The "Tamachek Vibration": How Musicians Rework Identity through Fluid Cultural Traditions

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The Tamachek of Mali are a unique people among the larger Tuareg subgroup of Berber people who live in Northern Africa. As part of a study abroad program based in Mali's capital city Bamako, I was able to conduct a two-month research study among a small Tamachek community located there. These connections enabled me to perform with my Tamachek informants at two concerts and learn much about their traditional, yet fluid forms of music, dance, and dress and about the social cause they support through their art. Through the transformation of these traditions, my Tamachek informants renegotiate their own social and cultural identities. Not only does this research add valuable information about Tamachek musical traditions and fluid identities to the small body of research about them, it also provides an important look at the wider issue of praise singing in Mali and calls into question its validity in connection with the support of a social cause through musical traditions.

Introduction

The following paper discusses the ways in which certain members of the Tamachek[1] community have used music in order to invoke identity, social solidarity, and support a specific social cause. At first, the continuing conflict between the Malian government and the Tuareg nationalist movement, which came to a head in the early 1990s, inspired this research project; I wanted to bring Malian culture into the national spotlight, and gain access to the separatist's circle in order to learn about the Tuareg nationalist movement from the inside. Once in Bamako, I realized that this goal was not possible due to the relatively menial social and political presence of the Tuareg who reside there. Instead, I focused on extensive ethnographic interviews with my musical instructors, used their personal social networks to get a larger snow-ball sample of the Tamachek community, and used participant observation at my private lessons, social functions, and performances to better understand the role of music in the Tamachek community. Fortunately, the interviews I had planned concerning nationalism opened the doors to more compelling questions about the ways in which tradition is used and reinvented for specific purposes. My choice to study music as my main topic was not random. Music has proven to be a very important means of protest and a way of creating and maintaining social solidarity.[2]Not only has this been the case in the United States, but many forms of African music, especially Malian *griot* music, have been used for political purposes.[3] Indeed, certain types of Tuareg music were used in the recent movement for independence from Mali and are still used to promote other social causes.[4]

Though the original hope of this research was to discover a thriving and growing Tuareg nationalist movement, it evolved into something quite different. This is not because the nationalist movement does not exist, but because the group of musicians who became my chief informants have a different mission. This mission is closely tied to the goal of a non-governmental organization called *Ama* to which my primary informant belongs.[5] The goal of *Ama* is to bring the issue of ongoing slavery among certain ethnic groups in Mali to public attention and to fight for slavery's eradication. The group of musicians with whom I studied receives backing from this organization because they have chosen to support its humanitarian cause through their music.

Methods

As part of a semester-long study abroad program through

[1] The Tamachek are a subgroup of the Berber people known in academic literature as Tuareg. Most subgroups of Tuareg refer to themselves by their dialect of the language they all share which is called Tamasheq. Some variations of these names are Kel Tamasheq, Kel Tagelmust, Tamajaq, and Tamachek.

[2] Charles H. Cutter, "The Politics of Music in Mali," *African Arts* 3 (1968): 39.

[3] Ibid., 38.

[4] Susan J. Rasmussen, *Those Who Touch: Tuareg Medicine Women in Anthropological Perspective.* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 633.

[5] *Ama* is a pseudonym given to protect the identity of my informants.

Antioch University in Mali, I lived with a Malian family in the capital city of Bamako for about two months. This family was well-to-do and lived just off of one of the major paved roads in an upscale part of the city. The father owned a few farms as well as a taxi company. He also had two wives who lived in two small houses within his courtyard. There were a total of twelve people living there (including myself), eight of whom were under 25 years old. All of the children except for the oldest attended private schools and had had tutors at one time or another during their educations. The oldest child was about my age and I learned many things from her about Malian customs and traditions. For example, at first I thought my host family was Tamachek due to the mother's heritage. Yet, during my first week in their house, my host sister informed me that she was not Tamachek, but Malinke because their descent system is patrilineal. Though I had learned about this type of descent system before, I had no idea how exclusive it could be. The Tamachek, much like neighboring Malinke ethnic groups, still hold to a patrilineal descent system in which it is only required of the men (not the women) to marry within their ethnic group in order to preserve it.[6] Rasmussen's work among the Tuareg in Niger echoed this reality when she said that "if the father is a sultan or prominent marabout and the mother is an ex-slave, the child is considered noble; […] if the father is an ex-slave and the mother a noble, the child is considered a slave."[7]

While I lived with my host family I was treated as one of the family. I would wake up about nine in the morning, have breakfast that they bought for me from a street vendor, and walk about fifteen minutes to *Ama* where I had music lessons for about two hours a day. My two teachers, the male band leader/flute player and one of his female singers/*tende* drummers would meet me there and often brought other band members and friends along with them. At my lessons I learned to drum, sing, play the flute, make artisan/leather goods, and dance as the Tamachek do. I also had the opportunity to do informal interviews with four of the six band members (two males, two females) on topics ranging from traditional clothing and music to their life histories and personal experiences with the Tamachek nationalist rebellion. After my lessons I would often walk back to my home with one or both of my teachers for lunch (they were related to my home-stay family). In the afternoons and evenings I practiced whichever instrument or vocal technique I was learning at the time, interacted with my family, or went on interviews or performed with the band.

I was lucky enough to play with them at two public performances and observe them perform at another. The first performance I observed was one which took place at the home of the band leader in celebration of his child's birth. I was also present and performed with the band on two other occasions. One of these performances was at the national museum of Mali and was put on for a group of foreigners. The second was the final performance and visual arts show for Antioch Study Abroad which had a mixed, but predominantly Malian, audience. The second two shows were different from the first in that they were on a stage facing an audience and, because of this, the dance styles and band-audience interactions were different than those between friends at an informal party.

In addition to these opportunities for observation and participation, the band also connected me to members of two important organizations that work with the Tamachek community where I conducted additional interviews. The first of these two more formal interviews was with about fourteen members of a Tamachek women's cooperative that sells various food items and provides beauty services to the public in order to help support their own families and eventually open a school for adult literacy. I interviewed these women for about an hour, asking them about their organization's purpose and history, why they chose to sell or make what they did, why they were living in Bamako, their lack of formal schooling and their reduced job opportunities as a result. During the second formal interview I was able to speak with the president of *Ama*. At that interview, we discussed the *Ama*'s history and goals, the work it does with those it calls 'black Tamachek' and other marginalized communities, the modern-day existence of slavery and the Malian government's refusal to acknowledge it, as well as the contribution of musicians, like those with whom I studied, in raising awareness for this social cause.

In addition to the informal interviews with members of the band, participant observations, and two interviews with organizations impacting the Tamachek community, I also talked with five other Malians about how the Tamachek are regarded in order to better understand how they are perceived by other ethnic groups. I found it hard to get a feel for the situation because the Tamachek community seemed small and largely ignored.[8] For example, many times when I would introduce myself by my Tamachek name I would be asked for my Malian name, given a new one, or receive a blank uncomprehending stare. Still, these reactions were better than the anger I had anticipated I would receive for associating myself with a people whom some Malians assume are purely "Tuareg separatists."[9] There were, indeed, a few times where my interest in the Tamachek community was questioned. For example, more than once, Malians

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[6] Sekpu Camara, conversation with author, September-October 2008.

[7] Susan J. Rasmussen, "The Slave Narrative in Life History and Myth, and Problems of Ethnographic Representation of the Tuareg Cultural Predicament," *Ethnohistory* 46 (1999): 91.

[8] Clair Oxby, "Tuareg Identity Crisis," *Anthropology Today* 12 (1996): 21.

[9] Jennifer C. Seely, "A Political Analysis of Decentralisation: Coopting the Tuareg Threat in Mali" *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 39 (2001): 503.

asked me why I wanted to learn about a "minority culture at the expense of learning about the majority." Other times, my choice was not just questioned, it was condemned. Why would I want to associate myself with a people that some Malians consider "lazy good-for-nothings that rely on their slaves to do all their work" and who "kill Malian soldiers"? Although my history professor in Mali, Sekpu Camara, informed me of Tamachek tribes who are more rebellious and nationalistic than others, he also told me that most Malians cannot discern one from the other[10]. Due to this fact, I imagine that there must be some confusion for outsiders who don't understand which individual tribes are to blame for continuing violence.

