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Chapter 1: Profile

Introduction

Tamashek is the language spoken by the Tuareg of northeastern Mali. Known as the “Blue Men” because of the indigo-dyed robes and turbans they wear, they are related to the Berber of Mediterranean Africa (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia). Traditionally traders and nomadic herders, modern Tuareg occupy the northern region of Saharan Mali that extends from the border with Mauritania and Algeria in the north to the border with Niger in the southeast.¹



© BBC World Service
Tuaregs on camelback

Modern Tuareg have tried to maintain their nomadic lifestyle, but political turmoil in Mali since its independence in 1960 has forced many Tuareg to settle in towns and cities. The droughts that plagued Mali in the 1970s and 1980s forced many Tuareg into refugee camps as far away as Libya, where many young men were trained as fighters by Muammar Qadhafi.^{2, 3}

Geography

Area

The Tamashek-speaking Tuareg occupy the northeastern portion of Mali. The area is vast, underdeveloped, and comprises about 65% of Mali’s total area—1,240,192 sq km (480,000 sq mi).⁴ Northeast Mali shares borders with Mauritania to the west, Algeria to the northeast, and Niger to the east and south. The area is divided into three administrative regions—Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao, which are named after those cities. Tamashek speakers are predominantly nomadic people, and their encampments lie scattered throughout northeastern Mali.^{5, 6}



© Damian Rafferty
Mali Desert

Climate

Tamashek-speaking Tuareg live predominantly in the Saharan zone, a hyper-arid desert of low rainfall averaging 0–250 mm (0–10 in) annually. Sand and sandstone dominate the landscape, so the sparse rainfall is quickly absorbed. Food cannot be grown in the Saharan zone, but livestock

¹ Ann Hershkowitz, “The Tuareg in Mali and Niger: The Role of Desertification in Violent Conflict,” *ICE Case Studies* 151, (August 2005), <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/tuareg.htm>

² Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough Guides, 2003), 324–332.

³ BBC News, “Tuaregs ‘Join Gaddafi’s Mercenaries,’” 4 March 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12647115>

⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, “Mali,” in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>

⁵ Maps of the World, “Mali Map,” 2009, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/mali/>

⁶ Affala Voyages Initiatives, “Kidal and Adrar Des Ifoghas,” n.d., <http://www.affala.com/GB/mali3.html>

can be kept there.⁷ Temperatures in the Sahara vary between hot days and cold nights. The *harmattan*—a hot, dry wind—blows through the Sahara from February through June, carrying dust storms that blow about 300 tons of dust each year.⁸ Sand dunes and rocky steppes occur in the Saharan zone with many varieties of thorny plants growing in some areas.⁹

The Tuareg also occupy the Sahel zone in the southeast region of their territory. This area is arid and receives only 250 to 550 mm (10 to 22 in) of rainfall annually. The area is well suited to subsistence farming and livestock grazing.¹⁰ From April through June, the Sahel experiences hot weather, averaging 30°C (86°F). Thorny plants and shrubs abound in the Sahel, along with a variety of wildlife such as gazelle, lions, hyenas, ostriches, and red monkeys.¹¹

Topographic Features

Sahara

Covering approximately 40% of Mali to the north, the hyper-arid Sahara sees little to no rainfall each year. The desert lies north of the Niger River and is a true desert. In the far north, shifting sand dunes sweep westward across the desert from their origin in Algeria. The population of the region is low. The waterless sands and sandstone cannot support subsistence farming, and travelers must rely on oases for water.^{12, 13}



© BBC World Service
Saharan dunes

Erg Chech

The Erg Chech is the shifting sand dune that sweeps westward across the Sahara in northern Mali. This area is almost waterless, and its southern area features the salt mines of Taoudenni.¹⁴ The *harmattan*—a hot, dry wind that blows dust storms through central and west Africa from

⁷ Almoustapha Coulibaly, “Mali: Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Climate and Agro-Ecological Zones,” Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2003, <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/counprof/Mali/Mali.htm#3.%20CLIMATE%20AND%20AGRO%20ECOLOGICAL>

⁸ Ross Velton, *Mali*, 3rd ed. (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, Inc., 2009), 6.

⁹ *Encyclopedia of the Nations*, “Mali: Flora and Fauna,” 2011, <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Mali-FLORA-AND-FAUNA.html>

¹⁰ Almoustapha Coulibaly, “Mali: Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Climate and Agro-Ecological Zones,” Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2003, <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/counprof/Mali/Mali.htm#3.%20CLIMATE%20AND%20AGRO%20ECOLOGICAL>

¹¹ *Encyclopedia of the Nations*, “Mali: Flora and Fauna,” 2011, <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Mali-FLORA-AND-FAUNA.html>

¹² iExplore, “Mali Travel Guide: Mali Climate,” 2010, http://www.iexplore.com/world_travel/Mali/Climate

¹³ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Erg Chech,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1564619/Erg-Chech>

¹⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Erg Chech,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1564619/Erg-Chech>

February through June—originates in this area. It contributes greatly to drought, desertification, and respiratory illnesses (dust-borne illnesses such as meningitis).¹⁵

Taoudenni

Taoudenni refers to deposits of salt located in the southern portion of the Erg Chech in Northern Mali. The locations of the salt mines change periodically as the mines become depleted. The surrounding community comprises miners who ship salt blocks south each year to Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal. Most caravans use camels because they are cost effective and well suited to desert travel. But some caravans use trucks to increase the volume they transport to markets.¹⁶

Tanezrouft Region

The Tanezrouft Region is in northeastern Mali and consists of waterless, rocky plains with sand dunes. This area may not see rainfall for years at a time. Once avoided by caravans, a trans-Saharan road crosses this area from north to south connecting Gao, Mali to Bechar, Algeria. A small number of Tuaregs inhabit the area.¹⁷

Iforas Massif (Adras de Iforas, Adrar des Ifoghas)

Originating in the Ahaggar (Hoggar) mountains in Algeria, the Iforas Massif is an eroded sandstone plateau 600 m (2,000 ft) above the rocky plains of the desert in Mali's northeastern border with Algeria.¹⁸ The area is rich in ancient rock carvings and paintings among the piles of boulders in the wide, shallow valleys. It is home to many snakes, lizards, and scorpions. Hyenas and jackals occupy the region, as do gazelle and antelope that feed on the grass that grows there.¹⁹



Courtesy of Wikimedia
Iforas Massif

Rivers and Lakes

Niger River

The most important river in Mali, the Niger creates wetlands at the southern point of the Sahara, providing fish, drinking water, irrigation, and navigation.²⁰ Water levels are generally low because of the Sélengué dam in southwestern Mali, but larger vessels can navigate the



©Jacques Taberlet
The Niger River at Gourma Rharous (Guillford, CT: The Lyons

¹⁵ Jeffrey Tayler, *Angry Wind: Through Muslim Black Africa by Truck*, Mifflin Company, 2005), vii.

¹⁶ Michael Benanav, *Men of Salt: Crossing the Sahara on the Caravan of white Gota* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2006), 134–136.

¹⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Tanezrouft,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/582288/Tanezrouft>

¹⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Iforas Massif,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/282179/Iforas-Massif>

¹⁹ Ross Velton, *Mali*, 3rd ed. (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, Inc., 2009), 232.

²⁰ Geographia, “Adventure in Mali,” 2005, <http://www.geographia.com/mali/mali02.htm>

river during the rainy season from August through January.²¹

Lake Faguibine

Located 75 km (47 mi) north of the Niger River and 80 km (50 mi) west of Timbuktu, Lake Faguibine is the largest in a system of five lakes in the southern Sahara. Fed by the Niger River, it provides irrigation for food production. The area surrounding the lake provides grazing for livestock during the dry season. During the rainy season, agriculture and fisheries thrive. The lake also provides wintering habitat for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds from Europe.²²

Cities

Timbuktu

Located about 13 km (8 mi) north of the Niger River where it turns north into the Sahara, Timbuktu is the administrative center of the Timbuktu region. Once the seat of Islamic learning, the city is home to the Koranic University and boasts three mosques built using the traditional mud architecture of the area.²³ The Tuareg laid siege to the city during the Tuareg Rebellion in the 1990s. Timbuktu is accessible by air, camel, and boat. The city suffers droughts, and desertification threatens it.²⁴



Courtesy of Wikimedia
Timbuktu

Gao

This city lies on the Niger River where it turns south in eastern Mali. An administrative center, Gao is a market city for many ethnic groups. Its international airport, paved roads, and ferry services connect it to other cities.²⁵ Once the capital of the Songhai Empire in the 11th century, Gao is still home to many Songhai, where they mix with Tamashek-speaking Tuaregs who live and trade in the area. Farmers irrigate their wheat, rice, and sorghum fields from the Niger River.²⁶

Kidal

Located in northeastern Mali near the border with Algeria, Kidal is a regional administrative center known for its livestock breeding and craft making.²⁷ The city lacks paved roads but remains a celebrated destination for intrepid tourists willing to risk visiting this area despite its

²¹ Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough Guides, 2003).

²² UN Environmental Programme, "Ecosystem Management for Improved Human Well-Being in the Lake Faguibine System: Conflict Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change," 02 October 2008, <http://www.unep.org/pdf/Lake-Faguibine.pdf>

²³ Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough Guides, 2003), 380.

²⁴ Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough Guides, 2003), 374–382.

²⁵ Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough Guides, 2003), 397–406.

²⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Gao," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/225505/Gao>

²⁷ Maps of the World, "Kidal," 2009, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/mali/travel/kidal.html>

Tuareg rebels and insurgent violence. Kidal has a high concentration of Tuareg, many of whom are former rebels.²⁸ Many Tuareg encampments are in this rocky wadi.

History

It is uncertain when the Tuareg began to occupy the Sahara region of northern Mali. The Greek historian Herodotus writes of the Tuareg in the Sahara as early as the fifth century B.C.E. The Tuareg claim that they entered Africa from as far north and east as Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and were driven south and west to the Maghreb by the Arabs in pre-Islamic times. The Arabs who invaded in the seventh century C.E. encountered the Tuareg already entrenched in the Sahara.²⁹

The Tuareg founded the city of Timbuktu in the 11th century. As the city flourished, they maintained control of it although they did not live there.³⁰ For the next four centuries, the Tuareg traded, traveled, and conquered throughout Saharan Mali. Shortly after converting to Islam in the 14th century, they took control of the trans-Saharan trade routes. They led caravans as far north as Tripoli and Cairo and gained great wealth trading salt, gold, and black slaves. They also gained prestige as fierce warriors, a reputation that remains to this day.³¹

In 1894, the French defeated the Tuareg at Timbuktu and established borders and administrative districts to rule the area until Mali declared independence in 1960.^{32, 33} From 1916–1917, the Tuareg rebelled when the French did not create a Tuareg autonomous region—the Azaouad—as promised.

Post-Independence

After independence, the Tuareg maintained an anti-government stance and rebelled openly against the Malian government in 1962. Droughts in the 1970s and 1980s decimated the Tuareg's herds and forced many of them into refugee camps. In 1990, the Tuareg again rebelled against the Malian government and fought until 1996 for greater aid to the desert region and greater Tuareg autonomy.^{34, 35} Tuareg insurgency erupted again in 2006 when rebels attacked the cities of Kidal and Ménaka in an effort to compel the Malian government to



Courtesy of Wikimedia
1996 'Flame of Peace' Monument

²⁸ Affala Voyages Initiatives, "Kidal and Adrar des Ifoghas," n.d., <http://www.affala.com/GB/mali3.html>

²⁹ Marq De Villiers and Sheila Hirtle, *Timbuktu: The Sahara's Fabled City of Gold* (New York: Walker and Company, 2007), 45–46.

³⁰ Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough Guides, 2003), 374–375.

³¹ The Bradshaw Foundation, "The Tuareg of the Sahara: An Age Old Occupation," 2011, <http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/tuareg/index.php>

³² *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Timbuktu," 2011,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/596022/Timbuktu>

³³ Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough Guides, 2003), 324.

³⁴ Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough Guides, 2003), 327–332.

