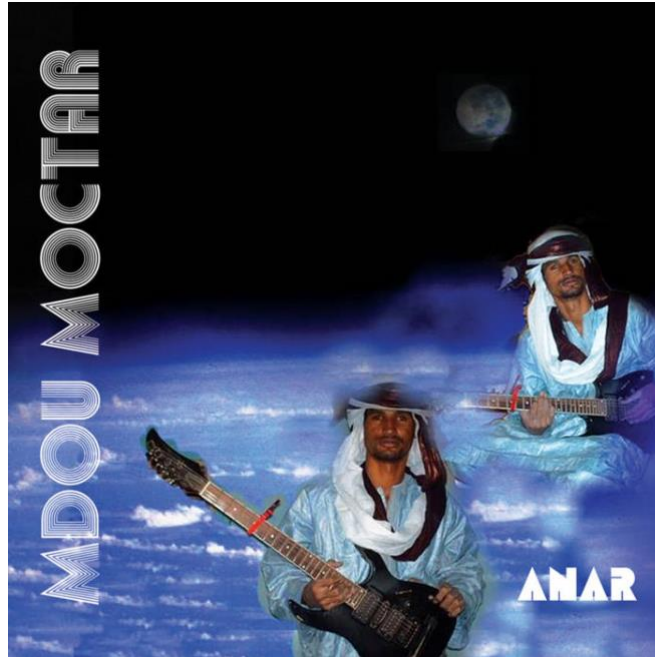


Figure 5.6. *Mdou Moctar album Anar (2014).*

obvious marks of the work of Nigerian producers adds to the appeal of the album because they do not undermine that “mystique of ‘direct’ contact” identified by Steiner in African art exchange (1995, 157); it would be understood as a very different record had Western producers intervened to this degree, adding foregrounded drum machines or audio effects like Auto-Tune (cf. Whitmore 2016). Afropop Worldwide notes the “charm” of these studio effects, seen to connect listeners directly to the production process, much as the raw sounds of acoustic instruments for other albums:

The contrast of texture in sound, the ethereal effect of the Autotuned harmonies and the rumble sound of the guitars, leaves you stuck floating in a haze halfway between the dune and the moon, a space the album artwork invites you to imagine. The immediateness of the sound and roughness of the recording, a close listen to the glitches and incongruous sounds that litter the album add to the charm, making you feel almost as if you were invited into the recording studio. (Afropop Worldwide 2014)

“Mdou Moctar merges influences subtly [*sic*] & uses modern equipment to enhance rather than overwhelm,” writes listener “Pete OntheCorner” in their review of *Anar* on the digital streaming

and download site Bandcamp. “I’m always bowled over & ready to book a trip when hearing camel rhythms.”<sup>87</sup>

What is being consumed in the album, then, is not simply Tuareg music, but a token of West African cultural industries. This is true not only of *Anar* but of many Sahel Sounds releases that circulate recordings produced in West Africa by locals at recording studios, on personal computers, or with street sound systems.<sup>88</sup> A sort of “technofetishism” (Feld 1994) propels much of these projects (recall Kirkley clicking through a cellphone on the Afropop Worldwide program described above), cast as a corrective to the over-mediation by mainstream world music. This genre of fetishism plays into the broader culture of independent music circulation in which Sahel Sounds, like Sublime Frequencies, is rooted, but here it is also in service of the desire for closeness and authenticity.

### *Sousoume Tamachek*

In *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (2003), Louise Meintjes connects these dynamics to particular technological interventions in the studio and in performance. She highlights the way “liveness,” among other characteristics, serves as a trope of authenticity in mbaqanga music. Based on research conducted in the early 1990s, at the height of the world music boom and South Africa’s transition from apartheid state to democracy, she finds that liveness is an “embodied sensibility” (ibid., 118) that evokes Africanness, particularly as understood by those who are not indigenous Africans. “To sound authentically African,”

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<sup>87</sup> <https://sahelsounds.bandcamp.com/album/anar>, accessed May 12, 2017.

<sup>88</sup> For examples of each, consider Amanar’s *Alghafiat* (2015) for a local recording studio; Pheno S.’s *Kani* (2013) for personal computers; and *Balani Show Super Hits: Electronic Street Parties from Mali* (2014) for sound systems.

Meintjes writes, “is to sound live” (ibid., 112).<sup>89</sup> It becomes, furthermore, a studio aesthetic, an “illusion of sounding live” constructed by technological intervention in the studio and by promotional discourse in the music industry.

Indeed, liveness emerged as a value well before the flourishing of world music, in the recording of early rock music. In African recordings, authenticity becomes not only a product of illusory non-mediation, but of technological disengagement by performers; recordings marked as authentic offer consumers direct contact to something outside modernity. In the South African studios discussed by Meintjes, outdated recording techniques are often deliberately referenced, as in the use of old synthesizers; in another example, an old echo plate is used rather than a reverb machine because it creates an echo effect physically, rather than digitally. These effects “make the face-to-face imaginable by reproducing the acoustics of such an encounter” (ibid., 127). The goal was to make the studio invisible as a site of performance.

This pursuit of liveness informs the studio production of another Moctar album, *Sousoume Tamachek* (Tam.: “Hush, Tuareg!”). Although the out-of-date liveness Meintjes describes manifests in *Anar* and other Sahel Sounds releases, where synthesizers may be immediately recognized as a decade or more out of date, the motivation of rendering the studio invisible poses a particularly potent challenge. In February 2017, Moctar visited Portland to perform at a screening of the film *Akounak* (in which he stars; see below) and to record the new album; except for the *Akounak* soundtrack, *Sousoume Tamachek* would be the only studio album that Moctar had recorded for Sahel Sounds.

Over three days, Moctar and Kirkley recorded the new album at Buzz or Howl Studio

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<sup>89</sup> Of course, evoking Africanness for consumers abroad becomes differently complicated for the Sahel-Saharan than for South Africa, set as it is on the perceived fringes of an Africa imagined as inherently Black and a Maghreb perceived as resolutely Arab.

with the help of audio engineer Jason Powers (Figure 5.7). As the producer, Kirkley grappled with seemingly contradictory ambitions. He wanted the album to be something “just a little more produced than a field recording” by leaving Moctar to explore and take advantage of the possibilities of multi-tracking, with which Moctar had no previous experience and which Kirkley himself could not explore with his usual single-microphone field recording setup. In conversations in the control room throughout the recording process, Kirkley and Powers discussed the studio aesthetics of world music records, such as the heavy use of reverb on voice tracks, with a hint of disdain; Kirkley didn’t want to include “some funky guitar” or “electronic effects” on the album. “It’s important that this doesn’t sound like another Tuareg or world music album,” Kirkley commented on the last day in the studio. “Otherwise, what’s the point? There



*Figure 5.7. Jason Powers (left), Mdou Moctar (center), and Christopher Kirkley (right) at Buzz or Howl.*

are so many now.” Yet, if he wanted it to take advantage of multi-tracking and studio fidelity sound, he also wanted it to also retain the organic, raw feel of a *takayt*, a casual jam among friends (see Chapter Two). This posed a challenge given that Moctar traveled alone, without any of the musicians he normally tours with from Niger, and because he is principally a lead guitarist, less fluent in the performance of rhythm guitar.

