From the "Tuareg question" to memories of conflict: In support of Mali's reconciliation

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Contents

Foreword

The following report is an analysis of the « Tuareg question » by Adib Bencherif, PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa. On the basis of exhaustive field research, the author puts into perspective an interpretative framework which focuses on the Tuareg rebellions to explain the Malian conflict. His analysis of the rebellions memories is indeed essential to better understand the dynamics of the conflict between the Tuareg and the Malian state as well as those between the various Tuareg communities.

In the coming months, the Centre FrancoPaix will publish complementary reports and analyses that will cover different elements and dimensions of the situation in Mali. A final report will be available in the spring of 2018. The following is therefore part of a collective research effort.

Indeed, in September 2016, the Centre FrancoPaix launched a major research project on the Malian conflict and its international engagements. Entitled "Stabilizing Mali: the challenges of conflict resolution", the project aims to produce a rigorous scientific analysis of Malian conflict dynamics. Through multidisciplinary and multidimensional analyses of the situation and opportunities for action, through a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods and with a team of eight expert researchers, the initiative seeks to establish the connections and relationships between multiple variables, notably the links between conflict dynamics and those of international intervention. As such, the Mali Project will develop an enhanced and detailed understanding of the conflict and opportunities for peace.

The complexity of the situation in Mali is undeniable. The difficulties of the peace process are obvious. The limits of mediation and international interventions are important and, some will say, counterproductive. We do not pretend to know or to have discovered the solution to the Malian conflict, but we are confident that our approach and our team can identify and analyse the crucial links between various dimensions of the conflict, and thus shed new light on it.

Good reading.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The relationship between certain Tuareg communities in Mali and the country's government has been one of conflict from the time that Mali became independent. Although the "Tuareg question" is commonly used to refer to the conflict between the state and the Tuareg, mainly in the north of the country, and the Malinke-Bambara populations in the southern part of the country, it actually tends to reify many prejudices, inherited in part from the colonial era. Moreover, the Tuareg rebellions (of 1963, the 1990s, 2006 and 2012) and the successive government repressions have gradually intensified resentments on both sides and fueled the memories driving potential conflicts. The objective of this report is to put competing representations of the conflict into perspective through a thoughtful reading of history. This also means grasping the formations of the various representations and resentments that exist in people's memories. We will concentrate on the conflict between the Tuareg and the government of Mali, and between the various Tuareg communities. The study is focussed on the Tuareg as the key players in successive rebellions in Mali. The material used in this report was collected during field research in Mali conducted from December 2016 to February 2017. This material consists primarily of semi-directed interviews and discussions with Tuareg officials and leaders, as well as discussions with international stakeholders and experts.

FROM THE "TUAREG QUESTION" TO MEMORIES OF CONFLICT: IN SUPPORT OF MALI'S RECONCILIATION

Introduction

The government of Mali is often depicted as the prisoner of a cycle of Tuareg rebellions ever since its independence. Since independence, analysts identify four Tuareg rebellions (Bourgeot 2012; Barbet 2015; Ag Khammadine 2013). The first, between 1963 and 1964, was carried out by a few Tuareg in the Kidal region. The second took place during the 1990s and was the first rebellion to spread over the entire north of Mali. The third rebellion, which broke out in 2006, was brief and led that same year to the signing of the Alger Agreement by the parties. The fourth Tuareg rebellion began in 2012. In addition to the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which is part of the continuum of Tuareg claims vis-à-vis the government of Mali, transnational jihadist groups - Al-Qaïda au Maghreb islamique (AQMI) and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) – and an ambiguous jihadist group, *Ansar Dine*,[1] were the groups setting off the armed conflict in northern Mali in 2012. They would then conquer all of northern Mali which the Tuareg autonomist and independence factions called *Azawad*.[2] The jihadist groups would rapidly take the upper hand and take control of *Azawad* until France's military intervention in 2013. The following years would witness the splintering of armed Tuareg groups and growing numbers of Arab, Songhai, Tuareg and Fulani community militias, against a background of reports of force that was fluid and circumstantial, intercommunity and intertribal (Bencherif and Campana 2017; Boutellis and Zahar 2017).

Thus, jihadist groups and the growing numbers of armed groups in northern Mali are increasingly analyzed. The approach of this report is not to relativize the work carried out in these studies, some of which are very thorough and sound (Sandor 2017; Boutellis and Zahar 2017; Bencherif 2017), nor to obscure the many plausible security risks and threats in the region, but to bring a complementary view for understanding the conflict, and more specifically, the relations between the Tuareg communities in Mali and the government.

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[1] Iyad Ag Ghali is one of the leaders of the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s. He remains something of a celebrity and enjoys a still-current legitimacy within many segments of the Tuareg community, particularly within the *Ifoghas* tribe. His engagement in a path of conservative and Salafi Islam in the 2000s is inexplicable for many Tuareg (field notes, 2016-2017). However, the pre-existing bonds of allegiance and solidarity among Tuareg tribes led many Tuareg youth in the north of Mali to support Iyad Ag Ghali during the creation of his group Ansar Dine in 2012, particularly in the Kidal region. At the same time, he was successful in recruiting in certain radicalized segments of various communities in the north and centre of Mali and has had help from the AQMI and the MUJAO (field notes, 2016-2017). Ag Ghali is therefore simultaneously part of the continuum of past Tuareg claims while also having espoused the path of jihad, maintaining relations with international jihadist groups. To grasp the murky reality of Ansar Dine, refer to International Crisis Group (2012); Bencherif and Campana (2017) and Bencherif (2017).

[2] *Azawad* originally referred to a space in the Timbuktu region; the term seems to have expanded to more generally describe the north of Mali as a whole during the 1990s. There does not seem to be any historical support of this notion in the literature. The cultural reality of the *Azawad* was however recognized and consecrated in the preamble of the 1992 National Pact and in the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali that resulted from the 2015 Processus d'Alger.