³⁵ Minority Rights Group International, "World Directory of Minorities: Tuareg," n.d.,

<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=5315&tmpl>

grant them greater autonomy. Since 2006, the Tuareg-occupied area of northern Mali has become unstable and unsafe, with armed rebels attacking military convoys and barracks, maintaining smuggling routes, and kidnapping soldiers, officials, and civilians.^{36, 37, 38}

Government

Mali is a republic divided into eight administrative regions. Each region is headed by a high commissioner and subdivided into five to nine districts called *cercles*, which are headed by *préfets*. Each *cercles* is divided into communes, which are further divided into villages or quarters. Elected mayors govern the communes. The Malian legislature enacted these divisions and subdivisions of the country to decentralize government and put control of the varying regions into the hands of the local populations.³⁹



The Tuareg, who reside in the three northeastern administrative regions, have a long history of rebellion. Their loyalties are to their tribe first and to the Mali nation second. They identify themselves as Tuareg, not as Malian.⁴⁰ Rebels under the leadership of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga still launch attacks on Malian military stationed in northern Mali.⁴¹

Each Tuareg rebellion stemmed from dissatisfaction with Malian government policy in Tuareg territory. The Tuareg claim that the Malian government squanders resources allocated for the economic development of the region. Ethnic and tribal alienation also contribute to Tuareg unrest.⁴² The Tuareg do have numerous small political parties, the most popular and influential being the Alliance for Democratic Change (ADC).⁴³

³⁶ BBC News, "Tuareg Rebels in Mali Peace Deal," 30 June 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5132656.stm>

³⁷ BBC News, "Mali Boosts Army to Fight Tuareg," 18 September 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6999669.stm>

³⁸ BBC News, "Malian Town under Shadow of Rebellion," 30 January 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7215947.stm>

³⁹ Mongabay, "Mali," 2005, http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_profiles/2004-2005/Mali.html

⁴⁰ Ann Hershkowitz, "The Tuareg in Mali and Niger: The Role of Desertification in Violent Conflict," *ICE Case Studies* 151 (August 2005), <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/tuareg.htm>

⁴¹ Andrew McGregor, "Government Forces Overrun Tuareg Rebel Camps in Northern Mali," *Terrorism Focus* 6, no. 6 (25 February 2009), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34555

⁴² Minority Rights Group International, "World Directory of Minorities: Tuareg," n.d., <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=5315&tmpl>

⁴³ Central Intelligence Agency, "Mali," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>

Traditional Jobs and Economy

Traditionally, the Tuareg are a nomadic people. They survived for centuries in the Sahara by herding goats and farming. They also controlled the trans-Saharan caravan routes and held vast territory and wealth in northern Mali. Their power declined after the French defeated them at Timbuktu in 1894.⁴⁴

Today's Tuareg raise cattle, sheep, goats, and camels. Severe droughts in the 1970s and 1980s decimated herds, so animal husbandry is slowly shifting to the south.⁴⁵ During times of economic hardship, the Tuareg resort to banditry, waylaying convoys to cities such as Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal.⁴⁶ Tourism has also played a role in the economy of northern Mali. People travel from all over the world to see the famous city of Timbuktu, the ancient rock paintings in the Iforas Massif, and the Tuareg caravans led by the famous "Blue Men" in their indigo robes and turbans. The quality of Tuareg jewelry and leatherwork fetches high prices from tourists. Tuareg insurgency in northern Mali virtually halted tourism to the area, however, stunting the economic potential of tourism to the region.⁴⁷



© Emilia Tjernström
Boy with Donkey

Ethnic Groups and Languages

In northern Mali above the Niger River live three ethnic groups, of which two—the Maure and the Tuareg—are of Berber origin, while the Songhai are Africans.

⁴⁴ Ann Herszkowitz, "The Tuareg in Mali and Niger: The Role of Desertification in Violent Conflict," *ICE Case Studies* 151 (August 2005), <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/tuareg.htm>

⁴⁵ Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Mali," 20 September 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2828.htm#econ>

⁴⁶ Ann Herszkowitz, "The Tuareg in Mali and Niger: The Role of Desertification in Violent Conflict," *ICE Case Studies* 151 (August 2005), <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/tuareg.htm>

⁴⁷ Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Mali," 20 September 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2828.htm#econ>

Maure (Moors)/Hassaniya Arabic

The Hassaniya Arabic-speaking Maure make up about 1.2% of the population of Mali.⁴⁸ The Maure occupy the northwestern region of Mali. They are traders and nomads similar to the Tuaregs, and they cross the border between Mauritania and Mali to find grazing for their animals and to transport goods. They practice Sunni Islam.⁴⁹



Courtesy of Wikimedia
Songhai Man: Portrait

Songhai/Koyraboro Senni Songhai

Songhai-speaking Songhai make up about 7.2% of the population of Mali.⁵⁰ They are concentrated in and around the city of Gao in eastern Mali where they speak a dialect of Songhai called Koyraboro Senni. The Songhai people live as farmers, irrigating their rice, sorghum, and wheat fields from the Niger River. The Malian government actively promotes the Songhai language by making it the language of instruction in some primary schools and adult literacy classes. The Songhai people practice Sunni Islam along with animist beliefs.^{51, 52}

Tuareg/Tamashek

The Tamashek-speaking Tuareg make up about 1.7% of the population of Mali.⁵³ Of Berber descent, they are nomadic herders who practice Sunni Islam along with traditional animist beliefs. The Tuareg occupy northern Mali, but they lack centralized leadership, preferring instead to be loosely tied politically, based on tribal affiliations. Though some Tuareg groups are engaged in anti-government insurgency, others are working with the Malian government to end hostilities.

⁴⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Society: Ethnic Groups," in *Country Profile: Mali*, last modified January 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Mali.pdf>

⁴⁹ Refworld, UN High Commission on Refugees, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Mali: Overview*, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4954ce5bc.html>

⁵⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Society: Ethnic Groups," in *Country Profile: Mali*, January 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Mali.pdf>

⁵¹ M. Paul Lewis, ed., "Songhay, Koyraboro Senni: A Language of Mali," in *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 2011, http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=ses

⁵² Everyculture, "Songhay," 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Japan-to-Mali/Songhay.html>

⁵³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Society: Ethnic Groups," in *Country Profile: Mali*, January 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Mali.pdf>

Chapter 1: Assessment

1. The Tuareg are Arab people.

False

The Tuareg are related to the Berber of Mediterranean Africa.

2. The Tuareg are desert, nomads.

True

The Tuareg are nomadic herders who occupy northern Mali in the Sahara.

3. The Sahel is suitable land for agriculture.

True

Although arid, the Sahel is well suited to subsistence farming and livestock grazing.

4. Tuareg territory is waterless.

False

The Tuareg make use of oases in the desert, as well as Lake Faguibine and the Niger River, for water resources.

5. The Tuareg only recently began to occupy the region of northern Mali.

False

Although the Tuareg's origin is uncertain, historians have noted their presence in the Sahara as early as the fifth century B.C.E.

Chapter 2: Religion

Introduction

The Malian government is secular. Its constitution provides for freedom of religion and a secular government, yet all religious institutions must register with the state. Until the 11th century, the Tamashek-speaking Tuareg of northern Mali practiced animism.⁵⁴ Their control of the trans-Saharan trade routes put them in contact with Muslims from the north; slowly, they began to adopt Islam. Several centuries passed before the Tuareg as a group professed their belief in Islam.⁵⁵ They do not practice any form of orthodox Islam; rather, they blend Islamic and animistic traditions and practices.^{56, 57}



Courtesy of Wikimedia
National Emblem of Mali

Role of Religion in Government

Mali has no official state religion.⁵⁸ The country remains about 90% Muslim, 1% Christian, and about 9% of the population practices traditional indigenous faiths.⁵⁹ The Malian government has not reported any abuse or discrimination of individuals based on their religious affiliations or practices.⁶⁰ The Malian people interact cross-culturally every day, and the Muslim majority is tolerant of and respectful toward religious minorities.⁶¹ Many ethnic groups—such as the Tuareg—practice a hybrid form of Islam that incorporates their traditional, indigenous religions.⁶²

⁵⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Mali: People: Religion,” 2011,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/360071/Mali/54978/Languages>

⁵⁵ Marq De Villiers and Sheila Hirtle, *Timbuktu: The Sahara’s Fabled City of Gold* (New York: Walker and Company, 2007), 226.

⁵⁶ Susan J. Rasmussen, “Tuareg: Religion,” Everyculture, 2009, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Tuareg.html>

⁵⁷ Josto Maffeo, “Tuareg: Los Moradores del Desierto en Lucha: Profiles: The Tamasheq of Mali,” 2005, <http://www.josto.net/tuareg/tuareg.html>

⁵⁸ Abdullah Saeed and Hassan Saeed, *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 14.

⁵⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Mali,” in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>

⁶⁰ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Mali: International Religious Freedom Report 2008,” 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108379.htm>

⁶¹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Mali: International Religious Freedom Report 2008,” 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108379.htm>

⁶² “History: Religion,” Mali: Ancient Crossroads of Africa, Virginia Department of Education, Prince William County Schools, 2002, http://mali.pwnet.org/history/history_religion.htm

Officially, the government protects all religious groups, provided they do not threaten social stability and peace.⁶³ People may change their religions and commonly do so, usually converting to another religion because of a spouse.⁶⁴

Presidents have galvanized political support by expressing the need for Malians to practice Islamic piety.⁶⁵ The Malian government officially opposes Islamic extremism and terrorism, however, and works closely with the international community to block the spread of extremism in the Sahel and Sahara.⁶⁶ But the Malian government has difficulty achieving its goal in Tuareg northern Mali. According to the 1992 peace agreement between the government and Tuareg rebels, all Malian military must stay out of Tuareg territory, making it difficult for the government to combat extremism.⁶⁷



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Sankore Madrasah

Religion and Daily Life

Religion strongly influences the daily lives of Tamashek-speaking Tuaregs. Predominantly Sunni Muslim, they do adhere to some tenets of Islam. But some people have called the Tuareg lukewarm in their faith.⁶⁸ The Tuareg were some of the last peoples of the Sahara to convert fully to Islam. They resisted the Arabs' attempts to convert them, and it was not until the 15th century that all the Tuareg tribes professed their faith in Islam.⁶⁹ It is because they resisted Islam that the Arabs termed them Tuareg, which in Arabic means *abandoned by God*. The Tuareg refer to themselves as *Imohag* or *Imazighen*, which in Tamashek means *the free people*.^{70, 71} Alternatively, they call themselves *Kel Tamashek* (People who speak Tamashek) or *Kel Tagelmust* (People of the Veil).⁷²

⁶³ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Mali: International Religious Freedom Report 2008," 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108379.htm>

⁶⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, "Mali: Attitude of the Government and the Population Toward Those Who Have Renounced Their Muslim Faith or Changed Their Religion," 26 May 1998, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,IRBC,,MLI,456d621e2,3f7d4dd42a,0.html>

⁶⁵ Everyculture, "Mali: Religion," 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Mali.html>

⁶⁶ Scott Stearns, "Bush, Malian President Toure Discuss Efforts to Combat Terrorism, AIDS," Voice of America, 12 February 2008, <http://povertynewsblog.blogspot.com/2008/02/bush-malian-president-toure-discuss.html>

⁶⁷ Neil MacFarquhar, "Mali Tackles Al Qaeda and Drug Traffic," *New York Times*, 1 January 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/02/world/africa/02mali.html>

⁶⁸ Josto Maffeo, "Tuareg: Los Moradores del Desierto en Lucha: Profiles: The Tamasheq of Mali," 2005, <http://www.josto.net/tuareg/tuareg.html>

⁶⁹ Marq De Villiers and Sheila Hirtle, *Timbuktu: The Sahara's Fabled City of Gold* (New York: Walker and Company, 2007), 226.