Unfortunately, my experience with large Tamachek groups was also limited due to their underrepresentation in Bamako. Still, I did have extensive experience with a group of Tamachek musicians and their friends and families. Yet, certain areas of my lessons and research were problematic due to my own inadequacies in addition to my small sample. For example, not only was there a vast language barrier that interfered with my plans for interviews, I also had problems overcoming my own cultural conceptions about music and beauty. I was able to do more formal interviews with the help of translators and less formal ones on my own due to my developing French language skills. I also forced myself to overcome what I consider the most difficult part of learning the music of another culture -- the "ethnocentric ear." Though I have almost always appreciated music played throughout the world, I have never really tried to learn another culture's music, especially one so different from western musical traditions.

I encountered my first musical problem after I started learning my second Tamachek song. This song is called *Ehema* and features a very different way of using the voice than any I have ever encountered. It is hard to describe the tone quality that is produced. In order to create it, the diaphragm must be fully engaged and issue short powerful bursts of air which come up through the throat, therein taking on a very guttural growling sound which is the basis for the hard 'e' sound in the ever-repeating title *Ehema*. My primary problem with performing this song was that it was so difficult to learn how to produce such a new and foreign sound. In addition I could not help thinking that what I was doing was not beautiful or particularly musical. I have since been able to change my internal definition of what music is in order to include this sound as not only musical, but beautiful.

The Republic of Mali

The Republic of Mali, where I conducted my ethnographic research, is one of the world's poorest countries.[11] Under French rule, Mali was part of French Sudan. Informants tell me that only after years of unjust treatment of the Tamachek and other ethnic groups did Mali peacefully gain its independence from France in 1960.[12] Still, this young country did not begin its life as the democracy it is today, but existed as a dictatorship until 1991.[13] Informants tell me that many of the older people who grew up in that era of Mali's history wish for the return of that system of governance because jobs were guaranteed to every Malian after they finished school and the country did better economically. Yet, many Malians seem to enjoy the fact that their new government is democratic, but this does not blind them to the bitter reality that Mali's economic situation.

Mali's landscape is as rich and diverse as its political past. Though Mali is landlocked, it houses a very large river and part of a vast ocean of desert. Mali has many distinct ethnic groups packed into a region which is almost twice the size of Texas.[14] Much of Mali's population and economic activity centers around the lush Niger River while some ethnic groups including the Tamachek live and work in the 65% of Mali's land that is boiling hot, yet mesmerizingly beautiful desert or semi-desert.[15] Nomadic groups like the Tamachek, who engage in animal herding, trade, and skilled craft production are about 10% of Mali's population.[16] According to Camara, other ethnic groups in Mali, such as the Bozo, are primarily engaged in fishing, which takes place on the Niger and especially in the city of Mopti.[17] Along with livestock and fishing, Mali also grows and exports rice, but most farming is subsistence.[18] These three activities provide the 12.7 million people living in Mali with 70-80% of their income.[19] Mining of gold, petrol, and diamonds also contributes to Mali's economy, the remaining 20% of which is split equally between the industrial and service sectors.[20] While the service sectors are disappearing fast due to money shortages, the farm product industry is surviving.[21]

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[10] Sekpu Camara, conversation with author, September-October 2008.
[11] David Levinson, *Mali. Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: Oryx Press, 1998), 149.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Mali," Accessed March 19, 2009: https://www.cia.gov/library /publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Levinson, 1998: 149.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Sekpu Camara, conversation with author, September-October 2008.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Mali," Retrieved March 19, 2009: https://www.cia.gov/ library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

Though Mali is a very poor country, it has a rich history of religious amalgamation. Islam came to Mali in the seventh century and its adherents are now officially 90% of Mali's population while 9% are Christian and 1% follows traditional religions.[22] According to Sekpu Camara,[23] Malians are, in general, religiously tolerant and freely mix traditional beliefs and practices, such as fortune telling and magic, with Islam and Christianity. In fact, informants told me that many Malians only claim to be Muslims in order to receive help from others when death or unfortunate circumstances befall their families. They say that otherwise their "real" Muslim friends would not help them. Camara informed me that much of Mali's Muslim population practices traditional religion privately while maintaining "a good Muslim front in public."[24]

Tuareg Groups in Africa

The various peoples known as Tuareg are one of a few subgroups of Berber people who are thought to have moved into Northern Africa from the Near East.[25] Berbers number over 11 million and live in Algeria, Niger, Mali, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco where they are most highly concentrated and make up 34% of the population.[26] Some Berber subgroups include the Rifians, Berraber, and Shluh of Morocco, the Kabyles, the Shawia, the Mzab of Algeria, and the Tuareg, primarily of Niger.[27] The Tuareg, of whom the Tamachek are a distinct group, are a politically and demographically underrepresented community[28] within a relatively small number of countries -- Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.[29] Tuareg population figures range from 300,000 to 3 million, a direct result of whether or not their dependent populations and tributary groups are also counted and because some countries do not have official statistics on their numbers.[30] The Tuareg are most concentrated in Niger "where they constitute 11 percent of the population."[31]

The few print sources about the Tamachek of Mali and its neighboring countries almost always refer to them as "Tuareg." I have heard two different origins of this name from my primary informant and the president of *Ama* respectively. The first is that this is the term the French gave to white- or red-skinned Tamachek people. The other is that this is a term referring to both the Tamachek and Arabs who "cut the path" or traded across the desert. I found one literary source which states that "the people known in Western literature as Tuareg, […] call themselves Kal-tamashaq" meaning people of the Tamachek language[32] or "Kel Tagelmust" meaning people of the veil.[33] Due to dialect differences of Tuareg in other countries, there are various other names which they use to refer to themselves. For example, the community in Niger call themselves Tamajaq after their dialect.[34] Regardless of the origins of the term "Tuareg," my informants did not use the words to refer to themselves. In fact, the world-famous traditional Tamachek music ensemble Tartit points out in its own publicity literature that terms like Berber and Tuareg are not their first choice because they have been attributed to this group by outsiders.[35] Indeed the term "Tuareg" was:

> imposed as a gloss, or cover-term, to designate the ethnicity and culture of a people who, although unified by their common language and culture, belong to diverse social strata based on descent, have different geographical origins, and practice varied subsistence patterns of stockbreeding, oasis gardening, caravanning, professional Quranic scholarship, and smithing.[36]

Therefore, I have opted not to refer to the Tamachek of Mali by the term "Tuareg" despite the many resources about them that do. This article will only use the single word "Tamachek" with which my informants normally referred to themselves and will employ the spelling they provided me.

Because the presence of the Tamachek predated that of the Arabs, (who arrived in the seventh century) the cultural and political traditions of the Tamachek have caused clashes

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Sekpu Camara, conversation with author, September-October 2008.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Cynthia Becker, "Tuareg," *In The Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Folklore and Folklife,* Edited by Walter Clements (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 112.
[26] Walter Spencer, *Muslim Peoples: A world Ethnographica Survey* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 99-100.
[27] Ibid.
[28] I. Ag Youssouf, A. Grimshaw, and C. Bird, "Greeting in the Desert," *American Ethnologist* 3 (1976): 800.
[29] J. Straker, "Performing the Predicaments of National Belonging: The Art and Politics of the Tuareg Ensemble Tartit at the 2003 Folk Festival," *The Journal of American Folklore* 121 (2008): 83.
[30] Jeremy Keenan, *The Lesser Gods of the Sahara,* (Chippenham, Wiltshire: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), 1.
[31] Straker, 2008.
[32] Youssouf, Grimshaw, and Bird, 1976: 800.
[33] Susan J. Rasmussen, "Veiled Self, Transparent Meanings: Tuareg Headdress as Social Expression," *Ethnology* 30 (1991b): 366.
[34] Susan J. Rasmussen, *Healing in Community: Medicine, Contested Terrains, and Cultural Encounters Among the Tuareg* (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 277.
[35] Susan J. Rasmussen, "A Temporary Diaspora: Contested Cultural Representations in Tuareg International Musical Performance" *Anthropology Quarterly* 78 (2005): 805.
[36] Rasmussen, (1991b): 366.

with Arabs throughout history.[37] Even though they are now predominantly Muslim, some still hold traditional beliefs.[38] Indeed, "[t]he local belief system, with its own cosmology and ritual, interweaves and overlaps with Islam rather than standing in opposition to it."[39] The majority of Berber groups practice "subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry" and still holds to political systems which distinguish them from their fellow countrymen and crosscut the nations in which they live.[40]