Caught in the immediacy of the dynamics of the most recent conflict, analysts can lose sight of the political dimension attached to the narratives of local stakeholders and the complexity of the Tuareg political landscape. The Tuareg communities have different portrayals of their relations among themselves and with the government, depending on events, circumstances and their own place in the inter- and intracommunity power plays. This report will therefore focus on the government's memories of the conflict and those of the main Tuareg communities in Mali in order to clarify the various positions.[3] After having presented the methodology of this report, we will present a picture of the Tuareg political mosaic by examining its twists and turns and its prospective unity. Then, we will examine the main episodes of confrontations between Tuareg armed groups and the government and the imaginings conveyed and progressively reinforced over the course of Mali's post-colonial history.[4] The episodes studied in this report are: 1) the Tuareg rebellion against the colonizer, particularly the rebellion led by Firhoun between 1916 and 1917; 2) the rebellion, or more accurately, the Tuareg revolt in 1963; 3) the generalized and widespread rebellion of the 1990s; and, 4) the 2006 Tuareg rebellion. These rebellions are compared with the most recent Tuareg rebellion which began in 2012. Indeed, interviewees connect these episodes in their narratives, making them part of a continuum. In order to settle that which analysts and observers have become accustomed to calling "the Tuareg question" (Salifou 1993), we should first put into perspective the dynamics and memories that have fuelled this "question" and kept it burning.

I.   Methodology and Narrative Challenges

My research into Mali led to two trips to the country in 2016-2017. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2012, Tuareg elites have been very much in demand for interviews regarding the situation in Mali by many analysts, researchers and foreign observers. As a result, their narrative is well-oiled and adapted to the interviewer's identified or assumed position, outside and inside Mali alike (interview with Luis Martinez, November 24, 2016). To be able to have even a basic understanding of the complexity of this Tuareg world, it was therefore necessary to have a modest attitude and conduct long discussions, where semi-structured interviews could be transformed into unstructured interviews and vice versa depending on the circumstances. I was a student researcher with the African Union's Mission for the Sahel and Mali (MISAHEL) in Bamako at the time of my two field trips to Mali. Alongside my international mediation observations, I conducted interviews, mainly with the various Tuareg elites. I met Tuareg elites who were members of armed groups, the government of Mali, and civil society.

The objective of this report is to present the broad strokes of the narratives told by the Tuareg elites and patterns observable in the world of the Tuareg, mainly along tribal lines, and statutory[5] and generational categories. We will make explicit reference to the

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[3] In this study, memories are understood as narratives mobilized and shared by the groups when they tell one another their respective stories and experiences.

[4] The relations maintained with the other communities, such as the Arabs and Songhai, will be briefly addressed throughout this paper.

[5] Term that is interchangeable with the concept of "caste" in this text.

interviews only to advance the vision of a particular stakeholder or when it is necessary to quote him or her to affirm a difference or illustrate a clear trend or element that appears unexpected at first glance.

II.   The Tuareg political mosaic in Mali: Is unity tangible or just a dream?

The Tuareg are nomadic populations of Berber origin in the Sahelo-Saharan region, whose lifestyles and ways of travel have become more complex since independence (Grémont 2014). Indeed, some fringes of the populations have settled, some travel semi-nomadically around fixed sites; otherwise they move around based on the availability of the pastures that are required for their herds (Grémont 2014; Bourgeot, 1990b; field notes 2016-2017). Finally, others have stepped up their movements and are involved in various types of trafficking, be it in subsistence products, known as *lahda* consisting primarily of basic necessities brought in from Algeria (Scheele 2011, 2012), or in cigarettes, weapons and drugs (Scheele 2011; Kohl 2013; Bencherif 2018). In pre-colonial times, Tuareg populations were mainly structured around the confederations of Ajjer, Air, Ahaggar and Adagh. These confederations are located in Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

In the course of our interviews, the Tuareg elites emphasized their preference to be called an emic term, namely *Kel Tamasheq* meaning "Tamasheq speakers."[6] In the context of this report, we will use the term "Tuareg" and variations thereof instead, because it is more familiar to and better understood by readers.[7]

The Tuareg live mainly in northern Mali in three regions: Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal.[8] Unlike southern Mali, northern Mali does not historically belong to the Malinke/Bambara cultural area. The former Kingdom of Mali, used as an historical referent by the fathers of the nation, especially under Modibo Keïta, did not extend to the north of the country (Lecocq 2010, 70-74). However, northern Mali is not populated by the Tuareg alone; Arab, Fulani and Songhai communities also live there. The Songhai are, moreover, the majority in the Gao and Timbuktu regions, while the Tuareg appear to be the majority in the Kidal region (OECD 2015). However, given that the subject is highly politicized, it is difficult to establish a demographic representation of these communities.[9] Furthermore, the various

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[6] *Tamasheq* is the language of the Tuareg. There are many dialects and many variations, especially in pronunciation (Casajus, 1990). The people I spoke with in Niger did not use "*Tamasheq*" but rather "*Tamajak*", which was the local pronunciation.

[7] Tuareg elites sometimes preferred the emic term *Imushagh* (in Mali) over the term "Tuareg". This partially hearkens back to the language of the dominant caste (Bourgeot, 1990a, 131-132 ; Casajus 1990).

[8] These three regions have recently turned into five when the regions of Menaka and Taoudénit were created, most likely to fulfill the wishes of community leaders and strongmen seeking dominance over their local areas of influence. (field notes, 2016-2017).

[9] One of the underlying issues, restricting any attempt to paint an accurate demographic picture, is knowing whether one attributes an individual to an ethnic group on the basis of his or her language spoken. Moreover, some Tuareg elites and representatives of the government of Mali in general tend to have a murky relationship of inclusion/exclusion of black Tuareg communities in their understanding of the Tuareg world. The terms most often used are moreover "*Bella*" (Songhai) or "*Iklan"* (Tamasheq) and not "black Tuareg" in private space. They refer to the past status of ancestors of this caste as slaves. Although they have been freed, this reminder of origin in the caste name contributes to commodifying and reinforcing existing statutory categories, or at any rate at least their holdovers in the local imagination.

ethnic groups, depending on the region and locality, have lived and exchanged with each other to varying degrees. Over past centuries, while there have certainly been conflicts, relations have also been harmonious and there has been mutual assistance between the various ethnic groups in the river area, similar to dynamics in the past in the Gao region (Grémont et al., 2004).