⁷⁰ Stefan Anitei, "Tuareg: The Blue People," Softpedia, 26 June 2007, <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Tuareg-the-blue-People-58353.shtml>

⁷¹ The Bradshaw Foundation, "The Tuareg of the Sahara: An Age Old Occupation," 2011, <http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/tuareg/index.php>

⁷² Susan J. Rasmussen, "Tuareg," *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, 1996, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Tuareg.aspx>

The veil, worn only by men, carries special religious significance for the Tuareg. Men wear the veil not only out of modesty, but also because it covers their mouths. In their animist belief system, which they practice alongside Islam, evil spirits (*djinn*) enter a person through his mouth and cause illness. Men who have made the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) achieve sacred status and are no longer required to wear the veil.⁷³ Boys do not need to wear the veil because they are not considered to have knowledge of sin. Women do not wear the veil, but their tents (which are the property of wives in Tuareg culture) fulfill the same function as men's veils.⁷⁴



© Emilia Tjemström
Tuareg Camp Woman and Children

Jewelry also has religious significance for the Tuareg. Men and women wear silver jewelry that functions as a talisman, in a blend of animist and Islamic beliefs.⁷⁵ Traditionally, jewelry is made of silver because it is considered pure and holy—excellent protection for the believer.⁷⁶ Boys, upon reaching puberty, begin to wear the veil. Their fathers give them a *tcherot*, which is a silver talisman box worn around the neck. It contains verses from the Quran to protect the young man from evil.⁷⁷ Mothers give young women pendants containing the mineral gemstone carnelian, believed to relieve blood disorders and menstrual cramps.⁷⁸

Religious Conventions and Gender Roles

Although the Tuareg are Muslim, they defy traditional Islamic gender roles by favoring traditional Tuareg animist conventions. The Tuareg are matrilineal, tracing their family line and heritage through the mother. This provides women with a great deal of control over their lives—more than the strictly patrilineal and patriarchal social structure dictated by traditional Islam. Tuareg women own the family tent, choose their husbands, and have the right to petition for divorce. They also possess a great deal of sexual freedom and are allowed premarital relationships with men.^{79, 80}



© Emilia Tjemström
Tuareg Man in Tagelmoust

But Islamic conventions do relate to gender roles in Tuareg daily life. Although the Tuareg are matrilineal, they are patriarchal in that men rule

⁷³ Jeremy Keenan, *The Tuareg* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 134.

⁷⁴ Gabriella F. Scelta, "The Calligraphy and Architecture of the Nomadic Tuareg within the Geometric Context of Islam," 2002, http://www.thisisgabes.com/images/stories/docs/tuareg_paper_lowres.pdf

⁷⁵ Todd Pitcock, "As the Wind Moves, So Does Memory," *Forbes*, 18 September 2006, <http://www.forbes.com/forbes-life-magazine/2006/0918/108.html>

⁷⁶ Andy Morgan, "Kel Inaden: The Tuareg Blacksmiths," 12 January 2011, <http://www.andymorganwrites.com/kel-inedan-the-touareg-blacksmiths/>

⁷⁷ Kenzi, "Tuareg Designs," 2007, <http://www.kenzi.com/HENNA/HTML/tuareg.htm>

⁷⁸ Kenzi, "Tuareg and Berber Necklaces," 18 December 2006, <http://www.kenzi.com/JEWELRY/HTML/necklaces.htm>

⁷⁹ Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 210.

⁸⁰ Stefan Anitei, "Tuareg: The Blue People," Softpedia, 26 June 2007, <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Tuareg-the-Blue-People-58353.shtml>

the political life of the tribe.⁸¹ Men also are responsible for the religious care of their communities. The role of *ineslemen* or *marabout*—religious holy man—is reserved for men alone. Some men become *marabout* through religious birth while others achieve *marabout* status through Quranic study and devotion to Islam.^{82, 83}

Animist beliefs also illustrate Tuareg gender roles. Tuareg communities feature blacksmiths, who are members of a special male caste entered by birthright. They produce the tools, utensils, jewelry, and weaponry necessary to Tuareg life. The Tuareg believe that blacksmiths possess magical powers that allow them to work with metals without being possessed or harmed by the evil spirits residing within the metals.⁸⁴

Religious Events and Holidays

Tabaski

Tabaski, known as Eid al-Adha in much of the Muslim world, commemorates the willingness of Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ishmael to Allah, and is one of the most important religious holidays in Mali. Fathers must slaughter a sheep, and buy new clothing and shoes for their wives and children. If a man practices polygamy, he must slaughter a sheep for each wife.⁸⁵ After slaughtering and eating the sheep, families remove themselves to sacred grounds for prayers. Many nomadic Tuareg drive sheep to the cities in northern Mali to sell their animals for the holiday slaughter.⁸⁶

Mouloud

Mouloud celebrates the birth of the Muslim prophet Muhammad. To celebrate, Tuareg communities create and perform both sacred and secular songs. They hold camel races and celebrate with great joyfulness.^{87, 88, 89}



© Emilia Tjemström
Tuareg women dancing

⁸¹ Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 210.

⁸² Gateway to Africa, “Ahaggaren Tuareg: People of Africa,” n.d., http://www.gateway-africa.com/tribe/Ahaggaren_Tuareg%20_tribe.html

⁸³ Susan J. Rasmussen, “Tuareg: Religion and Expressive Culture,” Everyculture, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Tuareg-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html>

⁸⁴ Andy Morgan, “Kel Inaden: The Touareg Blacksmiths,” 12 January 2011, <http://www.andymorganwrites.com/kel-inedan-the-touareg-blacksmiths/>

⁸⁵ Nicolas Brulliard, “For Tabaski Holiday in Mali, Families Pay to Sacrifice Sheep,” *Global Post*, 03 December 2009, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/south-africa/091130/malian-holiday-sacrifice-sheep>

⁸⁶ Susan J. Rasmussen, “Tuareg: Major Holidays,” Everyculture, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Tuareg.html>

⁸⁷ Susan J. Rasmussen, “Tuareg: Major Holidays,” Everyculture, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Tuareg.html>

⁸⁸ Holiday Year, “Mouloud (Birth of the Prophet),” n.d., <http://holidayyear.com/holidays/mouloud.html>

⁸⁹ Marq De Villiers and Sheila Hirtle, *Timbuktu: The Sahara’s Fabled City of Gold* (New York: Walker and Company, 2007), 227.

Ramadan

Ramadan is the holy month of fasting for Muslims. One of the five pillars of Islam, the tradition of fasting and prayer prescribed in the Quran must be observed by Muslims.⁹⁰ Yet the Tuareg of northern Mali rarely observe this holiday because of their nomadic lives. Those who celebrate Ramadan end the holy month of fasting by slaughtering an animal and having a feast, prayer, and dancing.⁹¹



© Erwin Bolwitt
Tower: Great Mosque Timbuktu

Buildings of Worship

The Islamic house of worship is called a mosque. The Tuareg are a nomadic people, though, who have no fixed residence. They live in tents that they move with them as they drive their herds to water and pasture. They use large tents as mosques.⁹² The cities of Timbuktu, Gao, Ménaka, and Kidal boast mosques built in the traditional mud architecture of Mali.⁹³

Exchange 1: May I enter the Mosque?

Visitor:	May I enter the Mosque?	aak ee dobigh oojish n-tamizgida
Local:	Yes.	eeya

Timbuktu has three mosques that are some of the oldest in West Africa: Dyingerey Ber Mosque, Sidi Yahiya Mosque, and Sankoré Mosque. Gao is home to a mosque-tomb. The tomb was built at the end of the 15th century and modeled after the Egyptian pyramids.⁹⁴

Exchange 2: When do you worship?

Visitor:	When do you pray?	naaR alwaq nimood
Local:	On Friday.	is tzeR

Behavior in Places of Worship

Mosque etiquette is simple, and rules differ for men and women. Modest, clean clothing that is free of images of living creatures is a

⁹⁰ Colorado State University, "Islamic Holidays and Observances," 30 August 2002, <http://www.colostate.edu/orgs/MSA/events/Ramadan.html>

⁹¹ Susan J. Rasmussen, "Tuareg: Major Holidays," Everyculture, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Tuareg.html>

⁹² Stefan Anitei, "Tuareg: The Blue People," Softpedia, 26 June 2007, <http://news.softpedia.com/resources/news/Tuareg-The-Blue-People-58353.shtml>

⁹³ Tim Bewer et al., eds., *West Africa*, 7th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet, 2009).

⁹⁴ Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough C



© Inthesity / flickr.com
Mosque: Timbuktu

must. Women should wear pants or ankle-length skirts that are neither tight-fitting nor transparent. Shoulders must be covered, the arms must be covered to the wrists, and the neckline should fit up to the neck. Tops should not be tight fitting or transparent. A woman must also cover her hair completely while she is in the mosque. For men, pants are preferred, but shorts that cover the knees are acceptable. Shirts should have sleeves no shorter than a standard T-shirt. Men and women should avoid shaking hands with members of the opposite sex.⁹⁵

Exchange 3: Do I need to cover my head?

Visitor (Female):	Do I need to cover my head?	aak il zaam aahee aasheekumbush
Local:	Yes.	kalaa. iRoohushil

If prayers are in progress, visitors should remain silent; otherwise, speaking softly is permissible. One should silence or shut off mobile phones and pagers, and refrain from bringing food and drink into a mosque. One should remove one’s shoes before entering a mosque. Requesting permission before taking photographs inside the mosque is suggested. Do not photograph worshippers while they are praying or performing their ablutions.^{96, 97}

Exchange 4: May I take photographs inside the temple?

Visitor:	May I take photographs inside the temple?	aak taRhaa ikele fototen dagh tamizid
Local:	No.	eeyaa taRhaa ten tikeled

⁹⁵ Hounslow Jamia Masjid and Islamic Centre, “Etiquettes of Visiting a Mosque,” 2009, <http://www.hounslowmasjid.co.uk/page2/page10/page30/page30.html>

⁹⁶ Hounslow Jamia Masjid and Islamic Centre, “Etiquettes of Visiting a Mosque,” 2009, <http://www.hounslowmasjid.co.uk/page2/page10/page30/page30.html>

⁹⁷ Istanbul Trails, “Mosque Rules and Etiquette,” n.d., <http://www.istanbultrails.com/2008/06/mosque-rules-and-etiquette/>

Chapter 2: Assessment

1. The Malian government mandates Islam as the national religion.
False
The Malian government is secular. Its constitution provides for freedom of religion and secular government.
2. The Tamashek-speaking Tuareg of Mali are fundamentalist Muslims.
False
The Tuareg do not practice fundamentalist Islam. They practice a form of folk Islam that combines elements of mainstream Islam with their traditional, indigenous beliefs.
3. The Tuareg were early converts to Islam.
False
The Tuareg did not fully convert to Islam until around the 15th century.
4. The veil, or *tagelmust*, worn by Tuareg men has religious significance.
True
The veil protects men from evil spirits known as *djinn*.
5. Tuareg men and women wear jewelry designed to protect them from evil.
True
Tuareg jewelry often contains holy verses that protects the wearer from the evil eye, helps to heal wounds, and relieves blood disorders.

Chapter 3: Traditions

Introduction

Tuareg culture has deep roots in the Sahara and the Sahel. Their traditions developed over centuries as a means of survival in a landscape of intense heat, scarce resources, and deep tribal rivalries. Although the Tuareg are Muslim, their social structure differs from traditional Islamic culture. The Tuareg are not Arab; they are of Berber descent, and blend ancient animist religion with Islam.



© BBC World Service
Gathering of Tuareg Cameleers

They are loyal not to the countries they occupy but to their separate tribes and the whole Tuareg people. Over centuries, the Tamashek-speaking Tuareg of northern Mali developed social customs that signify group membership. Their rituals help them identify other members of their community and offer protection in a world of intense rivalries.

Codes of Politeness

The Tuareg prize social custom when greeting one another. Greetings allow people to identify one another and their tribal affiliations, reveal social status, assess possible threats, and elicit information critical to survival in the desert. The greeting ritual has four stages. First, men greet each other with *salaam*. A man can assess another's devotion or fidelity to Islam by how he pronounces his greeting. Greetings are followed by a handshake that, while leaving the man vulnerable, helps to ease tensions over the possible aggression of a stranger. Second, individuals take turns as interrogators, asking each other standard questions designed to test the intentions of the other. At the same time, these questions are intended to fool *djinn*s (evil spirits) that may be masquerading in human form. Third, men ask each other questions about their personal condition. They must answer positively to each inquiry, even if they have recently suffered loss or tragedy. The last stage allows men to exchange information about camps, water, and relationships with other groups. But they must use caution and not ask direct questions that violate rules of politeness. They cannot ask each other's names or the names of their fathers, for example. After they have received the necessary information, each man continues his business.⁹⁸



© Martha de Jong-Lantink
Tuareg Men in Timbuktu

⁹⁸ Ibrahim Ag Youssouf, Allen D. Grimshaw, and Charles S. Bird, "Greetings in the Desert," in *A Cultural Approach to Interpersonal Communication: Essential Readings*, eds. Leila Frances Monaghan and Jane E. Goodman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 50–59, <http://cspeech.ucd.ie/pub/fred/docs/Tuareg.pdf>
© DLIFLC

Exchange 5: Good morning!