Producing this liveness required significant studio labor. This was particularly true for Moctar, who effectively had to perform several roles usually divided among performers in a guitar group. The recording process for most songs on *Sousoume Tamachek* began with Moctar recording the core roles of a solo guitarist simultaneously: lead acoustic guitar and solo voice, often with tapping on the guitar body to provide additional accompanying rhythm. These were captured on two room microphones, a mic for voice, and a fourth mic for the guitar. This last mic posed a challenge for Powers because Moctar’s tapping was not always consistent in volume; the microphone levels were not always present to handle the huge contrast in the volume of the body tapping and the guitar strings, since the best mic placement for the richest string sounds was also the place where the tapping would be particularly strong. When Powers or Kirkley would direct Moctar to tap more gently, he would reply by saying it wasn’t possible for him to control, likely because he has rarely been in acoustic recording situations like this one.

Once these initial four tracks were recorded, Moctar would then record accompanying voices, layering on two or three voice parts in chorus; and additional guitars, usually at least one rhythm acoustic guitar and occasionally an electric guitar that would respond to the lead guitar melody or play bass lines. This, too, posed some challenges, given Moctar’s limited experience as an accompanist. Generally, these additional parts would be overdubbed immediately after the initial tracking of the lead voice and guitar, with Kirkley and Moctar discussing ideas for how to

arrange a particular song. Later in the recording process, especially as remaining time in the studio was running low, Moctar would record the lead parts without doing much accompaniment, leaving this work for later, should time allow. Although the arranging and tracking process could have been sped up by having Moctar record with a metronome click track, Kirkley didn't wish to use one because he was concerned it would not only stifle Moctar's playing, but be "cheating." Thus, multiple takes of a particular track would sometimes be necessary when changes in tempo and rhythm in either the original take or the new one led to phasing.

Overdubbing was also difficult because of the irregular musical form of Moctar's performances. Although structured fairly simply into verses, refrains, and open spaces for overdubbed guitar solos, these components were not always divided into two, four, and eight bar groups typical for Western popular music, nor were they consistent in length from one take to another. On one track, for example, Moctar and Kirkley decided that a good way to promote the live feeling of a casual jam session into the recording was to have Moctar, Kirkley, and I clap together around a mic. It proved difficult for Moctar to articulate when we were expected to clap, and even when Kirkley and I followed his lead, Moctar was not overly concerned with having the clapping always happening at the same points within the form. Kirkley and Powers were both concerned about this inconsistency, however; Kirkley felt it sounded better with a regular pattern in equally divisible parts. In fact, he noted that on the soundtrack to *Akounak* he edited the recording to better suit this aesthetic of regularity, even though it hadn't been recorded that way. With *Sousoume Tamachek*, Kirkley was again confronted with the dilemma of how heavily to get involved as a producer with an ear acculturated to certain subtle aesthetics, even as he sought to render the studio production processes invisible.

The amount of labor that recording all these tracks required of Moctar was compounded by his jetlag; he had been performing in Australia at the end of January, just two weeks before his visit to Portland, with a brief return home to Niger in between. In the studio, worn out, he sometimes grew exasperated with what in some respects seems unnecessary labor of recording additional tracks for a given song. Following a discussion with Kirkley and Powers in the control room about an arrangement, for which Moctar needed to record multiple backing vocals, he observed: “In Nigeria, you can record one voice and multiply it [on the computer]. Here in Portland, I have to go back in multiple times. C’est *nul!* [It’s rubbish!]” He stepped out of the control room and, before disappearing back into the studio, turned back to flash a grin at us: “Christopher, did you see how I insulted Portland?”

Throughout their interactions in the studio, Kirkley and Moctar often exchanged playful jabs like this. These interactions recall the joking relations common between members of different ethnic groups and social castes in much of West Africa, a means to solidify social relationships and diffuse moments of tension through the playful performance or inversion of hierarchical distinctions between individuals. Although close in age, the power relations between Kirkley and Moctar were not always clear. After Moctar recorded a take of a new song, he waited alone in the recording booth while in the console room, Kirkley discussed with Powers whether to scrap it. After a few minutes’ discussion, during which Moctar sat silently beyond the soundproof glass, unable to participate in the debate, Kirkley punched in on the console mic leading to the recording booth: “Hey, *Petit* (Little One), let’s keep going!” At another moment, as Moctar, Kirkley, and Powers discussed whether to add backing vocals to a different song, Moctar turned to Kirkley, asserting his artistic authority in French: “You have to bring me whenever you record Tuareg guitarists”—then, switching to English midsentence—“I’ll show



you how to get the real sound.” Kirkley then turned to me, as I’m sitting nearby writing notes, and asked in French: “Did you hear what he said? You’ve got to include that in your book.” Indeed, throughout the studio time, they joked with one another that I was their *forgeron* (griot), documenting their deeds and occasionally called upon to prepare them a pot of Tuareg tea (even when none was available).

These interactions are important for the intercultural production of Tuareg musicians who work with Sahel Sounds. The recording processes for both *Anar* (in Nigeria) and *Sousoume Tamachek* (in the US) reveal how Tuareg musicians rarely have much technical control during the recording process. Few Tuareg have the knowledge, training, and equipment to control the means of record production in the studio; in Niger, for instance, most of the recording studios are run by Hausa.<sup>90</sup> With their artistic agency limited by such unequal access to the intellectual and material infrastructures required for conventional participation in world music circulation, playful insults symbolically level the playing field among artists and producers. In the midst of great structural inequality among Tuareg musicians and Western producers, then, this allows a sense of collaboration to remain. Collaboration is valued, furthermore, because it downplays the capitalistic aspects of these projects and discursively distances them from the exploitative nature of the music industry.

## **CURATION AND ETHNOGRAPHIC AUTHORITY**

Even if collaboration is valued within the artistic regime of which Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds are a part, the global circulation of Tuareg music in these labels’ hands is

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<sup>90</sup> The debut album of the group Imarhan (2016) was celebrated in the international world music press in part because it was the first album released in the West that had been produced by a Tuareg musician, bassist Eyadou Ag Leche of Tinariwen (Morgan 2016).

heavily dependent upon the roles of Mayet and Kirkley as curators. Curation has proliferated in recent years in the contemporary developed world as an important form of labor made necessary by data oversaturation. As Michael Bhaskar (2016) argues, the days of information being rare and difficult to reproduce are over. Value, he suggests, once hinged on production, but today it emerges in solving the problems of abundance and cutting down complexity. His broad definition of curation—“using acts of selection and arrangement (but also refining, reducing, displaying, simplifying, presenting and explaining) to add value”—draws attention to how this term has outgrown its art museum connotations and entered the worlds of the internet, retail, manufacturing, media, policy, and finance (Bhaskar 2016, 7-8).

Curation is an underlying logic of the artistic communities in which Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds are rooted, a means to differentiate themselves from major labels through “obstinate” older media formats like cassettes and vinyl. But their work with music from Niger, a place about which relatively little information is available to most Westerners, casts curation as also being a matter of ethnographic authority. This resituates curation in the sorts of conversations in which it frequently emerges—for example, about museum exhibits—and acknowledges the broad array of activities that make up curatorial action. For music producers, these include the selection of which songs to include on a compilation, which projects and artists to support on a label, even the sounds to mix into a collagist project like *Radio Niger*. But there is more: it is also the storytelling that accompanies these projects, the way in which narratives about music scenes, styles, and artists are crafted.