The Tuareg world is often portrayed as divided into tribes where "*rezzous*" ("razzias") structure the relationship between them and the other communities (Boilley 1999, 9; Boutellis and Zahar 2017, 7). This representation strengthens the stereotype of the Tuareg that is seriously prone to violence. The colonial writings are moreover split between a representation of the rebellious and unbowed Tuareg who cannot be trusted even after an agreement with tribal chiefs has been formalized, and a romantic fascination for this "noble and free icon" (Lecocq 2010; field notes 2016-2017). This romantic fascination from the colonial era, perpetuated by certain French nationals "enamoured" with a Tuareg cause, certainly added fuel to the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s (Casajus, 1995), as well as the current tensions between communities in Mali (field notes, 2016-2017).[10]

However, since the beginning of the last Tuareg rebellion in 2012, the French authorities, especially the army, seem to be seeking a "balanced" and pragmatic position between the various communities in the country to preserve the geo-political integrity of Mali (field notes, 2016-2017).[11] With respect to the issues of Mali's geo-political integrity - and although the doctrines differ in many respects between the French and Algerian governments - the Algerian authorities seem to take the same stance. The Algerian authorities also give priority to the geo-political integrity of Mali (field notes, 2016-2017), in this "cobbled together peace" between the parties to the conflict (Guichaoua and Pellerin, 2017). However, Algeria's role is that of mediator upon each Tuareg rebellion. Thus, while trying to use their assorted networks to get the various parties to sit at the negotiating table, the Algerian government is "reactivating previous peace agreements" to formulate a new peace agreement (field notes, 2016-2017). This, however, often leads to the various parties to the conflict becoming part of a narrative in which the current situation of conflict is supposedly most often caused by France, sometimes by Algeria, or by both countries. The responsibility for the conflict in Mali is externalized through this rhetoric. The enemy armed group is thus considered to have been assisted, supported or even created by one of these two countries. This perception is very much shared on the ground by Mali's elites, with a denial of sorts of the local responsibilities of the various parties to Mali's conflict (field notes, 2016-2017).

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[10]Concurrently, many Tuareg elites told me that the French authorities had promised to support them if they, the Tuareg, would not endorse Gaddafi at the time when the fall of his regime was not a certainty. This assertion, which can be considered a "rumour" in the milieu, is nonetheless very much present in the Tuareg imagination, but also in Mali, where members of other ethnic communities told me the same story in confidence. Regardless of how true or not this story is, it also illustrates the anti-French sentiment that is very much prevalent locally and which is moreover strongly revived when the issues of migratory traffic and military deployments in the region are in the news.

[11] This is despite the fact that many trends seem to criss-cross officials and French security forces (field notes, 2016-2017).

Beyond the role of external players, the issue of a Tuareg political order has been discussed in scientific literature, particularly among researchers Claudot-Hawad (1992, 1993) and Bourgeot (1992). Claudot-Hawad (2001) supports a historicity of the Tuareg nation, creating a "cosmogony" of a Tuareg political, social and cultural space. The Tuareg elites have also greatly engaged Professor Claudot-Hawad to legitimize *Azawad*. The concept of *tumast*, meaning "community", was widely used with the meaning of "nation" when the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s was brewing and after it broke out, strengthening the ethnocentric outlook of the Tuareg rebels (Lecocq 2010). According to Bourgeot (1992), the concept of a "Tuareg nation" would be unfounded, since there has never been a unified Tuareg political order nor a common political agenda. However, would the structuring of a collective project identified as *Azawad* not mean that Tuareg political unity would come within the realm of possibility? All national or identity narratives belong to a social construct. On the other hand, Bourgeot (1990a, 1992, 2012) is of the opinion that the Tuareg world has a decidedly vertical structure, with rigid statutory categories. These debate points illustrate the extent to which the same social objective can be interpreted differently by researchers, who contribute to the construction and legitimization of certain narratives at the expense of others, and thus partially commodify the Tuareg world, strengthening a unity or fragmentation that exists to varying degrees. Thus, Grémont (2010) urges us not to be misled by pre-existing categories (nation, castes, tribes, etc.) and to challenge these categories when we set out to understand the Tuareg world.

The truth of the matter is that while the Tuareg world can be understood as being a political order that shares a number of norms and rules, it is at the same time fragmented. Unity and division coexist in a kind of dialectic, which leads us to a point of view similar to that of Casajus. Casajus (1998), aware of the fluidity of the socio-political reality of the Tuareg political mosaic, noted that *civility* is preserved, even in times of internal strife between Tuareg groups. Casajus is of the opinion that the shared normative corpus makes it possible to speak of a "Tuareg *cité*" and, possibly, of a Tuareg political order. Furthermore, let us add that in the pre-colonial era, the *Iwellemmedan* were dominant for a period between the 17th and 19th centuries, and this domination extended over the Tuareg political mosaic stretching from the territory of present-day Mali to the *Azawagh* basin in Niger (Grémont, 2010). Before their military defeats at the hands of French colonial troops, this domination seemed to demonstrate, for us, the relationship maintained by the various Tuareg communities before the same symbolic authority, although we cannot speak of a centralized power, nor of "a monopoly of legitimate violence". These communities did not succeed in rallying all the Tuareg tribes against colonial troops. Some of the tribes fought them and took advantage of the colonial era to reposition themselves in the new power struggle of the Tuareg political mosaic and gain relative influence and power, like the *Ifoghas* (Boilley, 1999).