Visitor:	Good morning!	talaghaasam!
Local:	Good morning to you!	aalKheR ghaas!

Strict rules dictate who must initiate the greeting rituals. Newcomers or strangers to an area are always required to announce their presence and to initiate the greeting. When newcomer status is unclear, however, age and social status dictate who initiates the greeting. Younger men must initiate the greeting with members of the same social level. But when people of different social status meet, the person of lower social standing must initiate the greeting. Young women must not use the greeting *salaam*, and older women may only use it in response, never to initiate a greeting.⁹⁹



© valne / flickr.com
Tuareg Greeting Ritual

Exchange 6: Good night!

Visitor:	Good night!	tinsam dagh alKheyR
Local:	Good night to you!	ey-wala!

Male/Female Interaction

Tuareg culture allows a great deal of freedom for both sexes.¹⁰⁰ The Tuareg trace their families through the female line, a practice based in the belief that the Tuareg people are descended from a single female ancestor.¹⁰¹ Women do not have to veil themselves, but must wear a headscarf when they reach marriageable age. They are introduced to men, shake their hands, and may entertain male visitors in their tents when their husbands are



© Emilia Tjemström
Elegant tuareg family

⁹⁹ Ibrahim Ag Youssouf, Allen D. Grimshaw, and Charles S. Bird, “Greetings in the Desert,” in *A Cultural Approach to Interpersonal Communication: Essential Readings*, eds. Leila Frances Monaghan and Jane E. Goodman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 50–59, <http://cspeech.ucd.ie/pub/fred/docs/Tuareg.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Susan J. Rasmussen, “Reflections on Myth and History: Tuareg Concepts of Truth, ‘Lies,’ and ‘Children’s Tales,”” *Oral Traditions* 13, no. 2 (1998): 247–284, http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/13ii/2_rasmussen.pdf

¹⁰¹ Hélène Claudot-Hawad, “‘Woman the Shelter’ and ‘Man the Traveller’: The Representation of Gender among the Tuaregs” (paper, Societies of Peace, 2nd World Congress on Matriarchal Studies, San Marcos and Austin, TX, 29 September–2 October 2005), http://www.second-congress-matriarchal-studies.com/claudot_hawad.html

away.¹⁰² Modesty and honesty characterize relationships between males and females. But the community discourages social mixing between members of different castes. During special holidays, though, social norms governing the behavior of young men and women are relaxed. Young people may behave immodestly toward each other, even going as far as initiating sexual relationships.^{103, 104, 105}

Exchange 7: How are you?

Visitor:	How are you?	maa daR toloham?
Local:	Fine, very well.	aalKheR ghaas

Tuareg men treat women with great deference. If a man does not honor women and treat them with respect, he jeopardizes his prestige and place in society.¹⁰⁶ To rape or beat a woman is disgraceful, sometimes carrying the death penalty in Tuareg society. Even arguing with a woman brings shame on Tuareg men.¹⁰⁷

Exchange 8: Hi, Mr. Reddy! (Informal)

Visitor:	Hi, Mr. Maiga!	taghalaasad, Redee!
Local:	Hello!	aalKheR ghaas
Visitor:	Are you doing well?	waR key jeRo haRat?
Local:	Yes.	aboo tabaRak ala

Hospitality and Gift Giving

Hospitality is a way of life for the Tuareg. By custom, the Tuareg treat guests with great respect. The Tuareg will never refuse a request for hospitality. When hosting guests, the Tuareg feel responsible for them and ensure their guests’ comfort, food, safety, and protection. The



© Emilia Tjernström
Tuareg Tea Ritual

¹⁰² Richard Engel, “Timbuktu: A Journey to Africa’s Lost City of Gold,” http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39563268/ns/world_news-africa/

¹⁰³ Eric Schmidt, “*Ishumar*: The Guitar and the Revolution of Tuareg Culture” (paper, Honors Program, American University, Washington, DC, 2009), <http://dSPACE.wrlc.org/bitstream/1961/8069/1/ESchmidt%20Capstone.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ Gian Carlo Castelli Gattinara, “Poetry as a Reflection of Tuareg Cultural Values and Identity,” in *Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, eds. Thomas K. Seligman and Kristyne Loughran (Los Angeles: Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2006), 51.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 212–213.

¹⁰⁶ Trebbe Johnson, “Without Heart You Have Nothing: Inner and Outer Paths of the Tuareg,” 6 August 2009, http://www.visionarrow.com/Without_Heart.pdf

¹⁰⁷ Susan J. Rasmussen, “Alms, Elders, and Ancestors: The Spirit of the Gift among the Tuareg,” *Ethnology* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2000), 15–36, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3773793>

Tuareg’s legendary hospitality is borne out of life in a brutal, harsh environment.^{108, 109}

Exchange 9: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Guest:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	aalKheR ajin namajaaret
Host:	It’s my pleasure.	timeynakam daa aajoRan aadee

Gift giving is another Tuareg tradition. The Tuareg believed themselves superior to other ethnic groups in Mali. That belief was the foundation of their caste system and practice of slave holding. The Tuareg believed that gifts were their birthright, and those they interacted with had to provide them with gifts. This tradition can be seen in the system of “taxation” that the Tuareg employed for caravans traveling through their territories. Some Tuareg, when visiting cities, would demand gifts of the urban population.¹¹⁰

Children regularly receive gifts, and it is not shameful to the Tuareg to request gifts from family and strangers alike. The custom of gift giving is multilayered. Children are encouraged to share their gifts with other children, a practice that strengthens ties and engenders communal support and survival. Gift giving also suggests a benediction and blessing in Tuareg society.¹¹¹

Types of Food/Eating Habits

The Tuareg subsist on a Spartan diet. Milk from goats and camels is a primary source of food for the Tuareg. They drink the milk and eat the curds. They also make butter and cheese from the milk. Other staples in the Tuareg diet are millet and noodles. They make porridge and bread with the millet, and eat noodles spiced with paprika or sweetened with sugar.¹¹² Dates are the primary fruit of the Tuareg. They eat few vegetables, except in agricultural areas, but eat salads made from local plants that they keep chilled with dampened wraps. On special occasions, the Tuareg eat goat meat or sometimes camel or oxen if the situation allows. In some areas in the south, they eat chickens



© Emilia Tjemström
Tuareg women dancing

¹⁰⁸ Explore Timbuktu, “Who Lives in Timbuktu: Tamacheq,” 2008, <http://www.exploretimbuktu.com/Travel%20in%20Timbuktu/inhabitants.html>

¹⁰⁹ Marguerite Rigoglioso, “Out of the Sahara,” *Stanford Magazine*, May/June 2007, <http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2007/mayjun/features/tuareg.html>

¹¹⁰ Fergus Fleming, “The Road to Timbuctoo: Gordon Laing and René Caillié (1824–28),” in *Off the Map: Tales of Endurance and Exploration* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2004), 252–253.

¹¹¹ Susan J. Rasmussen, “Alms, Elders, and Ancestors: The Spirit of the Gift among the Tuareg,” *Ethnology* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2000), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3773793>

¹¹² Peter Fuchs, *The Land of Veiled Men*, trans. Bice Fawcett (New York: The Citadel Press, 1956), 63.

and other fowl, but this habit is rare. Fish is new to the Tuareg diet in areas along the Niger River.¹¹³

¹¹³ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 22–24.

Exchange 10: What is the name of this dish?

Guest:	What is the name of this dish?	meesim nasing-waa
Host:	This is <i>Taguella</i> .	alabaaja

Exchange 11: What ingredients are used to make alabaja?

Guest:	What ingredients are used to make alabaja?	maas eekaan aalbaaja?
Host:	Millet, water, and salt.	eesaan, eedahan, taafaghat, oodee id teysem

Tuareg men and women do not eat together. Men eat around a communal dish on one side of the tent, and women use the other side. Diners circle the communal dish and eat using a large spoon. The Tuareg favor silence while eating, speaking very quietly only when necessary. Children eat after their parents have eaten.¹¹⁴

Dress Codes

Rules of modesty do not govern the dress of Tuareg women; the hot, dry climate of the desert dictates their clothing. Typically, Tuareg women wrap themselves in two skirt-like layers of cloth with a loose blouse or two above.¹¹⁵

Exchange 12: Is this acceptable to wear?

Visitor:	Is this acceptable to wear?	taRhaa elsagh awa?
Local:	Yes.	eKhayeys

However, rules of modesty do restrict the dress of Tuareg men. They wear loose-fitting trousers and shirts, and long, flowing robes. Tuareg men also wear the distinctive *tagelmoust*—a long piece of cloth that they wrap around their head and face as a turban-veil.

¹¹⁴ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 22.

¹¹⁵ Jim Angus et al., “Africa: The Tuareg,” published in conjunction with the exhibition *Africa: One Continent, Many Worlds*, California Academy of Sciences, 9 October 1999–9 January 2000, <http://www.calacademy.org/exhibits/africa/exhibit/sahara/tuareg/6.htm>

Exchange 13: Where I put my shoes?

Guest:	Where do my shoes go?	indeg deeha saamsagh tefeydeleh nee
Host:	Here on the rack.	dat eemenahan

The Tuareg *tagelmoust* serves many functions. It protects the man from the sun, wind, and sand. It designates his status within the community. In the past, only nobles could wear the indigo veil, which was quite expensive and imported from Agadez, Niger. Today, modern dyeing techniques make the indigo veil affordable to most Tuareg, yet its use is reserved for special rituals and celebrations. Social status is designated by the length and size of the veil. Men of higher status wear longer veils that wrap numerous times around their heads, creating a large crown. The position of the veil on the face also indicates status. Traditionally, the lower a man wore his veil, the higher his status. But when a man of high status converses with a man of lower age or status, he will then wear his veil higher than the person he is speaking to in order to signal his status. The veil also protects the Tuareg man from *djinn* that may try to enter his body through the mouth and cause illness or madness. Tuareg men only take the veil when they have reached adult status, usually around age 18.^{116, 117}



© Emilia Tjernström
Veiled Tuareg Man

Non-Religious Celebrations

Because they are nomadic/semi-nomadic, the Tuareg celebrate holidays sporadically. But they do celebrate state holidays when they are not travelling.¹¹⁸ The Tuareg celebrate holidays with feasting, camel races, and music and dancing festivals.¹¹⁹



© flykr / flickr.com
Musicians: Festival in the Desert

The Essakane Music Festival occurs each year in January, and hosts local and world-famous Malian musicians. The Tuareg musicians and participants are the highlight of the festival. The Festival in the Desert, as it is also called, celebrates Tuareg culture, values, and community.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 26–27.

¹¹⁷ Peter Fuchs, *The Land of Veiled Men*, trans. Bice Fawcett (New York: The Citadel Press, 1956), 49.

¹¹⁸ Everyculture, “Tuareg: Religion and Expressive Culture,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Tuareg-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html>

¹¹⁹ Everyculture, “Tuareg,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Tuareg.html>

¹²⁰ Anthony Ham et al., *West Africa* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty. Ltd., 2009), 521.

Dos and Don'ts

Do

Do wear clothes that cover your knees.

Do engage in small talk—say hello and ask people how they are doing—before you ask for help, directions, or other information.

Don't

Don't eat with your left hand—Mali is a Muslim country, and the left hand is considered unclean.

Chapter 3: Assessment

1. The Tuareg engage in intricate greeting rituals.

True

The Tuareg prize social ritual and custom when greeting one another.

2. The Tuareg are a matrilineal culture.

True

The Tuareg trace their families through the female line, a practice based in their belief that the Tuareg people are descended from a single female ancestor.

3. Tuareg women have little freedom with members of the opposite sex.

False

They are openly introduced to men, shake their hands, and have male visitors to their tents when their husbands are away.

4. Tuareg men treat their women with a great deal of respect.

True

A man jeopardizes his respect and place in society if he does not honor women and treat them with respect.

5. The Tuareg rarely give gifts.

False

Within Tuareg tribes, gift giving is customary. Children are regularly given gifts, and it is not shameful to the Tuareg to request gifts from family and strangers alike.