Though the Tuareg traditionally held to a matrilineal descent system, they have compromised with Islamic tradition (which practices patrilineal descent) and now have a more or less bilateral system in which women are highly regarded and enjoy a secure position in the social hierarchy.[41] In fact, important group alliances are inherited from the mother while place in the social hierarchy of the group is passed on by the father.[42] Still, there is not much upward mobility for women or men in traditional Tamachek society because individuals are expected to practice endogamy by marrying their close cousins and therefore, into their own social stratum.[43] Tuareg women are well respected and free within their society,[44] which is not true for all Berber women, and hold "one of the most valued roles […] according to both men and women, [which] is motherhood."[45] Women are free to divorce their husbands, own specific necessities (their own tents and animals), and play music publicly.[46] Though my informants told me that the Tamachek are often stigmatized as more radical in their adherence to Islamic tradition, I was also informed that unlike more strict Muslims, Tamachek women are not veiled. In fact, traditionally it is men who veil for modesty.[47] The Tuareg (the Tamachek included) value music and visual arts highly.[48] Music is a central part of almost every important ritual in Tamachek culture, including baby name days, weddings, funerals, and holidays. In addition, as described later in this paper, certain musical instruments are reported by my informants to have healing qualities and/or medicinal abilities which can be used in cases of spirit possession.[49] Susan Rasmussen,[50] who has written a great deal on the latter, has also done much to bring the group she usually refers to as the Tuareg to the attention of the scholarly community. In fact, of the group of Berber people known as Tuareg, it seems none has been more closely studied than the group which lives in the Air Mountains of Niger and speaks a dialect of Berber called Tamajaq.[51] Unfortunately, though the Tamajaq are closely related to the Tamachek of Mali (as confirmed by the correlation between my research and Rasmussen's), there are few resources in scholarly literature that are based directly on the Malian Tamachek community. This is why research on this particular subgroup of Berbers is so desperately needed.

The Tamachek of Mali

The Tamachek are predominantly located in the Northern Sahara desert regions and are centered around the cities of Kidal, Gao, and Tombouctou.[52] In Mali there are "six hundred thousand Tuaregs [who] represent 5 percent of the national citizenry."[53] Though the Tamachek's traditional homeland is in the north, rural to urban migration is increasing due to many famine causing droughts, slavery, and political unrest -- which push some southwards into Bamako, Mali's capital city. There, the Tamachek are an even smaller minority and are almost lost among the majority Mande (50%) (Bambara, Malinke, Soninke) [and smaller ethnic groups like the] Peul (17%), Voltaic (12%), Songhai (6%), Moor (10%) [calculated with the Tuareg], [and] other (5%).[54] Each of these ethnic groups to greater or lesser extents also makes their homes in Bamako. In addition to their small numbers, the Tamachek are also verbally isolated from many of Mali's other ethnic groups because their language is derived from the Afro-Asiatic language family while Bamanankan (Mali's most widely

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[37] Susan J. Rasmussen, "Tuareg." In *The Encyclopedia of World Culture,* 9 (1991a): 367.
[38] Becker, 2006: 114.
[39] Rasmussen, 1991a: 369.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Rasmussen, 1991b: 367.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Spencer, 1978: 105.
[45] Barbara Worley, "Where all the Women are Strong," *Natural History* 11 (1992): 56.
[46] Becker, 2006: 114.
[47] M. Brett and E. Fentress, *The Berbers* (Cambridge, UK: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996), 212.
[48] Rasmussen, 1991b: 369.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Susan Rasmussen has written numerous articles (2007, 2008) and some books on the Tuareg in Niger. The topics of these works range from music and the nationalist movement, aging, spirit possession, traditional clothing, and tradition vs. modernity among the Tuareg. Her books include: *The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging: Life Course and Personal Destiny in Niger*, *Those Who Touch: Tuareg Medicine Women in Anthropological Perspective*, *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*, and *Healing in Community: Medicine, Contested Terrains, and Cultural Encounters among the Tuareg.*
[51] Rasmussen, 2001: 277.
[52] Rasmussen, 1991b: 366.
[53] Straker, 2008: 83.
[54] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Mali," Retrieved March 19, 2009. https://www.cia.gov/ library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html.

spoken language) is of the Niger-Congo family.[55] Also, Tamachek is "distinctly different from the Berber languages […] with a more elaborate grammar and fewer loan-words form Arabic."[56]

Scholarly research is clarifying an academic understanding of Tamachek society by showing that the Tamachek have a high degree of social stratification much like Mali's other ethnic groups.[57] My informants describe the Tamachek social structure as having feudal elements.[58] The Tamachek community is comprised of different tribes, each of which is headed by a family and has an internal as well as an intertribal hierarchy.[59] These tribal hierarchies no longer have great political significance, but their "social distinctions are carefully maintained."[60] "Tuareg society was constructed like a pyramid, with nobles on top and various levels of dependents and servile groups below, dominated by a few aristocratic leaders like managers of large farms."[61] At the bottom rung of Tamachek internal hierarchy are the slaves known as *Bellah* who are not a discrete ethnic group, but a mix of individuals from groups who lived near the Tamachek and were raided and taken as prisoners.[62] These slaves lived in close relations with their Tamachek masters who were supposed to treat them as they would their own children[63] and even called them by kinship terms.[64] It is because of this closeness that informants tell me that the slaves of one tribe may even outrank the nobles of another. This fact is due to more noble origins of one tribe as compared to others.[65] *Imajaghen*, the noble segment of society, has now come to represent the entire Tamachek group in pop culture.[66] Informants state that there are various other segments of society that include the "clergy [*ineslemen*], vassals [*imghad*], blacksmiths [*inaden*], and slaves [*eklan*]."[67] Each of these groups has a distinct position in Tamachek society and a specific job or duty that is associated with them. For example, the nobles are associated with restraint and dignity and were traditionally responsible for camel breeding and trade.[68] The blacksmiths were "both respected and feared, due to their ability to smelt iron and work with fire"; they were also known for their position in Tamachek society as musicians.[69] The blacksmiths were and in some cases still are dependent on noble families on whom they used their music in order to gain material support. "[T]hey call out in praise songs to elicit presents from nobles: 'to grease the throat.' This is a request for millet, sugar, tea, and cash in order to release positive praise from the mouth of the smith."[70] Though smiths are considered as one of the lowest status segments of Tamachek society, they are thought to have internal powers which allow them to "convert the natural into the cultural and protect cultural autonomy."[71]

Due to traditional roles of smiths within Tamachek society, in modern times they face challenges because they often lack formal education and the wealth of nobles is diminishing. Members of the Tamachek women's cooperative whose name means "let's stand up, wake up, and work" told me that many women from the association are illiterate because their parents literally hid them from the enculturation they felt was happening in schools during colonization. According to Lecocq:

> It was generally believed that French education would turn children away from Islam […] Many reacted by sending their slave's children instead […] This has resulted in the overrepresentation of Tuareg from slave origins in administrative and educational posts.[72]

Because of situations like this and the lack of resources for schools in areas close to the desert, many of the Tamachek I have come to know are uneducated in the Western sense. Still, a very small group can read *Tifinagh,*[73] their traditional written script which is "pictographic in nature but us[es] lines, circles, and dots.[74] It is an interesting dilemma that

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[55] R.G. Gordon Jr. ed., "Ethnologue: Languages of the World," *SIL International*, 2005. http://www. ethnologue.com/.
[56] Brett and Fentress, 1996: 209.
[57] Rasmussen, 1991a: 366.
[58] Keenan, 2004: 50.
[59] Becker, 2006: 113.
[60] Robert F. Murphy, "Tuareg Kinship," *American Anthropologist* 69 (1964): 164.
[61] Rasmussen, 1999: 70.
[62] Rasmussen, 1991b: 366.
[63] Rasmussen, 1991b.
[64] Baz Lecocq, "The Bellah Question: Slave Emancipation, Race, and Social Categories in Late Twentieth Century Northern Mali," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines* 39 (2005): 51.
[65] Murphy, 1964: 1261.
[66] Becker, 2006:101.
[67] Ibid., 102.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Susan J. Rasmussen, "Ritual Powers and Social Tensions as Moral Discourse Among the Tuareg," *American Anthropologist* 100, (1998): 459.
[71] Ibid., 464.
[72] Lecocq, 2005: 55.
[73] Rasmussen, 1991a: 366.
[74] Spencer, 1978: 105.

the very characteristics that the nobles treasured, such as adherence to Islam, reserve, and honor, would keep them from getting Western-style educations and finding work while those of lower status are more often finding prestigious positions outside of the Tamachek community.

