That Desert is Our Country: Tuareg Rebellions and Competing Nationalisms in Contemporary Mali (1946-1996)
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Introduction
An account of my research

This thesis sets out to provide answers to a series of seemingly simple questions which have obsessed me since 1994. My original question was – what took place in the Adagh n Ifoghas in 1963?

The Adagh n Ifoghas is a small range of low mountains appended to the south-western edge of the central Saharan Hoggar mountains. The mountains are called Adagh n Ifoghas after part of its inhabitants. The Ifoghas are a Kel Tamasheq clan, and Adagh n Ifoghas literally means ‘mountains of the Ifoghas’ in their language, Tamasheq. The Kel Tamasheq are better known as the Tuareg, but in this thesis they will, for the most part, be referred to as they refer to themselves – Kel Tamasheq, ‘the people speaking Tamashkq’.\(^1\) The Ifoghas are the leading clan of a larger group of Tamashk clans in the Adagh mountains. Only the Ifoghas call these mountains ‘Adagh n Ifoghas’. The other clans in the Adagh simply speak of ‘Adagh’ and refer to its inhabitants as Kel Adagh, ‘the people of the mountains’. In their turn, the Kel Adagh form part of the larger Tamashq world, which forms part of the North African Berber culture and language group.

On a Tamashq map of the area, the Adagh is bordered by the Hoggar mountains to the North, by the sandy plain of the Tamesn to the East, by the Azawad valley to the South-East, by the flat and treeless Tilemsi plain to the South and South-West and by the Timetrine plain to the West and North-West. Most of these areas are seen as part of the Kel Adagh living space. The areas beyond, the Azawagh valley and Air mountains to the East, the Hoggar mountains and Touat plain to the North, and the Niger Bend to the South, are not formally part of the Kel Adagh living space, but they do form part of their world as they are inhabited by other Kel Tamashq groups.

On a political map of the world, the Adagh is situated in the North-Eastern corner of the Republic of Mali, on its border with Algeria. While Mali’s northernmost part, including the Adagh, is situated in the Sahara, its southernmost part, the Mande mountains, is situated in the more forested part of the WestAfrican savannah. This geographical location places Mali in the Sahel zone, neighbouring Mauritania and Senegal to the West; Niger and Burkina Faso to the East; and Ivory Coast and Guinée to the South.

\(^1\) Exceptions are made when I quote sources. /Kel Tamasheq/ is a general plural. The masc. sing. is /Ou Tamasheq/, fem. sing. /Tou Tamasheq/. For the sake of simplicity these will not be used. A single person will be referred to as /a Kel Tamasheq/, in full realisation of the grammatical abhorrence. /Tamasheq/ simple means /the language/, but I will use /Tamasheq/ as adjective as well.
Mali and its neighbouring countries
Source: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/mali.jpg
I came to my original question—what happened in the Adagh in 1963?—while researching events taking place in the same area in the 1990s. In June 1990, a group of Kel Tamasheq started an armed revolt against the Malian state. To anybody taking an interest in these events, it quickly became clear that the rebellion was not an isolated event, but had its roots in a previous rebellion which had taken place in 1963, when the Kel Adagh revolted against Mali.

Previous research and writing on the 1963 rebellion of the Kel Adagh amounts to two publications and one unpublished manuscript. The latter was written in 1977, by the Dutch anthropologist Ab Leupen, based on a few newspaper sources. The first published article on the rebellion was by Cheick ag Bay, a Kel Adagh himself, and Rachid Bellil, an Algerian historian, and appeared in 1986 in *Awal*, a journal for Berber studies. The article was largely based on informal research by Cheick ag Bay. The second was by historian Pierre Boilley who, in 1994, defended his *Thèse d'état* on the history of the Kel Adagh from 1893 to 1992, and this was published in 1999. His research was well-founded and his chapter on the 1963 rebellion provided new information and insights, but it remained unsatisfactory, even to himself. My questions were left unanswered, and my curiosity remained unabated.

The original question, although remaining important throughout my research, led to other questions which became just as important to me. The first was of course 'Why did this 1963 revolt take place?'. The second question was, 'How exactly are the first rebellion of 1963 and the second rebellion of 1990, connected and why is this first rebellion so important in explaining the second?'.

**Before, during and after 'the field'**

These three questions guided me in constructing a theoretical framework in which to place the answers I hoped to find. Before starting research, I had the following general ideas: As I wanted to focus on the 1963 rebellion in the Adagh, I expected to work mostly with oral history sources. I assumed that archive material on the subject would either not exist or be unaccessible. However, I also suspected that causes and origins should be sought in the colonial period, as the rebellion broke out so shortly after independence.

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3 Ag Bay, Ch., R. Bellil, 'Une société touarègue en crise: les Kel Adrar du Mali', *Awal: cahier des études berbères* 2 (1986), 49-84.

4 Boilley, P., *Les Kel Adagh. Un siècle de dépendances, de la prise de Tombouctou (1893) au Pacte National (1992)* (Thèse de doctorat d'histoire, Université Paris VII 1994). A book based on this thèse d'état was published as Boilley, P., *Les Touaregs Kel Adagh. Dépendances et révoltes: du Soudan français au Mali contemporain* (Paris 1999). The book differs mostly from the thèse in lacking the useful and extensive annex to the manuscript. As the book is widely available, I will mostly refer to it. I will refer to the original thèse only when I use material from its annex.

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The Malian regime at the time had made accusations that France had instigated the Kel Adagh revolt in 1963. From what I knew about the causes and origins of this second rebellion, I expected that more or less the same causes and origins would form the basis for the first rebellion - a desire for independence based on a feeling of exclusion and ethnic sentiment leading to separatism, a topic much in vogue in the early 1990s. As for the connection between the two rebellions, I had come to understand that the second rebellion was a kind of revenge for the failure of the first one. With these ideas, and many others on Tamashq society, I left for 'the field'.

I started in December 1997 in Mali's capital Bamako with a first round of research lasting until April 1998. During office hours, I worked in the Archives Nationales du Mali, where I read the Malian newspapers of the 1960s and colonial records dating from 1946 until independence, from the Kidal, Menaka, Goundam and Gourma Rharous administrative Cercles. The rest of my time was spent making contacts in the Tamashq community in Bamako, working on my Tamashq language skills and interviewing people. My contacts were mostly limited to functionaries and the Tamashq intellectual upper class (partly because my research permit did not allow me to formally interview other people). Two things stuck me in my conversation partners. The first was that, while a number of these had not been in favour of the rebellion of the 1990s, while others had been actively involved, these opposing political stances did not bring a hostile atmosphere between exponents of both sides when they were together. However, and this is the second thing that struck me, they were bound together in a shared hostility towards non-Kel Tamashq Malians which was rather overtly expressed between them.

One could conclude, as I did, that this proved the idea that ethnocentric sentiments took over in a hostile environment. However, it slowly dawned on me that this was not the case. Hostile feelings towards the former 'enemy' (or even the former ally in the case of those not in favour of the rebellion) were expressed in a discourse with pronounced racist overtones. I tried to dismiss the idea that my interlocutors might be inspired by racism, as that brought me feelings of unease. After all, I liked these people (I still do), even those among them known as notorious rebel fighters. As a researcher, I was intellectually prepared to deal with ethnocentrism, but as a person, I was not able to deal with racism, which is one step beyond.

In October 1998 I left for northern Mali for an extensive period of fieldwork lasting until July 1999. For logistical reasons, I spent most of my research time in the city of Kidal. To those people who asked me about the reasons of my stay, I made it quite clear what I was doing there – I was a researcher, interested in history and particularly interested in the history of Alfellaga, as I knew the first rebellion to be known. I reckoned that, as Kidal is a small town (8,000 inhabitants maximum during the cold and dry seasons), the word about the reasons of my stay would spread. It did, but reaction to my honesty was shock and retreat. Most people simply did not want to talk about this subject in detail, although they did appreciate my
interest. In the meantime, I made an attempt to gain access to the local archives of the Kidal Cercle — the most important administrative unit in colonial and independent Mali — which I obtained after three weeks. The Cercle archives were in an excellent state of conservation, although extremely chaotic, and, contrary to my low expectations, I found a small number of rather rich files on Alfellaga, the 1963 rebellion.⁵

These files, as well as other files from the period of the first Malian regime after independence, gave me a rare insight into the thinking of Mali’s administration towards its subjects and with regards to its own political ideas, which were key in understanding both the Malian reaction to revolt in 1963 and the causes of its outbreak in the first place. The idea that the Kel Tamashiq today are living through a period of recolonisation, an idea notably defended by Claudot-Hawad and Boilley, became evident before my eyes in concrete policy reports.⁶

As my research progressed, and as I managed to talk to more people, I came to understand that ideas on race and racialism, rather than ethnicity in general, were shaping discourses on the causes and origins of the first rebellion, as, to some extent, they were shaping ideas on the reasons for the second rebellion.⁷ The subject of race could no longer be discarded.