The colonizers' efforts to administer the territories where nomad populations live, including the Tuareg, has led them to describe but also to restructure the Tuareg political landscape, particularly after having considerably weakened the *Iwellemmedan* (Boilley, 1999; Grémont, 2010). One of the issues was to favour cooperative tribes, disregard Tuareg leaders who were opposed to the colonial structures, divide recalcitrant tribes and get rid of the chiefs who refused to obey and cooperate with the colonial authorities. As a result,

the "traditional" structures, i.e. the tribes, were modified but their divisions also became more rigid during the colonial era.[12] When Mali became independent, the splinter groups became the basic unit in the nomadic setting and the tribes were dissolved as administrative structures (Lecocq, 2010, 143-151). However, they would continue to play a key role despite the relationship of distrust with successive Malian regimes (*Ibid.*). Indeed, some tribal chiefs remained valuable collaborators that the government of Modibo Keïta occasionally rewarded, while continuing to maintain a distrustful attitude toward them, much like the *Ifoghas* (*Ibid.*) and the *Kel Antessar* (field notes, 2016-2017). Although the "traditional" structures, i.e. the tribes, are not taken into account in the official government architecture, they retain an informal role that has been taken into account by the successive regimes. With the exception of this difference regarding the status of chieftainship, relations between the government and the traditional nomadic chieftainships maintain the dynamics observed even in colonial times, simultaneously muddling cooperation and distrust. Successive Malian regimes have thus preserved and inherited the image of the irredentist nomad that exists in the French colonial imagination (Grémont, 2017).

Finally, at the same time, a caste system exists in the Tuareg world, as in the other communities of the Sahel (Jourde, 2017). These castes are: the *Imushagh* (translated as "nobles" in literature), the *Imghad* (translated as "vassals" or "tributaries")[13], the *Inadan* (i.e. the "blacksmiths" or "artisans") and the *Iklan*[14] (field notes, 2016-2017). It is important to note that the status of *Imushagh* and *Imghad* was not historically rigid and was able to evolve (Grémont, 2010). The colonial era seems to have made these categories more rigid based on the evolutions observed. The present Tuareg elites are fairly rigid in their ways of perceiving past Tuareg political order, even though new narratives introduced by the *Ishumar*[15] challenge the "conservative" and "traditional" narratives (Lecocq, 2010). Even though the socioeconomic reality of the Tuareg has changed, belonging to castes remains fairly set in the arguments of Mali's Tuareg elites, particularly among those claiming to belong to a "traditional" authority or hierarchically in a position of privilege and at the top of the caste system (field notes, 2016-2017).

In the context of this study, we will maintain use of the word "tribe". At this time, it is the term most used by Tuareg elites, even though some individuals I spoke with express their desire to get rid of this concept (field notes, 2016-2017). The most prominent, well-known and frequently-mentioned tribes of the Tuareg political mosaic in Mali when our interviews were conducted are the: *Iwellemmedan, Ifoghas, Cherifanes, Idaksahak, Kel Ansar, Taghat*

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[12] Moreover, the term "tribe" is, in the case of the Tuareg, a re-adaptation by the colonizer of the emic term *tewsit.* For a discussion surrounding the reinterpretation and modifications of Tuareg political structures in the colonial era, see Lecocq (2010) and Boilley (1999).

[13] In reference to a tax paid in order to have the protection of the so-called noble tribes (Bourgeot 1990a, 2012). *Imghad* is the plural of *Amghid*.

[14] See the footnote on page 9.

[15] Tuareg term that is an adaptation of the French term "chômeur" [tr.: unemployed person]. It is used to describe the unemployed Tuareg youth from Mali and Niger who were economic exiles after the draughts of the 1970s and 1980s, and also occasionally for political reasons. These *ishumar* went primarily to Libya, but also to Algeria. Beyond this original social status, a *Teshumara* culture would be formed, distancing itself from the local political order and power games of the "traditional" elite and the associated caste logics. However, they also convey a romantic and revisited interpretation of an ancient Tuareg order and therefore would redefine an interpretation of the "tradition" (Bourgeot, 1990a; Lecocq 2010; Bellalimat 2003).

Mallat, Kel Essouk, Shamanamas, *Idnan, Iredienatene, Kel Ghellat* and *Imghad.* Even though *Imghad* is generally associated with the "vassal" caste, the term is currently often used as the equivalent of "tribe". This term is, however, more complex. It designates a caste but for some, it can also mean a united political sub-set due to its common origins that cut across all of northern Mali. At this time, this sub-set is allegedly under the authority of General El Hadj Ag Gamou who hopes to put an end to what he considers domination of the *Imghad* by the *Ifoghas* in the Kidal region. This recent view of the *Imghad* is bitterly debated in the Tuareg world (field notes, 2016-2017).

Finally, the objective of this presentation was to introduce the plural reality of the Tuareg world but also to be more prudent with the categories used to describe it. Analysts would be encouraged not to give in to an exclusively functionalist model[16] for understanding the Tuareg political order in Mali, but to reconnect with the various layers of meaning in the "history" of the conflict and – more specifically in the context of this report – with the diversity of narratives in the Tuareg political order. When each of the Tuareg rebellions is studied in greater depth, some continuity can of course, be observed but there are also many co-existing particularities and narratives that run in parallel or opposition.

III.   Memories and the Tuareg rebellions

The causes explaining the Tuareg rebellions were identified very early in the literature studying the Malian and Nigerian Tuareg rebellions that took place at the same time during the 1990s. In short, these causes are related to the lack of political inclusion of the Tuareg communities in the governments and government agencies, the lack of economic development in northern Mali and Nigeria – territories where many Tuareg communities live – and the desire for self-government on the part of the fringes of these communities, particularly among the nomad element. Moreover, these causes re-engage the issues raised by the insurgents and that are part of a functionalist model. However, these explanations are inadequate for understanding the existing tensions in Mali that are reactivated with every conflict, particularly during the most recent Tuareg rebellion begun in 2012. How can the still-present community fractures be explained? For the answers to this, the communities must be questioned, and the memories and resentments that are harboured regarding the conflict, more specifically between the government of Mali and the Tuareg rebels, must be explored. In this report, we will therefore focus on the following questions: What are the conflicting representations, and what are the representations of the conflict between the Tuareg communities and Mali? What are the memory fragments used by the Tuareg elites to legitimize the rebellion and explain their resentment toward the government of Mali?