In this sense, label producers assume the powerful role of cultural brokers, creating, translating, and determining meaning and value for their audiences. Curation remains an aspect of intercultural production here, part of the “culture making” which Myers (2002) describes

whereby Pintupi painters are understood to be agents in the recontextualization of their art in new value regimes, rather than passively exploited art laborers. Yet much of the power is indeed in the hands of Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds. They retain the “power to name” (McGraw 2016, 335), exemplifying a politics of value articulated by Terence Turner (1979) and David Graeber (2001). Turner argues that politics is about the ability to define and accumulate what is valued within a particular setting (i.e., a regime of value). He writes that at “any given moment, some elements of [a] society will benefit in terms of the ability to define and accumulate surplus value through their control of the reproductive apparatus of the society, at the expense of others from whom this surplus is extracted and who are, in these terms, exploited” (Turner 1979, 30). Graeber builds on this point by arguing that “the ultimate freedom is not the freedom to create or accumulate value, but the freedom to decide (collectively or individually) what it is that makes life worth living. In the end, then, politics is about the meaning of life” (Graeber 2001, 88).

By spurning the market regime’s emphasis on producing exchange value in the universal equivalent form of money, Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds are not generating huge amounts of surplus value that would be equally treasured within Kirkley and Mayet’s DIY artistic regime and the Tuareg artistic regime in Niger. In other words, although the labels generate money that is valuable to both Tuareg and Americans alike, incommensurable values like rawness and authenticity that may be central to the labels’ artistic regimes are not as important for Tuareg. In my reading, it is not clear whether this kind of production of incommensurable value amounts to the kind of exploitation about which Turner writes. In this final section, I examine the politics of value in the Tuareg guitar curatorship by Mayet and Kirkley by addressing two of their projects: the *Guitars from Agadez* album series by Sublime

Frequencies, and the film *Akounak Tedalat Taha Tazoughai* (Tam.: “Rain the Color Blue with a Little Red in It”) by Sahel Sounds. The projects produced and curated by these labels do not simply disappear among their audiences and fans in the West; through the feedback loops of global circulation, they also come to inform the politics of value and meaning of Tuareg guitar music in Niger.

### ***Guitars from Agadez: “The Truest Music of Revolution”***

“When I arrived in Agadez, I knew no one or anything about where I was,” Mayet recalls. After two weeks in Dogondoutchi during his first visit to Niger in 2004, he was “at the end of the earth”; Agadez was “a complete mystery” to him. Within days of his arrival, during what Mayet describes as a “magical evening,” he met the guitarist Bibi Ahmed (on the right in Figure 5.3) and his band, Groupe Inerane (personal communication, May 5, 2017).

We waited around the public square all evening and were finally told that it was time to head out. My operative in Agadez and I went out to the “suburbs,” pulled in and entered this mud-built family room, and my jaw hit the ground. All I saw were guitars and the drums and the whole of the extended family lounging around. Grandmothers, children, all the women and men drinking tea and a couple of people just playing this sort of trance guitar tuning that was completely formless but utterly engaging. Then Bibi and his entourage set up and I was completely blown away! [...] They just got up and plugged in and proceeded to make history! (Dolman 2006)

Groupe Inerane would feature not only in *Niger: Magic and Ecstasy in the Sahel* but also on the first and several subsequent releases in the *Guitars from Agadez* series.<sup>91</sup> Given the “suicide mission” of Sublime Frequencies to deal with obscure, raw sounds from far, often dangerous reaches of the globe, as well as its roots in experimental post-punk music (through the Sun City

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<sup>91</sup> At the time of this writing, Sublime Frequencies has made seven releases in its *Guitars from Agadez* series, a mix of full-length albums and shorter EPs and 7-inch records, all also available for download: three by Group Inerane (volumes one, three, and four), one by Group Bombino (volume two), and three by the late guitarist Koudede (volumes five, six, and seven). See Appendix A.

Girls), the gritty sound of electric guitars, feedback-prone amplification bricolages, and dynamic singing and shouting recorded at those first encounters was an enthralling treasure. Tuareg music had yet to saturate the Western world music industry at this time: Tinariwen's second international release, *Amassakoul*—widely credited as the breakout success for the founders of Tuareg guitar music—was released in 2004, the same year as Mayet's first Niger visit. The group's growing fame paved the way for many other Tuareg acts to achieve international recognition, such as Terakaft, Tamikrest, Bombino, Mdou Moctar, and Koudede.

Profiting from the fluidity of its style, Tinariwen was marketed as blues, rock, African music, and Tuareg music; with the group's third release, *Aman Iman* (2007), Tinariwen broke out of its world music audience and began drawing a large following among rock listeners (Amico 2013, 101-102; Belalimat 2010, 167-170). Through popular press accounts of Tinariwen's genesis during conditions of exile and rebellion, sensationalized through seductive stories of veiled Tuareg rebel "guitar-poets" like Tinariwen co-founder Keddou Ag Ossid running to battle with Kalashnikov and saber at hand and guitar on the back (Rasmussen 2006, 643), Tuareg guitar music was situated within long-standing narratives linking rock to rebellion. Sublime Frequencies' dedication to an aesthetic of rawness and direct mediation suggests more authentic and intimate affiliations than what the mainstream music industry offered with its polished studio recordings. Seemingly closer to the danger of the real rebellions experienced by Tuareg musicians, the label could set itself apart while still drawing on this same narrative. Introducing Inerane in the first volume of *Guitars from Agadez*, Mayet's enthusiasm is palpable as he cites revolution and rebellion: "Group Inerane is the now sound of the Tuareg Guitar Revolution sweeping across the Sahara Desert and is inspired by the rebel musicians that started this music as a political weapon used to communicate (in the Tamacheq language) from the

Libyan Refugee camps in the 1980s and 1990s.” The album opens with “Kuni Majagani,” a track acquired from the band’s own archive of recordings; the remaining nine tracks were recorded in Agadez by Mayet in 2004 and during a second visit in 2007.

During that latter trip, Mayet attended a large wedding in Agadez where he reconnected with Group Inerane and was also introduced to additional prominent local musicians, including Hasso Akotey, Gountou (Alhassane Alwiguine), and Bombino (Goumar Almoctar). “All were fantastic,” Mayet writes in *Guitars from Agadez, Vol. 2* (2009), “but when Bombino took the stage, it was such an electric force that it transformed the crowd. The kids were going wild, dancing and cheering. Bombino was gyrating like Houdini soloing out of a strait jacket. It was electrifying!” Much like on the first volume with Group Inerane, the second *Guitars from Agadez* release featured Mayet’s own field recordings alongside locally archived recordings, this time all performances by Bombino rather than Inerane. The archived tracks were dry, acoustic numbers recorded by a Spanish documentary film crew with whom Bombino had worked as a guide in 2004, and reappeared (with additional tracks not included on the *Sublime Frequencies* release) on the album *Agamgam 2004* (2010) by French label Reaktion; Mayet’s recordings, like on the Group Inerane volume, all featured electric guitar.

