

Iklan Aesthetics in Niger

Identity and Adornment from Servility to Self-agency

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Silver pendants, camel saddles, and leather bags are typically featured in museums and books as examples of Tuareg art. These finely crafted objects were made for upper-status families or so-called nobles by artisans belonging to a class referred to as *inaden*. Such an approach emphasizes the striking objects commissioned by men and women who held the highest status in Tuareg society but ignores the objects produced by and for people in the lower strata, including the descendants of enslaved people. Commonly referred to as *iklan*, they constitute a diverse, socially and economically marginalized group with a distinct culture that has driven markets while creating new styles of visual representation.

Iklan are referred to as *buzu* in Hausa and *bella* in the Songhai language in Niger.¹ Since the colonial period, ethnographers have translated the term *iklan* as “slave” or “captive.” *Iklan* (sg. *akli/ekli*) can best be described as a socially stratified group constructed from the descendants of outsiders who found their way into Tuareg society either because they were captured or purchased, or because they joined a Tuareg group in search of protection. As we will see, the very name *iklan* presents problems of translation and identity, especially

in relation to the larger Tuareg society in contemporary Niger.

This article provides a nuanced look at Tuareg visual culture by concentrating on how formerly enslaved communities have been forging new identities in the twenty-first century (Fig. 1). It considers how *iklan* have used visual culture to engage in resistance strategies. As asserted by Michel de Certeau, marginalized groups subvert “rituals, representations, and laws imposed upon them” and transform them into something quite different, deflecting the power of the dominant social order (1984: xiii). It is through this lens that we can understand and interpret *iklan* aesthetics as “tactics” to gain autonomy from hierarchies of power. We examine the choices contemporary *iklan* communities, as a historically marginalized population, are making to represent their identity, sometimes adopting elite Tuareg aesthetics, often drawing inspiration from newly available goods in the market, or adopting the aesthetics of neighboring people. These various responses to the abolition of slavery and the breaking down of endogamous social categories reveal how the formerly enslaved use visual culture to negotiate their status and resist against the hierarchies that historically marginalized them.

We take a comparative approach and concentrate on two Tamasheq-speaking regions of Niger: the Tillabéri region along the Niger-Burkina Faso border and the Tahoua-Agadez region within Niger (Fig. 2). We explore the different tactics used by *iklan* in aesthetic expression and consider the various institutions and market forces that have contributed to the refiguring of *iklan* self-identity. A comparative approach allows for a detailed understanding of how postcolonial economic policies, access to markets, nongovernmental organizations, and societal change have impacted the visual culture of *iklan* in rural Niger, as they solidify their identities in response to established social hierarchies but also forge new ones far removed from the history of enslavement.

This article draws from both independent research and collaborative work on both sides of the Niger-Burkina Faso border, where *iklan* communities have managed to grow and survive despite multifaceted obstacles.² The activism of various NGOs in these two areas, as well as the tendency for low-status individuals in Tuareg culture to express their sentiments without reserve, meant that *iklan* actively shared

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BRIAN (“BARKÉ”) NOWAK tragically passed away, after completion of this article, in Niamey, Niger in November of 2021. He was an independent scholar and consultant based in Niger, with a passion for anthropology, ethnomusicology, development, and education. He lived, travelled, and worked in Niger for nearly eighteen years, including teaching for the Boston University study-abroad program and consulting for field research and assessment projects. He was programs director for the NGO Rain for the Sahel and Sahara and a research consultant and contributor to the African Language Materials Archive. Fluent in Zarma, Nowak made a profound impact on everyone who knew him, including countless Nigeriens and almost every American who traveled through Niamey in the last two decades. He tirelessly documented music and oral traditions across the Sahel and leaves behind an incredible legacy of photographs as well as audio and video recordings.



their experiences with us.³ Unfortunately, deteriorating security conditions starting in January 2012 resulted in attacks and kidnappings of Nigerians, other Africans, Europeans, and Americans, making any further trips into the Agadez, Tahoua, and Tillabéri countryside impossible without a military escort. Such attacks have increased in recent years, negatively impacting some of the most socially and economically marginalized people within Niger, especially *iklan*.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ENSLAVEMENT IN NIGER

While this article concentrates on Tuareg societies in Niger, it is crucial to recognize that enslavement was a historical practice deeply embedded within the Saharan-Saharan region of northwestern Africa.⁴ Slavery is by no means unique to Tuareg culture, but the race dynamics that classify elite as light skinned and equate low status with dark skin are unique to Tuareg and Arab society in the region. Racialized

1 A group of *iklan* women travel to the Tegue market in the Tillabéri region. Family and friends enjoy the hours-long journey as a time to spend away from the daily grind. Going to the market is also an opportunity to purchase household necessities unavailable in the countryside. Tegue, Niger, 2009. Photo: Cynthia J. Becker

2 Map of Niger
Drawn by Svetlana Matskevich, 2021





3 This man and women were working together to collect wild *isiban* seeds that historically provided a food reserve from the end of the rainy season into the cold season, a time when nomadic families would temporarily settle. This activity was undertaken throughout the Sahelian belt of Niger by servile classes, oftentimes women, often by order of an upper-status leader who assembled a large group of women for the wild harvest seen here, followed by husking and winnowing to isolate the tiny grains. North of Ayerou, northern Tillabéri region, Niger. 1960s. Photo: Edmond Bernus

categories present in century-old written accounts in Arabic distinguished between *sudan* (“Blacks”) and *bidan* (“Whites”), with the former associated with slavery and servitude. French colonial officials used the word *bella* as an overarching term to distinguish anyone with dark skin in Tuareg society as enslaved, reinforcing the racialization of Tuareg status categories (Hall 2011b: 63–64).