Many of the now disadvantaged nobles have found a means of survival by revisiting the skills that they learned as children. For example, the women's organization I visited makes various food items, dyes indigo, creates jewelry, and braids hair in order to help support their families and to finance their goal of creating a school where they can learn to read and write in French. I was impressed by these women's courage, but surprised that they were not (like the other Tamachek I know) making more traditional items like leather goods and jewelry to sell to tourists. Unfortunately, the goods of the women's organization I interviewed are not selling well and they are looking for a way to export their wares abroad. Even though traditional Tamachek artisans seemed to be doing slightly better than their food-producing sisters (perhaps because their customers are primarily foreign tourists), many also longed for the opportunity to export their goods.

The current economic situation in which many Tamachek find themselves is much improved when compared to their marginalized state at the beginning of French colonialism. Though the Tuareg are said to have held back French colonial progress,[75] the six Tuareg groups in Niger and Mali and other two located in Algeria were significantly different from each other and did not form a united social or political confederation.[76] Due to long standing inequalities between the Tuareg and other ethnic groups reaching back as far as the beginning of colonialism, there have been numerous Tuareg uprisings and rebellions which turned into a nationalist movement in the early 1990s. French colonial policies which favored southern farming regions were reflected in post-independence policies and distribution of foreign aid.[77] The marginalized situation in which many Tuareg live, both in the past and the present, is expressed well by the words of the Tamachek resistance leader Hama ag Sid Ahmed, who said,

> In Mali, we are considered second-rate citizens, only good for paying heavy taxes and managing to survive on our own. […] Our role is to attract curiosity tourists and international aid that constitute the bulk of Mali's revenue. Time has now proven that this country has no interest in integrating us. […] We become, day by day, a little more like strangers in our own land, subjugated to all kinds of abuses, a people dying…Our traditions are ridiculed and our children are encouraged to despise them.[78]

These words not only reflect the cause of the 1962 tax revolt in Mali, but the reasons for the Tuareg nationalist/separatist rebellion which took place from 1990-1996.[79] During this rebellion, many "white Tuareg" were forced to leave their homes, animals, and livelihoods as they fled to refugee camps in Mauritania and elsewhere to avoid the armies of local governments enraged by the rebels expanding territory, attacks, and robberies.[80] According to both Keenan[81] and Rasmussen,[82] important bonds between these refugees and their host Tuareg populations in Algeria, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso were formed. After the 1995 and 1996 peace accords were signed, many Tuareg began to return to their home countries where NGOs are still working to re-integrate them. I encountered one such project funded by *Ama*. This project was based on agriculture and its main goal was to buy land, plants, and animals for newly repatriated Tamachek refugees who fled Mali in 1993. While projects like this one are needed, they have historically had trouble succeeding because of problems due to political bureaucracy, local redirection of aid, and unavailability of matching funds from locals.[83] Even though many such efforts have not been successful, music, especially that of the Tamachek, has been used to promote and emphasize goals of "peace, repatriation, and reconciliation."[84]

Music in Mali

Mali's rich ethnic and cultural diversity has given rise to wonderful aesthetic and oratorical traditions. Not only does Mali have a long history of visual art forms (pottery, textile weaving, dying, and decoration, as well as wood carving), it also has a long history of distinct musical forms. Malian music is characterized by a very conversational style of phrasing in vocal music due to the subject matter of songs (genealogies and historical accounts). It also relies

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[75] Jeremy Keenan, *Sahara Man,* (Burry St. Edmounds, Suffolk: St. Edmoundsburry Press Ltd., 2001), 3.
[76] Jeremy Keenan, *The Lesser Gods of the Sahara,* (Chippenham, Wiltshire: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), 33-34.
[77] Rasmussen, 2005: 799.
[78] A. Gaudio, *Le Mali* (Paris: Karthala, 1992), 190.
[79] Rasmussen, 2005: 799.
[80] Susan Randell, "Demographic Consequences of Being Refugees: Malian Kel Tamasheq" (presentation, IUSSP General Conference Salvador, Brazil, 2001).
[81] Keenan, 2004: 89.
[82] Rasmussen, 2005: 806.
[83] Rasmussen, 2005.
[84] Ibid.

on a great deal of vocal and instrumental improvisation on the part of singer-historians who sing to praise many different patrons. Malian instruments have diverse tuning systems.[85] In addition to diversity in tuning systems, Malian music often has two independent melodic parts that create a polyrhythmic (more than one rhythm playing at the same time) or an offbeat texture.[86] The spread of Islam has also introduced monophony (or one melody) and much melodic ornamentation into Malian music through liturgical chants.[87]

Of Mali's three main musical genres, the music of traditional hunter's societies, which is said to predate even the Malian empire, is the oldest.[88] Another genre of Malian music is drumming, which is used to mark important stages of the life cycle and celebrate agricultural and recreational events.[89] Though certain rhythmic patterns were traditionally associated with particular events, today they are most often used indiscriminately.[90] While it is a fact that drumming is a distinct genre of Malian music, it can also be mixed with other genres. For example, drummers and *Jelies* (which form the final and most distinctive Malian genre) often perform together at weddings and concerts.[91] *Jelies*/*griots* are professional musicians who began a new genre of music in the thirteenth century, around the rise of the Malian empire.[92] The musicians who perform this genre are part of the blacksmith caste in Mande society and it is their special rite and responsibility to fulfill the role of musician/oral historian for their patrons.[93] Although music is protected through endogamy and the rite of *griots* through birth and training, others outside the caste can become musicians as well, though they might be met with social resistance and usually do not attain the social status of *griot.*[94]

Mainstream Malian music has often been used for political purposes. In fact, *jelie* or *griot* music is often listened to by outsiders in Mali in order to understand popular political opinion of the time.[95] Indeed,

> Music has served Mali as an instrument of political communication, transmitting political information and values, mobilizing the population, evoking and sustaining its pride and identity, and legitimizing both patterns of authority and incumbents of authority roles.[96]

As alluded to above, the vocal genre of Malian music began at the rise of the Malian empire and may have been instrumental in its success because of the popular praise songs which are still sung today about the founder of the Malian empire. In this way *griots* "make the past immediate. 'Other people use writing, but this invention killed memory among them; they no longer feel the past because writing does not have the warmth of the human voice.'"[97] Therefore, by singing about past Malian heroes, the *griot* is perpetuating a common memory and national pride. This serves to unite his or her people politically and socially as well as to mobilize them.[98]

Tamachek Instrumental and Vocal Music

Though my informants are a self-proclaimed traditional Tamachek ensemble, they play instruments that are not played in traditional Tamachek music. The ensemble came together as a group of family and friends who played for special occasions like baby name days, weddings, and so on in their community. After playing together for four years, the man who is now band leader suggested they play for money. Only one year later, the three women and four men (most of whom are husbands and wives) have played for numerous key Malian dignitaries as well as important visitors like Laura Bush. Though the majority of the band's performances are localized in Bamako, they have been invited to the famous Festival of the Desert twice and opted instead to play at a similar festival of Tuareg music that takes place in Tunisia around the same time each year. The band leader, who is of noble origins, and the six other band members, who are of the blacksmith caste, prefer the Tunisian festival because they are treated to free airfare, hotel rooms, food, and private transportation as well as a better pay check than the Festival of the Desert would provide. Treatment like this is not only scarce in Mali, but for band members who come from the north and have survived many hardships, it is enough to lure them away from Mali for about a week.

When this traditional Tamachek ensemble performs in Mali or abroad, they play various traditional and less

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[85] Eric Cherry, *Mande Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 13.
[86] Cherry, 2000.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Charles H. Cutter, "The Politics of Music in Mali," *African Arts* 3 (1968): 74.
[96] Cutter, 1968: 38.
[97] Cutter, 1968: 74.
[98] Ibid.

traditional instruments. For example, my primary informant told me that the first and most traditional Tamachek instrument is the flute or *agneb* and the three elements which traditionally accompany music are the *tende* drum, dance, and clapping. More modern instruments which are played in my informant's musical group include the Tamachek guitar (or *tahardent*) and the calabash drums. Even though the ensemble incorporates these newer instruments, they still identify themselves as a traditional group. Interestingly, the Tamachek musical group Tartit also identifies their music as traditional, but does not employ a full-time flutist; instead they occasionally hire one to record with them on certain projects.