Once back home, a different story than I expected emerged. Rereading material about the second rebellion, especially Malian newspapers from the 1990s, it struck me that not only Tamashiq discourse on the rebellion was sometimes framed within a racist discourse, but ideas of their Malian adversaries were informed by racial notions as well. The Keita administration in the 1960s viewed the Kel Tamashiq primarily as ‘white nomads’ and both their ‘whiteness’ as well as their nomadic existence were seen as potentially, if not actually, problematic. During the second rebellion, the members of the Ganda Koy vigilante movement in particular attacked the Tamashiq rebels on the basis of their skin colour. As we shall see in chapter VIII, they did so primarily to attract the lower castes of Tamashiq society to their cause in a common struggle against the ‘white invaders from the desert’ who had made life in the North so insecure during the four years of rebellion prior to the creation of the Ganda Koy movement. Conversely, even during my fieldwork, my ‘white’ Tamashiq interlocutors were still called ‘red skins’ or ‘red ears’ by the kids in the streets of Bamako.

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⁵ The archives are, however, rather disorganised. No real classification or repertory system exists and papers of all kinds were stacked together in drawers and file-maps, sometimes with a name or number on it, sometimes without. Thus, I have not made an attempt to describe where I found documents as I do not regard descriptions as ‘the third yellowish file with 1976 written on it, in the second drawer on the left in the desk in the corner of the Commandant du Cercle’s office’ a valid archive code. I will refer to material from this archive with ACK — Archives de Cercle de Kidal.


In short, the history I present here focuses on different themes than expected. Most important are Malian and Tamasheq nationalism and ethnicity; race, stereotypes and preconceived images; and their influence on political practice; and the influence of historical discourse in Tamasheq and Malian politics. Most of these subject can be grouped together under the header ‘how Tamasheq politics works’. I will use the rest of this introduction to present each subject.

**Nationalism and ethnicity**

Enough has probably been written on the subjects of ethnic groups and nations, ethnicity, ethnocentrism, nationalism, ethnno-nationalism and whatever other term invented, to physically demarcate the borders between all existing ethnic groups using the paper spent in this prolific production. It is not my intention to discuss all different existing schools of thought on the subject. I simply present my ideas on both subjects through the works which have most influenced my own thinking.

Most writers agree that the concepts of ethnic groups, ethnicity, nations and nationalism are strongly interlinked. Ethnic groups and nations are seen as relatively large social units organised along principles of perceived common identity based on language, cultural traits, geographic location, polity and (fictional) bloodlines. Varying with the school of thought and purpose of use of both terms, other traits can be ascribed. The problem with both terms, as well as with the terms nationalism and ethnicity, is that they have never been the exclusive domain of either social science or politics. Both the realm of perception and analysis and the realm of creative practice, have used these terms and, in interaction, given them meaning and shape.

Nations and ethnic groups or *ethnies* – a term first taken from the French by Anthony Smith for want of a proper English noun – are social political bodies. Nationalism and ethnicity are ‘ideologies’, ideas giving cohesion to the nation or *ethnie*, the glues which hold them together and separate them from other, similar groups.

In the introduction to their *History and ethnicity*, Chapman, McDonald and Tonkin argue that ‘ethnic groups and nations are of the same stock’ and that therefore ‘it is no more than a tautology to say nations have ethnic origins (a tautology, however, that is thoroughly and interestingly explored by Smith)’. Indeed, nations and ethnic groups are highly similar. In *The ethnic origins of nations*, referred to by Chapman et al., Anthony Smith ascribes the following properties to an *ethnie* – a collective name, a shared myth of origin, history, and culture, a geographical territory associated with the group (but not one in which they necessarily live) and a feeling of solidarity and ‘belonging’. Indeed, many of these traits are also seen as properties of a nation.

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The choice between one term or the other – *ethnie* or nation – therefore sometimes seems to be arbitrary. In most literature, the various social polities of the indigenous Americans are indicated as nations, not only in recent ‘politically correct’ literature, but also in source material. However, as soon as one sets foot in Africa, there is no longer any question of nations, but of ethnic groups. Yet, it is assumed that these African *ethnies* and the native American nations share certain organisational traits in both being originally ‘pre-modern’ (whatever that is), pre-industrial, small scale, and decentralised (segmentary, acephalous) as a polity. In the African context, ‘nation’ is reserved to denote the ‘modern’ social political bodies inhabiting the post-colonial state. With ‘state’ is meant, of course, the organisational and administrative body within a delimited territory.

All over the globe, the social polity identified with the state is called ‘nation’ as well, hence the concept ‘nation-state’. The dual use of ‘nation’ as both a social polity in itself and as the social polity identified with the political unit ‘state’ enhances confusion, which is then solved by distinguishing between ‘nations’ as embodying the state and ‘ethnic groups’ as social polities living within but disconnected from the ‘nation-state’ ideological construct. Thus, in Mali, there is a Malian nation and there are Malians. There are also Mande, Bambara, Songhay, Fulbe, Kel Tamasheq etc., but there is no Mande or Tamasheq nation. These are labelled ‘ethnic groups’. To both politicians and, it seems, researchers, recognising their existence as ‘nations’ would imply recognizing their right to separate from the Malian state. The implied difference is inspired by political rather than academic concerns.

This political distinction between nation and *ethnie* forms the basis for the distinction between their respective ‘ideologies’ or cohesive forces – nationalism and ethnicity. Indeed, as with the characteristics ascribed to nations and ethnic groups, it is hard to observe the difference between nationalism and ethnicity. According to Ernest Gellner, ‘Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. A nationalist movement is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind’.¹⁰

Here, Gellner seems to fall into the trap of nation and state congruency, but he probably does so for practical reasons as it is exactly the idea that nation and state as a polity should be congruent that matters to the nationalist, and also as Gellner goes on to describe nationalism as an ideology intimately linked to the ‘nation-state’.

Although ethnicity resembles nationalism as an ideology, it is not the same thing. In practice, they are both cohesive ideas intended to give shape to a social group larger than the direct surroundings and networks of its individual members and stimulating these members to create a larger

social (and or economic) polity. However, the distinctions between them, fine as they may be, are important.

It should by now be clear that what I will describe as the ideology of nationalism in this thesis is a modern-day, slightly less functionalist version of what Benedict Anderson has called 'official nationalism', or the 'nationalism of the state or empire'. In practice, it shapes a national idea or image through the use of specific symbolism and language, the ultimate goal being to create a national image that is coherent with state interests and serving state-set goals. In this way, nationalism decides who is a member of the nation (not all are worthy to participate in its politics or even live on its soil). Let it also be clear that I see this particular form of nationalism as the one that both the Malian state as well as the Tamasheq nationalist movement adhered to. Both the Malian state and the Tamasheq nationalists linked nation to state. Both the Malian political elite and the Tamasheq political elite imagined a nation – the Malian nation and the Tamasheq nation respectively – which had a right to political sovereignty or independence.

Both political elites imagined these nations as having been historically sovereign in precolonial times. The one difference is that the Malian political elite imagined the Malian nation as embodying various ‘ethnic groups’ which should all strive to further the interests of the existing Malian nation-state, while the Tamasheq political elite imagined the Tamasheq nation as one, striving in the interests of independence yet to be achieved. In fact, within the Malian state, two nationalisms and two nations strove for different goals. This is a problem that beset many African states at the beginning of their independent existence, and it remains a problem for some. In the 1950s, Ashanti nationalism competed violently with the ‘official’ Ghanaian nationalism of Nkrumah’s CPP. The Biafran war is an all-too-known example of an aborted attempt at secession, while the equally known case of Eritrean independence from Ethiopia in 1993 is the only example in Africa of a successful war of liberation and competing national ideologies on the same territory.

An important aspect of the ‘official’ or state-created nationalist image and language is its ‘crudeness’, its uniformity all over the world and a certain interchangeability. As Benedict Anderson has remarked, its success as an ideology lies exactly in that fact that it can be copied. Ethnicity, although similar, is another organisational idea, another imagined community, with its own symbolism, language and criteria of participation. What is important in ethnicity is not that it is expressed through symbols, language and criteria of participation as such, but their substance in the

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case of each ethnic group, which makes each ethnic ideology unique in itself.

An even more important aspect of national ideas and images, derived from the former, is a certain discretion in adhesion, in ‘belief’ if you like, of the individual members. The proof of ethnic membership lies in recognition of behaviour. In ethnicity, group membership is perceived to be less voluntary. The language of ethnicity is more subtle and flux. Ethnic markers can change and only sometimes they can be acquired. This makes inclusion and exclusion more a matter of identity-building through education, seen as ‘natural’, than of registration in administrative state registers and observation of certain nationalist 'rituals'.

To return to Ernest Gellner’s ideas on what nations and, in a way, nationalism are, he proposed to look at nations starting from two definitions:

1. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.
2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation.  