Within Tuareg society itself, there is a well-established hierarchy that includes elite “nobles” (*imajeghen*—literally “the free ones”), a second class of people known as “vassals” (*imrad*), and Islamic scholars (known as Kel Essouk or *ineslemen*), who occupy the top rungs of Tuareg society. The *inaden* (artisans) make elaborate leather, wooden, and metal objects for these three classes, including tools and weapons as well as jewelry used to mark status, such as silver crosses, bracelets, and anklets for women from noble families. The lower classes, in descending order, include the *iderfan* (manumitted slaves), *ighawalen* (manumitted slaves tied to particular low-status crafts), and *iklan*. However, these social categories must be understood as reference points and labels that demonstrate where social divisions historically existed. This essay emphasizes how individuals and communities are redefining these social boundaries in the twenty-first century.

Although typically defined as “slave” or “captive,” the *iklan* social class historically referred to people with various relationships to noble families. *Iklan* often served as domestic servants within a noble household, existing in a fictive, patronizing kinship relationship with nobles. Nobles described themselves as “parents” to slaves and referred to the enslaved as their “children” (Rasmussen 1997: 16). Some *iklan*, however, lived in self-reliant, distinct communities geographically removed from noble families, with noble families requiring a percentage of the harvest or animals raised by *iklan*. If a drought and/or food shortage occurred, nobles could set up camp and claim any crops and animals raised by *iklan*, providing Tuareg nobles with a safety net. This demonstrates the wide control nobles had over *iklan* even if they were not physically present in an area (Baier and Lovejoy 1977: 408).

In the late nineteenth century, French colonization of Niger resulted in a policy that outlawed slavery, although the policy was ambiguous at best (de Sardan 1984; Klein 1998; Lovejoy 2000). The scholar of law Thomas Kelley describes the colonial situation in Niger as follows: In the early twentieth century, French colonial policies outlawed “slave raiding, caravan, markets, and ultimately any sale or exchange of slaves, but looked the other way when it came to individuals and families possessing them” (2008: 1010). French officials feared the Tuareg nobles allied with them would rebel if forced to manumit their slaves (Hall 2011a: 220).

It is important to recognize that across the Sahel, the decline of slavery varied quite markedly among different Tuareg groups and in different regions. Susan Rasmussen noted that by the mid-twentieth century, many slaves had been absorbed into Kel Ewey noble families after manumission, although they retained the status of jural minors to be cared for by their former enslavers, retaining a marginal and ambiguous social position. Located in the northern Agadez region of Niger in the Air Mountains, intermarriage between nobles and descendants of slaves sometimes occurred, indicating that Kel Ewey had become less endogamous and less concerned about class affiliation (Rasmussen 1997: 3). Intermarriage has led to variations in skin tones, complicating colonial era notions that all dark-skinned Tuareg were enslaved.

Bruce Hall, however, writes about a very different situation in postindependence Mali. By the mid-twentieth century, *iklan* began to abandon noble families as new opportunities for wage labor arose, but, as noted by Hall, when servile people migrated to labor for wages or work in petty commerce, noble families often followed and demanded a share of their wages (2011a: 222). The history of slavery also colored postcolonial government policies in Mali. The Malian government stereotyped Tuareg and Arabs as racists and slaveholders. In an attempt to reduce the political and economic power of Tuareg elite, they attempted to liberate definitively *iklan* and grant them property rights (Hall 2011a: 319). Malian strategies to empower socially subordinate people and eliminate feudal class-based categories led to a perception by noble Tuareg (and Arabs) that they would have no place in the Black-ruled postcolonial nation. Both the Malian government and Tuareg rebels engaged in the racialization of identity, and this contributed to a series of Tuareg rebellions against the national government. Unfortunately, conflict continues to plague northern Mali today (Hall 2011a: 319–23, 2011b: 65–66).