Chapter 4: Urban Life

Introduction

A series of droughts in the 1970s and 1980s devastated the nomadic culture of the Tamashek-speaking Tuareg in northern Mali. On the southern edge of the Sahara, Lake Faguibine dried out, although seasonal rains partially filled it in later years.¹²¹ Tuareg tribes lost their livelihoods as thousands of their camels perished from lack of water and food. They faced hunger as the drought decimated their goat, sheep, and cattle herds. The Tuareg left the desert and migrated to cities such as Gao and Timbuktu, where they nurtured a growing rebellion against the Malian government. The droughts forced many Tuareg into a more settled farming life while others fled to refugee camps as far away as Libya.^{122, 123}



Flight from drought-stricken regions has swelled urban populations in northern Mali. The rate of urbanization has outpaced the government's ability to provide infrastructure, leaving many Tuareg city dwellers without basic services. About 6% of Mali's government investment is allocated to urban infrastructure; most goes exclusively to cities with populations of 5,000 or more.¹²⁴ These are the three administrative capitals of Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao.¹²⁵

Urbanization Issues

Urban Tuareg mainly occupy areas in their traditional homeland, the Sahel and Sahara of northern Mali. Urban areas suffer many problems because of a lack of infrastructure. Electricity is in short supply. Only about 8% of Malians have access to electricity. Diesel generators supply electricity in the administrative capitals of Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu to those residents who have



¹²¹ UN Environmental Programme, "Ecosystem Management for Improved Human Well-Being in the Lake Faguibine System: Conflict Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change," 2 October 2008, <http://www.unep.org/pdf/Lake-Faguaibine.pdf>

¹²² UN Environmental Programme, "Ecosystem Management for Improved Human Well-Being in the Lake Faguibine System: Conflict Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change," 2 October 2008, <http://www.unep.org/pdf/Lake-Faguaibine.pdf>

¹²³ Minority Rights Group International, "Tuareg," in *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*, 2005, <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=5315&tmpl>

¹²⁴ Catherine Farvacque-Vitkovic et al., "Development of the Cities of Mali: Challenges and Priorities" (Africa Region Working Paper Series Number 104/a, The World Bank, Washington, DC, September 2007), www.worldbank.org/afr/wps/wp104_english.pdf

¹²⁵ INSTAT (Institut National de la Statistique), République du Mali (Mali National Institute of Statistics), "Résultats Provisoires (Provisional Results) RGPH 2009," 10 February 2011, http://instat.gov.ml/contenu_documentation.aspx?type=23

access.¹²⁶ Sanitation problems also plague the urban areas of northern Mali. They lack sufficient drinking water, especially in Kidal and Gao. Mali's financial hardship restrains the government from investing in water infrastructure and proper access to drinking water.^{127, 128} Population increases are partly responsible for this. Because the population has increased most rapidly in southern Mali, scarce resources are devoted to developing resources there instead of the poorly represented northern regions. Cash-strapped local governments are responsible for sanitation disposal, but they do not have the means to develop the proper facilities. Solid waste often collects in waste transportation sites that function as local garbage dumps.¹²⁹ The lack of sanitation and safe drinking water contribute to disease and malnutrition.^{130, 131}

Desertification also threatens the livelihoods of urban Tuareg. Drought has caused the loss of habitat and has pushed the desert south until it is encroaching on cities such as Timbuktu.^{132, 133} The drifting sands of the Sahara have almost buried other Tuareg cities, such as Kidal and Araouane.¹³⁴

Urban Working Conditions

Tuareg do not easily settle into urban areas. Their centuries of nomadic herding and traveling in caravans formed the basis of their culture. Nobles shunned the sedentary or agricultural life as being beneath them. Today, economic hardship from civil strife and severe drought has forced many Tuareg nomads into semi-permanent settlements.¹³⁵ They practice a mixture of



© Mya Jamila
Talisman: Tuareg Cross

¹²⁶ Catherine Farvacque-Vitkovic et al., "Development of the Cities of Mali: Challenges and Priorities" (Africa Region Working Paper Series Number 104/a, The World Bank, Washington, DC, September 2007), www.worldbank.org/afr/wps/wp104_english.pdf

¹²⁷ IRIN, "Mali: Water Has Become a 'Luxury,'" 23 July 2010, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=89956>

¹²⁸ Catherine Farvacque-Vitkovic et al., "Development of the Cities of Mali: Challenges and Priorities" (Africa Region Working Paper Series Number 104/a, The World Bank, Washington, DC, September 2007), http://www.worldbank.org/afr/wps/wp104_english.pdf

¹²⁹ Catherine Farvacque-Vitkovic et al., "Development of the Cities of Mali: Challenges and Priorities" (Africa Region Working Paper Series Number 104/a, The World Bank, Washington, DC, September 2007), www.worldbank.org/afr/wps/wp104_english.pdf

¹³⁰ Oxfam, "Water Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools: Increasing Children's Access to Safe Drinking Water through Low-cost Technologies: Mali's Experience," 8 April 2011, <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/EventAndCommunityFiles/Waterweek/content/pdf/Oxfam%20Mali.pdf>

¹³¹ Heidi Good, "Fighting Guinea Worm, a Waterborne Blight in Mali," *UNICEF Newslines*, 4 October 2010, http://www.unicef.org/mdg/mali_56294.html

¹³² The World Bank, "Desertification and Land Degradation Threaten Africa's Livelihoods," 7 November 2007, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/MALIEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21540142~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:362183,00.html>

¹³³ Carine Debrabandère and Claudia Pape, "Mali: Desertification Changes Nomadic Lifestyle in Mali," United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, n.d., http://www.unccd.int/publicinfo/docs/dw_mali-eng.pdf

¹³⁴ 1227.ch, "Village d'Araouane, au nord de Tombouctou, Mali," 9 October 2005, http://www.1227.ch/Pervenches/Dossiers/TdH-05/YAB/YAB_01g.htm

¹³⁵ International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations, "Restoring Peace and Improving Lives in Mali's Northern Regions," Rural Poverty Portal, n.d., <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/voice/tags/mali/peace>

herding, oasis gardening, trading, and itinerant work in the larger Malian cities or abroad.¹³⁶

Tuareg blacksmiths—known as *inedan* or, pejoratively, as *bellah*—have fared better than many of the nomadic members of Tuareg society. They craft saddles, leather goods, utensils, and jewelry for the local market, as they have for centuries. Tourism and a global market for indigenous craftwork also allow many blacksmith artisans to create jewelry for sale to tourists and visitors. Some blacksmiths have formed guilds that receive commissions from famous European boutiques for their traditional silver jewelry.¹³⁷ Once the slaves of Tuareg nobles, *inedan* enjoy much greater freedom and prestige than they did before Mali's independence in 1960. Still, some members of the blacksmith caste claim the Tamashek-speaking Tuareg continue to hold them in servitude in some areas of Mali.^{138, 139}

Although Tuareg women fulfill their traditional roles as homemakers and caretakers, they have adapted to a more settled life by becoming healthcare workers, midwives, and produce vendors.¹⁴⁰

Urban Healthcare

Facilities for medical emergencies and general care are almost nonexistent in northern Mali. American medicines are rare. Local markets sell counterfeit medicines that are dangerous. Many medical facilities and local doctors demand payment for services, usually up front and in cash.¹⁴¹



¹³⁶ Susan J. Rasmussen, "Tuareg Diaspora," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World*, eds. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, and Ian Skoggard (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, Inc., 2005), 308–317.

¹³⁷ Todd Pitock, "As the Wind Moves, So Does Memory," *Forbes*, 18 September 2006, <http://www.forbes.com/forbes-life-magazine/2006/0918/108.html>

¹³⁸ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Mali," 6 March 2007, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78745.htm>

¹³⁹ IRIN, "Mali: Thousands Still Live in Slavery in North," 14 July 2008, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=79242>

¹⁴⁰ Stefan Sperl, "International Refugee Aid and Social Change in Northern Mali" (New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper no. 22, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK, 2000), <http://www.jha.ac/articles/u022.htm>

¹⁴¹ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Mali: Country Specific Information," 25 January 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_962.html#medical

Exchange 14: Is there a hospital nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a hospital nearby?	aak ohaaz eydeg n-seeseefaR?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	eehaa aamaas-n tadabaayet

Exchange 15: Is Dr. Narayana Rao in, Sir?

Visitor:	Is Dr. Narayana Rao in, Sir?	aak laghtoR iley?
Local:	No.	abo

Health concerns in Mali span north and south. Malaria is prevalent, and even though the highest transmission areas are in the south, northern Mali suffers from the disease. Over 80% of Mali's population lives in high-transmission areas.¹⁴² Malaria heavily affects children, resulting in over 68% of deaths in children under 5.¹⁴³

Exchange 16: Do you know what is wrong?

Local:	Do you know what is wrong?	hun tsend aawa key ijiRawa?
Visitor:	No.	abo, waR isena

Another serious health concern is the guinea worm. Contaminated water is the source of the worm, which infected individuals can transmit to entire communities. The northern regions of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu suffer most.¹⁴⁴ Outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as cholera, hepatitis, meningitis, and tuberculosis occur regularly.¹⁴⁵

Exchange 17: I have pain, Doctor. Can you help me?

Patient:	I have pain, Doctor. Can you help me?	doktaR, oozaaRa. ajaahee asafaR
Doctor:	Yes, I can help you.	aad aRamagh teelalt hak

¹⁴² World Health Organization, "Mali," 2010, http://www.who.int/malaria/publications/country-profiles/profile_mli_en.pdf

¹⁴³ President's Malaria Initiative, U.S. Agency for International Development, "Country Profile: Mali," April 2010, http://www.fightingmalaria.gov/countries/profiles/mali_profile.pdf

¹⁴⁴ Heidi Good, "Fighting Guinea Worm, a Waterborne Blight in Mali," *UNICEF Newslines*, 4 October 2010, http://www.unicef.org/mdg/mali_56294.html

¹⁴⁵ Smart Traveller, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Travel Advice: Mali," 11 March 2011, http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/mali#Health_Issues

Education and Schools

Education of Tuareg children has been a family affair. Fathers and uncles educated young boys; mothers and aunts educated young girls. Education for boys dealt with the realities of nomadic life in the Sahara and the Sahel. Girls learned how to care for the home. Girls also learned to read and write *Tifinagh* (the geometric script of Tamashek) and were schooled in the folklore and history of the Tuareg people. Contemporary Tuareg are beginning to send their children for more formal education.¹⁴⁶

The Malian constitution provides free, compulsory education for children ages 7 to 16. In reality, the education system charges families for uniforms, books, and supplies. The costs of schooling are prohibitive for the impoverished Tuaregs, and the semi-nomadic life of many urban Tuareg discourages enrollment of their children in school. There are almost no schools in the remote northern regions of Mali.¹⁴⁷



© Nathaniel Whittemore
Tuareg Father Saddling Camel

Urban Daily Life

The Tuareg have traditionally shunned urban centers and refused to live in urban areas they controlled, such as Timbuktu.¹⁴⁸ Many contemporary Tuareg have been forced into the cities because of severe droughts that decimated their livestock and dried up their water sources. They settle near urban centers and participate in the tourist trade by hosting tour groups in their camps.¹⁴⁹



© BBC World Service
Tuareg: Desert Al-Guitara

These new Tuareg urbanites entertain themselves with parties called *zahuten*, which means distraction. These parties feature *tindé*—female drum performances accompanied by improvised poetry—a tradition in the Sahara. They also developed the *aggawin*—professional musicians who recited the oral histories of the Tuareg. *Al-guitara* developed out of the refugee experience. Known also as the “desert blues,” *al-guitara* is a male musical performance using an electric guitar. The Tuareg feature *al-guitara* at parties. It contains politically charged lyrics that promote rebellion and Tuareg independence.¹⁵⁰

Life for the urban Tuareg remains precarious. Although they work in the cities as wage laborers, their work is usually seasonal. Called *l'exode*, this seasonal migration allows Tuaregs to earn

¹⁴⁶ Everyculture, “Tuareg,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Tuareg.html>

¹⁴⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Education and Literacy,” in *Country Profile: Mali*, January 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Mali.pdf>

¹⁴⁸ Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, *The Rough Guide to West Africa* (New York: Rough Guides, 2003), 324.