Although the emphatic ‘if and only if’ employed seems to imply that the two definitions are mutually exclusive, both definitions are equally valid and actually work simultaneously. The differences in meaning between both definitions is that:

a) people, here including both scholars, politicians and the general audience, recognise definition 1 to be constantly working and definition 2 to be only sometimes and more deliberately working,
b) for political reasons only, definition 1 is often seen as defining an ethnic group while definition 2 is seen as defining the nation,
c) they both describe two elementary components of nationalism as ideology.

To illustrate all these examples, think of a Kel Tamasheq with three different passports (they exist), who speaks French (the national language of Mali) and Arabic (the national language of Algeria and Libya) while all the time remaining Kel Tamasheq as he speaks Tamasheq as his mother tongue and has acquired a particular understanding of the world that makes him Tamasheq. This has not withheld him from being educated in the Algerian national school system, defending the Libyan cause as a Libyan soldier, participating in Malian politics, while being a member of the Tamasheq nationalist movement and longing to have a Tamasheq passport.

The ‘crude’ image and symbolic language of nationalism in general and of particular nation-states in practice, are often derived from or based on the specific, more refined language, culture and symbolic language of an

ethnic group or nation, which is the same thing after all. Thus, as I argue in chapters I and II, Malian nationalism – which decides in a way who is Malian and who is not, and what it should feel like to be Malian – has been effectively constructed (although of course not entirely) on already existing sentiments and images of what it is to be Mande or Bambara, the two main ‘ethnic groups’ inhabiting Mali. Thus, the more subtle language and image of ethnicity could be made instrumental as a basis for creating the cruder Malian nationalist language and image. The modern Malian nation was imagined to have reconquered the political independence, more or less congruent with the political territory, of pre-existing Malian polities – the Mali empire and its successor states (including the Songhay empire). The independence of Mali on 22 September 1960 aroused feelings of satisfaction for reinstalling congruency between nation and polity in Gellner’s terms, or so it was presented.

But nationalism and ethnicity are nevertheless, not the same thing. There is no such thing as a longing for congruence between ethnic belonging and ... what? The point is that ethnic groups can be seen as exactly the same things as nations (which will at least be the case in this study). Thus, the sentiment expressing the wish for congruence between political unit and social group could always be called nationalism. Ethnicity is an idea expressing or shaping the human and social cultural content of an ethnic group or nation. While ethnicity defines the nation, nationalism expresses its political aspirations. Therefore, I will not refer to Tamasheq political ideas as ‘ethnicity’, ‘ethno-nationalism’ – a term often used to define the political aspirations of nations intent on seceding from the state(s) they currently live in – or other terms.\textsuperscript{14} The Kel Tamasheq efforts to obtain their national independence will be referred to as Tamasheq nationalism, indeed making it equal to Malian nationalism and the creation of the Malian nation.

**Race**

Let it be perfectly clear from the start that I do not use race as a category of analysis. Let me state it as plainly as possible that my use of race and racism throughout this thesis are categories of discourse and distinction, used by some of the players in this story to explain and justify their actions. From its beginnings in the late 1940s onwards, the tension between the Kel Tamasheq and ‘Mali’ has been expressed through local and/or imported ideas on race. Both the Kel Tamasheq and the Malian political elite, as well as more common citizens, used and still use, concepts of race in primary characterisations of ‘the other’. Let me first briefly sketch racial ideas as held in the local setting of northern Mali.

During the phase of colonial conquest, the French saw the Kel Tamasheq and Moors only as a problem and as people inferior to the

\textsuperscript{14} For an overview of all terms and categories of political aspirations and ethnicity, see Gurr, T., B. Harff, *Ethnic conflict in world politics* (Boulder & Oxford 1994).
French. Therefore ‘extermination of these two nations [peoples] by all means at our disposal’ could still be considered an option to pacify the Sahara.\footnote{Lieutenant Colonel, Lieutenant Gouverneur du Soudan B. Audéoud, Rapport politique 1898. Kayes, le 20 septembre 1898. This document was retrieved during research prior to SHAT’s reorganisation. The old code was SHAT AOF Soudan Carton 6. It is now most likely SHAT 5H191, but this is not certain.} After colonial conquest and pacification, France had no other interest in the Sahara than to keep the peace at the lowest costs possible. Therefore, a system of indirect rule was put in place where the tribal chiefs of leading clans were appointed by the French. A positive appreciation of these clans was therefore necessary. This positive appreciation was partly developed along racial lines of thought. To the colonial administration, Tamasheq society consisted of two ‘races’ as in the colonial ideas on race and its contents based on Social Darwinism.

What the French called ‘white’ corresponded with the Tamasheq shaggaran, the colour of the free but not the noble. But the French officers, and many after them, thought white/shaggaran to be the colour of nobility. Hence, especially after the virtual extinction of the imoushagh or highest nobles after the 1916 uprising under Firhun ag Elinsar, French racial perceptions of Tamasheq society led to a gradual reappraisal of skin colours, with shaggaran winning in importance and ‘black’ becoming more and more stigmatised as the colour of slaves.

The colonial conquerors saw the upper strata of Tamasheq society as ‘white’ and, according to some, even of European descent. They have been portrayed among other things as the descendants of the Vandals, lost crusaders or even a Caucasian-populated sunken Atlantis.\footnote{Henry, J-R., ‘Les Touaregs des Français’, H. Claudot-Hawad (ed.), Touaregs et autres Sahariens entre plusieurs mondes. Les cahiers de l’IREMAM 7/8 (1996), 249-68.} The lower strata of Tamasheq society, the slaves and casted craftsmen, were seen as racially black, ‘Sudanese’. Thus, in colonial European presentations of African history, the Kel Tamasheq elite was presented as an ‘alien invader’ who had subdued an indigenous African population, an image that would resurface at various times after independence. In a way, Kel Tamasheq society and its historical ‘white’ origins, in the colonial mind, mirrored colonial images of the colonial project itself – ‘whites ruling blacks’. This may have been at the root of the later positive appreciation of Tamasheq society by French colonial rulers.

To the Malian administration, the Kel Tamasheq were just as ‘white’ as they had been to the colonial administration. However, where the latter appreciated their ‘whiteness’ positively, the Malian Government saw it as a sign of ‘otherness’ and as a threat. As we shall see in chapters I and II, in the 1950s and in the first years after independence, the Malian political leaders made it quite clear that they perceived the Kel Tamasheq, their ‘whiteness’ and their way of life as a problem. This was because in the mind of the ruling USRDA elite, the Kel Tamasheq had been colonial favourites because of their ‘whiteness’, which had given them a misplaced superiority complex.
As for the Kel Tamasheq themselves, Tamasheq concepts of race have slightly more sophisticated nuances, but they are nevertheless important in classifying people. Indeed, like all other people, the Kel Tamasheq make distinctions between people on racial appearance. Three skin colours are perceived: *koual*, black; *shaggaran*, red; and *sattefen*, greenish or shiny black. It is also true that social status is connected to skin colour in Tamasheq society. *Koual* is the colour of the casted craftsmen (*inadan*) and slaves, *shaggaran* is associated with the free but not the noble (*imghad* and *ineslemen* groups) and *sattefen* is the colour of nobility. When it comes to outsiders, these are not primarily divided on a racial basis. The immediate neighbours are labelled according to more or less appropriate ethnonyms – Arabs (*Araben*) and Songhay (*Ihaten*). While Europeans are generally referred to as *Ikufar*, infidels, Southern Malians are known as *Bambaraten*, Bambaras. However, the more generic and racial term *koualnin* ‘blacks’ or even *iklan*, slaves, were in use during my research. Then again, this might very well have been a result of the latest rebellion, which pitted the Kel Tamasheq against all other Malians, ending in a full-scale conflict in which racial discourse was used on both sides to indicate the other (see chapter VIII).

Nevertheless, from colonial times onwards, the idea of ‘whiteness’, translated with *shaggaran* in Tamasheq, crept in, which does not mean that a racial discourse did not exist in Tamasheq or Southern Malian society prior to colonial conquest. On the contrary, the suggestion made by Amir Idris and others might well be true that, in the fifteenth century, European racial discourse developed from North African Arab Muslim discourses on race and blackness.17 After all, prior to European naval expansion, the Sahel and the Swahili coast were the zones of direct contact between Africans and other peoples, and this contact had for long involved the trade in ‘African’ slaves by ‘Arab’ merchants.18 Furthermore, the European practice of categorising human beings on racial grounds started in the late 1600s, when François Bernier postulated a number of distinctive categories, based largely on facial character and skin colour, leading to the establishment of a racial hierarchy with the white European at the top and the black African at the bottom. This practice coincided with the take off of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.19 But racialist ideas might well have changed over the colonial period on both sides of the perceived line. They might also have been enhanced under the pressure of changing political situations in the period described here.