In Niger, the postcolonial national government did little to combat slavery after independence in 1960. At independence, the colonial apparatus was handed over to a class of Nigerien leaders,



In contemporary rural Niger, we met many *iklan* who continue to work for noble families, herding animals for them and relying on nobles to provide for them. At the same time, these elderly men and women encourage their children to travel to Niamey or outside of Niger to look for work, not wanting them to be stuck in servile positions. We met others who chose to integrate themselves into non-Tuareg communities, no longer speaking Tamasheq, practicing sedentary agriculture, and even learning new trades, such as pottery. Despite efforts to create a new identity for themselves, their servile status remains. Anthropologist Oliver Gosselein recounted that many Zarma in rural southwestern Niger think of themselves as higher status than their *iklan* neighbors, no matter how much *iklan* have integrated themselves into the local community, stating that, “Everybody knows they are Bella, no matter what they call themselves or

what language they speak” (2008: 157–58). *Iklan* generally remain linked to rural livelihoods, but when they do move to urban areas

known as *les évolués* (“the evolved ones”), who comprised a small number of men who attended French schools and adopted the French language and culture. Some were sons of traditional chiefs but many were *iklan*. Tuareg elite often refused to send their children to French schools, sending instead their servants, who learned the skills that allowed them to land jobs in the colonial administration. This complicated Nigerien postcolonial responses to slavery. Elite Tuareg and others in positions of governmental power often wished to maintain the power hierarchy, as they realized that their wealth and status depended partially on slavery. The descendants of enslaved people tended to downplay their families’ former servile status. Neither were motivated to recognize the problem of slavery in Niger and it continued as before (Kelley 2008: 1011).



4 These anklets demonstrate the diversity of metal alloys and shapes available. Most forms include bulbous ends that are oriented towards the front of the foot, some include a flat center which would rest on the Achilles tendon. The perfectly round design of the model seen at the bottom center of the photograph and its pair on the right center of the photo are the only two anklets that use a closed-model, triangular-tongue insert that must be knocked from the inside in order to open and knocked on the outside in order to close the anklet, locking it in place. Ayerou market, Tillabéri region, Niger, 2008.
Photo: Brian Nowak

5 The festival attire seen here presents a collection of a woman’s best silver adornments that highlight her prestigious status by representing wealth accumulated in the form of jewelry. The *aleshu* headscarf is a prestigious fabric that is expensive and naturally perfumed with indigo dye, that also rubs off easily on the skin. The woman in the background is wearing a sequined shirt, a new style reminiscent of the shine once only attributed to silver and indigo in women’s fashion. Festival of Iferouane, Air Mountains, northern Agadez region, Niger, 2007.
Photo: Thomas K. Seligman



iklan families work for him without monetary compensation, and co-ruled with an elected *iklan* mayor (Eriksen 2010: 68). However, such situations are increasing rare, and *iklan* communities are responding to and redefining historical boundaries that once relegated them to a marginal status. *Iklan* use visual culture to engage in creative acts of resistance to the hierarchical power structures that once controlled them.

IDENTIFYING HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY IKLAN AESTHETICS

Very little visual evidence exists that can tell us about the servile classes in Niger in the early to mid-twentieth century. One exception is a photograph from the Tillabéri region by scholar Edmond Bernus from his first trip to Niger in the 1960s. Bernus photographed a lower-status woman and man working and wearing simple, unadorned dark-colored garments with minimal jewelry (Fig. 3). Bernus identified the man and woman as “captives” who were forced to collect crop seeds after the end of a harvest for a local Tuareg leader (Bernus 1999). The photograph gives us a sense of the clothing and jewelry worn by *iklan*. These could have been second-hand clothes of the nobles for whom they worked or inexpensive material purchased for them; since cloth was not made by Tuareg themselves, *imajeghen* had to travel great distances to source new clothes (Bouman 2003: 278). The unidentified woman has no headscarf and wears bracelets made of imported, plastic seed beads sewed on leather that can still be found in the market

in Niger, like the capital of Niamey, they often take the lowest status jobs that involve high labor and low pay, performing jobs that other ethnic groups do not want to do, such as delivering water to people’s homes (Keough and Youngstedt 2019: 74). Like other economically marginalized people in Niger, including elite Tuareg impacted by droughts, political violence, and other events, *iklan* men and adolescent boys may travel to coastal cities in West Africa for work when basic needs cannot be met by rural or urban economies in their homeland.

As this brief history demonstrates, the current situation for *iklan* in Niger and across the Sahel remains extraordinarily complex, and in most areas intermarriage is rare. Despite efforts to negotiate a new status for themselves, if a lack of alternative opportunities for survival exist, some *iklan* have maintained historic social structures, relying on former “masters” to support them. Furthermore, nobles occupying traditional roles of rulership may refuse to give up their positions of power. We met a traditional noble chief in 2009 in Bankilaré, a Tuareg village in southwestern Niger. He felt entitled to be at the top of the social hierarchy, continued to have

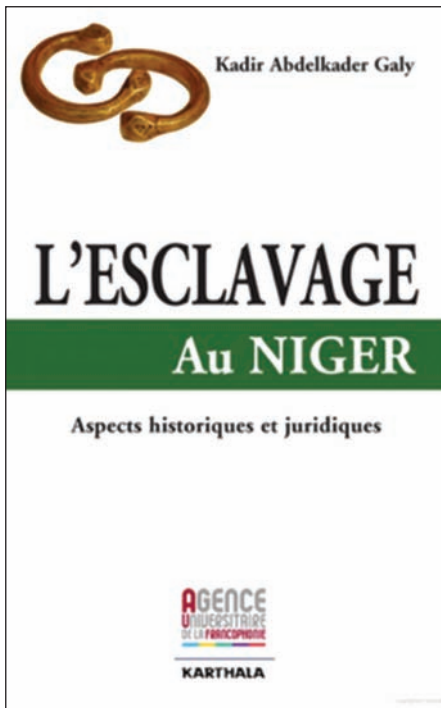


6 An *iklan* woman wears dark clothing and brass anklets, both historically indicative of servile status. Damergou region, central Niger, 2006.