If the revolution of which Mayet wrote about in the notes for the first volume appeared as something of the past—the “now sound of the Tuareg Guitar Revolution” cast as a continuation in the spirit of, but separate from, the armed uprisings of the 1990s—for *Volume 2*, rebellion returned to the present. In February 2007, the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ) launched a new armed struggle against the Nigérien government from its base in the Aïr mountains north of Agadez. The conflict effectively cut Agadez off from the rest of the country, Mayet notes in *Volume 2*, as military escorts were required for all travel on the only road to

Niamey, which was littered with land mines. “The demands of this uprising are the same as in the past,” he continues, pointing to the extraction of local resources and the desire for a way of life preserved with autonomy and dignity. While highlighting the frenetic, Houdini-like movements of Bombino and his audiences at the outset of the liner notes, here Mayet concludes: “This is the music of the rebellion.”

Tension between postcolonial governments and the Tuareg community permeates the remainder of the *Guitars from Agadez* series, too. The third volume, compiled in 2010, notes that two weeks before Mayet’s return to Niger, Nigérien president Mamadou Tandja was ousted by a coup d’état after overstaying his term. This release, while featuring Group Inerane, also inaugurated the first of several releases with guitarist Abdoulahi Maman, better known as Koudede. Koudede was among a group of musicians assembled for the recording in Niamey because Agadez was again inaccessible; Mayet notes that Bibi Ahmed traveled alone to Niamey as Inerane’s second guitarist Adi Mohamed had been killed during the recent conflict, slain while running from gunfire that nearly caught Bibi as well. Mayet was excited by the addition of Koudede: Born in Agadez and raised in Arlit, he represented an important force in what is widely understood as the second generation of Tuareg guitarists, emerging after the 1990s *ishumar* stars like Tinariwen and Abdallah Oumbadougou. He learned guitar while among fellow *ishumar* in Algeria and Libya, drawing on these experiences as well as a firm dedication to deep Tuareg musical and poetic aesthetics in composing his own songs (cf. Genthon 2012).

Koudede stars in volumes five through seven (two 7” singles and one 12” EP), the first American releases of his music.<sup>92</sup> Although the first of these releases was recorded during a

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<sup>92</sup> Koudede also has released several albums on the French label Taxila: *Amghar-d’ana* (2010), *Alam’i* (2010), and *Taghlamt* (2012). He tragically died in a car accident while returning to Niamey from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in October 2012.

European tour, all but one track on the latter two were recorded in January 2012 at Centre Culturel Toumast, a Tuareg cultural center in Bamako, Mali. This was a historic and tense moment: Just after the conclusion of the Festival au Désert in Timbuktu, a new Tuareg insurgency erupted in Mali, heavily armed with weapons that had fallen into their hands by way of Libya after the toppling of Ghaddafi. Koudede's group returned to Bamako, with Mayet accompanying them, just as tensions mounted and Tuareg were advised to leave the capital. After much hesitation, they proceeded with their concert at Toumast.

In the circumstances of producing releases in the series and the ways in which Mayet presents it, then, Tuareg guitar music from Agadez fits a clear narrative: “This is the truest music of revolution—where transcendence of historical poetry and the daily grit of human struggle are in dialogue, from verse to verse and refrain to refrain.”<sup>93</sup> It offers listeners a taste of danger, whether in the tragedies that claimed the lives of musicians like Adi Mohamed and Koudede or in the circumstances by which Mayet recorded materials in a turbulent Mali. Given that Mayet's own travels play into the storytelling of *Guitars from Agadez*, it is no surprise that he has been asked about his personal safety in interviews about his work. Although he insists that he has never put himself in a position of real danger (Dolman 2006), sharing the uncertain recording situations in which Mayet works clarifies that the recordings do not come from studio sessions. This serves to highlight the mediation of other record labels, reminding listeners of the studio labor that distances them from the conditions and experiences of the Tuareg rebellions.

### ***Akounak*: Setting *Purple Rain*'s “Universal Story” in the Sahara**

If *Guitars from Agadez* shares the now sound of a true music of revolution, I'd like to

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<sup>93</sup> From the Sublime Frequencies webpage promoting *Guitars from Agadez*, Vol. 5: <http://www.sublimefrequencies.com/products/576405-koudede-guitars-from-agadez-vol-5>, accessed June 22, 2017.



turn to the Sahel Sounds fiction film *Akounak Tedalat Taha Tazoughai*, which deals with an altogether different sort of revolution. *Akounak* is an adaptation of *Purple Rain*, the 1984 cult classic featuring the American rock star Prince and his band, The Revolution. Rather than telling the story of Prince struggling to get a break in Minneapolis, it features Mdou Moctar as its lead protagonist in an Agadezian music scene that appears far removed from the subversive concerns portrayed by *Guitars from Agadez*. On the Kickstarter page soliciting financial support for the project, Kirkley explains that “*Akounak* tells the universal story of a musician trying to make it ‘against all odds,’ set against the backdrop of the raucous subculture of Tuareg guitar.”<sup>94</sup>

Following a brief primer on Tuareg guitar that notes its origins in a political movement and its global success through stars like Tinariwen and Bombino, he critiques the documentary films that to date had presented this scene abroad: “[They] are almost always aimed at Western audiences and betray a sensationalist tilt, focusing on the origins of the ‘rebel music’ and not the contemporary subculture.” He elaborates in an interview with music journalist Peter Holsin, stating, “It feels a little weird to me to exploit that [rebel narrative] to sell records. [...] I don’t like the idea of creating myths to sell records. I don’t think it’s necessary. I think we can tell the truth about things and that truth is interesting enough to carry on its own” (Holsin 2015).

Situated within the broader Sahel Sounds oeuvre, the astonishing *Akounak* project exemplifies the ways by which Kirkley makes claims to present “what is actually happening on the ground” in West Africa.

But where did such a project come from, given that Prince is a relatively unknown artist in the Sahel-Sahara? And why Agadez? When he began work on *Akounak*, Kirkley was well versed in the Tuareg music scene, but knew Kidal, Mali (where he had lived in 2009 and

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<sup>94</sup> <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/454629120/akounak-the-feature-film-of-a-tuareg-guitarist-in>, accessed October 13, 2016.

collected materials that later appeared on *Music from Saharan Cellphones*) far better than Agadez. His impression was that musicians in Kidal were keen to find international tours and follow in the footsteps of Tinariwen and Tamikrest (both bands from Kidal who have widely toured abroad), while in Agadez it seemed that musicians were primarily concerned with being the top wedding performer. In 2014 he explained to me over the phone, in the midst of his fundraiser drive for the film, that “when I first came up with this project, I was going to do it in Mauritania with a Mauritanian guitarist” (personal communication, January 20, 2014). It was there, in fact, that the idea to adapt *Purple Rain* came to life:

It was sort of just a joke because, you know, *Purple Rain*... I think I hadn't seen it when we talked about it, we hadn't seen it in a long time when I was talking with a friend in Mauritania about it. And like, man, *Purple Rain* was like the perfect movie, you know? It was made to hype up a musician, basically. [...] It was like a long music video, with a bunch of narrative things kind of tying it together. And so I got the idea [for] adapting that format, more than anything else. (ibid.)