¹⁴⁹ Anthony Ham et al., *West Africa*, 7th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty. Ltd., 2009), 77, 521.

¹⁵⁰ Baz Lecocq, “‘That Desert Is Our Country’: Tuareg Rebellions and Competing Nationalisms in Contemporary Mali (1946–1996)” (Ph.D. project, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, Netherlands, 2002), 186–187.

money as herdsmen, farm workers, and guards for wealthy expatriates. They return to their home territories after short terms of service and migrate back to the cities in another season.^{151, 152}

Urban Traffic and Transportation

In the main cities of northern Mali (Timbuktu and Gao), public transportation is readily available. Taxis charge flat rates for passengers. The roads are below Western standards. The larger cities of Timbuktu and Gao have few if any paved roads.¹⁵³ The roads in northern Mali are desert tracks. Travel is rough, necessitating four-wheel-drive vehicles. The long distances between urban centers compel drivers to carry supplies and to repair their vehicles in case of breakdowns. Terrorism and kidnapping are real threats in the northern regions of Mali.¹⁵⁴ Convoys are essential to safety when traveling overland.¹⁵⁵



Exchange 18: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	aak ileh eReh ohaazen eekaanan toRfan?
Local:	There is.	ileh

Along the Niger River, boat travel is common. Long, motorized canoes called *pinasse* ferry passengers along the length of the river. Passengers can travel from the southern interior to Timbuktu in public or cargo *pinasse*.¹⁵⁶ Gao also features travel by *pinasse*, and taxis and motorcycles carry passengers to all points of the cities.¹⁵⁷

Exchange 19: Where can I rent a car?

Visitor:	Where can I rent a car?	n-dik tefarmet toRfan?
Local:	By the square.	oja mokes n-baaRan

¹⁵¹ Baz Lecocq, “‘That Desert Is Our Country’: Tuareg Rebellions and Competing Nationalisms in Contemporary Mali (1946–1996)” (Ph.D. project, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, Netherlands, 2002), 178–179.

¹⁵² Living Cultural Storybases, “Tuareg/Mali,” 2009, http://storybases.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=55&id_pays=2&Itemid=56

¹⁵³ Columbus Travel Media Ltd. (firm), “Mali Local Transport,” World Travel Guide, 2010, <http://www.worldtravelguide.net/mali/local-transport>

¹⁵⁴ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. State Department, “Mali: Country Specific Information,” 25 January 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_962.html#traffic_safety

¹⁵⁵ Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Mali 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report,” 8 April 2011, <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportPDF.aspx?cid=10799>

¹⁵⁶ Anthony Ham et al., *West Africa*, 7th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty. Ltd., 2009), 523.

¹⁵⁷ Anthony Ham et al., *West Africa*, 7th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty. Ltd., 2009), 528.

Air travel is possible in both Gao and Timbuktu. Gao only has one domestic flight per week; Timbuktu features three flights per week to the capital Bamako and other larger cities in the south.¹⁵⁸

Exchange 20: Is this airline safe for domestic travel?

Visitor:	Is this airline safe for domestic travel?	aak aabyon wa eewaRt saRho?
Local:	Yes, it is safe.	eeya eewaRteeha ashaR

Street Crime and Solicitations

Overall, street crime in northern Mali is rare, although petty crimes are frequent in crowded areas. Thieves target tourists, looking to steal passports and wallets. Violence is common when victims resist thieves, and many thieves are armed. Crime increases at night, especially in poorly lit areas. People should not travel outside of urban areas at night. Banditry and carjacking are common in the northern desert. Armed gunmen stop vehicles, usually leaving their victims by the side of the road.^{159, 160}



© Mark Abel
Welcome to Timbuktu

Northern Mali is prone to experience violence by Tuaregs. Political unrest has fueled dissent in the northern regions. Although the Tuareg usually target military and government personnel, land mines have injured civilians. Intertribal conflict in the region makes it unsafe, despite truces signed in 2010 between warring tribes. The northern regions of Mali reportedly provide safe haven to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).¹⁶¹ Furthermore, drug, arms, and human trafficking throughout the northern regions make it unsafe, and accidental encounters with traffickers could result in violence.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Anthony Ham et al., *West Africa*, 7th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty. Ltd., 2009), 523, 528.

¹⁵⁹ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. State Department, “Mali: Country Specific Information,” 25 January 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_962.html#traffic_safety

¹⁶⁰ Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Mali 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report,” 8 April 2011, <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportPDF.aspx?cid=10799>

¹⁶¹ Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Mali 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report,” 8 April 2011, <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportPDF.aspx?cid=10799>

¹⁶² Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. State Department, “Mali: Country Specific Information,” 25 January 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_962.html#traffic_safety

Chapter 4: Assessment

1. The Tuareg maintain a high standard of living in urban areas.
False
Tuaregs in urban areas suffer many problems, mostly from a lack of infrastructure. Electricity and safe drinking water are in short supply.
2. Desertification threatens northern Mali.
True
Drought has caused the loss of habitat and has pushed the desert south until it is encroaching on cities such as Timbuktu.
3. The Tuareg settle easily into urban life.
False
The Tuareg shun urban life but have been forced to search for work in the urban centers of Mali.
4. Some Tuareg have fared well in urban life.
True
The *Kel Inedan*—the Tuareg blacksmiths—in the cities have formed guilds, and some blacksmiths sell their jewelry and crafts to tourists and visitors.
5. The Tuareg have access to modern medical facilities.
False
Facilities for medical emergencies are almost nonexistent in northern Mali.

Chapter 5: Rural Life

Introduction

The Tuareg of Mali are unique. They defy tidy categorization as urban dwellers, villagers or nomads. The Tuareg who occupy the Sahara feel little loyalty to Mali as a nation. Instead, they remain faithful to the tribe, crossing borders with impunity and without regard to official border crossings and checkpoints. Tuareg in the 21st century are the product of severe drought and conflict with the Malian government. Their traditions suffered from the starvation of their herds, a situation that forced many to adopt more sedentary lives. Conflict with the Malian government created tensions between the two groups, and the Tuareg feel abandoned by the government that claims sovereignty over them. The cities they occupy are little more than clusters of small brick homes located near water sources. Lacking running water, electricity or support, the Tuareg turn to the desert to live, maintaining their traditional way of life as much as possible, despite pressure for them to be settled.



© ju-yaovi / flickr.com
Tuareg Tent Village: Kidal

Tribal Distribution

The Tuareg are broadly distributed across a large arc of Saharan and Sahelian Africa. The Tuareg occupy northern Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Algeria, and parts of Libya.¹⁶³ In northern Mali, they are called the Kel Tamashek, “The people who speak Tamashek.” Confederations of tribes in different regions of Africa refer to themselves by region. The Tuareg of the Air Mountains of Niger call themselves Kel Air, “The people from Air.” Tuareg from the Adrar des Ifoghas region of Mali call themselves the Kel Adrar, “The people from Adrar.”¹⁶⁴



© Stephen Montgomery
Tuareg Men in the Desert

Tribes are affiliated with one another, yet they do not form a cohesive whole, and they lack centralized leadership. Their loyalties lie first with their individual tribes, then the Tuareg as a whole. Intertribal conflict occurs frequently between Tuareg tribes, usually over access to grazing land, water, and caravan routes.^{165, 166}

¹⁶³ Everyculture, “Tuareg,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Tuareg.html>

¹⁶⁴ Thomas K. Seligman, “An Introduction to the Tuareg,” in *Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, eds. Thomas K. Seligman and Kristyne Loughran (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2006), 22.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas K. Seligman, “An Introduction to the Tuareg,” in *Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, eds. Thomas K. Seligman and Kristyne Loughran (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2006), 23.

Land Distribution/Ownership

Although the Malian government owns and controls land, it believes that land belongs to farmers who grow crops.¹⁶⁷ But the Tuareg consider the land they occupy as theirs. As nomadic and semi-nomadic people, the Tuareg favor communal land that supports the tribe.¹⁶⁸



Exchange 21: Do you own this land?

Official:	Do you own this land?	aak t-faaReh taa tinek?
Local:	Yes.	eeya

To supplement the scarce yields of nomadic life in the Sahara and Sahel, Tuareg exacted “taxes” from Tuareg farmers in the form of staple crops. These agriculturalists—known as *izeggaren*—are the peasant class and maintain a sharecropping relationship to the Tuareg nobility, a system still in effect though rapidly disappearing.^{169, 170, 171}

Exchange 22: What crops do you grow?

Official:	What crops do you grow?	maa tidoomud?
Local:	I grow Millet.	eemaghtan wee eylinem teyli

¹⁶⁶ Kalifa Keita, “Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Sahel: The Tuareg Insurgency in Mali” (paper, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 1 May 1998), <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub200.pdf>

¹⁶⁷ Kalifa Keita, “Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Sahel: The Tuareg Insurgency in Mali,” (paper, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 1 May 1998), www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub200.pdf

¹⁶⁸ Ann Hershkowitz, “The Tuareg in Mali and Niger: The Role of Desertification in Violent Conflict,” *ICE Case Studies* 151 (August 2005), <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/tuareg.htm#fn29>

¹⁶⁹ Thomas K. Seligman, “An Introduction to the Tuareg,” in *Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, eds. Thomas K. Seligman and Kristyne Loughran (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2006), 22.

¹⁷⁰ Pippa Chenevix-Trench, Moussa dit Martin Tessougué, and Philip Woodhouse, “Land, Water, and Local Governance in Mali: Rice Production and Resource Use in the Sourou Valley, Bankass Cercle” (working paper, Rural Resources/Rural Livelihoods, no. 6, Institute for Developing Policy and Management, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK, 1997), 4–19. http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/research/publications/wp/rr/documents/rr_wp06.pdf

¹⁷¹ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 19.

Rural Economy

Tuareg society is stratified, with each level contributing to the survival and welfare of the tribe. Earlier, tribes were divided into castes based on labor and production. Nobles governed the tribe, waged war, raided for goods, and led caravans across the desert. Vassals were divided into herders and farmers who provided sustenance for the tribe. They paid the nobles a tribute of crops and animals for protection. Blacksmiths were the artisans who fashioned jewelry, utensils, saddles, and leather goods, as well as weapons for the noble class in turn for protection. The Tuareg also kept slaves who were responsible for heavy labor.^{172, 173}

Contemporary Tuareg of northern Mali maintain their caste system, but it is no longer so rigid. They maintain their nomadic/semi-nomadic existence, with nobles performing many tasks previously reserved for subordinate castes. Most Tuareg nurture herds of goats, sheep, and camels, and migrate periodically in search of water and grazing. En route, they forage for edible and medicinal plants and hunt for game. The herds they tend are their source of wealth, and they barter animals and animal byproducts for other staples such as millet, a mainstay of the Tuareg diet. The Tuareg also barter for cloth, and they will travel as far south as Agadez, Niger, for the indigo-dyed cloth they use to make their *tagelmoust* (turban-veils).^{174, 175}



© ju-yaovi / flickr.com
Tuareg Man Waters Animals at Oasis

Many Tuareg have abandoned a nomadic life, settling into an agricultural livelihood. They engage in diverse occupations, such as oasis gardening and growing millet. Still others are semi-nomadic, dividing their time between being traders and being itinerant laborers. They lead caravans to the salt mines of Taoudenni, returning to cities such as Timbuktu and Gao to trade salt for staples to support their families.¹⁷⁶

Blacksmiths have thrived since Mali's independence in 1960. Less dependent on the weather for their living, many have expanded their craft to include numerous tribes. Blacksmiths often work for money rather than barter goods, and trade with tourists and visitors has increased their wealth. By forming guilds, they have also increased their independence and power within Tuareg society.^{177, 178}

¹⁷² Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 19.

¹⁷³ Djansa Academy, "Les Touareg," 30 July 2011,

http://www.djansa.be/Home/index.php?content=LES_TOUAREG&front_id=49&lang=fr&locale=fr

¹⁷⁴ Thomas K. Seligman, "An Introduction to the Tuareg," in *Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, eds. Thomas K. Seligman and Kristyne Loughran (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2006), 27.

¹⁷⁵ Peter Fuchs, *The Land of the Veiled Men*, trans. Bice Fawcett (New York: Citadel Press, 1956), 49–52.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Benanav, *Men of Salt: Crossing the Sahara on the Caravan of White Gold* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2006), 117–125.