Tamachek music groups are apparently free to choose what instruments they use to play traditional music. Yet they seem to find the music of the *agneb* or "oblique end-blown flute with four finger-holes" indispensible for important occasions.[99] This type of flute was first "made from a sorghum stem with four equidistant holes […] and ha[d] leather thongs tied round its body for protection and ornamentation."[100] The *agneb* played by my primary informant was metal and wrapped tightly in a single piece of leather with decorative leather tassels. According to my informants, in addition to the flute being the primary instrument of traditional music, it also has healing qualities. Listening to the music of the *agneb* is said to be not only calming and sleep inducing, but it also has the ability to relieve stress. Still, the real magic happens when the individual plays this instrument for themselves. Not only does the music distract a person from his/her problems (which reduces stress), but the flute is said to grant the person more intelligence if they play it for two to three months. In addition, the action of playing the flute is said to give one a better appetite and is therefore good for the body.

The Tamachek *agneb* is not only played for its healing qualities, it is also an important mood-setter for musical performances. According to my informants it is the first instrument to be played at performances because it has a calming, natural sound which sets a mood of contentment and tranquility. It also sets the stage for romantic tales as well as more serious ones. For example, the flute is the only instrument played with the song *Itononing*, which is a romantic tale about a beautiful girl with many suitors. It can also be played as background music for oral historians' emotional retellings of the history of Mali. Because of the deep emotional and physical impact of this instrument and its history as one played for personal enjoyment alone in the fields, I suggest its music is of a very personal and introspective nature.

Even though the *agneb* is said to be the most historic and powerful instrument in traditional Tamachek music, it is not the most frequently played in modern performances. In my observations, the tende drum is played much more often and according to my informants, exclusively by women. Indeed, Rasmussen also notes that, "where smith populations are absent, ex-slaves or noblewomen tend to fulfill the role, but never […] did any noblemen play the tende."[101] The tende drum is made by "stretching a goatskin over a wooden mortar used to grind grain.[102] Though informants tell me this instrument also creates an atmosphere, it does so in a very different way than the agneb. For example, this type of drum is most often played with fast songs, which are accompanied by dancing and are typically played at parties and marriages. During my first few music lessons with my informants, I was taught to play the tende with force because without it, my attempts would create sound, but not music. Unlike the music of the flute, the drum is obviously meant to draw an audience. For these reasons, tende drum music plays a much more social function than that of the flute. This type of drum is also a very interesting instrument because it involves a long process of reattaching the drum head each time it needs to be retuned (which usually happens just before important performances). During my participant observations, I noticed that each time this instrument is retuned, its head, made from goat hide or elum, is taken off the mortar body and soaked in water. It is then stretched very tightly by at least two people and tied with a cotton cord called argon. The hide is stretched again (forcefully with the person's entire body weight) and re-wet; usually after this, a thin piece of cloth called *acarshe* is placed over the top of the hide. Then, the *tende* is normally put out in the sun to dry. The retuning process can take anywhere from a half an hour to an hour. Though *tende* is not always placed in the sun to dry afterwards, this action can add another half an hour of prep time. When the drum is finally ready, it is placed on top of a plastic sack or piece of cloth with a buffer (usually plastic flip-flops) for stabilization. My informants tell me that this augments the resonance of any size of *tende.*

In juxtaposition to the *tende,* which requires much on-site preparation time, the Tamachek guitar or *tahardent* as well as the calabash drums need relatively little or no prep time. Informants say the *tahardent* is a three-stringed *ngoni* type instrument which is distinctive of the Peul, Tamachek, and Moorish groups of northern Mali. This

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[99] T. Nikiprowezky, "Tuareg Music," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 25, (2002): 856.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Susan J. Rasmussen, "Art as Process and Product: Patronage and the Problem of Change in Tuareg Blacksmith/Artisan Roles," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 65 (1995a): 600.
[102] Becker, 2006: 108.

instrument is a "plucked lute […] which has a canoe-shaped wooden resonance chamber covered with goat hide. The neck supports three strings once horsehair but now synthetic."[103] For me, the musical style characteristic of the solo (acoustic) *tahardent* is much more in tune with the music of the flute than with that of the *tende* because it is typically slow, flowing, and soft. Yet, the *tahardent* is more often used in faster songs which feature drums and is usually distorted so excessively that it sounds like an electric guitar. Because of this popular way of playing it, *tahardent* music sounds good with the calabash drums which are by far the loudest acoustic instrument in modern Tamachek music. This is due to the fact that they are made from half of a dried and hollowed-out calabash (indigenous gourd) and are placed face down on a blanket or mat. These drums are played with the hands which usually bear at least one large metal ring to augment the natural volume and sound of the drum beats. According to my informants, the playing of the *tende* drum differs from that of *tahardent* and the calabash drums because the latter are played exclusively by men.

In much the same way as mainstream Malian musicians, Tamachek musicians create music which is most often characterized by vocalization and improvisation on "traditional melodic forms."[104] Tamachek music's

> scales are often pentatonic [five notes, instead of the seven or twelve note scale normally used in western tradition], though other more complex ones are also to be found […] [s]ometimes, especially at the ends of certain songs, the singer introduces notes that appear unrelated to the scale on which the piece as a whole is based. On the other hand notes with specific structural functions are deliberately altered. Such practices are evidence of the outstanding virtuosity of skilled Tuareg singers, and it is by such means that they constantly renew the interest in their songs.[105]

The music of the Tamachek is a complex form and it seems to be well-suited to those with a creative nature and artistic skills. It is for this reason that the most important segment of Tamachek society for my musical research are the "blacksmiths [who], in rural [as well as urban] areas manufacture jewelry, household tools and weapons for nobles, and also provide musical entertainment at ritual services."[106] In this way, the smiths of the Tamachek serve much the same role as the *griots* in Mande society who are also craftsmen, errand runners, and the public voice for their patrons. Yet, in juxtaposition to the very thriving role of *jeliya*, female Tamachek smiths are more often involved in crafts which require them to "tan, dye and embroider leather, and dress noblewomen's hair. [Still,] smiths of either sex sing praise songs for nobles."[107] While smiths traditionally put on musical performances for their noble patrons, due to the decline of the Tamachek social hierarchy and rural to urban migration, many have turned to creating praise songs for others or making and selling jewelry and leather goods to tourists.108 In addition, nobles have also begun to perform less noble forms of music as well as their more traditional forms of sung poetry.[109] Also in keeping with the culture of the majority of urban Malians is the fact that there is a joking relationship between Tamachek nobles and smiths (through actual dialogue and song lyrics).[110] According to Camara, joking relationships like these allow an outlet for anger which might otherwise be expressed through violence.[111]

There are genres of Tamachek music which go beyond popular praise songs and sung poetry. Firstly, traditional male vocal music was accompanied by few musical instruments and "multiple instruments were not usually played at the same time."[112] This genre of music has gone through many transformations. Though more traditional forms called *tichiwe* (men's songs) mainly praised female beauty or recounted happy moments in life, the most recent transformation of this genre has introduced a form of song which has been used as a means of protest and way of creating social solidarity.[113] Yet, this new form is still marked by the heavy ornamentation and extensive vocal ranges of more traditional men's music.[114] During the "Tuareg rebellion" of the early 1990s, this new style of music, termed *Ichumar,* emerged to fulfill the need to unify the various Tuareg groups spread over multiple countries towards the common goal of nationality.[115] This music is characterized by the use of Western-style guitars, multiple instruments playing simultaneously, and lyrics which at once praise rebel leaders while appropriating cultural traditions and familiar

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[103] Ibid., 116.
[104] Nikiprowezky, 2002: 856.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Rasmussen, 1991a: 592.
[107] Rasmussen, 1995a: 595.
[108] Rasmussen, 1991b: 369.
[109] Becker, 2006: 108.
[110] Rasmussen, 1999: 74.
[111] Sekpu Camara, conversation with author, September-October 2008.
[112] Becker, 2006: 116.
[113] Nikiprowezky, 2002: 856.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Rasmussen, 2006: 637.

stories and memories in order to unify this very diverse group. After the peace accords were signed, this style of music began to be adapted to the current situation and broadened in order to include more than just protest songs or music of the rebellion.[116] The songs of the Tamachek group Tinariwen are a prime example of the guitar-centered style of this new musical form. They also demonstrate how this music, which was at first meant to spur people to separatist political action, can be used for a broader cause.[117] For example, the lyrics of one of Tinariwen's songs tells their audience to

> Abandon this incessant laziness
> that kills the body and the living soul.
> Men, extend the sleeping hand to me.
> Work is at your door; what prevents this?[118]

Though this song was originally meant to mobilize Tamachek to work toward a nationalist cause, its message is still valid and necessary today with regard to the joint goal of my informants and *Ama*--to reduce modern-day slavery by encouraging the Tamachek and other ethnic groups to work to provide for their own needs instead of employing slave labor.