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18 The slave trade towards the Arab and Mediterranean world is a largely neglected topic of research. The often mentioned participation of the Kel Tamasheq in this trade – which is now a part of their image, and the one they are most keen to lose – is even more obscure. For an overview of research on the topic, see Savage, E. (ed.), *The human commodity - Perspectives on the trans-Saharan slave trade* (London 1992).
Racialist perceptions influencing political and social relations between local populations are not unique to the Tamasheq. The problem extends to the whole Sahel zone from Mauritania to Sudan throughout the described period. Even the Swahili coast had its racial problems in the late colonial and early independence period. Jok Madut Jok rightly suggests that race, in Africa as elsewhere, is a constructed and ascribed identity, which is not necessarily based on visible or otherwise accountable differences. Particularly in Jok’s native Sudan, the ‘boundaries between “races” and ethnic groups are not so clear cut, at least to the outsider’. The difference between Sudanese Arabs, Shilluk, Dinka and Nuer is cultural, not (so much) physical, which is also the case in present day Mali.

In northern Mali, race is certainly a created identity, ascribed on cultural bases. This becomes evident in the indiscriminate use of terms ‘nomads’ and ‘whites’ by the Government and population in talking about the Kel Tamasheq. Tamasheq and Arab ‘whiteness’ is primarily defined by their nomadic way of life. ‘Nomad’ and ‘white’ are interchangeable in forming one identity as ‘other’. In contrast, the terms ‘farmers’ and ‘blacks’ remain used separately by both those who are indicated by these terms (Malian sedentary societies) and by the Kel Tamasheq themselves. On the other hand, ‘black’ and ‘slave’ seem interchangeable derogatory terms used by the Kel Tamasheq from the upper strata of society to denote all who are not ‘their kind of people’. In other words, the lower caste members of Tamasheq society itself, but also members of other societies in Mali.

Yet, to some extent, Tamasheq ‘whiteness’ is based on the physical appearance of some Kel Tamasheq. Picture books of the Sahara abound with photos of light skinned, preferably blue or green-eyed Kel Tamasheq. These pictures serve to spark Western orientalist imagination, but they can do so because the depicted are indeed recognizably ‘white’ to the Western audience. The idea that they are ‘white’ (and the very idea of ‘being’ in race identity) is, of course, a generalisation. Many Kel Tamasheq only ‘look white’ when compared to ‘black Africans’. In the 1970s, the Kel Tamasheq, seeing themselves as white and related to the Berbers and Arabs of the Maghreb, were confronted with a different opinion on their racial appearance by the very same Berbers and Arabs they thought they were related to. To many Maghrebin and, in fact, to many Europeans, the average Kel Tamasheq would be classified as ‘black’.

**Stereotypes**

Throughout this thesis, we will see how constructed stereotyped images and ideas of Tamasheq society, ‘character’ and ‘behaviour’ influenced attitudes and policies towards Tamasheq society by various colonial and


post-colonial administrators. The stereotypes held by the Malian political, military and administrative elite, from the 1940s to the 1990s, were a mixture of already existing ideas and recollections of historical behaviour by the peoples in contact with the Kel Tamasheq, and stereotypes and ideas created by the colonial imagination and library. I will try to show how stereotypes, and not day-to-day reality and experience, was at the basis of both Malian policies towards the Kel Tamasheq and the Kel Tamasheq attitude towards the Malian Government, as well as the attitude of other Malian populations towards the Kel Tamasheq and vice versa.

If one was to draw a top ten of most mythical peoples, the Kel Tamasheq would probably rank rather high. If confronted with the ethnonym 'Kel Tamasheq', or even 'Tuareg', most people outside West Africa would not necessarily know who are meant. But if shown a picture of a veiled and turbaned head, they would quickly recognise them. Cars, camping gear, travel agencies, perfumes, even skiing outfits have been advertised with the image of a Kel Tamasheq, some products even sporting a Kel Tamasheq as their logo. In globalised commercial imagery, the Tamasheq man with his veiled face and turban, flowing indigo robes and camel, has become the prototype desert nomad, a symbol of freedom.

This essentialisation of the Kel Tamasheq into 'the nomad' in Western culture is the result of a process of stereotyping a strange 'other' which had already started in classical Arabic culture and even well before in the ancient Middle East. As we can read in documents from the ancient Middle East, nomad-sedentary relations have been problematic since their beginnings thousands of years ago. Yet, sedentary fascination and idealisation of nomadic existence is almost as old. Much of the old testament deals with nomadic existence and draws its wisdom from it. Yet, the recollections (or imagination) of their ancestors' deeds were written down in a (by then) largely sedentary Jewish society.

Tamasheq culture has a few characteristics which makes it peculiar in the eyes, not only of the European, but also of the Arab-Muslim culture or of neighbouring African cultures. When visiting Timbuktu, Ibn Battuta already remarked (and scorned) the relative freedom in gender relations which are now seen as almost unique to Tamasheq culture. It is the men who veil their faces in front of women, and not the other way around, which astounded both Arabs and Europeans. European administrators cherished Tamasheq 'chivalry', but condemned their 'nomad laziness'. On the other hand, these days, rich Saudi tourists visit northern Mali and Niger to see the people who still live the honourable nomad camel-breeding life which their Saudi grandfathers had lived, as one of them told me. The nomadic pastoral existence of the Tamasheq ancestors was already extolled by Ibn Khaldun as an explanation for the military and

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moral superiority of the nomadic Berber tribes over their sedentary Arabised neighbours.\textsuperscript{24} Then again, to the surprise and disgust of the post-colonial Malian administrator, it is the Tamacheq man who fetches water and firewood, and not the woman. The present-day image of the Kel Tamacheq would definitely qualify as ‘orientalist’ in Edward Said’s sense, but the creation of stereotyped images and the subsequent projections of virtues and failings on the Kel Tamacheq and other nomads is not a uniquely European business.\textsuperscript{25}

The possible role of a colonising power in creating antagonistic and ethnic stereotypes has been aptly described and analysed by Donald Horowitz. His point of departure is that ethnic groups, or social groups in general, attribute qualities to themselves and their surrounding groups in order to satisfy the inherent need to compare self and other and to attain ‘a positive evaluation of the group to which they belong’.\textsuperscript{26} The colonial system introduced new labels of categorisation, based on its own perceptions. Such categories were ‘backward’ and ‘advanced’, ‘traditional’ and ‘evolved’, et cetera. These stereotyped criteria provided the basis for colonial policy towards ethnic groups as a whole, including or excluding them from parts of the colonial system. The same stereotyped characteristics could also form the basis of ‘policies of protection’. The ‘traditional way of life’ of certain ‘backward’ groups were seen as worth protecting. In short, this is the creation of the living ‘noble savage’. These colonial stereotypes, according to Horowitz, were ‘enduringly influential’ on post-colonial contacts between ethnic groups or, in this case, between the Kel Tamacheq and the Malian state.

On the other hand, the Kel Tamacheq too had their preconceived ideas about the Europeans and about their neighbours; their colonial and post-colonial rulers. The idea of the European, in colonial times as well as now, is best summarised in the term reserved for them – \textit{Ikufar}, infidels. Although militarily superior to the Kel Tamacheq, the European was (and still is) seen as an ethically and morally inferior being as he does not adhere to Islam. However, to some Kel Tamacheq in the late twentieth century, the rule of the ‘infidel’ was preferred over that of the ‘slave’. Indeed, to many Kel Tamacheq of free origins, ‘black Africans’ were peoples who had long been subjected to Tamacheq rule. Ever since the Moroccan invasion and subsequent fall of the Songhay empire at the end of the sixteenth century, the Kel Tamacheq had not been subdued to a sub-Saharan polity. On the contrary, after the quick demise of Moroccan rule in the area, it was the Kel Tamacheq federations who ruled the Niger Bend and present-day northern Mali and Niger, and its inhabitants, to the borders of the Maacina state, when this was founded, and towards Haussaland and the Sokoto caliphate when the latter was created. In

\textsuperscript{24} Ibn Khaldun, \textit{Histoire des berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l'Afrique septentrionale; traduit de l'Arabe par le baron de Slane} (Algiers 1852-1856).


\textsuperscript{26} Horowitz, D., \textit{Ethnic Groups in Conflict} (Berkeley 1985), 144.
Tamasheq ideas on power, black peoples could not rule over the Kel Tamasheq. At best they ruled themselves and were left alone or were partners in business. At worst they were Kel Tamasheq dependents and victims to slave raids.  

**Tamasheq social political organisation**

This thesis will mainly deal with political problems and debates within Tamasheq society ever since the late 1940s until present. The internal political affairs of this period had a large impact on the organisation and dynamics within the Tamasheq revolutionary movement that arose in the late 1970s, dealt with in chapters V and VI, and the internal struggles and conflicts between the various rebel movements after 1991, dealt with in chapters VII and VIII. This thesis also deals with the way the Malian Government perceived Tamasheq society and its place in the Malian Republic. So, before we can say anything on these matters, we need to have some basic understanding of the principles of Tamasheq social and political organisation, and the ways in which they have been shaped.

The first thing that can be observed about Tamasheq social and political structure, is its extreme diversity. As Clare Oxby has rightly put it –

> "Scholars have always tried to distinguish "ordered structures" in Tuareg social organisation ... In the end, all attempts to model society fail as one can always find a Tuareg group escaping the rule".  