1) The Tuareg rebellion against the colonizer

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[16]   A model that tends to represent complex systems with subunits and units that can interact, but are rigidified and frozen in their meanings. The horizon of possibilities associated with social objects are therefore ill-considered.

The resistance of Tuareg populations against French colonial troops is raised through various episodes of confrontation. However, the episode mentioned most often by the Tuareg in Mali is the rebellion of the *Iwellemmedan's amenokal,* Firhoun, between 1916 and 1917 (field notes, 2016-2017).

This resistance, embodied by the figure of the *amenokal* Firhoun, is frequently used in narratives to underscore resistance in the face of an outside force oppressing the Tuareg communities, whether this force is the government, the army or colonial/post-colonial officials. Moreover, a continuum is often constructed between the colonial and post-colonial eras in the narratives of Tuareg elites to stress the necessity and normality of using the rebellion to protect oneself (field notes, 2016-2017).[17] The rebels from the most recent conflict begun in 2012 also refer to this time (field notes, 2016-2017). This episode was mentioned or recounted primarily (but not exclusively) by the *Kel Adagh* in general, and, of course, by the *Iwellemmedan.*

In the case of the *Iwellemmedan,* there is a noteworthy difference. The *Iwellemmedan* had been considerably weakened and suffered heavy human losses following their confrontations with the colonial troops (field notes, 2016-2017). Upon Mali's independence, the *Iwellemmedan* elites positioned themselves on the side of the government of Mali to be able to at least maintain their past status (field notes, 2016-2017). The *Iwellemmedan* elites will often explain their refusal to enter the rebellion as due to their frustration at having lost so many of their own in their confrontations with the colonial troops. They also point out that not enough other Tuareg communities followed them at the time (field notes, 2016-2017). Accordingly, it would be useless for them to carry out a new rebellion, as Firhoun's rebellion was not able to completely form the Tuareg world into a federation at the time (field notes, 2016-2017).[18]

2) The Tuareg rebellion – or revolt – of 1963

The 1963-1964 Tuareg revolt is a sensitive period to deal with for a number of issues, notably what to call it. It is key to understanding the memories of the conflict and the resentment within Tuareg communities. It is often presented as the first Tuareg rebellion of post-colonial Mali, whether by scholars (Bourgeot 2012; Barbet 2015; Ag Khammadine 2013), government stakeholders or even Tuareg rebels from other generations. The revolt enables the imagination to reinforce the cycle of Tuareg rebellions taking place in Mali since independence or since the colonial era, depending on who is speaking. This model emphasizes a dysfunctional relationship between the government and the Tuareg communities, even though this relationship has proved to be much more complicated in reality. This reinforces the Tuareg irredentism that exists in the minds of Mali's

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[17] There is a simultaneous desire to create a continuum between the colonial and post-colonial eras but there are also times where the Tuareg individuals spoken with express a break between these two periods. For considerations of space, this debate will not be addressed in this study. See Lecocq (2010) and Boilley (1999) for a discussion about these elements.

[18] A few *Iwellemmedan* youth can nonetheless be found in the various rebellions. They should probably be considered on an individual basis.

government authorities and the need to regard these communities with suspicion (field notes, 2016-2017). In the case of the rebellion, it allows legitimization of an historic discourse with past referents for explaining the structurally conflictual relationship with the government and the need to lead rebellions to obtain rights through the use of weapons (field notes, 2016-2017).

The 1963 Tuareg revolt is likely more a *révolte d'humeur et d'honneur* [tr.: a revolt of mood and honour] as stated by Zeydane Ag Sidalamine (2012). Indeed, the revolt was triggered following provocation of a young Tuareg from Adagh by a representative of Mali's security forces, reminding him of the fate that had befallen his father, Alla Ag Albacher at the hands of the colonial authorities in 1954 (Grémont 2017). A handful of poorly armed men, not organized, would throw themselves into this *revolt of mood and honour* initially driven by personal reasons (Grémont 2017). Among these men, there were a few secessionist leaders who began to sketch out a military-political strategy. However, the sudden revolt of 1963 happened while the planning and operationalization of a political vision was still under construction (Boilley 1999, 317-350; Lecocq 2010, 181-226).

A letter drafted by Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Cheick, *cadi* of Timbuktu, and signed by many chiefs and important people from the loop of the Niger (Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Cheikh, letter of May 30, 1958), is now often referred to by Tuareg and Arab rebels to recall the nomadic communities' concern about independence on the eve of Mali's independence (interview with an international mediator, Bamako, January 5, 2017). However, other documents and declarations dating from the same period as this letter went in the opposite direction (Ag Sidalamine 2012; Grémont, 2017). Therefore, there were disagreements within the Tuareg populations on the status of the north. The fierce repression of the 1963 Tuareg revolt by the government of Mali, unfortunately did not take this into account, and was based on stereotypes focussed on lifestyle (nomadic) or skin colour (white, i.e. Arabs and Tuareg).

The many acts of violence and brutality by the Malian army between 1963 and 1964 were collected and reported by Ag Baye and Bellil (1986), and Mariko and Boilley (2001). They found that repression was also exercised against civilians and nomadic populations who were not "rebels". This event was therefore transformative and "uniquely injurious" for the Tuareg communities, most especially for the *Kel Adagh* (field notes, 2016-2017). The 1990 Tuareg rebellion was carried out by the "children" of the 1960s (field notes, 2016-2017). For them, it was restoration of the honour that was lost in the acts of violence or brutality committed by the Malian army between 1963 and 1964 (Lecocq, 2010, 266-272). The theme of vengeance, with reference to the acts of violence and brutality, is also very present in the narratives of the Tuareg rebels for justifying the 2006 and 2012 rebellions. This event is systematically recalled in the narrative of the *Kel Adagh,* but also consistently by other Tuareg communities to explain why the Tuareg rebellions started again in Mali. These acts of violence and brutality suffered by the *Kel Adagh* also explain for the other Tuareg communities why the initiative to enter into rebellion always comes from the *Kel Adagh,* particularly the *Ifoghas.* However, in the case of the *Ifoghas*, the likely objective of their involvement in the conflict is to stay in power and ensure their "survival" vis-à-vis the government (field notes, 2016-2017).