Kirkley found further inspiration in *The Harder They Come*, the 1972 Jamaican film starring musician Jimmy Cliff and featuring a soundtrack said to have “brought reggae to the world” (McLellan 2006). Yet in developing the idea for his adaptation, Kirkley realized he didn't feel there was any guitarist in Mauritania he felt he could work with; after all, he had in mind that the project would not only lead to a film, but also to a tour. Reflecting on his good working relationship with Mdou Moctar, and cognizant of the similarities between Mauritanian and Agadezian weddings, Kirkley began to imagine the project in a Nigérien setting.

Like *Purple Rain* and *The Harder They Come*, and departing from the extant films featuring Tuareg music, Kirkley envisioned *Akounak* as a stylized fiction film more than as a documentary.<sup>95</sup> That it would draw a Western audience was clear in his appeal to financial

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<sup>95</sup> Among the films that have portrayed contemporary Tuareg music are *Festival in the Desert* (2004), *Desert rebel: Ishumars les rockers oubliés du desert* (2007), *Tinariwen: Live in London* (2008), *Agadez: The Music and the Rebellion* (2011), and *The Last Song Before the War* (2014).

support through Kickstarter, his largely American and European press campaign, and in his references to the film's potential for generating international tours, among other factors. But the goal, as Kirkley explained to Kickstarter supporters, was "to create a compelling story that is relevant and watchable by the Tuareg community."<sup>96</sup> Creating a film that could appeal to viewers in quite different cultural settings added to his already ambitious task of making a film on a small budget and with limited filmmaking experience.

*Akounak* strives to satisfy its envisioned Tuareg viewership through two main strategies: linguistic translation and cultural translation. The first approach is more or less straightforward, as *Akounak* would be the first fiction film in Tamasheq (to our knowledge), with subtitles available in French and English. Although many Tamasheq dialects exist across the Sahel-Saharan, most can be relatively well understood across the region; *Akounak* blends both the Aïr and the Azawagh dialects that are most prominent in Niger. The long-winded title less gracefully glosses the original "Purple Rain," however, owing to the alleged absence of a word for "purple" in Tamasheq. Yet close approximations abound that are ignored, such as indigo (Tam.: *billa*). In some ways this is rather shocking, given that since the early days of European exploration in the Sahara, Tuareg have been known rather wistfully as the "blue men of the desert" on account of their indigo cloth, which often stains their skin. On the other hand, drawing attention to untranslatability, of incommensurable linguistic values, exoticizes Tuareg and emphasizes that part of the point of *Akounak* is that it is an experiment in intercultural media production. The second, cultural translation effort proved a more challenging, dialectical process among Kirkley and his fellow filmmakers. Stylistically, the film draws heavily on the imagery of *Purple Rain*, most obviously in the prevalent use of the purple chromatic motif and in reproducing the jagged

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<sup>96</sup> <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/454629120/akounak-the-feature-film-of-a-tuareg-guitarist-in>, accessed October 13, 2016.

lettering of the original film (Figure 5.8). But it is the plot that demands greatest finessing.

*Akounak* follows more or less the same overall plot arc as *Purple Rain*. In the original, the main character (Prince, known as The Kid) tries to make it big in the Minneapolis music scene over his rival, Morris Day, all while managing relationships with his abusive father (Clarence Williams III) and his lover, Apollonia (Apollonia Koteró). Kirkley brought a copy of *Purple Rain* with him to Niger to view with Moctar and his friends, but most of the work involved them all sitting together and rebuilding the story. For example, they would decide that “the first scene should start out in a wedding, or like a concert, and that’s where you meet the



Figure 5.8. Promotional posters for *Purple Rain*, featuring Prince on his iconic purple motorcycle; and for *Akounak*, featuring the Sahelian Prince reigning over Agadez.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>97</sup> *Purple Rain* image source: <http://www.metacritic.com/movie/purple-rain>, accessed June 25, 2017. *Akounak* image source: Christopher Kirkley.

characters. And then Mdou and his friends would come up with ideas—so they’d give me ideas, I’d sort of shape it [...] aiding the development of the story, ‘cause I knew where I wanted it to go” (personal communication, January 20, 2014). The Nigérien retelling situates Mdou Moctar as a new arrival in Agadez, known to locals from circulated audio recordings of his music but a stranger in the town where, so the trailer tells us, “guitar is king.” He, too, struggles to win recognition over his jealous musical rival Kader (played by prominent Nigérien musician Abdoukader Ag Mohamed Kaoucen, better known as Kader Tanout) while confronted with a disapproving father (performed by Moctar’s real-life brother, Abdoulaye Souleymane) and nascent romance with Rhaicha (played by Rhaicha Ibrahim).

Despite these general parallels, many plot departures were necessary to make the film relatable—not to mention appropriate—for Tuareg audiences. Many elements in *Purple Rain* simply could not be reproduced. The domestic violence and sexuality that figures prominently in the Prince film were abandoned, a coy, flirtatious relationship with Rhaicha the extent of Moctar’s romantic activity. “But, you know, real things we could adapt,” Kirkley explained, identifying several examples:

The conflict between the son and the father about music, because that’s a real thing. Families not wanting their kids to play music—that’s something that happens. In the story, Mdou is gonna have his guitar burned. He’s gonna come home, and his guitar’s gonna be in the fire. And that happened to one of the musicians I know from Tchinta[baraden, Niger]. [...] So, a lot of this stuff, like I’m using this scene where another musician steals his song with a cellphone. He has a kid who’s hanging out while Mdou’s playing, records his song, and gives it to him. *That* happens. I’m gonna have the bad musician actually go to a marabout, and actually put like, an evil spell, like a hex—some gris-gris on him. ‘cause that happens. So I think there’s stuff we can write that makes it work as both—maintain the idea that, like, we want to make this a film that Mdou is proud of, and that people will watch in Niger. And I think, by doing that, we can make something that people in the States, or in the West, are interested in. (ibid.)

Some of these plot points would be further revised over the course of the ten-day shoot, when Kirkley and director of photography Jerome Fino, a video artist based in Marseille, France,

arrived in Agadez. After his guitar is burned in the film, Moctar's anticipated confrontation with his father is more subdued than Western audiences may expect; during shooting, Kirkley demanded Moctar redo the anti-climactic scene, but Moctar refused on the grounds that it is unheard of in Niger for youth to yell at elders. Furthermore, Kader refused to film the scene envisioned by Kirkley in which he would consult a marabout to cast a spell on Moctar, concerned that audiences would believe this performance was real (Holsin 2015). In this regard, *Akounak* skirts a fine line between documentary and fiction. Much as in the film, Moctar had resettled in Agadez from Tchintabaraden in 2011, only a couple years prior to the project; although his recordings preceded his arrival, like the "Tahoultine" version that appears on *Music from Saharan Cellphones*, he nonetheless had to adapt to the competitive Agadezian scene. Such fact-and-fiction blurring is an important aspect in *Purple Rain*, too.<sup>98</sup>