Photo: Brian Nowak

7 Assibit Wanagoda and her mother posed for a photograph outside of the town of Tamaya, Niger, 2009.

Photo: Cynthia J. Becker



today. *Iklan* anklets were made of inexpensive copper alloys, also still sold in markets today, such as Niger's Ayerou market, which are most likely liquidated heirlooms sold by a woman or family facing extreme desperation (Fig. 4).

The jewelry worn by the unidentified *iklan* woman in Figure 3 can be compared to that worn by noble women, which would have been made from silver or silver alloys—prestigious materials. For example, the two women in Figure 5 each wear dark, bluish black indigo-dyed cloth called *aleshu*, which would have been pounded until it shimmered. As noted by Susan Rasmussen, *aleshu* was favored by noble women since the mid-twentieth century, and because it was cloth acquired through trade, its expense meant that low-status woman seen in Figure 3 would not have worn it (2006: 142).

The photographer of Figure 5, Thomas K. Seligman, was one

of the curators of the exhibition *Art of Being Tuareg: Saharan Nomads in a Modern World*, which was organized by the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University and the Fowler Museum at UCLA from 2006 to 2007. The exhibition largely featured silver jewelry similar to those worn by the women in Figure 5. Cocurator Kristyne Loughran indicated that “classical” styles of silver jewelry worn by the women in Figure 5 would have been specially commissioned by a noble family and produced by *inaden* (2006: 169). As noted by Loughran, “Tuareg women would not consider themselves properly dressed if they were not wearing a bracelet, rings, and other pieces of jewelry, which they believe enhance their beauty while symbolizing their age and social position” (2006: 179). Both women are clearly dressed in their finest clothing and jewelry, wearing shiny *aleshu*, large earrings, and layers of pectoral ornaments, including amulets (*tcherot*) and various styles of crosses. Their jewelry demonstrates some of the features typical of noble jewelry aesthetics, with intricately incised surface decorations on a flat piece of hammered silver, requiring time-consuming work and using expensive materials.

The exhibition and its accompanying catalog provided an inventory of various functional and aesthetic objects while demonstrating the changing patron-client relationship and its impact on visual culture, concentrating on artisans (*inaden*) and nobles (*imajeghen*) (Seligman and Loughran 2006). Little has been published about the changing aesthetics of formerly enslaved populations as they entered the twenty-first century. In some areas, formerly enslaved communities wear the same dark cloth and brass anklets as the woman in Figure 6. This woman from the Damergou region in central Niger wore a necklace and hanging hair pendant made from inexpensive plastic beads that recently became available in the market. In some cases, a minimalist aesthetic might continue out of current poverty or historical habits; however, in other cases market forces contribute to the development of completely new trends. Slight adaptations to jewelry, hairstyles, or clothing may eventually turn into larger trends. Just as the *inaden* now have new freedom in terms of clients and do not work exclusively for nobles, *iklan* have new freedom in terms of choice and self-agency, as they are no longer bonded by upper-class perceptions.

8 The cover of a French antislavery publication in which brass anklets serve as a symbol of servitude. 2010.

9 This young newlywed couple sat for a portrait in a home representing the start of a new phase of their life. The fine sand on the ground was brought in from a dry river bed, and most of the decorations and household items in the house were received as part of dowry and gifts from the wedding. Some of the items are functional but also represent important items in Tuareg culture, such as the wall-mat, the tent posts, and the yellow and red leather pillow while the new carpets and enamel dishware proudly present contemporary forms of decoration and abundance. Ayngam, Tillabéri region, Niger, 2009.

Photo: Cynthia J. Becker





10 A small girl looks at her temporary new home, an *eheket*, or leather tent, that is portable and easy to set up during periods of migration. Her parents temporarily settled on an island in the Niger River north of Ayerou to pasture their animals in an area clearly greener than the rolling hills of the mainland seen in the far distance. *Iklan* and Fulani herders settle among the various islands that they reach by canoes, swimming their animals across what may be multiple passages of river before reaching the island that is their final destination. Island in the Niger River, north of Firgoun, Tillabéri region, Niger, 2008.

Photo: Brian Nowak

11 This man dressed in brightly colored garments rode his camel from the countryside, seen here arriving in the main village on his way to the weekly market. Taratako, Tillabéri region, 2009.