The psychological and physical violence against the Tuareg civilian populations in the Kidal region continues to haunt memories. "Our parents were executed and the children were made to come out and applaud the execution and sing" (interview with a leader of the *Iredienatene*, Bamako, December 23, 2017); "Our women were thrown into prison and died there with their children, including newborns"; "It was genocide" (interview with an elderly *Afaghis*[19] leader, Bamako, December 25, 2016). These few excerpts from interviews, describing the violence, are elements that return consistently when the Tuareg elites recount the military repression. A young *Adnou*[20] from Kidal went as far to insist on the existence of "crematoriums in the desert", where the army allegedly incinerated the Tuareg populations during this revolt (interview with a young *Adnou* university student from Kidal, Paris, February 22, 2017).[21] Even though this young Tuareg did not experience these events, the weight of the memory proves to be preserved and reinforced, amplifying the interpretation depicted of the violence (Licata et al., 2007). Similarly, one of the individuals I spoke with stated that: "the women do not want the soldiers or the Government to come back to Kidal, because for them this means the risk of being raped like before [i.e. like the Tuareg women in 1964-1964]" (anonymous interview with a female Tuareg leader, Bamako, February 2, 2017). This pain that is borne and preserved in the memories of the Tuareg women, particularly those from the Kidal region, helps to reinforce resentment capable of deepening and reactivating the conflict.[22]

The following quote summarizes the most frequent remarks on the behaviour of the government of Mali toward the Tuareg communities: "They [the representatives of the independent Mali, mainly the Bambara/Mandinka] reproduce the colonial model of the Jacobin republican government, but they do a worse job of it as they are incompetent". The numerous statements of this type also emphasize the ongoing behaviour of Mali's government representatives with respect to imposed order, their repressive customs and the prejudices and distrust surrounding the Tuareg, while also highlighting the worsened nature of the post-colonial situation.

3) The wide-spread and generalized rebellion of the 1990s

The Tuareg rebellion in Mali, that began in Menaka in 1990 and was led by the *Ishumar,* is part of a Tuareg nationalism that seeks to go beyond tribal divisions and is based on ethnocentrism and unity. It should be noted that many Tuareg elites attempted to structure the political reality of *Azawad* by stating that they did not want to exclude the black communities, like the Songhai (field notes, 2016-2017). However, the actions,

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[19] *Afaghis* is the singular of *Ifoghas.*
[20] *Adnou* is the singular of *Idnan*.
[21] The crime of genocide and the Holocaust have been closely associated for recounting the generalized and intentional crimes committed by the representatives of the government of Mali. It should be noted that just one incident was raised by Ag Baye and Bellil (1986, 74) vis-à-vis a person burned alive (Silla) by Mali's army. It is moreover difficult to verify if there were other similar patterns between 1963 and 1964 with the sources currently available.
[22] Many Tuareg women also participate in the national reconciliation process and inter- and intra-community dialogue. Some were in favour of the rebellion and then in favour of peace and vice-versa. Tuareg women are not essentialized to a single position (Bencherif and Ag Rousmane, 2017).

declarations, referents and perceptions associated with *Azawad* independence or autonomy since the rebellion of the 1990s, make it part of a more or less pronounced ethnocentric nationalism (Alzouma, 2012). For the most part, the rebellion of the 1990s would only convince certain Arab and Tuareg factions among the communities in northern Mali, even though this rebellion was much more widespread and generalized than the 1963 revolt (2016-2017 field notes; Grémont et al., 2004).

In 1991, at the time of the Tamanrasset Accord negotiations, the dominant positioning of the *Ifoghas* tribe through the Azawad Popular Movement (MPA) and the person of Iyad Ag Ghali, caused splintering and an increase in the number of rebel groups among the Tuareg. In addition to the MPA, the most important groups are the Popular Liberation Front of Azawad (FPLA) and the Azawad Revolutionary Army (ARLA). The Azawad Arab Islamic Front (FIAA) recruited in the Arab and Moorish communities of northern Mali and was also a signatory of the Tamanrasset Accord. In 1992, the four movements would form the United Movements and Fronts of Azawad (MFUA). This alliance would sign the National Pact in 1992 with the government of Mali. However, this agreement did not make it possible to immediately control the inter- and intra-community violence that would worsen in 1994 (Klute, 1995).

Over the course of these years, narratives split and conflicts were structured around inter-community prejudices between "people from the dunes", "nomads", and "white populations" against the "river people", "the sedentary" and "black populations" (Grémont et al., 2004). Quite obviously, the reality is more complex and the two opposing groups of categories are not mutually exclusive.[23] Unfortunately, the armed Tuareg groups, that had trained in Libya, misunderstood the complexity and interdependence of the intercommunity relations in the Timbuktu and Gao regions (Grémont et al., 2004). At the same time, the group *Ganda Koy* ("lords/owners of the land"), a primarily Songhai militia, partially used by the government for its own ends, would feed a caricature-like ideology that depicted the Tuareg and Arab populations as threats to the black sedentary farming communities (Grémont et al., 2004). The populations would thus be taken hostage by cycles of violence and conflicts between armed Tuareg groups, and *Ganda Koy* would peak in 1994 (Grémont et al., 2004). These are the images that would be reactivated by the various armed groups during the most recent conflict in 2012.