¹⁷⁷ Cynthia Haven, "Upcoming Exhibition at Cantor Center Highlights 'Artful' Tuareg of the Sahara," *Stanford University News*, 23 May 2007, <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2007/may23/tuareg-052307.html>

Rural Transportation

Transportation in rural Mali is primitive by Western standards. Desert tracks serve as roadways in the north. They are isolated, poorly built, and travelers experience breakdowns and the threat of bandits.¹⁷⁹ The Tuareg still use camels for travel. An impoverished people, few can afford the costs of driving and maintaining vehicles in the harsh desert. Camels only require the fodder they need to survive, which the Tuareg expertly find in the resource-scarce desert.¹⁸⁰ Not all Tuareg travel by camel. The blacksmiths usually travel by donkey, though some wealthier blacksmiths will travel by camel.¹⁸¹ Some enterprising Tuareg have opted to invest in the tourist industry. They own four-wheel-drive vehicles that allow them to safely and quickly transport tourists to Tuareg destinations in northern Mali.^{182, 183}



© Emilia Tjernström
Automobile Devoured by Sahara

Exchange 23: Please get out of the car.

Guard:	Please get out of the car.	izjeR toRaft
Driver:	Okay.	aaywa

Health Issues

Health is a great concern in Mali, especially in the northern regions. Apart from the capital Bamako in the south, health clinics are rare. American medicines are nonexistent, and counterfeit medicines purchased on the black market are dangerous.¹⁸⁴ Many diseases and illnesses afflict the people. The U.S. Center for Disease Control reports that northern Mali is a high-risk area for hepatitis A, typhoid fever, yellow fever, meningitis, rabies, and malaria.¹⁸⁵ Nongovernmental agencies (NGOs) in the area stopped travel because of kidnappings and insurgent violence in the

¹⁷⁸ Todd Pitock, “As the Wind Moves, So Does Memory,” *Forbes*, 19 September 2006,

<http://www.forbes.com/forbes-life-magazine/2006/0918/108.html>

¹⁷⁹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Transportation and Telecommunications,” in *Country Profile: Mali*, January 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Mali.pdf>

¹⁸⁰ Michael Benanov, *Men of Salt: Crossing the Sahara on the Caravan of White Gold* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2006), 122–123.

¹⁸¹ Peter Fuchs, *The Land of the Veiled Men*, trans. Bice Fawcett (New York: Citadel Press, 1956), 53–55.

¹⁸² Michael Benanov, *Men of Salt: Crossing the Sahara on the Caravan of White Gold* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2006), 122–123.

¹⁸³ Lonely Planet, “Review of Tuareg Tours,” 2011, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/thread.jspa?threadID=1869759>

¹⁸⁴ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Mali: Country Specific Information,” 25 January 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_962.html#medical

¹⁸⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Travelers’ Health: Health Information for Travelers to Mali,” n.d., <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/mali.htm>

area. Other NGOs have trouble aiding the Tuareg simply because they cannot find them or their camps in the vast expanse of the Sahara.¹⁸⁶

Exchange 24: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Official:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	aak ohaaz eydeg n-seeseefaR?
Local:	Yes, over there.	ileh seehaan

Schooling

Traditionally, Tuareg children are taught by family in their respective tribes. Boys are taught the skills they need to herd animals and to live in the desert. Girls receive domestic educations, learning how to care for the family, cook, craft household items, and complete domestic chores. Girls also learn Tuareg folklore and history, as well as how to read and write *Tifinagh*—the geometric Tuareg script.¹⁸⁷



© Emilia Tjemström
Tuareg Woman Raising Tent

The droughts of the 1970s and 1980s drove many Tuareg to refugee camps outside Mali. Their traditional pattern of education changed. While in refugee camps, many Tuareg children attended schools set up by relief agencies.¹⁸⁸ Many Tuareg families encouraged education for their children. The traditional Tuareg way of life is threatened by modern economies and natural disasters, and many see education as a way to provide for their children’s futures.¹⁸⁹

Exchange 25: Is there a school nearby?

Official:	Is there a school nearby?	aak ileh lak-kol ohaazan?
Local:	Yes.	ileh

Since returning from refugee camps abroad, many Tuareg have established semi-nomadic communities in northern Mali. Nongovernmental organizations have helped the Tuareg establish

¹⁸⁶ All Africa, “Mali: Kidnap Threat Throws Spotlight on Local Aid Staff,” 17 September 2010, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201009170952.html>

¹⁸⁷ Everyculture, “Tuareg,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Tuareg.html>

¹⁸⁸ Larry Thompson, “Mali: RI Release, Tuareg Refugees Return to Bleak Future in Mali,” 6 October 1997, http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Newsletters/irinw_10697.html

¹⁸⁹ Turtle Will (firm), “Educational Projects: Mali,” 2011, <http://www.turtlewill.org/education.html>

small permanent and temporary schoolhouses to provide Tuareg children with education.¹⁹⁰ Some Tuareg families are sending their children to schools where they stay in dormitories while the family migrates with their herds.¹⁹¹ The quality of education remains poor. The Tuareg struggle to provide consistent, quality education for their children.

Exchange 26: Do your children go to school?

Official:	Do your children go to school?	aak eesheketaawan nawan taakan lak-kol?
Local:	Yes.	taaken-t

Nomadic Way of Life

Animals govern life for the nomadic Tuareg. The day begins for the Tuareg just before sunrise. They milk their goats and tend other animals before the heat of the day begins. Breakfast is a simple meal of cheese, milk, and millet. Domestic chores take up their mornings until the excessive heat of midday forces people to seek the shelter of the tent or other shady place.^{192, 193}

Before midday, women complete their daily chores, which include caring for the tent and pounding millet. Young, unmarried men live almost exclusively with the animals, living off the animals’ byproducts, foraged plants, and small game. Tuareg meals are simple and rarely vary from milk products. On festival days and special occasions, they will eat meat. Tuaregs who have settled in villages and agricultural areas have begun living in mud-brick houses and adding more vegetables to their diet.¹⁹⁴

Tea is ubiquitous in Tuareg life. At least three times each day, the members of a tribe will sit together and drink small glasses of strong, heavily sweetened tea. The Tuareg have developed extensive rituals around tea drinking.¹⁹⁵

The Tuareg fill their lives with entertainment. Musical performances are common. Often erupting spontaneously, *tende* are frequent in Tuareg



¹⁹⁰ Peoples of the World Foundation, “Friends of Mali—Ireland Appeal,” 2011, <http://www.peoplesoftheworld.org/fomiappeal.jsp>

¹⁹¹ Turtle Will (firm), “Educational Projects: Mali,” 2011, <http://www.turtlewill.org/educational-projects-mali>

¹⁹² Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 22–29.

¹⁹³ Amman Imman (firm), “People of the Azawak,” 2010, <http://www.ammanimman.org/>

¹⁹⁴ Kadiatu Kourouma, “Nomadic Conflict in Mali,” 2008, <http://www.justiceafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/06/kourouma-k-nomadic-conflict-mali.doc>

¹⁹⁵ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 22–29.

camps. *Tende* are women's singing and drum performances that feature improvised verse sung by young women. The young men of the camps welcome the *tende* as a way to show off their riding skills and for the opportunity to meet young women eligible for marriage.^{196, 197}

¹⁹⁶ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 22–29.

¹⁹⁷ Susan J. Rasmussen, "Between Several Worlds: Images of Youth and Age in Tuareg Popular Performances," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2000): 133–144. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/3317938>

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

The road system in northern Mali is severely underdeveloped. Few roads exist between towns and villages, and those that do are usually desert tracks. Because of the lack of roads, Mali's borders with Mauritania, Algeria, and Niger are porous. Along highway RN17 from Niger to Mali is a border crossing at the village of Labbenzanga, and the border station is primitive. Run by military personnel because of Tuareg insurgencies, the border crossing often has tanks positioned in the surrounding hills. Travelers must have a visa to enter Mali at this point, and some report graft by the border officials.¹⁹⁸

Exchange 27: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Official:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	indek edag n-kontRol wa ohaazan?
Local:	Two kilometers from here.	deehadagh haaR eesin keelometRan

Another border crossing lies on a desert track that crosses the Route de Tanezrouft in Algeria to an unnamed village in Mali before turning south to Tessalit, Aguelhoc, and terminating in Gao. Because of security concerns, this border crossing has been effectively closed to travelers who are not from the region. Guides can help travelers maneuver through this border, but it is unsafe because of the high number of kidnappings and the presence of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the region.^{199, 200}



© Aysha Bibiana Balboa
Lone Tuareg in the Desert

Exchange 28: Is this all the ID you have?

Guard:	Is this all the ID you have?	awaadagh aateelad dagh teekaaRdiwan?
Driver:	Yes.	eeya

¹⁹⁸ Jeffrey Tayler, *Angry Wind: Through Muslim Black Africa by Truck, Bus, Boat, and Camel* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 179–181.

¹⁹⁹ Anthony Ham, Nana Luckham, and Anthony Sattin, *Algeria* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet, 2007), 212.

²⁰⁰ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Mali: Country Specific Information,” 25 January 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_962.html

No official border crossing exists between Mauritania and northern Mali except in the southeastern region of Mauritania. A primitive dirt road runs east from the village of Néma, Mauritania, crossing the border into Mali to Niafunke and turning northeast to Timbuktu.²⁰¹

Exchange 29: Are you carrying any guns?

Guard:	Are you carrying any guns?	aak tawaayad taazolee?
Driver:	No.	abo

Land Mines

In northern Mali, anti-vehicle mines are problematic. Although the extent of the mined area is unknown, Mali reported as many as 80 mined areas in the administrative regions of Timbuktu and Kidal. As of 2010, Mali has not reported on mine removal efforts within its territory. The Malian government listed a wide range of factors blocking its clearance of mines, such as a lack of experienced personnel, climatic conditions, and a lack of resources.²⁰²



© Ayscha Bibiana Balboa
Tuareg Caravan

Exchange 30: Is this area mined?

Visitor:	Is this area mined?	aajum eydag wa hant mintan wee laabasnan?
Local:	Yes.	waR aba

In 2007, Tuareg rebels were suspected of planting land mines that killed 11 people in the administrative region of Kidal.²⁰³ Mali is among the African nations that were required to clear its borders of all antipersonnel mines by 2009. Mali did not report problems with antipersonnel mines and did not request an extension to this deadline. The UN report “2010 Portfolio of Mine Action Projects” did not list Mali.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Guide Gecko, “Mauritania: Getting In and Out,” n.d., <http://www.guidegecko.com/mauritania/get-in/p.127217.150>

²⁰² Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, “Mali,” 22 October 2010, http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/113

²⁰³ Tiemoko Diallo and Gamer Dicko, “Landmines Kill 11 in Mali Desert Conflict,” *Guardian Online*, 31 August 2007, <http://mg.co.za/article/2007-08-31-landmines-kill-11-in-mali-desert-conflict>

²⁰⁴ Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, “Mali,” 22 October 2010, http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/113

Chapter 5: Assessment

1. The Tuareg are a unified ethnic group.

False

Tuareg tribes are affiliated with one another, yet they do not form a cohesive whole and they lack unified leadership.

2. Tuareg tribes fight with one another.

True

Intertribal conflict occurs frequently between Tuareg tribes, usually over access to grazing land, water, and caravan routes.

3. The Tuareg do not practice private land ownership.

True

The Tuareg favor communal land that supports the tribe.

4. Traditionally, the Tuareg maintained a caste system.

True

In earlier times, tribes were divided into castes based on labor and production.

5. Contemporary Tuareg maintain their traditional nomadic existence.

False

Because of severe droughts and political change, many Tuareg have given up their nomadic existence and settled into agricultural livelihoods.

Chapter 6: Family Life

Introduction

Because they are nomadic, the Tuareg own few material possessions. They make up for this with a rich social culture. The foundation of Tuareg culture is the family. Interactions between family members follow prescribed social and ancient customs. Even though the Tuareg, especially the women, possess a great deal of freedom, kinship ties are multilayered and govern how individual members of society interact.