Ultimately, Kirkley envisioned *Akounak* as a way to tell audiences locally and abroad something about how music works in Agadez. Some viewers were nonetheless skeptical about its representations. For example, in his review of *Akounak*, Holsin (2015) responds to Kirkley's critique of the myth-making in Western representations of Tuareg music by pointing to the mythologizing inherent in the film and its "universal story." Although he loved the music and visuals, for Holsin, "the perspective feels myopic." Perhaps the clearest example of this is the

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<sup>98</sup> This is a tension explored by one of the most celebrated and controversial muses for filmmakers working in the Sahel-Sahara: the French ethnographer and filmmaker Jean Rouch (1917–2004). He worked extensively in Niger from the 1940s until his death, known as a father of *cinéma vérité* and for his "ethnofictions" that tell fictional stories set in real ethnographic situations (see Stoller 1992; Rouch 2003; Rothman 2007; and Henley 2009). His *Moi, un noir* (1958), for example— cited as one of Kirkley's many cinematic inspirations in his description of *Akounak*—features Nigérien immigrants living in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire whose identities as actors and as subjects of the film are largely indistinct. Ethnofiction informs the latest Sahel Sounds film, *Zerzura* (2017), an "ethno-Western" about a mythical city of gold set in the context of an actual gold rush in Niger as well as global migration crisis in which Agadez plays a prominent role. See [https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/454629120/zerzura-the-saharan-acid-western?ref=profile\\_created](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/454629120/zerzura-the-saharan-acid-western?ref=profile_created), accessed June 25, 2017.

prominent role of cellphones in the film. The exchange of gifts is a major plot driver in both *Purple Rain* and *Akounak*. Some gifts are material: The Kid and his lover Apollonia exchange earrings, an anklet, and guitar at key moments, when securing their relationship to one another or—in returning them by angrily hurling jewelry to the floor—heightening the drama of a breakup. Meanwhile, Rhaicha gifts a rare left-handed electric guitar to Moctar that he had forsaken earlier in the film, when he instead buys her a necklace as a token of his affection.

More significant is the exchange of song recordings. The Kid often dismisses a song his female friends and musical companions repeatedly invite him to listen to on a cassette they recorded for him, until he relents before his final showdown with his rival Morris Day and learns the song to use in the battle of the bands. A similar plot line unfolds in *Akounak* between Moctar and his companions Ahmoudou (Ahmoudou Madassane) and Achcouscous (Mahmoud Ahmed Jabre) through the medium of a song recorded on a cellphone. At another point, a young boy records another song being rehearsed by Moctar and his band, and runs off to deliver it to the rival Kader ahead of their musical showdown. Kader pays off the boy for his work, and later performs the song in an informal gathering with Moctar, Rhaicha, and other observers, publicly humiliating Moctar. The instrumentality of cellphones in the film is a strong reminder of the Sahel Sounds brand built off of the buzz surrounding *Music from Saharan Cellphones*. Viewers are similarly reminded of its Portland rootedness by an acoustic guitar in the film that prominently displays a bumper sticker from the Portland store Trade-Up Music.

“The movie could’ve very well ended up as a superficial Sahel Sounds advert,” writes Holsin (2015); other viewers in both the US and Niger have voiced similar concerns. Indeed, at a Society for Ethnomusicology conference in 2014, one scholar of southern African media asked me if the cellphone exchange narrative was even a realistic representation of Sahel-Saharan

culture. Mayet responded more strongly to questions about the contrasting narrative of Tuareg guitar told by Sahel Sounds, and *Akounak* in particular:

I find it quite perplexing to suddenly re-contextualize what this music is about. Kirkley's claim that Tuareg music is all about motorcycles and cell phones is absurd! There were no cell phones when I made my first recordings in Agadez in 2004. Talk to Tinariwen or [Abdallah] Oumbadougou or any of the early pioneers of this music and tell them that their music is all about cell phones and motorcycles. I've lost three musician friends to the rebellion. (personal communication, May 5, 2017)<sup>99</sup>

Young Tuareg viewers with whom I spoke in Niger about *Akounak* are generally less concerned than Mayet about the cellphone exchange, motorcycle, and romantic aspects of the story; these constitute an important part of contemporary youth culture and the newer generation of guitar songs in Niger. Instead, controversy centers on the way competition among musicians is represented. One university student, Abdourahmane\*, told me that the film is not a good representation of the Tuareg guitar scene because it exaggerates competitiveness; although he acknowledged that song theft does occur, Abdourahmane thought *Akounak* injects dimensions into Tuareg guitar culture that he didn't believe to really be there. A musician who did not participate in the film, Alhassane\*, praised the visual beauty of *Akounak* but also criticized it for being an imbalanced portrayal that represents only a negative side of Tuareg guitar, without showing anything positive. Ahmoudou Madassane, who co-stars in the film, acknowledges that there is competition in Agadez, even among Moctar and his real-life peers, like Kader Tanout (personal communication, December 9, 2016). And when asked by an audience member at a February 2017 screening of *Akounak* in Portland if the competitive aspect of the film was

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<sup>99</sup> Both Kirkley and Mayet have critiqued each other's work on multiple occasions and on different grounds, but both also insisted to me separately that there is no deep animosity between them. Mayet noted that early on in the Sahel Sounds project, Sublime Frequencies was interested in releasing some of Kirkley's recordings (personal communication, May 5, 2017); Kirkley, for his part, praised Mayet's video projects in discussing the development of *Akounak* (personal communications, January 20, 2014 and March 6, 2017). My goal here is not to create a tabloid-style he-said/she-said dynamic, but to illustrate the complexity of reactions to the work of both Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds.



representative, Moctar equivocated. All musicians compete to stand out and make a name for themselves, he replied, but solidarity is also important; he explained that Kader is a real friend, and that they will routinely call one another up to borrow cables or other equipment. As this question demonstrates, this is an aspect of Agadezian music culture that is not clear in *Akounak*.

According to Alhassane, when he presented his critique to Kirkley, his response was that tight deadlines, limited funding, and chronically tardy arrival of actors and other film participants constrained film production in Agadez. Kirkley has demonstrated continued interest in the possibilities of participatory video by collaborating with Nigériens as filmmakers, principally by talking through the development of scripts for *Akounak* and forthcoming films; but he also imagines a future project filmed entirely on iPhones distributed among locals so that they can film it themselves. But the challenges of intercontinental communication and this kind of local production come up frequently in press and conversations with Kirkley (see Holsin 2015; Murray 2015; Durosomo 2016; and MacMurdo 2017), a theme also raised by other Tuareg music producers, such as past Tinariwen producers and managers Philippe Brix and Andy Morgan (Amico 2013, 312-313).<sup>100</sup> Regardless of whether or not Kirkley's response to Alhassane is a satisfactory explanation for *Akounak*'s representation of Tuareg music-making, Moctar remarked to me that when people in Agadez who had been skeptical of the film finally saw it projected on screen, they often completely transformed (personal communication, February 6, 2017). This has facilitated the production of the next Sahel Sounds project, starring Ahmoudou Madassane: *Zerzura*, an "ethno-Western" whose striking visuals, soundtrack, and story will likely engender as much controversy as *Akounak*.