Photo: Cynthia J. Becker

Our comparison of two different regions of Niger highlights two different avenues to self-agency and considers both the historical and contemporary opportunities and boundaries that *iklan* navigate. This approach demonstrates how communities adapt and change within their regional sociocultural context, responding to NGO interventions and the consumer world of market fashions in order to forge new sociopolitical relationships, both within and outside of Tuareg society.

IKLAN SOCIAL REFORMS IN THE TAHOUA-AGADEZ BORDER REGION

The small town of Tamaya is a relatively new settlement along the main road between the regional centers of Tahoua and Agadez, both with considerable Tuareg populations (Fig. 2). Edmond Bernus notes that since the 1960s, Tuareg spent the dry season in Tamaya, reflecting the fact that this area was part of an established seasonal migration pattern where nomads moved according to pastureland resources (1982: 103). In the past, people settled there for part of the year but, with the creation of a paved road completed in the 1980s, Tamaya developed into a roadside town that drew people from the countryside. A market was developed, allowing for fixed settlements and access to goods, people, and a weekly confluence of diverse people from the surrounding area.

During the postcolonial period, *iklan* developed complex and varied relationships with nobles, and in some situations they continued to hold slave status, especially in the rural areas surrounding Tamaya. This was one of the factors that motivated the Nigerien antislavery NGO called Timidria

to work in that area (Tidjani Alou 2000: 176–77). Created in 1991, Timidria pushed the Nigerien government to adopt aggressive antislavery legislation in 2002, with strong penalties for anyone convicted of holding slaves. Timidria has played a major role in drawing international attention to the issue of slavery in Niger and works with such international organizations as the London-based Anti-Slavery International and Oxfam. Its Nigerien members travel to remote areas of Niger, locating enslaved people in order to help them achieve liberation, often taking their enslavers to court.

In defining slavery and servile status, Timidria states that, while a person may not be physically held by force, they may occupy a subservient and marginalized mentality. Therefore, some of their most significant work involves what they call consciousness-raising. That the group focuses on Tuareg society is evident in its name Timidria, a Tamasheq word that translates as “fraternity-solidarity”



(Galy 2004: 75). As noted by Nigerien scholar Mahaman Tidjani Alou, Timidria valorizes the hard work historically done by the former enslaved and places it in contrast with the “mythical image of the noble warrior as is presented in classical ethnology” as a lazy man who lives off the blood and sweat of others (2000: 181). Timidria encourages the formerly enslaved to denounce nomadic life and settle in villages, building wells and schools and choosing their own local rulers (Tidjani Alou 2000: 182). Timidria also encourages the rejection of clothing and jewelry historically worn by *iklan* as markers of slave status, especially women’s anklets.

In an interview with the former president of Timidria, Ilguilas Weila stated that people in Niger recognize anklets worn by *iklan* women as negative symbols of enslavement. The organization encourages women to remove them as a symbol of liberation.⁵ Assibit Wanagoda, seen in Figure 6 with her mother, has been featured in the international press extensively, becoming an example of the work done by Timidria (see, for example, Rudebeck 2004). She recounted that she had been enslaved her entire life but after severe mistreatment by the noble Tuareg family who “owned” her, she ran away after hearing about an organization that could

help her. She left the nomadic encampment and walked 30km to a Timidria office in the central Nigerien town of Tahoua and met Weila. Members of Timidria traveled with her into the countryside in order to confront her enslaver and, fearful of imprisonment, he released her and the rest of her family.

Timidria most famously worked with international antislavery organizations to help Assibit Wanagoda press charges in a Nigerien court against her former enslaver. Although she fled in 2004, her case did not come to court until four years later. The Nigerien court awarded her \$3,321.06 in restitution for her fifty years of enslavement. Her enslaver was given a one year suspended sentence and a fine of less than \$165.79 (Hepburn and Simon 2013: 245). Her case took years to come to court because in the early 2000s, the government of Niger denied the existence of slavery, going so far to place Timidria’s president Ilguilas Weila in prison for several months in 2005, accusing him of fraud since, according to government officials, slavery had been eliminated in Niger (Vasagar 2005).

Wanagoda stated that Timidria provided her with financial assistance for the first few months but since then she felt abandoned by them. She also complained about the calluses that resulted from wearing heavy anklets, explaining that “they hurt my ankles because I was always chasing after my master’s donkeys ... but I did not know any better.”⁶ Timidria, she explained, taught her that this jewelry represented slavery and oppression and she removed them. In fact, numerous people in the Tahoua Region of Niger recounted that enslaved women were forced to wear such anklets and bracelets to stop them from running away—comparing them to shackles. However, as the collection of anklets seen in Figure

12 The stall seen here is typical of an *iklan* oriented stall that also serves as a meeting point for friends who may come and go throughout the day. The fabrics on display would be identifiable to all ethnic groups in the region as *iklan*-preferred. Taratako Market, Tillabéri region, 2009.
Photo: Cynthia J. Becker





4 demonstrates, none of the anklets would have been impossible for enslaved women to remove. Hence, their current classification as shackles seems exaggerated, especially given the fact that other groups within Niger wear similar anklets without associating them with enslavement.