© Leslie Lewis
Tuareg Gather for Tendé

Family Structure

Whether the Tuareg are nomadic or living in fixed communities, family structure remains the same. Although Tuareg tribes consist of a group of related family members, the basic Tuareg unit is the immediate family. Each tent within the community is the property of the wife. She lives there with her husband and their children.²⁰⁵ The tent is women's domain. Wives and their daughters are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the tent, in which they store the belongings of the family. Women have a great deal of power and freedom within Tuareg society. The Tuareg trace their lineage to a single female ancestor, so wives have a great deal of influence on decision-making within the home. Women command great respect from their husbands and sons. Wives are literate, and safeguard tribal folklore. They also have the right to divorce their husbands for many reasons.²⁰⁶



© Emilia Tjemström
Interior of Tuareg Tent

Although Tuareg society is matrilineal, it is patriarchal. Husbands are the heads of households. They care for the animals, make decisions about migrations, and control the political life of their families and tribes. Fathers are responsible for educating their male children to ensure they have the skills necessary to support themselves as nomads.²⁰⁷

Male/Female Interactions within the Family

Tuareg women have a great deal of freedom in dealing with men. They are not constrained by customs of modesty. They do not veil themselves in front of men, and they often expose much of

²⁰⁵ Thomas K. Seligman, "An Introduction to the Tuareg," in *Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, eds. Thomas K. Seligman and Kristyne Loughran (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2006), 23.

²⁰⁶ Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 209–213.

²⁰⁷ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 19.

their bodies in public. Despite violating many Islamic restrictions on women’s behavior, the Tuareg see their women as above reproach.²⁰⁸

Men, on the other hand, must conform to many rituals in their dealings with women. To be considered as decent, men must wear the veil. They may unveil in front of their wives, but they rarely do. When they are in the presence of their mothers-in-law, however, they must position their veils to cover their mouths and noses.²⁰⁹ For some Tuareg women, it is a source of great pride that they have never seen their husbands’ faces.



© Emilia Tjemström
Portrait: Tuareg Woman

Exchange 31: How many people live in this house?

Official:	How many people live in this house?	maa eehan eyhan dagh ideeneh?
Local:	5	samos

Status

Elders

The Tuareg define elders by factors other than age. Tuareg elders are those with children who are married or of marriageable age. Believed to possess *al baraka*—a mystical power of blessing, benediction, and spiritual power—elders command great respect in Tuareg society.²¹⁰ Elders preside over many of the ceremonies that define Tuareg life. Women elders instigate, plan, and chaperone events such as the *ahal*, which are courtship ceremonies and performances. Elders hold positions that are politically, religiously, and domestically important.²¹¹



© Emilia Tjemström
Portrait: Tuareg Female Elder

²⁰⁸ Hélène Claudot-Hawad, “‘Woman the Shelter’ and ‘Man the Traveller’: The Representation of Gender among the Tuaregs,” (paper, Societies of Peace, 2nd World Congress on Matriarchal Studies, San Marcos and Austin, TX, 29 September–2 October 2005), http://www.second-congress-matriarchal-studies.com/claudot_hawad.html

²⁰⁹ Jeremy Keenan, *The Tuareg: People of Ahaggar* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 127–136.

²¹⁰ Susan J. Rasmussen, “Alms, Elders, and Ancestors: The Spirit of the Gift among the Tuareg,” *Ethnology* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2000), <http://www.jstor.org/pss/3773793>

²¹¹ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuaregs: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 24–26.

²¹² Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 213–217.

Exchange 32: Does your Chief live here?

Official:	Does your Chief live here?	aak aamanokal n-tadabaayet eezagh deehaadagh?
Local:	He lives here.	iKhesh, eezagh deeha

Children

Children are treated with much love and devotion in Tuareg society. They have the freedom to run and play, often making demands on adults for treats and presents, which are never denied to them. Children are also taught to share with other children all gifts they receive. The Tuareg believe that babies and young children are susceptible to possession by spirits that cause disease and illness, so they care greatly for their children. Because they have little or no access to healthcare, Tuareg mothers and their children suffer high mortality rates.



Tuareg adults believe that they should always make time for their children, and they readily and unfailingly indulge children’s whims within the community. Tuareg adults do not punish their children physically and view corporal punishment as brutality.²¹³

Exchange 33: Are these people [children] part of your family?

Official:	Are these people [children] part of your family?	aajum aaRaatan eenawan?
Local:	Yes.	eeya

²¹³ Peter Fuchs, *The Land of Veiled Men*, trans. Bice Fawcett (New York: The Citadel Press, 1956), 93–95.
© DLIFLC

Married Life, Divorce, and Birth

A high degree of freedom and understanding typifies Tuareg marriages. Men and women in pastoral communities spend months apart because of the need to trade with different communities. As a result, adultery is common in both sexes. Men and women tolerate the practice, as long as the adultery occurs while the spouses are separated. Although she does not figure in the political life of the community, a Tuareg wife exerts a strong influence within her household. Tuareg parents arrange marriages after lengthy consultations and agreements with relevant kin. But in regard to relationships and marriage, a Tuareg woman's wishes cannot be subverted. Tuareg families will not force their daughters into marriages the women do not want to enter.²¹⁴



© Emilia Tjemström
Tamashek Woman and Child

Divorce

Divorce is common among the Tuareg. The process is not equitable, however, and tends to favor women over men. Women have the right to petition for divorce for many reasons. Since they own the nuptial tent and the belongings in it, women merely eject their husbands from the home. If a divorcing couple lives in the camp of the husband's family, the woman will return to the camp of her mother's family. Women keep the bride wealth that her husband gave her at the wedding. A newly divorced man often must live with friends, relatives, or in the desert until he can find a new bride.^{215, 216}

Birth

The Tuareg celebrate all births, but particularly the birth of boys. Pregnant women usually return to their parents' camp to give birth, remaining there for about one month afterward. The father is only allowed to visit her during the night and in secret during this time. Many midwives attend the young woman during the birth of her child. The Tuareg practice many rituals with the umbilical cord, blood, and afterbirth to protect the newborn from disease and evil spirits.²¹⁷ Women place iron knives under the pillows of newborns to protect them from *djinn*—evil spirits—until the child has been given a name.²¹⁸ The Tuareg believe that until children are named, they are nameless spirits susceptible to possession by malignant spirits.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Johannes Nicolaisen and Ida Nicolaisen, *The Pastoral Tuareg: Ecology, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 2 (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1997), 719–757.

²¹⁵ Johannes Nicolaisen and Ida Nicolaisen, *The Pastoral Tuareg: Ecology, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 2 (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1997), 719–757.

²¹⁶ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuareg: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 37

²¹⁷ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuareg: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 37

²¹⁸ Johannes Nicolaisen and Ida Nicolaisen, *The Pastoral Tuareg: Ecology, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 2 (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1997), 719–757.

²¹⁹ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuareg: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 42–44.

Social Events

Weddings

Despite the high divorce rate, the Tuareg celebrate marriage fervently. Custom requires the families of the couple to provide a feast for the attendees, which is no small feat considering their scarce resources. In the first step of the marriage process, a Tuareg *marabout*—a Quranic scholar and holy man—recites passages from the Quran to the couple’s families, without the bride and groom present. Afterward, a tent is constructed where the couple enjoys 3 days of celebrations, singing, eating, and rituals. The word for tent and for marriage is the same in Tamashek.²²⁰ After these 3 days, the man and woman are considered married and remain in their tent for a 7-day period of seclusion.²²¹



© CulturVultur / flickr.com
Tehardent Player

Exchange 34: Congratulations on your wedding!

Visitor:	Congratulations on your wedding!	n-taaRa aay-kenan ehen nek
Local:	We are honored to have you here.	aalKeR ajin

Funerals

Ceremonies accompany death in Tuareg society. A person of the same sex performs the ritual ablutions of the body, which follow a prescribed order and repetition. A goat of the deceased’s herd is sacrificed for a funeral banquet. This sacrifice and banquet are repeated 7 days and 40 days after the funeral and on the first anniversary of the funeral. Bodies are shrouded and buried in graves that are covered by flat stones and thorny branches. The Tuareg believe that the dead turn into spirits that haunt the tents where they lived until such time that no one remembers the deceased.²²²

Exchange 35: I offer my condolences to you and your family.

Visitor:	I offer my condolences to you and your family.	ajigh awan asafu
Local:	Thank you for being with us.	aalKheR ajin

²²⁰ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuareg: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 37.

²²¹ Johannes Nicolaisen and Ida Nicolaisen, *The Pastoral Tuareg: Ecology, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 2 (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1997), 719–757.

²²² Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuareg: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 45–46.

Rites of Passage

Puberty and circumcision are the key rites of passage for the Tuareg. Boys are circumcised when they turn 7. At this point, they no longer stay in their parents' tent. Circumcised boys sleep outside the tent with friends until they marry, when they move into their wives' tents. At the age of 18, boys take the veil. After receiving his father's permission, the boy wears the veil, sometimes receiving a small ceremony and presents. He will continue to live veiled until his death.²²³



© Benoit Rivard
Boy Saddling Camel

Unlike other ethnic groups in northern Mali, Tuareg girls are not circumcised. At puberty, they begin to wear the headscarf. The scarf signifies that the girl has reached marriageable age. A mother may celebrate her daughter's coming of age with a small party and an announcement to the community that her daughter is qualified for marriage. Girls continue to live in their mothers' tents until they marry.²²⁴

Naming Conventions

The Tuareg hold naming ceremonies for their children that begin 6 days after the child's birth. Food is prepared, and on the seventh day, a *marabout* slaughters a ram, announcing the baby's name as he cuts the animal's throat. Later, the women will cut the child's hair with two knives and give the child a second name that is used primarily by the family and by women. These "secret" names often suggest physical attributes of the child, such as beauty.²²⁵

²²³ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuareg: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 46–47.

²²⁴ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuareg: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 46–47.

²²⁵ Karl-G. Prasse, *The Tuareg: The Blue People*, trans. Poul Tornøe (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995), 43–44.

Chapter 6: Assessment

1. Tuareg women possess a great deal of freedom within the family.

True

Tuareg society is matrilineal, so women have a great deal of influence within the home and command great respect from their husbands.

2. Women head households in Tuareg society.

False

Tuareg society is patriarchal. Husbands are the heads of their households and control the political life of their communities.

3. Women do not veil themselves in Tuareg society.

True

Although women wear a head scarf, they do not veil their faces. Only men wear the veil in Tuareg society.

4. Tuareg elders are deeply respected.

True

Elders command high respect in Tuareg society and are believed to possess mystical powers of blessing and benediction, called *al baraka*.

5. Tuareg women can choose their husbands.

True

Although families play a crucial role in brokering marriages, a woman's choice is seldom denied her.

Final Assessment

1. The Tuareg consider themselves Malian.
True or False
2. Northern Mali is unsafe.
True or False
3. The Tuareg make up only a small percentage of the Malian population.
True or False
4. Tourism plays a role in the Tuareg economy.
True or False
5. The Tuareg promote violence in their region.
True or False
6. Traditional Islam defines Tuareg gender roles.
True or False
7. The Tuareg are matrilineal.
True or False
8. Women have few rights in Tuareg society.
True or False
9. Tuareg women play a major role in Tuareg politics.
True or False
10. Men are responsible for the religious care of Tuareg communities.
True or False
11. A family-oriented people, Tuareg men and women take their meals together.
True or False
12. Tuareg women adhere to a strict dress code.
True or False
13. Tuareg men must wear the veil when they reach maturity.
True or False
14. The Tuareg relax social norms during holiday festivities.
True or False
15. Hospitality is important to Tuareg culture.

True or False

16. Tuareg face numerous medical perils.

True or False

17. Tuareg children receive a formal education.

True or False

18. Numerous well-developed roads connect urban centers in northern Mali.

True or False

19. Northern Mali is accessible by air.

True or False

20. Street crime is common in Mali's urban areas.

True or False

21. Tuareg blacksmiths remain dependent on Tuareg tribes for their survival.

True or False

22. Roadways in northern Mali are modern and well maintained.

True or False

23. The Tuareg suffer many illnesses.

True or False

24. Animals are important to the Tuareg way of life.

True or False

25. Travel is dangerous in northern Mali.

True or False

26. Divorce is uncommon in Tuareg society.

True or False

27. Tuareg particularly favor the birth of girls.

True or False

28. Weddings are important events in Tuareg society.

True or False

29. Tuareg do not believe in spirits and spirit possession.

True or False

30. Boys and girls are circumcised in Tuareg society.

True or False

Further Reading

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