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<sup>100</sup> Kirkley also discusses these challenges on the Kickstarter page where he fundraises for *Akounak*: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/454629120/akounak-the-feature-film-of-a-tuareg-guitarist-in>, accessed October 31, 2016.

## CONCLUSIONS

As participants in the new mode of world music circulation described by Novak (2011), Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds operate within a social world where money is not the principal concern; rather, it is rawness, direct mediation, artistic collaboration, and other values understood to be lacking in the mainstream music industry that are most important. Yet in developing from art projects into record labels, their participation in the commodification of global sounds has deepened, demanding reluctant engagement with capitalist patterns of practice in order to sustain their work. Pericapitalist (Tsing 2015), they work at times anxiously, at others playfully, in the global shadows of neoliberal capitalism. The popular success of Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds exemplifies the point by Turner (1979) and Graeber (2001) that the politics of value is about the power to define what value is and to produce surpluses of those values.

Yet the intercultural production of Tuareg musicians working with these labels reveal that the social relations of production remain deeply unequal. The relative equality or inequality of these social relations is *sometimes* a result of personal artistic choices, such as the decision to salvage recordings and remediate them (at times) without the involvement of the featured artists, or to collaborate with actors in developing a script that is meaningful to them. However, it is *always* structural: the differences in intellectual and material infrastructures of recording studios, of promotional activity, and of media production between Western countries and Niger constrain Tuareg musicians' agency. Mdou Moctar calling Kirkley "*petit*" during a studio recording session in Portland, or of Nigérien actors amending the *Purple Rain* plot during filming, are examples of an agency that pales to that of Kirkley, who could speak at length with engineers and editors about artistic decision for months after recording or filming, the Nigérien artists

across the planet and hard to reach by phone. The means of curatorial and productive labor, of defining the values involved in circulating Tuareg music in the alternative artistic regime within which are situated projects like Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds, are many: recording equipment and technical training to control these means of production, multilingual promotional expertise, internet connectivity, the mobility afforded by a US or EU passport and constrained by the constant suspicious surveillance of Nigérien visa applications, and so on. Until the many infrastructures of intercultural production involved are more equal, it is difficult to read more than limited Nigérien agency in the global circulation of Tuareg music.

To identify and articulate critiques of Sublime Frequencies and Sahel Sounds as a result of these observations, much as they have done of academic and commercial recordings, is important work. But it is also crucial to remain sensitive to the fact that to moralize about their work would be the pot calling the kettle black, for ethnography, whether by professional academics or self-styled guerillas, is itself a result of intercultural production. Aspirational labor for equal collaboration, such as through dialogic editing of film scripts or dissertations, for thinking through the politics of value to seek ways to provide individuals with greater power to determine and curate what is valuable and meaningful in their lives, may be the best any of us can do within these structures.

## CONCLUSIONS

One Friday evening in October 2016, Kader Tarhanine and Groupe Afous d' Afous played a packed concert at one of Niamey's large performance venues, the Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture (MJC) Djado Sékou. Based in the birthplace of Tuareg guitar, Tamanrasset, Algeria, Kader and his band are some of the most popular performers of the current generation among Tuareg, though they are relatively unknown beyond the Sahel and Sahara. As Chris Kirkley proclaims on the Sahel Sounds blog, "Kader Tarhanine is the musician you don't know about, but should."<sup>101</sup> In the VIP couches in the front row of the audience sat the guests of honor: members of Tinariwen, the leading voice of Tuareg guitarists since the late 1970s, who occasionally cycled in to play a song or two with the band. They were visiting from their homelands in Mali to perform a major concert the next evening—their first in Niamey in over a decade—at the Centre Culturel Franco-Nigérien (CCFN) Jean Rouch.

For both events, the founding fathers of Tuareg guitar and some of the current wave's leading performers came together in engagements that were fundamentally intergenerational and transnational; the songs, musicians' comportment, and audience behaviors illustrated both how much and how little had changed since the early *ishumar* parties in Tamanrasset and the military camps in Libya. An audience of locals from diverse backgrounds as well as of foreigners living in Niger had paid for admission to the show, an infrequent but not unheard-of event driving a broader urban Tuareg music economy. Young audience members danced and cried out on the public dance *piste*, spraying money and now and then bunching into clumps of enthusiastic and disordered bodies. Together with Kader's singing, it seemed that the political mobilization and militancy of the early generations was something of the past:

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<sup>101</sup> <http://sahelsounds.com/2016/07/kader-tarhanine/>, accessed February 4, 2018.

*Aregh ad anna tenere*  
*Tenere raqqan man-nin*  
*Nekyad nensa neswad yetran*

I love pronouncing the name of the *ténéré*  
The heart beats wildly  
We watch the stars closely

*Edduniya a yassohen*  
*Tinni ha gat garen no fen*  
*Edduniya ta imidawan a yassohen*

Life is important  
Let's resemble that which we want  
In this life, friends are very important

*Ehad ashil eddiwannegh*  
*Fel tumast in nak mahenna?*  
*Tumast ta tikmat iman nin*

Through the days and nights they do nothing but hang out  
As for my community, what can I say?  
This community burns my heart<sup>102</sup>

Despite the festive atmosphere of the concert, however, the overt political mobilization of the rebellion era continued to reverberate overtly. As the band performed “Ténéré,” one of its other hits recorded on its Algerian-produced studio album *Imzad* (2015), the audience sang and danced along with the most enthusiasm it had shown all evening. Yet while Kader announced the names of many Tuareg communities and landmarks across the Sahara, as was part of the lyrics, the band and audience replaced the responsorial refrain “*ténéré*”: “Azawad!” they cried, naming the (predominately) Tuareg state whose independence had been declared in the northern half of Mali in 2012.<sup>103</sup> Some of the youth in the audience danced with blues flags on which had been embroidered a red *yaz*, the Tifinagh (Tamasheq alphabet) character used to represent the word “Amazigh” and, more loosely, “free man,” within the Amazigh political-cultural movement of northern Africa; others danced with the yellow, green, red, and black representing Azawad.

In these moments, the rhythms of value of which I wrote in the introduction become most clearly articulated: the relative circulation and significance of different values is not only spatially marked, as across national borders within and beyond northwest Africa, but also by the

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<sup>102</sup> “Rhegh Dennagh” by Kader Tarhanine and Groupe Afous d’Afous, recorded on the album *Imzad* (2015). Transcribed and translated into French by Amina Mohamed, with help by Brian Nowak; translated into English by the author.

<sup>103</sup> The state was never recognized by the international community, though negotiations continue to unfold on the region’s political status within Mali.

multiplicity of temporalities of past, present, and future that constitute, for Mbembe (2001), the quintessence of the postcolony. The invocations of “*ténéré*”—which as I showed in Chapter One became semantically linked to *akal* and *toumast*, the imagined community of all Tuareg people, during the 1970s-1990s—and its substitution with “Azawad” recall the community solidarity at the core of the *Tanekra* political movement and 1990s rebellions. New and ongoing ecological, economic, and political challenges affect the Sahel and Sahara, including political violence in Mali, in Libya, and around Lake Chad (affecting Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon), sustaining a mass culture of displacement and mobility among many Tuareg (and other Nigériens) that echoes *teshumara* culture of the 1970s and 1980s. Meanwhile, Tuareg cultural brokers continue to strive to resuscitate the tourism industry whose role as a “strategy of extraversion” (Bayart 2009) I introduced in the first chapter.