At the same time as that, if the dominance of the *Ifoghas* over the Tuareg rebellion was challenged by many tribes, and not solely by the *Imghad,* the most significant clashes would take place between the MPA of the *Ifoghas,* and the ARLA of the *Imghad* (Klute, 1995). Iyad Ag Ghali was one of the main leaders of the MPA, and the current general, Ag Gamou, was also one of the leading figures of the ARLA. The Tuareg spoken with therefore tend to consider the current clashes between the HCUA – dominated by the *Ifoghas* who are close to Ag Ghali – and the GATIA, made up of *Imghad* under the orders of Ag Gamou, as the continuation of the conflict of the 1990s between the MPA and the ARLA (field notes, 2016-2017). The *Imghad* I met with and the GATIA militants regularly stressed to me that the sole objective of the MPA at the time, the HCUA at the present time, or any other groups led by *Ifoghas,* was to protect their position and domination in the

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[23] For example, "dune people" can also belong to a "black population", etc.

Kidal region and on the northern Mali political chessboard (field notes, 2016-2017). Some even insisted that the *Ifoghas* pretended to defend the Tuareg cause but were in fact only concerned with their own interests (field notes, 2016-2017).

The people I spoke with, who were GATIA members and sympathisers, were consistently part of a narrative where the current conflict is actually a struggle of the *Imghad* against the inequalities, domination and abuse of the *Ifoghas*. Conversely, the *Ifoghas* questioned presented GATIA as a tool of the government created to weaken them. The Ifoghas and the allied tribes routinely stressed the ambiguous status of Ag Gamou who was both an officer in the army and head of the GATIA militia. The irony is that throughout the 1990s, the MPA had likely been supported by the government of Mali against the ARLA. Furthermore, even though the collusion between the government and GATIA is a reality, Ag Gamou's GATIA very likely follows and protects his own interests (Wikileaks 2008b; interview with an international mediator, Bamako, January 5, 2017).

Finally, for the *Idnan*, the *Shamanamas* and the *Kel Ansar* I spoke with, the divisions observed between the various armed Tuareg groups followed tribal allegiances, as their objective was to protect tribal and local interests (field notes, 2016-2017). The leaders of these three tribes consistently pointed out to me that the combatants had needed Tuareg leaders and intellectuals to negotiate "their piece of the pie" with the government (field notes, 2016-2017). The rebellion had to have positive returns for the various Tuareg communities.

For the *Kel Ansar,* a tribe known as having more Tuareg leaders and being relatively better integrated into Mali's government institutions than the other Tuareg communities, the 1990s were particularly difficult and helped to create a conflicted memory-imagination mindset (field notes, 2016-2017). Indeed, the *Kel Ansar amenokal,* Mohamed El Mehdi Ag Attaher El Ansari, did not align himself on the side of the rebellion. Overall, the *Kel Ansar* followed his stance (field notes, 2016-2017). Even so, there were military repressions against the *Kel Ansar* in the Timbuktu region (field notes, 2016-2017). The security forces did not differentiate between them and the Tuareg taking part in the rebellion. The *Kel Ansar*, caught in the middle between the Tuareg rebellion and the other Malian forces, were therefore forced to join the armed groups or flee to refugee camps (field notes, 2016-2017). Some normally peaceful communities were thus able to be led to rethink their stance on the basis of the circumstances and the watchful eyes of "the Other" and end up either completely or partially part of a narrative of conflict with the government of Mali.

4) The 2006 Tuareg rebellion

The 2006 Tuareg rebellion was mainly limited to the Kidal region. The Tuareg generally agree on the fact that this was a rebellion that only concerned the Kidal region. Some *Kel Adagh, Ifoghas* or those close to the *Ifoghas,* stress that it was a way of negotiating, or to force the Mali government to improve things in the Kidal region. "They [the leaders and representatives of Mali's government] only understand violence" (interview with an old *Afghis* official, December 25, 2016).[24] This conclusion would seem to perfectly illustrate

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[24] This remark is also made by certain political elites in Bamako on the topic of the communities in

relations between the *Ifoghas* and the government of Mali, which are structured around renegotiable and conflictual cooperation. This logic can be extended to a number of Tuareg communities of the *Adagh* (Wikileaks 2008a, 2009; Klute and Lecocq 2013). Many non-*Adagh* tribes pointed out to me that the 2006 rebellion only served some special interests or certain groups but not the Tuareg cause (field notes, 2016-2017).

Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, one of the founders of the Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC) and one of the leaders of the 2006 rebellion, nonetheless demonstrated his dissatisfaction vis-à-vis the Alger Agreement for restoring peace, security and development in the Kidal region signed in 2006 between the rebels and the government of Mali. He founded the Tuareg Alliance of Northern Mali (ATNMC) and decided to continue the fight over the years that followed. Ag Khammadine (2013) even considers that this episode constitutes a fourth Tuareg rebellion that he places in 2008. The use of Ag Gamou by Mali's regime to neutralize the whims of the *Ifoghas* over the course of these years would also help to modify the pre-existing power struggles and solidify the rancor between the *Ifoghas* and Ag Gamou's *Imghad* (Wikileaks, 2008b; 2016-2017 field notes). For some of the progressive elites of the *Adagh* that were not members of the *Ifoghas*, the years to come would enable some figures opposing the so-called "traditional" power of the *Ifoghas* to emerge (field notes, 2016-2017). These dynamics help them to explain the outbreak of the 2012 rebellion by certain fringe elements of the *Ifoghas,* who were hostile toward them. For them, the 2012 rebellion was not the only thing in common between the new nationalist Tuareg generation and the Tuareg combatants who have returned from Libya.

Conclusion

The 2012 Tuareg rebellion both inherited and appropriated the facts and narratives from the past. The Tuareg elites would use these narratives to shape memories based on their known pasts, their positions, circumstances, interests and with whom they are speaking. The conflict between the *Ifoghas* and Ag Gamou's *Imghad,* for example, cannot be understood if the past facts and the interpretations of the various players are not examined at the same time.

The objective of this report was just to present a few fragments of memories to demonstrate how recollections, resentments and the way in which one forms a picture and recalls the facts from the past can play a role in the return to conflict. It aims to point out the "singular wounds", the responsibilities and the local denials of the various parties in their memories of the conflicts (Grémont, 2013). The use of memories structured around inter-community antagonisms by some Malian elites (all communities without distinction) helps to crystallize tensions and to trigger conflict, just like the various Tuareg rebellions.