These anklets became the primary symbol that Timidria adopted to evoke the oppression of slavery. In the French version of

13 Around fifteen stalls in the Ayerou market are dedicated to jewelry. When they have money to spend, women pass a great deal of time looking at the hanging bead bracelets and necklaces and sifting through the diverse beads, pendants, earrings, bracelets and necklaces, keeping up with fashion trends and creating new ones. Ayerou market, Tillabéri region, Niger, 2008.
Photo: Brian Nowak

14 Djibrilla Seidi circulates the markets of the Bankilaré Department in the northwestern Tillabéri region and wanders from village to village between market days. He sells and buys silver and silver alloy materials from both *iklan* and nobles, who often need the money to survive. He resells to vendors linked to markets for tourists and collectors in the capital of Niamey. The metal alloy triangular earrings are popular among Fulani women in the region, as well as *iklan*. Taratako market, Tillabéri region, 2009.
Photo: Cynthia J. Becker

Galy's *Slavery in Niger* (2004), which was published by Timidria in 2010, the cover features two anklets as symbols of oppression (Fig. 8). In fact, the impact of Timidria's campaign was so profound in the region near Tahoua that several people who had been manumitted from enslavement or ran away from their oppressors approached Becker to recount their personal stories. In Tamaya, Timidria always played a major role in *iklan* stories, indicating how this organization prompted people in the region to be hyperaware and active in rejecting their former slave status, as per the NGO's narrative.

While it is tempting to view the rejection of heavy anklets as an example of liberation promoted by an antislavery organization, the actual situation is much more complex. Timidria's ultimate goals can be contextualized as part of a nationalist debate concerning the ethnicities that should be identified in the nation-state, with an overarching Tuareg identity preferable to one that recognizes the hierarchies in Tuareg societies. Rather than have noble and slave classes, Timidria advocates that *iklan* simply redefine themselves and adopt the aesthetics of the noble class. In addition to heavy anklets, *iklan* women told Becker that headscarves were reserved for women higher on the social hierarchy than them. *Iklan* did not cover their heads, adorned their braids with cowries and pieces of money, and often went topless. Timidria encouraged *iklan* women to reject anklets and other forms of dress from the past and encouraged them to rename themselves. Imou Immi, a local





member of Timidria, told Becker that the descendants of enslaved people in Tamaya refuse to be called *iklan*, associating the name with enslavement and a history of marginalization. Rather they call themselves Kel Tamasheq (meaning “people of the Tamasheq language”), rejecting hierarchical classifications. Used by intellectuals, Kel Tamasheq is an identity term that encourages a movement towards an egalitarian and inclusive Tuareg society. Using a term that unifies a group based on language ignores the blatant

15 An entire section of the Ayerou market is dedicated to the black, embroidered tunics that feature a variety of designs and can be purchased or ordered at the market. There are at least twenty men who work as tailors, with some introducing new embroidery styles, starting new trends. The men in the back wear black and white fabric and turbans, which are typical styles of the past. The woman and tailor wear a new, inexpensive, synthetically dyed headscarf and turban, reminiscent of the expensive *aleshu* indigo-dyed fabric. Ayerou market, Tillabéri region, Niger, 2007.
Photo: Cynthia J. Becker

16 A woman in Ngari modeled her silver headdress for us, which she placed on top of her intricate braids and crested hairstyle. While wearing the headdress, she was motivated to sing and clap, and she encouraged us to join her, since such headdresses are reserved for special, celebratory occasions. 2009.
Photo: Cynthia J. Becker

hierarchical differences that continue to exist within contemporary Tuareg societies, which are based on racialized constructions and unequal access to power and resources. However, the goal is a rejection of the stereotypical image of the light-skinned, noble Tuareg on a camel and inclusive of the darker-skinned, marginalized segments of Tuareg society.

Timidria’s goal is liberation, but it also introduces itself as a powerful player in framing the discourse on slavery in Niger. Timidria identifies cases of contemporary slavery in Niger, represents and advises former slaves, confronts the Nigerien justice system, and engages with international antislavery organizations. While the NGO is Tuareg-founded, some people question the motivation that drives the group’s members, which could include altruistic sympathy, coercive retribution towards nobles, or even taking advantage of a loaded subject to raise money from the international community. Furthermore, Timidria has had limited success in the Nigerien courts, largely due to the influence of noble Tuareg on judges, who often want to retain traditional social hierarchies. At the same time, *iklan* are also concerned about retaliation; many are not aware of their legal rights, and if they are manumitted, they lack alternative livelihoods and do not trust law enforcement or Timidria to make their situations better.