Indeed, the question of why Tuareg continued to seek out tourists in a political climate in which few tourists would choose to visit Niger was a fundamental concern for the project I originally envisioned. Why, I asked, were people organizing festivals and speaking about tourism if there were no tourists? During my 2016 fieldwork, I was able to observe remarkable efforts in this regard, including the Cure Salée festival of Tuareg and Wodaabe (Fulani) nomads in Ingall. By chance, the *fête tournante* for Niger’s Republic Day, December 18, which is celebrated in a different city each year, was held in Agadez in 2016. The Republic Day festivities, called Agadez Sokni (“Beautiful Agadez”), coincided with a number of other celebrations in an almost orgiastic fashion: there was, over the span of a week, the enthronement of Agadez’s Sultan Oumarou Ibrahim Oumarou, the Grand Marathon du Ténéré, and the Festival International de la Mode Africaine (FIMA, International Festival of African Fashion). These events were preceded by massive infrastructure projects to pave and illuminate roads, erect new

traffic circles and monuments, and renovate cultural centers; furthermore, the first direct charter flight from France to Agadez in several years brought Nigérien expatriates and European tourists in to participate in the festivities. The atmosphere was electric, full of optimism, even as the politicking involved in organizing the events and their aftermath were often met with sharp criticism. I was fortunate to document and begin discussing these events with many Nigériens, about which I plan to write elsewhere; they were less directly relevant to the story of Tuareg guitar I wished to share here, and, furthermore, I contracted a serious illness at one festival which prevented me from completing much of my intended research.

While Chapter One historicized the development of Tuareg guitar and introduced its political significance that the Kader Tarhanine performance shows to be continually relevant, in Chapter Two I began to discuss contemporary Tuareg guitar practice by focusing on the musicking that takes place outside more conventional performance and recording settings. I showed how the music-centered practices of creative waiting among Tuareg youth, including talking about music in *fadas*, jamming at *tagssirs*, and exchanging recordings and images on social media groups, are part of a broader culture in which young people craft meaningful temporalities, social space, and sociality within the conditions of economic precarity. While many scholars have shown how the practices surrounding the drinking of tea have become a central facet of contemporary Sahelian life, I have extended these perspectives to integrate the nascent culture of fame and of music jams that have emerged as Tuareg guitar evolved into a public, global popular music.

While jamming, chatting, listening, and other forms of informal musicking are a crucial part of contemporary guitar culture—most Tuareg individuals spend more of their time involved in these activities than any other aspect of music—the transition of *al-guitara* into popular music

has coincided with substantial changes in the Tuareg music economy. Thus, in Chapter Three I discussed how the new social position of the Tuareg artiste is understood in relation to musician roles performed by other members of Tuareg and Nigérien society, including *inaden* artisans as well as griots and musical *artistes* in Nigérien national culture. At issue is the fact that social position is infused with expectations about decorum and comportment, which in Tuareg society is linked to an array of concepts often glossed in English either as “honor” or as “shame”: *imojagh*, *asshak*, *takarakit*, and so on. Tuareg *artistes* navigate these issues as they seek to earn a livelihood through the circulation of money for their services. In Chapter Three, I focused on aspects of performance that are wrapped up in these tensions of honor and money, including spraying, praise singing, dance, and performance antics. Then, in Chapter Four, I continued this discussion by looking at the intellectual property regimes proposed by the Nigérien state, on one hand, and the nongovernmental music culture (Skinner 2015) of artists as they dispute the ethics authorship and performance of covers. In these debates, musicians and audiences reckon with the transition of guitar into a more commercial, money-driven realm that many Tuareg understand to be at odds with social values like honor. “We’re not totally in the years of *asshak* anymore,” as Ahmoudou Madassane told me.

Back in Chapter One, I not only brought up tourism, but also international tours and recordings as musical strategies of extraversion. Other scholars before me have examined this phenomenon of Tuareg music on the world stage, of Tuareg music as world music (e.g., Rasmussen 2005, Belalimat 2010, Genthon 2012, Amico 2013). However, in Chapter Five I drew attention to the ways in which such intercultural production (Myers 2001, 2002), involving Tuareg musicians and European or American producers brought together to create albums, tours, and other projects, can be more complicated than the mere story of the global commodification



of a local musical style. Capitalism is a cultural system (Taylor 2016), and as I show, even if Western record labels may all occupy similar structural relations with regard to their musical collaborators, they are not all equally invested in the commercial drive to produce economic value. Labels like Sahel Sounds and Sublime Frequencies are better understood as situated within a broad underground network of alternative world music labels, where hip curatorship, raw aesthetics, and egalitarian intercultural collaboration are core values.

Collectively, the preceding chapters of this dissertation have framed their analysis of the entanglement of capitalism with Tuareg music in terms of value. This is a straightforward decision; after all, in *Capital Marx* ([1867] 1978) identifies the commodity as fundamental to capitalism, showing its unique form as an object (in his analysis) made up of use value and exchange value, while later scholars (e.g., Harvey 2007, Foucault 2008) show that one of the core characteristics of contemporary neoliberal capitalism is the pervasiveness of economic rationality. Yet most of the stories about Tuareg guitar I have presented are less directly related to matters of economic value, where value theory is most frequently invoked, than to the working out of new and old social values in a changing Tuareg society. From such an expanded perspective, value risks being a theory of everything, stripped of analytical perspicacity. Yet conceptualizing such disparate things as aesthetics, honor, and performance practice in terms of value encourages us to pay attention to how they are produced, consumed, and circulated, as well as to the politics of defining their meaningfulness (cf. Graeber 2013, 238; Turner 1979; Taylor 2017a). This is work that many specialists in material culture and visual art have undertaken in recent decades (e.g., Baudrillard 1981; Steiner 1994, 1995; Myers 2001, 2002; Winegar 2006). This dissertation joins the recent work of other music scholars (e.g., Shipley 2013; Taylor 2016b, 2017a) in exploring how the unusual (im)materiality of music and musical commodification does

not preclude analyses in terms of value. If anything, this literature enriches the broader scholarship on capitalism precisely at a historical moment when financialization, digital and internet technology, and other developments seem to lead to the ever-greater importance of the immaterial in the global economy, of which the Sahel and Sahara are a part.

Since returning from Niger in January 2017, I have kept tabs on guitar culture, as best I could from so far afield, through direct communication with friends and via social media. More and more often, it seems, I see invitations to concerts at restaurants, hotels, and cultural centers in Niamey or Agadez where admission requires the purchase of tickets. Furthermore, in just the course of a year, the means for local production of high-quality recordings in Niger appears to have vastly improved as some *artistes* prepare to release albums with much more polished audio and visual content than I encountered previously. These are not surprising developments. However, they show a Tuareg guitar music culture that is vibrant, continually developing from its *ishumar* roots as popular music; and they remind us that it is situated within an evolving music economy in which artists, producers, and fans strive to secure more of the means of cultural production within the *toumast*.

## APPENDIX A

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*Only material pertaining to northwest Africa is included here.*

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