In contrast to this more political form of men's music, there is a lighter dance form as well. This form was traditionally played by the less-reserved slaves of the Tamachek, but now crosses into all ranks of male society.[119] The male dance form encompasses three major dance styles, *tehigeltltehemmet, tazengherit,* and *arokas.*[120] These dances are usually performed by one to two males and differ from other dances in that the movements are very quick and are concentrated in the lower body (crouching and leg kicks) while most Tamachek dances revolve around fluid and graceful hand and upper body movements. In addition, whereas most dances are performed with very loud rhythmic accompaniment, men's dances are characterized by the short, rhythmic vocalizations (encouragements) of only one male which occur simultaneously with the dancer's quick change of position.

In addition to traditional male vocal music and dance forms, the Tamachek also have a traditional genre of female vocal music which encompasses three major styles. The first style called *ezele* (dance songs) is characterized by a rhythmic accompaniment of predominately hand clapping, while *tende nomnas* (praise-songs) and *tende N'guma* (songs of exorcism) are accompanied by the *tende* drum as well as other musical instruments.[121] Most women's music is performed in a call and response style and is characterized by women providing their own accompaniment on medium-sized drums they make themselves.[122] Though this genre of music was traditionally considered too passionate for nobles to perform, some noble women have taken up the *tende* drum that characterizes it. Due to this fact, today it is not just the "Bellah former slaves [many of whom still live in slave like conditions today] and *griot* (oral historians-bards) [that] perform these songs"[123] Therefore, Tamachek music is not limited to a single genre, but involves sung-poetry, male and female traditional vocal music which have been transformed through social movements and/or the advent of new performers.

In much the same way that the calabash drums and the *tahardent* seem to be dominantly played by males, females in my observation are more likely than men to do the singing and accompany themselves on the *tende* drum. Though males often let out encouraging cries to their fellow performers (especially during high energy songs), it is the women's vocalizations which typified the music played by my informants. "Interestingly, when the Tuareg woman sings […] she will often interject into her song a characteristic feature of Arab female singing, the *zaghruta* [italics added] or yodeling cry."[124] The quick grace notes which accompany most sung passages are also a reminder to me of music from the Middle East. Yet, the rhythmic patterns of some songs are for me more reminiscent of Native American music.

One song which employs a rhythmic pattern reminiscent of some Native American music is called *Eha Ehenia* and is accompanied by the *tende*, enthusiastic clapping, the calabash drum, the *tahardent,* and features a traditional call and response style as well as the rhythmic pattern mentioned above. Though most passages are repeated by the singer at least once, the most repeated section or call is the song title which is followed by the response *ahanna*. There seem to be innumerable passages that can be interjected between the call and response (which occurs on every third repetition); I learned a few. These were the words for "what are you telling me?" "We call Azahara (my Tamachek name)" and the name for loved ones or supporters which is *ed marhonis.* It was my impression from these words that the song must be about a woman (whose name is interchangeable) who has friends. Yet, the Tamachek group *Tartit* ("unity") plays a

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[116] Ibid.
[117] Susan J. Rasmussen, "Between Several Worlds: Images of Youth and Age in Tuareg Popular Performances," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73 (2000): 139.
[118] Nadia Belalimat, "Le rapport à l'histoire dans les chants de lutte de la résistance touarègue contemporaine," (Aix-en-Provence:Edisud, 1996), 158.
[119] Nikiprowezky, 2002: 856.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Becker, 2006: 116.
[123] Ibid.
[124] James A. Standifer, "The Tuareg: Their Music and Dances," *The Black Perspective in Music* 16 (1988), 48.

version of this song that is described as being about a good for nothing young wife who does not contribute to her household. This song, like many in Mali, serves an obvious social function in that it defines the behavior expected from a certain type of individual and reprimands anyone who does not fit into that model. Therefore, it creates social solidarity by reconciling the behavior of an individual with the expected behavior of the group.

In addition to the music of those with whom I studied, I was able to meet and learn from three members Malian group called Tartit who's music is also highly respect within the Tamachek community. Tartit began to play informally in 1994 while they lived in a refugee camp in Burkina Faso.[125] After peace accords were signed in wake of the Tuareg rebellion, Tartit returned to Mali.[126] Since then, the group has gained a diverse international audience in Europe, Canada, and the United States and their modern take on women's *tende* music has captured much global media attention.[127] It seems to be this band's goal to act as "the unofficial cultural ambassadors […] for Tuareg communities back in Mali" and to "attract American [and other] tourists to the Timbuktu region."[128]

Tartit transforms women's *tende* music by adding male performers who play instruments not typically associated with this type of music.[129] For example, both the *tahardent* and the Western-style guitar are played alongside the *tende* and call and response singing. Not only has Tartit brought traditional Tamachek music to the world stage, it has also succeeded in presenting the softer side of an ethnic group who have often been considered by fellow Malians and the outside world as problematic and dangerous. For example, the image put forth by Tartit is very contrary to media depictions. While the media and films tend to represent the Tamachek as the victimizer (because of violent Tuareg separatist movements), the musical group Tartit illuminates the fact that many of these people have had to live in hard situations because they are victims of increasing desertification, discrimination, and injustice.

In order to suit the modern and diverse tastes of their international audiences, Tartit has gone a step above incorporating less traditional instruments like the *tahardent* and Western-style guitar by presenting themselves as enigmatic. For example, in order to attract the attention and tourist interest from foreign audiences at the 2003 Smithsonian Folklife Festival,

> Tartit members deliberately sought to fashion themselves as both extremely exotic and essential figures of a nomadic lifestyle that flourished in a spellbinding desert realm a world away from the mundane constraints structuring quotidian experience in the West and even in most of Mali.[130]

Band members successfully enacted this identity by dressing in their traditional flowing garb and performing their music and dance in a subdued, slow, and fluid way which contrasted to their musical style with the more "raucous moods and movements inspired by most other Malian bands."[131] Because of their distinctive style of dress and music, Tartit was able to distinguish itself from even their fellow countrymen which "fostered and protected a romantic fantasy enshrining the band as living representatives of a nomadic way of life that transcended the mundane territorial limits and administrative constraints imposed by the laws of modern bureaucratized societies."[132] Therefore, Tartit has adapted their social identities and musical styles in a way that they hope will not only please their audience, but cause them to visit Mali and support the Tamachek community there.

Creating Social Identities through Fluid Traditional Forms of Music and Dress

Almost all of my research was conducted with a traditional Tamachek music ensemble, which performed a mix of both the male and female genres of traditional vocal music. The authentic tradition behind the music was very central for them personally and for the success of their careers. Yet Rassmusen's work with the Tuareg of Niger suggested that "the boundaries between so-called 'traditional' and 'modern' are fluid [and] flowing."[133] Keenan's work also echoed this notion when he wrote that Tuareg "language, dress (in the form of the veil), religion, nomenclature, abode, were all […] taking on new meanings."[134] Indeed, in my lessons and through observation I noticed an interesting mix between tradition and modernity for the Tamachek. My informants put a lot of emphasis on the tradition behind their group, but I noticed mixing with more modern practices. For example, they freely mixed male and female musical genres

[125] Straker, 2008: 80.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid., 2008: 82-86.
[129] Rasmussen, 2005: 802.
[130] Straker, 2008: 82.
[131] Ibid., 84.
[132] Ibid., 86.
[133] Rasmussen, 1995a: 595.
[134] Jeremy Keenan, "The Father's Friend," *Anthropology Today* 16 (2000): 10.

at their performances and in public by playing different forms of political music accompanied by the *tende* drum and characterized by a call and response structure.