This is not to say that the Tamasheq world does not know social or political unity. The Tamasheq are organised into a number of interconnected social political constellations, acknowledging each others existence in cooperation and rivalry, and in the idea that they are all part of one culture and one people – the Kel Tamasheq, 'those who speak Tamasheq'. However, it does mean that within the Tamasheq world, as everywhere, variety in political organisation exists. What will be said here is only valid for the Western Tamasheq world included in the Malian Republic. Other groups, in other countries have different experiences both at present as in the recent and more distant past.

The bases of social political organisation in the Western part of the Tamasheq world are twofold. The first is hierarchy. The second is the one social structure all Tamasheq groups have in common – the clan or *tewsit*, which can be seen as 'quasi kin groups', based on a lineage ideology which varies per clan (*infra*). The basis for the hierarchical structure of society is a system of social strata referred to as castes. The clans or *tewsiten* (sing. *tewsit*) are largely based on lineage structures and are partly caste

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related. The very notions of hierarchy and even the mere existence of castes and *tewsiten* are controversial. During the period described in this thesis, various parties outside and inside Tamashq society wanted to abolish either the hierarchical relationships, or the clans, or both, as social and political structures, while others wanted to enforce their role.

When attempting to describe the workings and organisation of these castes and *tewsiten*, one is confronted with two problems. The first problem is the legacy of colonial observation, describing Tamashq social strata as a ‘feudal’ system, but also as a racialised system or at least one in which race plays an important role. The second problem consists of the colonial and post-colonial administrative meddling in the system, which has resulted in confusion around the content and meaning of the term *tewsit*. I will first explain the organisation of the Tamashq castes and the resulting description of Tamashq society as ‘feudal’. Then I will describe the historical development of the various contents and meanings the word *tewsit* has acquired throughout pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times. I will explain how the French administrative terms *tribu* and *fraction*, translated throughout this thesis as tribe and fraction, are related to the Tamashq term *tewsit*, without these three concepts being totally congruent, while many people, administrators, researchers and even The Kel Tamashq alike, think this to be the case.

**Castes and feudalism**

Tamashq society is first of all based on a set of fixed social strata into which one is born. Early French ethnographers described the social organisation as ‘feudal’. At the top of this society stood the *imoushagh* or noble warriors, referred to as a ‘*noblesse d'épée*’ and perceived as racially ‘white’. At the bottom were found the ‘black’ *iklan* or slaves. In between these two groups stood various others. The first group the French discerned were the *ineslemen* – a group of free or noble (racially ‘white’) people specialised in religious affairs, classified as a ‘*noblesse de robe*’. The *inadan* or craftsmen, simply referred to as ‘blacksmiths’, were a second group the French discerned. They were racially ‘black’, but free and placed outside the strict hierarchy. Neither did they obey the ‘chivalrous’ code of conduct, the *temushagha*, that seemed to govern the lives of nobles. The *imghad* formed the third group. This group consisted of free, ‘white’ people who were not noble, but who lived like them. They were often described as dependent on the nobles for protection and rearing their cattle for them, although neither was necessarily true. However, for these reasons they were referred to as ‘vassals’ to the nobles. This social classification into five groups still form the basis of description of Tamashq society by many present-day researchers, although more and more reluctantly so.

Actually, it is not at all clear what it exactly means to be a member of any of these groups. Slavery no longer formally exists. The *imghad* deny any form of actual dependency on the nobles. At most they pay an honorary tribute, the worth of which is trivialised by the giving party (and sometimes even by the receiving party). It is not even clear whether a
social group called inesilemen actually exists. The exact meaning of the word is ‘Muslims’ and all Tamasheq are Muslims. True enough, some tewsiten are in one way or another connected to a Muslim identity, such as the Ifoghas who claim shorfa status (descent of the prophet Muhammad) or the Kel Essuq who are generally connected with religious study such as fiqh and therefore called alfaqiten, a Berber plural of the Arabic faqih. Not even the meaning of the word amashegh – noble – is clear. In present-day northern Mali the term seems to be reserved to denote small groups of Ouillimiden tewsiten of the former ruling elite. They are often referred to as ‘Bajan’s (their leader) imoushagh’ or, when speaking French, ‘les Touaregs’. Formerly an external ethnonym, the word is now internally used to denote exactly the one group which in Western imagination are ‘The Tuareg’ – the higher class nobles.

It is clear that one is born into either group and that these groups stand in a certain hierarchical relation to each other. What that hierarchy looks like or whether it should be there in the first place is another matter which is, as has been said earlier, hotly debated within Tamasheq society.

Another way of categorising

I would like to propose another way of looking at this hierarchical strata system, one not based on the old colonial parallel to feudalism. As I see it, the main criteria for classification of the existing groups are the following three oppositions: Free - unfree, strong - weak and lineage - non-lineage.

Free - unfree. The main categorisation, is between ellelu - free, and akli (former) slave, hence unfree. French colonial politics towards slavery in the Sahara was characterised by a dual attitude. Formally denying its existence in Arab and Tamasheq society after abolition, the French had never done anything to change the situation of ‘former’ slaves, thus perpetuating their servitude. Mallian politicians made the freeing of slaves and the breaking up of Tamasheq ‘feudal relations’ one of its focal points in regional, and even national politics. All this ensures that notions of free and unfree status still exist in Tamasheq society, and still form the major divide. The issue of social inequality expressed in the existence of a social category of former slaves will play an important part throughout this thesis. It should be noted directly that this divide is not a feature unique to Tamasheq society. Other Mallian societies know this social divide as well.

Strong - weak. The distinction between strong protecting groups or even persons, and weak protected ones, is the most important in this thesis. The Tamasheq concepts of strong and weak are ellelu (meaning free origins or social independence) and talaqiw (poverty or weakness). It includes ideas on economic and cultural capital, physical and military capacity and certain character traits. Weak and strong are more or less fixed categories, only slowly changing over time, and applied to whole social groups, the tewsiten, although of course they can also be applied to individuals. The French at first perceived the opposition between weak and strong, poor and rich as a distinction between the nobles – the imoushagh, and the ‘vassals’ – the imghad. In reality, some nobles are classified as tilaqiwin – poor or weak, and some vassal groups as ellelu – rich or strong.
by the Kel Tamasheq themselves. It is arguable whether those people labelled as *talaqiw* have a lower status than those who are not labelled thus. A poor noble might still be seen as better placed than a strong *amghid* from a noble's point of view or vice versa from an *amghid*'s position.

After independence, especially from the 1970s onwards among Tamasheq immigrants, the hierarchical position between *tewsiten* became open to negotiation. During and after the second rebellion, the internal dynamics of Tamasheq society led to inter-clan violence to alter the hierarchical position of certain *tewsiten*. The reorganisation process was accompanied by a language redefining the social political status of certain groups. Those who were once referred to as *imghad* now referred to themselves as *ellelu* (strong, which they were), which came to be similar to 'noble' without using the term *amashegh*. These new statuses were attributed to oneself or by others on the basis of ideas on strength and the ensuing obligation to defend weaker groups. This will be elaborated on in chapters VI, VII and VIII.

**Temet - lineage and prestige.** The last major opposition, is between those who claim a lineage and know their genealogy and those who do not claim a lineage or do not know their genealogy. Lineage or genealogy are called *temet*, which literally means placenta in Tamasheq. A clan's lineage ideology can be either patrilineal or matrilineal. In the Adagh and Azawad, lineage ideology is only patrilineal, but in the Niger Bend and the northern part of Burkina Faso, some groups, such as the Udalan and Immeddedeghen have a matrilineal ideology. In the Algerian Hoggar, the transfer of political power seems to be only matrilineal, which has been at the basis of much orientalist speculation on (matriarchal) gender relations in Tamasheq society. Having a *temet* is perceived to be the major characteristic of a noble origin. One of the main functions of keeping and knowing one's *temet* (or, as it is, inventing one that is accepted by other groups), is to accumulate prestige, a criteria on which hierarchy is based. The prestige generated by a *temet* depends on the ancestors claimed and the amount of known historical personages further down the line. It is partly through the *temet* that status and hierarchy are designated to a *tewsit* as a whole.

The ideological construct of lineage and genealogy is based more on wider kinship relations than strict descendence. In Tamasheq kinship terminology, most of ego's ancestors are called 'father' (*abba*) or 'mother' (*anna*), with the notable exception of mother's brother and his male ascendants, who are called mother's brother, (*annet ma*). In this way, lineage and descent allow for a larger construction of *tewsit* belonging through an idea of direct descent.

All criteria presented here as split entities are of course totally interwoven. They are concepts that can be played with and moulded at will in everyday practice where scholarly classification is of no concern. What is presented here concisely is, and will always remain, one of the major

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subjects within the study of Tamasheq society, because of its enormous complexity and because of social scientists’ fascination with classification.