While nongovernmental and governmental structural parameters for understanding and defining slavery continue to develop, Timidria’s insistence that women reject previous styles of dress



can be seen as patronizing. The impact of Timidira on *iklan* visual culture in the Tahoua-Agadez region cannot be denied, especially when Tamaya is compared to the northern Tillabéri region of Niger where new *iklan* aesthetic styles take full advantage of market items (Fig. 2). In the Tillabéri region, *iklan* women wear anklets and elaborate braided hairstyles, deflecting the power of historically dominant social orders to control them while shaping their own identities.

DEFINING A CONTEMPORARY IKLAN AESTHETIC: EXAMPLES FROM THE NORTHERN TILLABÉRI REGION

The majority of the formerly enslaved who settled in the Tillabéri region broke ties with noble families in the mid-twentieth century. In one example described by historian Martin Klein, *iklan* in Menaka, a region of Mali located 100km north of the Niger border, rebelled against their enslavers in 1946, many leaving fields unharvested and fleeing overnight. This revolt was decisive in ending the control of nobles over the enslaved class, who moved into the northern Tillabéri region (Klein 1998: 234; Hall 2011b: 73–74). This heavily forested area was sparsely populated. By using their skills in surviving with scarcity, families herded and cleared land for agricultural fields, establishing communities without any tense competition for natural resources.

Another advantage of the area was its proximity to the Niger River and seasonal tributaries. Within the countryside surrounding the riverside market town of Ayerou, near the Niger-Mali border, established riverside communities and scattered hamlets and camps in the surrounding countryside included Songhai, Fulani, Korgo (Hausa fisherman), and river-based Kurtey, who interacted with *iklan* families. Some *iklan* saw opportunities in specific artisanal skills and found new market conditions for producing, trading and selling goods, an experience that they were unable to exploit when the profits of their labor were directed toward noble Tuareg families.

In the Oudalan area of Burkina Faso, just west of the northern Tillabéri region, the demographics are very similar with a band

of majority *iklan* communities in Burkina Faso, with a greater density of nobles across the border in Mali. Safia, an elderly *iklan* woman, recounted her experience from servile status to freedom to the anthropologist Annemarie Bouman, underscoring the realities of enslavement:

We lived on a compound with almost fifty huts, four of those inhabited by *iklan*. We all belonged to this same family. My father herded their goats. He milked them ... In former times, the millet you cultivate is for the Imouchar [a lineage of nobles]. The men cultivate the millet, the women pound the millet, but it is not for yourself ... We worked, but those [noble] women lay always on their beds. When you enter her hut [of the woman you work for], she is sleeping. You wake her up. You give her a massage: the hands, the feet. You give her water. You give her milk, which you hold to her mouth like this ... I would not like to work for them again, unless they paid me for my work (Bouman 2003: 68–69).

According to Bouman, the contemporary status of *iklan* should be separated from the historical period of servility when *iklan* existed in the lowest social stratum of Kel Tamasheq society. Repression, servitude, and dark skin, Bouman argues, should not be the major force that identifies *iklan* in contemporary Tuareg society.

When visiting the small village of Ayngam, near the market village Taratako, the new lifestyles forged by people in a postslavery society became evident to us. Ayngam is a combined community of lower status crafts workers known as *ighawalen* (second to *iklan* on the lower end of the hierarchical class system), *iklan*, and *inaden* (artisans). As a potter, the woman in Figure 9 identified herself as part of the *ighawalen* class and the man as an artisan.⁷ His family removed themselves from former Tuareg noble relationships and began to produce farm tools and jewelry for *ighawalen*, *iklan*, and other ethnic groups in the surrounding communities. This couple lived in a round adobe house with a conical thatch roof, similar to those built by Fulani and Songhai in the area, demonstrating the impact of nearby groups on their lifestyle. For example, the three vertical displays of enamelware were adapted from the wooden bowl or calabash holder. Unlike Tuareg nobles, Songhai and Fulani women in the region make displays of various household objects.

17 These young women approached Becker in the Ayerou market, curious to meet a foreigner and to compare jewelry. Young women take the opportunity in the market to socialize with friends and to have relative freedom from life at home, where they would be busy with domestic chores such as pounding millet, hauling water, preparing meals, doing laundry, and helping to take care of their siblings. Ayerou market, Niger, 2007. Photo: Cynthia J. Becker





18 *Iklan* women wear coins and brightly colored pendants. Each individual style helps identify where a woman comes from in the region. Note that in most of these photos from the Ayerou market, women are not wearing head-scarves to display their adorned hair; the only women with fabric on their heads in the background of this photo have simply rolled a cloth to protect their head from the heavy firewood bundles that some women sell to help make ends meet. Ayerou market, Tillabéri region, Niger, 2007.

Photo: Brian Nowak

The couple retained the carved tent posts and grass-reed mats used by nomads for their portable leather tents, seen in the background on the left side leaning against the wall mat. Although sedentary families only use them as decorations, adding factory-made carpets, some newlyweds move around in leather tents to grow wealth through herds (Fig. 10). When families settle, they may keep their tent posts to adorn their homes or buy some for sale in markets; tent posts are used more for decoration than for holding up tents. Demands for products like the tent posts have led to market opportunities that are not linked to an elite clientele, or even to tents in some cases. Lower-status communities now have the freedom to

be producers and consumers, and *inaden* are not required to have ties to particular noble families (Rasmussen 1995: 592). Nobles may see *inaden* as having downgraded their status by working for *iklan* while *inaden* see themselves improving their status by rejecting the idea that their status and identity is ultimately determined by their linkage to nobles.