Music is not the only fluid tradition the Tamachek use to create social identity. Customary clothing can also be recreated in order to fit into a more modern concept of traditional. Informants told me of the prized *allacho* which is the most traditional of Tamachek garments. They also said that is a heavyweight, handmade, black turban which they claimed made these lighter skinned people blend in with the black African majority. Yet, the *allacho* was made from a heavier fabric while the turbans my informants and the wider Tamachek community wear today are created using "transparent netting [which] runs counter to traditional modesty norms."[135] Also intriguing is the fact that my informants tell me there is a specific type of very long, very large traditional clothing made from a cloth called *bazin*. Yet, this is not fabric used to make the traditional Tamachek clothing I saw on display at the museum of Bamako. It is the cloth used to make the traditional clothing my informants wear at performances. Perhaps the clothing at the museum dated back to before *bazin* imports became popular. In much the same way, the clothing that my primary informant wears in daily life is more often made from the popular wax fabric than *bazin*. However, it usually retains the ankle length cut of more traditional Tamachek clothing. This informant's personal history of leaving his tribe behind because he rejected the pleasantries of noble social position and wanted to make their own way in the world suggests that they much like other

> Tuareg consider dress and ornaments central to self-definition. As nobles disdain manual labor, dress and ornaments act as emblems of freedom from manual labor (e.g., voluminous clothing, elaborate hairstyles requiring smith stylists, fatness, and heavy rings and bracelets.[136]

Perhaps the rejection of strict traditional clothing represents this informant's resolve to be "self-made" through work which might be inhibited by large, flowing clothes or a distracting turban. This choice might also be a confirmation of Keenan's research that found the veil has become a dominant symbol of Tuareg identity in Mali and may be associated with the cultural revival which occurred concurrently with the Nigerian and Malian nationalist uprisings.[137]

Yet, traditional clothing like traditional music seems to be a stand-in for tradition itself and, in my observations, it is a tool people use in chosen occasions to further a cause. For example, some of my informants do not normally wear traditional Tamachek clothing, but put these on for special occasions like baby name days, weddings and performances. Perhaps this is in order to assert themselves as part of the community of Tamachek at such social gatherings or a means of promoting their music group which performs at these occasions. In my observations, many Tamachek artisans, vendors, and musicians will dress more traditionally when out in public. Perhaps their clothes are meant to function as markers of authenticity for their products and music. For example, most of the female informants I worked with were also artisans who made various leather items by hand which they sold at their performances. Among their families were young men who helped to make and sell the merchandise. These boys, like most Malian males their age, were normally dressed in Western-style clothing, but when they sold their wares, they transformed themselves by donning the traditional garb more typical of their elders. It seems that the Tamachek freely use and transform traditional forms of music and clothing to suit current trends or lifestyles while retaining just enough to assert their identity at the most opportune moments.

Consider how tradition and modernity were reflected in the two performances I witnessed. The first performance was at a Tamachek baby name day and took place in the courtyard of a rundown looking building on a quiet dirt-paved alley. After the guests had gathered into gender-segregated groups and eaten seasoned rice, vegetables, and some goat meat out of large communal bowls, the performance began. The musicians were sitting along the wall of one of the houses with a row of chairs facing them and a gap in-between for dancing. Though the visitors and men sat on unstable metal chairs, most of the women sat cross-legged on mats and blankets to the left of this area. The first musician in the line was a tall very thin man who sat cross-legged with a Tamachek guitar or *tahardent* on his lap which was connected to a small box whose knobs he constantly readjusted. This box so distorted the *tahardent* that it sounded like an electric guitar. A large speaker completely flooded the courtyard with its raw sound. Two men sat next to the first playing large calabash drums with the aid of thick silver rings.

At the beginning of the performance, another student and I were called to the middle of the performance space to dance. We faced two women with flowing scarves and large bobos (long shirts) who swayed their hands and upper bodies gracefully back and forth to the beat of the music. After a few minutes of this, they approached us slowly and we crossed paths and took the places that they had been occupying. After the first dance, two or three mats were placed on the ground and two men and two women were

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[135] Rasmussen, 1991a: 108.
[136] Ibid., 111.
[137] Keenan, 2004: 116.

selected from the sidelines and they performed a seated dance in which they sat side by side facing people of the opposite gender and gracefully moved their upper bodies and arms side to side. I did not observe any direct eye contact between women and men during any of the dances. The majority of the dances were performed sitting down to loud and very rhythmic music with a specific pattern of hand clapping on beats 1, 1, 2, then waiting three beats and beginning again. After many dances, one or two men came to the middle (the mats were removed) and did a much different style of dance. They hopped and squatted, kicking their feet forwards and to the right and left. The two men danced like this facing each other and carefully positioned themselves in front of young women. During this time one of the men called out encouragement in time with the dancer's quick movements. Towards the end of the performance, groups of two male and two female dancers began to dance standing again. At this time the women sitting on the sidelines (playing *tende* throughout the performance) sang. As the music was coming to an end our host (the new baby's father) took the opportunity to pass out his business card, as he was the leader of the band performing.

The second performance was a private party for a group of foreigners at the national museum of Mali. Three bands performed, taking turns on an open air stage. After we arrived, the first order of business was to get a bucket of water and wet the hides of the *tende* drums and stretch them over the tops of the drums for five to ten minutes. After the drums were retuned, the women put dark make-up on their eyes, eyebrows, and mouths, the men set up various leather and silver goods to sell, and all changed from their street cloths into long flowing robes. Each band member either accessorized with face-covering turbans for men or shorter, dark headscarves, silver-studded headdresses, and large amounts of bold silver and gold jewelry for women. After the first act and an intermission, our group relocated the colorful mats we normally sat on to the stage and formed a long row across it. First in line, there was a standing microphone for the band leader/flutist, then a mat with two men playing guitars and after that four women sitting cross-legged with short microphones and two *tende* drums in front of them. Seated next to me at the end of the line was the group's *griot*. The leader then stood in front of the band and reviewed who would lead what songs and the order they would be played in. One song was practiced for the sound check and the band used the rest of the thirty to forty-five minutes to sit and joke amongst themselves.

When the MC came and announced the audience's return, he encouraged the band to play background music to welcome them. With the loud drums pounding, the band waited as dark shadows walked into the courtyard and took their seats; the mood was very festive and expectant. When the audience was seated, the MC announced our group as a Tamachek orchestra whose goal was to create social solidarity, peace, and love. He then announced the title and meaning of the first slow, melodic, song which was sung in a lilting melodic solo by a small woman with soft light skin and a weathered face and accompanied by the tall, thin, band director on flute. After this, the MC interjected that music is universal and that Azahara was a student who loved Tamachek culture and wanted to share a song. Afterwards, a lively guttural song was sung accompanied by loud drum beats from the *tendes* as well as the calabash drums. During this song, a few of the musicians left their places to dance in front of the audience. The first was a small woman with a plump body and very light skin. She brought a small rug to sit on and danced with her upper body and arms as she sat cross-legged with her back to the band. A man joined her sitting next to her and facing the audience. Their positions and movements were modified from their normal dance style. (Normally two men and two women sit facing each other and move their upper bodies slowly and gracefully.) The movements here were much quicker and more jerky than normal. The audience was then informed that this was the final track and that they were welcome to move to the "Tamachek vibration." The band leader, the *griot*, and a few of the women singer/drummers got up and danced standing up between the audience and the band. The remaining band members played fast, cyclical drum rhythms and shouted encouragements or ululated.

The mixing of tradition and modernity in these performances echoes that witnessed by Rasmussen, which caused her to write that "[a]mong the Tuareg [tradition and modernity are] salient categories [which are] reflected upon and played out largely through how music is performed and enjoyed."[138] While the songs played at both performances described here were the same (except for the men's dance songs played at the first), they were performed in different ways depending on the performance's proximity to traditional life in Tamachek society. For example, the band put greater emphasis on tradition at their public performance (described second) by opening with a slow song accompanied by the flute. Yet, they transformed traditional dance styles at that same performance by adapting their dance positions, movements, and the number of dancers in order to better accommodate the more modern needs of stage performance. Finally, the band put greater emphasis on traditional clothing at the second performance where the women as well as the men put on dark veils and also wore traditional silver studded headdresses. Therefore, we can note that the Tamachek use and transform fluid traditional music, dance, and clothing styles to suit modern needs.

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[138] Susan J. Rasmussen, "Between Several Worlds: Images of Youth and Age in Tuareg Popular Performances," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73 (2000): 142.