**Tewsit**

*Tewsit* is the most important word in understanding the history and contemporary structure of Tamasheq politics. The etymological meaning of the word *tewsit* is that of a woven mat or a hair plait.\(^{30}\) A plait starts at the roots of one’s hair, taking various strands together, and intertwining them into a strong whole. A Tamasheq woman’s’ hair is plaited into three plaits, consisting of a number of smaller plaits. The plaits are partly visible from under her kerchief. This comparison is highly illustrative for the construction and functioning of *tewsit* and the imbraglio they have become nowadays.

Due to the fact that the term is now in use to denote different but related social political structures – the original clan, but also the tribe and fraction of modern administration – the meaning and content of the *tewsit* as a social political structure has become hard to define. Researchers, administrators and the Kel Tamasheq alike have used the word to denote various indigenous and administrative organisations in Tamasheq society. In these sorts of situations, words like ‘traditional’ or ‘original’ immediately come to mind as useful to discern between what is old, indigenous and Tamasheq and what is foreign or new. I will first discuss what the traditional *tewsit* might have been and looked like. Then we will see how and why the French administrators thought it wiser to introduce their own system of social organisation, which they thought was reflecting the ‘traditional’ Tamasheq system. Finally we will see how in post colonial times both systems became intermeshed into one inextricable whole in which practically everybody gets lost.

The shortest and least inaccurate translation of the ‘traditional’ *tewsit* into anthropological terms is ‘clan’. Other appropriate translations could have been ‘lineage group’ or ‘descent group’. What makes it more complicated, is that the traditional *tewsit* can also be seen as a ‘ramage’ of lineages or clans. That is to say, a grouping of lineages or clans through descent from the same but more distant ancestor, which can be either male or female.\(^{31}\) At present the Kel Tamasheq also use the term *tewsit* to denote the administrative units called *fraction* and *tribu.*

As has been said above, the concepts of *temet* – genealogy – and *tewsit* – clan – are interrelated. Clan and genealogy together form a kinship structure. A *tewsit* consists of all the living members of a lineage, hence the anthropological translation ‘descent group’. However, not all the Kel

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\(^{30}\) This meaning might be particular to the Tadghaq dialect. H. Claudot-Hawad gives as etymologies for *tewsit*: a wrist, a circular trap, or a woven mat, which conveys the same meaning as a plait. Claudot-Hawad, H., *Honneur et politique: les choix stratégiques des Touaregs pendant la colonisation française*, H. Claudot-Hawad (ed.), *Touaregs, exil et résistance* REMMM 57 (1990), 11-49.

Tamasheq are perceived to have a genealogy, such as imghad groups, former slaves and other poor and powerless or tilaqiwin. This does not mean that those without a genealogy are without a tewsit. Slaves were incorporated into their masters tewsit. Nowadays former slave families can still use their former masters’ clan to position themselves socially. Imghad or other socially poor or weak without their proper tewsit were incorporated into the clan of the free/strong illelan under whose ‘protection’ they were placed. In fact, often the noble’s real protection only consisted of this incorporation in his tewsit, since it offered incorporation into a social and political structure.

A tewsit is thus a social political group centred around a free or noble lineage or clan, containing other social categories. In practice a tewsit can be seen as a group of people who consider themselves to form one, explaining and justifying their common belonging in kinship terms, which makes it a ‘quasi kingroup’. This is possible through the way tewsiten are both split and bundled into ramage, precisely like a plait. A person can therefore belong to more than one tewsit at a time. A clan is part of a larger ramage when one ascends in the genealogical tree. This larger ramage, in turn, can also be part of a larger ramage when moving even higher up the genealogical branches. Sub-branching goes a long way.

The relations between tewsiten of the same ancestor are expressed in the language of non-lineal kinship structures. The two most important supportive kinship relations in Western Tamasheq society are the aran meddan and the tegeze relationships.\(^{32}\) The aran meddan – which very likely means ‘the male spine’ – are male paternal parallel cousins (female paternal parallel cousins being called tanyatin, and male and female maternal parallel cousins being called aran tidoden – ‘the female spine’). This relation can be extended over various generations, expanding the limits of the group to a fraternal interest group writ large. In the Western Tamasheq world, the aran meddan relationship forms the ideological basis of most tewsiten, with the tegeze relation as a supportive relation between tewsiten. Tegeze – literally meaning pelvis – is the relation between sister’s children (sons) and mothers’ brother. This relation entails unrestricted material support and protection to his nephews and nieces by mothers’ brother (called annetma), and protection and loyalty to their uncle by sisters’ children (called tegeze). This relation, too, can be extended over the generations, when it can be an instrument to invoke support between tewsiten which are seen as related through tegeze. In the eastern part of the Tamasheq world (the Air and beyond), the term tegeze is used to denote a confederation of federated tewsiten.\(^{33}\) Of course, with cousins

\(^{32}\) The relative importance attached to aran meddan, tegeze or aboubash relations differs throughout the Tamasheq world. In Te Adagh, the aran meddan relation is most important, whereas the Nigerien Kel Ferwan do not even know the term. Among the Kel Hoggar the tegeze relation is more important, since it forms the basis of power transmission.

\(^{33}\) For the perception and expression of social cohesion through the human body, see; Claudot-Hawad (1990), op. cit. For more detailed schemes of kinship classification, see Nicolaisen, J., I. Nicolaisen, The pastoral Tuareg - Ecology, culture and society (London 1997), 615-53.
being preferential marriage partners, tegeze relations also occur within one tewsit. This can eventually form the basis of differentiation between tewsiten within a tewsit, or at least helping the demarcation. The same goes for the aran meddan type construction of a tewsit. Cross cousins are called iboubashen.

The origins of a tewsit can be partly made and unmade at will. There is no exact system and although the Kel Tamashq see them as created in historical time, they are therefore often seen by researchers as post-fact creations, which has led many to describe the Tamashq kinship and clan structure as a segmented lineage system. Paul Pandolfi argues against this description by stating that the making, dissolving and continuous blending of clans is not a form of segmentation, but of internal dynamics and adaptation to new social political and economic situations. The same argument, however, led others to applying the term segmentary system to certain societies in the first place.) A second argument is that many tewsiten which came into existence after the 1910s were not formed through internal dynamics expressed in kinship relations. They were the result of direct administrative meddling, which will be dealt with below.

**Ettebel**

All tewsiten are perceived to be incorporated in or at least under the influence of an ettebel (pl. ittebelen). An ettebel is a grouping of clans and ramage groups into a political unit under the leadership of one clan or ramage group. The various clans and ramage groups stood in hierarchical relations toward each other. The leader of the ettebel as a whole is called amenokal which literally means ‘owner of the land’. The symbol of his power is a drum – the ettebel (from the Arabic tobol, drum) – hence the name. A convenient translation of ettebel is federation. The ettebel was historically the most important political and military defence group.

Federations could rise and fall. They could be made and dissolved, depending on the strength of dominant groups in the political field. They could also combine in an even larger unit, the confederation, called tegeze in the eastern Tamashq world. The once powerful Kel Tademekkat confederation was dissolved shortly before colonial conquest. A large confederation, such as the Ouillimiden was split in two halves – the Ouillimiden Kel Ataram and the Ouillimiden Kel Denneg in the 18th century.

During the phase of colonial pacification, roughly between 1900 and 1920, the French military administration enhanced the internal process of creating and dissolving federations. Federations that posed threats to French rule, such as the Ouillimiden Kel Ataram and the Ouillimiden Kel Denneg, were dissolved. Loyal collaborating clans were promoted to the rank of a federation which might lead a French recognised confederation. This was the case with the Kel Ifoghas federation, which was recognised by

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the French as independent from the Quillimiden Kel Ataram in 1910. Their leader Attaher ag Illi was promoted to the rank of amenokal, who informally lead the other ramage groups in the Adagh mountains – the Ilan, the Kel Taghlit and the Taghat Mellet, in a confederation called Kel Adagh. At present ittebelen are seen as historical relics in Northern Mali, but, informally, they do exist and have an influence on local politics which is hard to measure.

**Administrative restructuring, from tewsit to fractions and tribes**

It is clear that the flexibility and interchangeability of the social political system outlined above would get on the nerves of French colonial administrators. Most colonial administrators dealt with this problem in the same way – they decided for themselves who belonged together and what that grouping should be called.

The administration in French Sudan, as colonial Mali was called, was characterised by the colonial administration itself as a ‘double system’ of French Commandants and ‘indigenous traditional chiefs’. The largest administrative unit was the Cercle, lead by a Commandant du Cercle, who could be a military officer or a civil administrator. The Cercle was divided into French created ‘indigenous traditional chieftaincies’. Among the nomads, the French had created tribus and fractions – tribes and fractions – as traditional social and now administrative units. At first these tribes and fractions were based on the French comprehension of the tewsit system. The term tribus was believed to be the proper translation of the Tamashaque tewsit as a larger ramage group, for example the Ifoghas. Fraction was seen as the proper translation of the term tewsit as a clan, for example the Irayakan tewsit within the tewsit Ifoghas. It then slowly evolved into a system, based on French politics of control. Commandants could merge or split tewsiten, to group them together again into new fractions. The creation of tribus and fractions should not however be seen as a one way process dictated by French administrators. Their administrative grouping and regrouping often took place on the demand of, and effect by the influence of the chiefs. In the end, the connection with the tewsit system was almost totally severed when dependent groups were regrouped into fractions, detached from their original tewsit.