The explanation for the Tuareg rebellions is not, therefore, something that can be neatly fit into a functionalist model on which economic development programs or military deployments could act directly (like the G5 Sahel framework). It is imperative to increase the number of discussion forums in Mali and avoid using rigid models to over-define the reality of the Tuareg rebellions, relations between Tuareg communities and Mali's

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northern Mali, particularly regarding the Tuareg from Kidal (field notes, 2016-2017).

communities in general. The communities are many and vary based on local contexts. In the 1990s, initiatives on the part of citizens and powerful people of the Gao region made it possible to establish an inter-community dialogue between the armed groups and the Bourem meeting in November 1994. Even though the parties to the conflict had signed the National Pact in 1992, this meeting would initiate a genuine peace process between the populations in 1995 and 1996. These inter-community rapprochements would lead to the "Flame of Peace" ceremony in 1996, symbolically marking the end of the conflict (Marty, 2007). Nonetheless, since that time, trust has eroded between the communities over the conflicts, making peace and political stability more difficult to achieve (Boutellis and Zahar 2017). Moreover, an additional degree of complexity has been added in the most recent conflict with the participation by a local jihadist group led by Iyad Ag Ghali: Ansar Dine. Since 2012, this group has maintained ties and cooperation with transnational jihadist groups (AQMI and the MUJAO). These groups have moreover merged to form "Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen" (Group for the Victory of Islam and the Faithful) in March 2017 (Crétois, 2017).

One of the main challenges thus resides in the role that Ag Ghali can play in the peace process. He continues to have a certain celebrity and degree of legitimacy in the Tuareg world for having been one of the main players in the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s. Many Tuareg in the CMA or who are pro-CMA feel it is a mistake not to take Ag Ghali into account in the peace process (field notes, 2016-2017). This is, moreover, one of the recommendations of the National Agreement Conference (Dia, 2017). On the other hand, many Malians, including some Tuareg, no longer trust him and feel that he has been radicalized and that he has to demonstrate that he genuinely aspires to peace (field notes, 2016-2017). Others, even among the Tuareg, would like to see him tried and sentenced (field notes, 2016-2017). In our opinion, it is necessary to begin transparent discussions between the government of Mali and Iyad Ag Ghali, preferably with a third party. One non-negotiable condition should be the distancing of Ansar Dine along with the jihadist groups with close ties and affiliations with Al-Qaeda. These negotiations should also be subject to communication with the general public to transparently state the conditions of the government of Mali and Ag Ghali. This would enable Malians to assess Ag Ghali's positions, to deconstruct any rumours, and concretely evaluate his ability to join the inter-community discussions and the ability to all live together in Mali. In the event that he demonstrates his good will, negotiating with him will prove to be necessary as part of a peace process. In the opposite scenario, it will be important to demonstrate his refusal to dialogue and his rejection of peace for all communities in the country. This means that the pre-existing allegiances supporting Ag Ghali on a tribal and community model, will be able to gradually loosen after positions have been clearly stated. Without that, the extreme rhetoric describing him as a "terrorist" will continue to divide the communities defending him and those that are against him.[25]

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[25] The reflection behind this recommendation was driven by the concern for finding a solution to the Mali crisis during my discussions with Professor, Professor Marie-Joelle Zahar, Professor Bruno Charbonneau and my colleague Maxime Ricard during the 9th conference of the World Mediation Forum held in Saint Sauveur, Quebec, May 17-18, 2017.

Finally, in the case of the *Imghad* and *Ifoghas* conflicts, it is important that the hard-liners in Bamako stop encouraging and fueling community rancor through certain proponents, like Ag Gamou, for conflict management by proxy (2016-2017 field notes; ICG 2012). These actions only reinforce the distrust and suspicion of certain Tuareg communities regarding Bamako (field notes, 2016-2017). At the same time, it would be important that an investigation be done within the Tuareg communities on the gap existing between the past statutory categories, or castes, and the present economic and political reality. This does not mean suppressing the so-called "traditional" authorities. The "traditional" authorities must certainly retain advisory and symbolic authority, while being considered as part of Mali's government structure.

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Adib Bencherif is a PhD candidate at the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa. He graduated from ILERI in France and holds a Master's degree in International Relations from HEI at Université Laval in Canada. He holds a doctoral scholarship from the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Graduate Program of Canada from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). His research interests focus on security issues in the Sahelo-Saharan space. His thesis puts the emphasis on a comparative study of representations and memories of Tuareg elites in Mali and Niger. Affiliated with several research centers in international relations, he is, in particular, associate researcher at the Observatory on the Middle East and North Africa and at the Centre FrancoPaix of the Raoul-Dandurand Chair at Université du Québec à Montréal. He is also a member of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Africa and the Middle East of Université Laval (CIRAM) and junior researcher at the Canadian Network on Terrorism, Security and Society (TSAS).

About the Centre FrancoPaix

Following the 15th Francophonie Summit and the Resolution on crisis situations, crisis resolution and peacebuilding in the French-speaking world, the Raoul-Dandurand Chair in Strategic and Diplomatic Studies set up the Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix (in conflict resolution and peace missions) in order to support the strategic objectives of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) in conflict prevention and management.

Inaugurated in January 2016 with the financial support of the OIF, the mission of the Centre FrancoPaix includes:

• The promotion of scientific research and university training in French in the field of peace and conflict studies, in particular conflict resolution, conflict management and peace missions;

• The promotion of scientific research and university training about conflict resolution and conflict management in French-speaking countries, particularly in Africa;

• The production and diffusion of scientific research that focuses on conflict resolution and peace operations, particularly through knowledge production activities with policymakers and practitioners in the field;

• Enabling intellectual exchanges and the flow of knowledge by promoting mobility, innovation and collaboration between institutions, university researchers and students from the "Global North" and the "Global South".