The transformation of traditional musical forms is exactly what modern songwriters like my informants are doing in order to use music as a means of creating social awareness and challenge long-held Tamachek traditions like slavery. This is exactly the case with music written for the non-governmental organization described below. Though the songs written for *Ama* run counter to traditional Tamachek culture, they are in keeping with the music of the "*tende* which [is] potentially subversive [and often references] conduct, moral standards, and ideology."[139] *Tende* music also characterized traditional Tamachek music festival events which, like the one described later, challenged traditions surrounding the freedom of association between individuals of disparate social positions.[140]

To understand this music, it is necessary first to grasp the historical and present-day relationship between the Tamachek and those they enslaved, who are referred to as the *Bellah.* The place of the slave in Tamachek society is an important one because nobles are expected to show a great deal of reserve and dignity. Because of this, they need not only music as a means of expressing themselves; they also must have go-betweens to arrange their personal affairs.[141] The job of go-between is usually delegated to those of smith birth, but often those of slave status take on this responsibility as well. This is in addition to the other duties of slaves in Tamachek society. For example, there are slaves who are responsible for "domestic labor and herd[ing of] smaller livestock" called *iklan,* others called *ighawalen* "who garden for nobles" as well as "tributary groups who raided for nobles."[142] Though many of these slaves were "officially" freed at the beginning of French colonization, at independence, and during the displacement of the Tamachek after the uprisings of the mid-1990s, many stayed with their masters in slavery conditions because it was all they knew.[143] Even those scholars who do not directly speak of current slavery among the Tuareg acknowledge that "former slaves' lives are shaped through and evolve within contexts of relationships with non-slaves; for example, there is reliance on the resources of networks of former noble owners who act as fictive kin."[144] Therefore, even for those who do not recognize current slavery among the Tamachek, social distinctions that separate them from former masters are alive.[145]

In addition to the complex issue of slavery in Tamachek society, the very name given to those who serve the nobles is misleading because it seeks to simplify and lump together a diverse group of people. Originally the word *Bellah* was a derogatory Songhay term "for all Tuareg of lower social status."[146] This term was later embraced by the French and used to describe the slaves of the Tamachek.[147] Yet, these slaves were not a single ethnic group as the term leads one to believe. Instead, they were individuals from various sedentary groups living near the Tamachek who were assimilated into the servile strata.[148] While the French were willing to concede that slavery was still a very real problem in Mali, informants tell me that when Mali gained independence, the issue of slavery was pushed under the rug of democracy. "Slavery did not so much exist legally, as it did psychologically and socially."[149]

I was fortunate enough to have my music lessons at a Malian human rights organization "[…] whose name means solidarity in Tamasheq,"[150] and whose goal is to force the Malian government to admit that slavery still continues today. According to its president, this organization has only been running since 2006, but already has 47 branches and 21,000 individual members which contribute annually to its cause. *Ama* has been praised for its "innovation [which] is in its boldness: it is the first initiative to openly address the long-standing issue of trans-generational slavery in Mali" and fight for its eradication.[151] This organization works with the Bellah or *Iklan* (slaves of the Tamachek), Haratines (slaves of the Moors/Arabs), Komés (slaves of Soninké), Rimaibé (slaves of the Fulani), and the Barga (slaves of the Songoï).[152] Many of the individuals within these groups are located where "slavery continues in the north in the region of Gao" (Africa Research Bulletin). Indeed, Lecocq[153] attests to the fact that there were *Bellah* living in conditions of slavery as recently as 1999. But, when they are lucky enough to escape slavery and move southwards, "they do not easily integrate into the ethnic groups in the south, [because] they are usually illiterate and are thus limited to the most difficult and detested manual labor to be found in the cities."[154]

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[139] Ibid., 137.
[140] Rasmussen, 2000: 138.
[141] Rasmussen, 1998: 459.
[142] Ibid., 458.
[143] Rasmussen, 1999: 74.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Jeremy Keenan, *Sahara Man,* (Burry St. Edmounds, Suffolk: St. Edmoundsburry Press Ltd., 2001), 96.
[146] Lecocq, 2005: 48.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Rasmussen, 1991a: 368.
[149] Lecocq, 2005: 53.
[150] African Research Bulletin, Social & Cultural Series, "Mali:Slavery in the North," 45 (2008).
[151] Ibrahim Ag Idbaltanat, "Discovering Dignity: People and Communities at the Heart of Ending Trans-generational Slavery in Northern Mali," 2006, Change Makers Website: http://www.changemakers.net/node/8681
[152] Ibid.
[153] Lecocq, 2005: 43.
[154] Idbaltanat, 2006.

According to informants, many black Tamachek and/or *Bellah* people still living in traditional communities find themselves in difficult situations that would not occur if slavery was not an ongoing issue blatantly ignored by the government. It is for this reason that *Ama* has started initiatives to educate the public about slavery in their country, and to boost the confidence of underrepresented groups like the black Tamachek. One such initiative is a music festival/conference which *Ama* hosts each year.

> To begin organizing ourselves we hosted the first-ever Black Touareg cultural festival […] Four thousand people, representing more than 60 Touareg sub-groups from the four northern regions spontaneously came together to celebrate their culture and discuss how to organize themselves to fully assume their role and responsibilities as citizens and to liberate themselves from all their insecurities rooted in their status in society.[155]

Ama's fight against slavery started from the 1994 *Mouvement pour l'Eveil du Monde Bellah* through which a group of intellectuals sought to improve the social status and living conditions of the Bellah.[156] Another similar movement was started in Niger headed by the *Association Timidria* which calls for the "emancipation and 'liberation of slaves.'"[157] Unfortunately, it seems the government of Niger has reacted in much the same way as that of Mali, in that, it ignores, interferes with, or tries to down play or end the actions of the *Association Timidria*.[158]

Despite uncooperative governments and "freeborn Tuareg who [may] perceive the organization[s] as […] an attempt to tarnish their reputation," both organizations are still fighting for their shared goal.[159] The group of informants I worked with performs at the music festival for *Ama*. Their director is in charge of locating other bands from each ethnic group still practicing slavery (mainly those of the north) to play at the festival. My informants tell me each group is commissioned to write anti-slavery songs in their own languages in order to reach the people most affected by slavery. The song that my informants wrote for the festival admonished its listeners that slavery "isn't normal and justice for all people (who are equal) is important" and further stated that *Ama* has "brought justice to the world and reduced slavery" through its efforts. Though the president of the organization made it clear that they support musicians with a message, not praise singers, I found evidence to the contrary. In questioning my informants more deeply about the song they wrote for this festival, I found that they have never performed it since its debut. In fact, they seemed genuinely shocked when I suggested playing this song about the good things *Ama* is doing at places like art schools or the national museum when songs played there should be about how wonderful those places are. Still, I know this cause is important to my primary informant as evidenced by their departure from the noble tribe of their birth because they disagreed with slavery. Yet, according to this informant, they were musicians before working with *Ama* and for them, the festival and the song written for it were finished when the contract expired. So it seems influences from the Mande majority have so infiltrated Tamachek music that even when it is transformed in order to promote anti-slavery movements, traditional praise singing remains at its core.

Because of the popularity and banality of praise singing, it seems inevitable that bands, even those from such distinct cultural traditions would find it normal and necessary to create their music in this way. Still, praise singing raises very important questions about the genuineness, commitment to, and believability of a band's cause. I am comforted by the fact that even though my informants do not play their song praising *Ama* at other performances, its message was heard and understood by the Tamachek and other ethnic groups present at the festival.

Conclusion

I have always felt that music was a common language for people from very different cultures. I found this to be true in Mali. Indeed, the fluid tradition of Tamachek music has been used in numerous ways to invoke social identity, create social solidarity, and further various causes by communicating hopes and goals to those on the inside and the outside. The Tamachek, like many of Mali's other ethnic groups have lived through hard economic and social situations. Among all the Tuareg groups in Northern Africa, the Tamachek of Mali are one of the least studied and there remains much to understand about their culture, music, and identities. Their marginalized status has impacted the life chances of people from every position in the Tamachek social hierarchy. Yet, the band I worked with courageously communicates its own unique cultural identities both explicitly and implicitly through its fluid music, dress, and dance traditions. More importantly, informants adapt and reinvent these traditions to fit their performance settings and modern tastes. Changes notwithstanding, Tamachek music retains its overall distinctiveness and remains a powerful cultural export of this very unique ethnic group.

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[155] Ibid.
[156] Lecocq, 2005: 61.
[157] Ibid., 62.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

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