Until the late 1930s, the communication and dealings with the Kel Tamashaq of the Commandants de Cercle was limited to the tribal chiefs, the interpreters and the gourmiers – the native police force. Hence, the real impact of the administrative reshuffling of the tewsiten into tribes and fractions might have been quite small when it comes to internal social dynamics. The Kel Tamashq only had dealings with their tribe and fraction as far as they had dealings with the administration and their administrative chief. They could still use the tewsit and ettebel system in internal matters. It took devoted Commandants who spoke Tamashaq and

35 I will leave the administrative terms such as Commandant du Cercle untranslated throughout the thesis.
regularly visited the bush to make a real impact on the Kel Adagh social-political system.

**Independence**

After independence the new Malian administration set out on an active policy to ‘modernise’ society and to undo parts of the administrative colonial heritage. Like the French had done before them, but this time based on Marxist theory, the new regime concluded that Tamashiq society was ‘feudal’. In order to change this, the ‘feudal lords’ – the traditional chiefs – had to be ousted and the still existing servile social relations had to be totally abolished. Paradoxically, part of the pre-existing colonial structure was now formalised by law in order to change the system.

The new regime believed that in ‘traditional’ pre-colonial African society the village had been the spill of social-political and economic organisation and it therefore proclaimed the village to be the basic unit of Malian political, economical and administrative organisation. Parallel to the village, the fraction became the basic unity of administrative, political and economic organisation in nomad societies. Under the USRDA regime, the tribes were completely dissolved as an administrative unit. Their place was left vacant and was only filled by the enlargement of the fractions, which still exist today.

In the 1970s it was members of Tamashiq society themselves who sought to abolish both caste and tewsit hierarchy. The teshumara culture of Tamashiq immigrant labourers in the Maghreb and the tanekra, the revolutionary movement preparing the second rebellion, were hotly debating tewsit and caste hierarchy. While a majority of the members seemed to have been strongly against hierarchy and the tewsit system, a minority was in favour of strengthening its existence. Eventually, this minority would win the debate with the active help of the tribal chiefs and the passive help of the community as we shall see in chapters VII and VIII.

The autonomy of the fractions from the tribe and the empowerment of its chiefs, as against the power of the tribal chiefs opened the possibilities for political use of the fractions in internal affairs between tewsiten as clans. By installing the fraction and its institutions de jure, the procedures and conditions of creation and dissolution became standardised. This totally formal structure made it possible to create, split or bundle fractions on the initiative of others than the chiefs and Commandants. The main requirement to form a new fraction is one hundred potential members, who agree upon a designated chief and elect among themselves a fraction council (often consisting of the initial organizers of the new fraction). The potential chief and his councillors can then request the necessary administrative forms from the Commandant du Cercle, fill them out and submit their demand. This procedure became very popular shortly after the second rebellion and still is today. In 1960 there were 64 fractions in the Cercle Kidal, a number that had been more or less stable since the 1940s. In 1974 there were 65, in 1996 their number had almost doubled.
to 114. 'It won't be long until everybody is his own fraction' as one informant cynically observed. These new fractions, created on the initiative of the Kel Tamasheq themselves, partly reinstitute the internal social dynamics of Tamasheq society on clan basis. The new fractions are often rooted in the social and political dynamics within a tewsit as clan (instead of as fraction), which, despite all French and Malian efforts and despite the efforts of the tanekra movement, has largely remained the basis of Tamasheq social thinking and organisation.

**History and the sources**

This part will deal with the ideas on history that shape the further contents of this thesis. A historical work is always the outcome of the encounter between a historian and his sources. In this case, part of those sources consist of the historical discourse and memory of the actors and eyewitnesses of the presented events. These actors and eyewitnesses have informed the present writer from the point of view of their historical culture. Thus, it is necessary to be aware of their way of producing historical discourse and the notions that inform this production. Therefore, I will give here an outline of Tamasheq thought on history, its sources, circumstances of its production, and the functions of its production.

**Interviews**

My relations to those who could help to produce this history – former rebels – were characterised by both restraint and active engagement. Many were reluctant to speak, since the organisation of the tanekra movement had been formally sworn to secrecy. As one informant put it – 'you erect a wall around a house to keep the rubbish out'.

During fieldwork in northern Mali, I made contacts with a number of people I hoped to use as key informants and who could perhaps lead me to others. Two of these – Azzezen ag Iksa and Keyni ag Sheriff – were former Ifulagen (sing. Alfuleg) as the fighters of Alfellaga are called, but they were not keen on talking much about their experiences, nor did they direct me to former comrades.

Another informant was more talkative. Mohamed Lamine ag Mohamed Fall, presented to me as 'the official historian of the Ifoghas clan', doubled as research assistant and informant on another period crucial to my research – that of the tanekra, the movement that prepared for the second rebellion from 1975 to 1990. Fall had been among the first organisers of the tanekra movement and knew the story – his story – by heart. Working with Fall proved both a pleasure and a handicap when meeting other people. A handicap as it blocked access to some categories of informants who were not too keen on the ideas of 'the Ifoghas Minister of Propaganda' as Fall was also called, and a pleasure as his narratives provided me with a

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37 Interview with Malik ag Sallah. Menaka, 28/04/1999.
basic story. When my attempts to have people discuss the subjects I was interested in failed, I often offered to recount what I presumed to know. I then told the history according to Fall. More often than not people reacted to this version in exclaiming bahuten ghas dihadagh! — those are nothing but lies!

The relations between those who construe events in Tamasheq historical production are shaped by what Andrew Shryock calls 'a community of disagreement'. During my fieldwork, Tamasheq society was in a phase of high political polemics, based on tewsit affiliation. And, like the tribal world of the Jordanian Balga described by Shryock, 'In a community defined by polemic, dissensus must be preserved ... if tribal names are to retain their significance'. The narrative I gave to potential informants was either too general to fit the narrative of their own tewsit or it was too close to that of another tewsit to be acceptable. Thus, all information given (with a few remarkable exceptions) is coloured by the polemical relations between certain tewsiten. Indeed, I doubt that many of my informants would agree entirely with the story as I present it below, simply because the role of their own tewsit is absent or presented in a way which conflicts with their own vision. If there is one concept that lies at the heart of Tamasheq historical discourse, it is that of the fundamental incompleteness of narrative, since there is always a voice being left out. On the other hand, it is not completeness that matters so much, as does the vision presented in historical discourse.

**The sources**

The Kel Tamasheq encountered during this research distinguish four principal forms of historical knowledge constituting the sources of history as a whole: At-tarikh — written history, tinfusen — oral history / narrative, tisiway — poetry, and temet — genealogical recollection. The Tamasheq appreciation of historical sources seems to be not far removed from common views on history in Western culture and, indeed, from concepts held by some professional Western historians, which is probably due to the fact that the Kel Tamasheq have a long-standing tradition of literacy in Arabic. The literacy rate has increased in the last fifty years when some Kel Tamasheq became educated in French as well. Some forms of oral literature, like poetry, are highly regarded as historical sources, but most forms of tinfusen were discarded as unreliable. I do not know to what extent this was the case a few generations ago, but I imagine that this is a process linked to the increase of literacy.

As far as they are available, books constitute a source of historical knowledge presented as such, and used as a final argument reinforcing the


39 Ibidem.

validity of historical discourse. The Arabic word at-tarikh – history – means ‘written history’ in Tamashq. It is linguistically classified into two categories. Historical products written in Arabic are called kitaban – the Arabic word for book put in Tamashq plural. Historical products written in French are called livrant – the French word for book put in Tamashq plural. Regardless of language, most value and credibility is given to these written historical works and many of my informants deplored their lack of availability or access to them. Some of my informants, referred to articles or books written by local scholars (sometimes themselves), or the works written by foreign researchers. Some of them also referred to the local archives as livrant of great value. One of the more frustrating moments of my fieldwork occurred when one of my informants asked me – ‘Why don’t you go to France? There are many books and archives there. We don’t know anything about our history. France is where you can find it all’. 

Tinfusen (sing. tanfust) means ‘stories’ or ‘oral narrative’ in general, a large category ranging from folkloristic tales, jokes, and the narrating of anything from important events to what one did yesterday. The exact meaning of tanfust depends on its contents. In this respect a tanfust might be historical discourse itself, or the stories passed on by others on which one bases ones own interpretation. Tinfusen are perceived to be untrue, due to their changing nature. One can tell a story in one way, only to tell it differently the next time. Written texts and poetry are perceived to be fixed, unchanging, hence more ‘true’.

Tisiway (singular: tasawit) means poetry. Poems dealing with historical subjects are highly valued as both sources of history and as historical discourse itself. Poetry is, however, not a form of historical narrative itself. Poems serve as an aide de mémoire, emphasising other historical genres. The events dealt with are presented very concisely. It is more a reference to events, than an account of them. What makes a poem valuable is the argument, vision or feeling expressed, which can be debated or taken as an example in other forms of historical production. Fragments of poetry are often used to illustrate what has been said, or as a fundament to build one’s own narrative on.41

The teshumara movement, and its successors have been very prolific in the domain of poetry and song writing. Most poems and songs reflect upon the social political situation the ishumar found themselves in, and upon the social political conditions of the Tamashq world outside the teshumara. The aim of the poets was to raise political consciousness within the Tamashq world, along the lines of their own thoughts, which were not by definition shared by all Kel Tamashq. Hence, the relations underlying the (re)construction of events in historically loaded political discourse was one of ‘informed’ towards ‘non-informed’. Teshumara poetry is not only the result of relations contemporary to their production. Many poems evoke

41 A good and available example of this, is: Ag Alojaly, Gh., Histoire des Kel-Denneg (Copenhagen 1975), a bilingual Tamasheq-French historical monograph, larded with and based on the poetry of this confederation.
historical moments. Therefore, they are themselves historical end-products, which were used to raise political consciousness.

I have collected a corpus of poetry myself but, due to unfortunate circumstances, most of this corpus remains untranslated and thus closed to me. Luckily enough, more competent people in this respect have done similar work. With few exceptions, I will make use of two unpublished corpuses of poetry. The first was collected in 1995, mostly from the mouth of the composers themselves, by Nadia Belalimat and translated with the help of Moussa ag Keyna, himself a poet of the teshumara. The second corpus was collected by Georg Klute in 1996 and 1998, and was translated with the help of Ehya ag Sidiyenne. These poems were collected largely in a similar fashion to my own collection, and are similar in content as well. The two people that helped to translate both corpuses, were exactly those I had hoped to engage in the translation of my own corpus, simply because they are the best ones normally available. But alas, they were not available at the moment I wanted to engage their skills.

Form and content

The centrality of individualised history, the exploits of persons, is predominant in all forms of historical production mentioned above. Tamashiq communal identity and belonging are imagined, in the sense of Anderson’s work, but the whole of Tamashiq society consists of face-to-face communities in close contact with each other. They know of each others existence, stories and particular exploits. The role of the physical environment is related to this. In times of scarcity it is vital to be able to leave one’s territory and dwell on that of neighbours. In this particular environment, knowing people and the relation to them over space as well as time is essential to survival. It is easier to remember the historical relation one has to a particular tewsit through the intermediary of some of its most renowned members, than through knowing all of them personally. Second, the renown of individuals spreads out to their descendants and living kin. Tamashiq society is essentially hierarchical. The hierarchy is not only based on caste status, but within a tewsit on the value and consequent prestige of its members. One factor in acquiring status or keeping it, is to have legendary personalities in one’s genealogy. In this way, the history of a person reflects the history of a tewsit at a given moment, and their current status is partly derived from it.

The individuality of Tamashiq history is reflected in archive material of the French period and the early Malian administration. French rule in the Sahara was highly indirect. The French Commandants of the administrative units were all military officers until the late 1940s. These men were often of the French nobility, who thought in terms of leaders, army hierarchy and


43 Klute, G., Die Rebellionen der Tuareg in Mali und Niger (Habilitationsschrift Siegen University 2001).
French prestige. They only had contact with the appointed chiefs and their helpers, and then only when they went on inspection and tax collecting tours. Their reports reflect this. Most reports deal with tax collection, the functioning of the chief, his actions, and disputes on leadership. The civil servants of the late 1950s largely kept to the military tradition which had set the paradigms of their policy. After independence they were replaced by Malian officers, trained in the French army. It is striking to see the resemblance between early Malian administrative reports and the reports of French Commandants.

This individualistic approach to events from all sides – Tamasheq and administrative – will be mirrored in this work. If all sources available deal with individuals, it is more than logical that the stories narrated and the examples given will do likewise. One can consider a history as a case to be presented and analysed to the benefit of scholarly endeavours undertaken outside its original milieu. One could also see it as a presentation of the way a community looks at its existence and presents itself in time. If the latter option is taken, one should incorporate elements of historical production and presentation indigenous to the history told. I will try to strike a balance between both approaches.

A reader's guide to this thesis

The work presented here is a history and presented as such, but it shares borders with anthropology. The two extreme visions on both disciplines have it that history asks how the past shapes the present and that anthropology asks how the present shapes the past. The general idea at present is that both visions meet half way. This study is no exception to the rule. I will try to argue both ways. Discourses on the past are shaped in the present, but simultaneously discourses on the past shape an idea of the present and therefore a possible future. I will argue that preconceived stereotyped images of each other effectively shaped political and social interaction between the Malian state and the Kel Tamasheq between the 1940s and 1960s. In their turn, the events that came of it, the 1963 rebellion, were remembered and interpreted in a specific historical discourse which served to muster support for renewed armed resistance against the Malian state. Thus, historical discourse both serves to explain events and to justify an intended course of events, but it also shapes reactions to events and thus events themselves. It is this interaction between idea and action in Tamasheq and Malian politics that will form the heart of this thesis.

This approach means that I alternate various forms of historical writing in one thesis. While in one chapter I will construct a narrative, in the next (or in the same chapter) I will show how narratives or similar narratives are used as explanation or justification of a certain point of view. Where in one part I will use interviews as reference material in the construction of discourse or event, I will use it elsewhere to deconstruct it as explanatory analysis to itself or events described. The underlying idea is that, to me, the means are valid to come to a comprehensive answer to questions.
Structure, logic, ideas on veracity and interpretation are subject to a desire for understanding, an answer, as improvised and temporary as it might be.

The main structure will be chronological, with a few exceptions made. The period at hand roughly starts in 1946, the year France authorised the creation of political parties in its colonies and organised elections. The legitimisation of party politics heralded the late colonial state, inaugurating gradual independence. In this period we can find the bases for later conflicts between the Kel Tamasheq and the Malian state which was shaped during this period. With the discovery of mineral riches in the Sahara, many in France and the colonies supported this idea and propagated it with further help of Saharan leaders. These seeds of discord will be the focus of chapter I.

The plan to unite the Sahara and grant independence to the Kel Tamasheq failed and in chapter II we will look at the relation between state and Tamasheq society during Mali’s first Republic under the USRDA party and its leader Modibo Keita between 1960 and 1968. We will see how a Malian national idea was created and how the Kel Tamasheq fitted this idea as a barbarian other who was to be brought into civilisation.

In chapter III we will focus on the relation between state and Tamasheq society in Mali’s northernmost region, the Adagh n Ifoghas. We will see how these relations were ruled by mutual distrust and superiority complexes, how the Malian administration managed to further jeopardise already fragile relations which ultimately led to Alfellaga, the rebellion of the Kel Adagh between 1963 and 1964.

This rebellion will be the sole subject of chapter IV. Apart from a narrative on the rebellion and its effects, we will look at the way this period is remembered by the Kel Adagh in particular but also by other inhabitants of northern Mali and what role memories of Alfellaga play in historical discourse and explanations of the present day situation in northern Mali.

The rebellion was not the only disaster hitting the Kel Tamasheq after independence. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Sahara and Sahel were struck by drought, resulting in the death of many cattle and the forced transformation of Tamasheq society. Many young Tamasheq men and women moved from Mali to surrounding countries, particularly the Maghreb, to look for work. These migrant labourers shaped a new culture, the teshumara, touching all aspects of the life of its participants, the ishumar. These changes will be dealt with in chapter V.

In chapter VI, we will discuss the creation and organisation of a political movement by the ishumar or migrant labourers which both sought to change Tamasheq society on the whole and to establish an independent Tamasheq state. The movement, called the tanekra, the uprising, was created in 1974 and finally started the second rebellion in 1990.

In chapters VII and VIII, I will narrate the second rebellion, starting in June 1990 and lasting until March 1996. I have divided the subject over two chapters for the purpose of convenience, but these two chapters form a whole. Therefore, conclusions will only be drawn at the end of chapter
VIII. The rebellion can be divided into four phases. Chapter VII deals with the first and second phase. In the first phase, from June 1990 to January 1991, the Tamasheq military movement managed to defeat the Malian army in a way which, combined with pressure from a democratic movement in the Malian capital Bamako, led the Government to open negotiations. The second phase, from January 1991 to May 1994, is one of intermittent fighting and negotiation between various Malian Governments and the Tamasheq movement, which itself split into various factions on the basis of *tewsit* competition. In chapter VIII, we will see how internal splits within the movement, the practical refusal of various parties involved in the conflict on both sides (military and politicians) to implement the agreements reached in negotiations and a deteriorating economic and security situation led to a third phase of heavy violence lasting from May to October 1994. From November 1994 to March 1996 a last phase of local collaboration by civic leaders led to the final peace and end to the conflict.

As it seems now, and hopefully for all involved it will stay that way, that will be the end of the story.