If we consider the literature on Tuareg art, the style of dress worn by *iklan* men in the Tillabéri region is very different from the stereotypical image presented to us of Tuareg men, often referred to in Western circles as the “Blue People of the Sahara,” due to their use of indigo fabric that stains skin. As previously discussed, indigo-dyed cloth was expensive and once served as a status symbol reserved for elite Tuareg men and women. *Iklan* men have now expanded the color palette from dark-colored cloth to brightly colored fabrics (Fig. 11). These new styles of cloth have formed a new *iklan* style of dress, which would not be worn by *imajeghen*, who typically preferred contrasting, uniformly colored, black and white fabrics, with dark, indigo-dyed fabrics being the most prestigious. The multiple influences incorporated by *iklan* contrast with the standardization of style typical of the more reserved preferences of the noble character. The reserved style of dress of *imajeghen* men and women typify the idea of *takarakit*, meaning “reserved” and “controlled,” one of the tenets of Tuareg noble behavior.

Iklan choose fabrics following a new color palette of bold colors,



typically on a dark field, featuring bold abstract designs with predominantly deep reds, dark greens, dark blues, purples, and black. Their market choices have led to vendors dedicating a section of fabrics targeting this clientele; even within the local diversity, other ethnic groups recognize these fabrics as *iklan*-preferred. Demands from *iklan* consumers now determine the choices merchants are making when purchasing bulk merchandise to be sold in small town and rural markets. This has provided opportunities for *iklan* men to create *iklan*-to-*iklan* microeconomies, keeping the wealth in the community (Fig. 12). These new color themes also became prevalent in some men's choices for turbans and tunics; they would have been unthinkable as status symbols in the past and contribute to status enhancement today.

Despite the absence of nobles and being generations removed from slavery in many cases, women in the Tillabéri region continue to wear anklets, including the woman shopping at the jewelry section of the Ayerou market in Figure 13. Uninfluenced by the antislavery society Timidria, who are less active in this region, women were not pressured to abandon their anklets, nor did they identify them as symbols of exploitation. It is interesting to note that pastoral Fulani women who also live in the area wear metal alloy anklets with no association to servility. *Iklan* women's copper alloy anklets may be inherited as heirlooms and matrilineal wealth and kept as valuable jewelry. Women could choose to liquidate jewelry, like the anklets, in local markets during difficult times. In some areas of the Tillabéri region, women have abandoned metal anklets. Rather, they have created a new fashion trend, preferring to wear plastic anklets instead.

19 Two young, recently married women approached Becker for a photograph. Both are wearing hairstyles influenced by the Fulani groups in the area. However, the arrangement of the coins are unique to *iklan*. Ayngam, Tillabéri region, 2009.
Photo: Cynthia J. Becker

Another influence on changing *iklan* aesthetics, one that is linked to economic hardship, is travelling jewelry merchants associated with both rural and urban market centers. It is common to find mobile vendors in the markets and circulating from village to village selling a variety of low-cost items including those specializing in jewelry. Travelling vendors like Djibrilla Seidi would set up stalls in weekly rural markets (Fig. 14). Seidi also told us that he circulated the countryside to buy metal alloy jewelry from *iklan*, buying them or trading them for plastic beads, bracelets, and anklets. Since 2000, crystallike plastic beads entered the Nigerien market as large-scale commercial vendors in the capital Niamey extended their sourcing to commercial hubs like Dubai and China. Some of this plastic jewelry has led to new fashion trends among *iklan* women, especially those with red, green, and clear beads, as seen in Figure 14 next to the metal jewelry. Market influences and purchasing power seem to provide the only obstacles that restrain creativity as *iklan* represent themselves through a new aesthetic in the northwestern Tillabéri region.

ESTABLISHING NEW STYLES OF DRESS IN THE AYEROU MARKET

Ayerou is located on the Niger River and is the most important regional market in the area, attracting people from neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso (Fig. 2). Historically, numerous ethnic groups visited the market to trade local produce and livestock, in addition to basic household goods. From independence until now, itinerant merchants brought relatively inexpensive items such as glass and plastic beads, guided by market trends, for consumers to purchase for self-adornment. Fashions supported by the opportunities in the Ayerou market reflect the exchange of ideas and available materials, the establishment of a new identity, and economic opportunity. Men create large tunics from inexpensive black cloth, sewing colorful, intricate embroidery around the neckline and the front of the tunic (Fig. 15). The existence of new styles demonstrates the relative stability that *iklan* communities are able to establish, represented by the production and sale of these clothes that independently sustain the needs of their own communities.

Goods sold in the market include a variety of hair pendants for *iklan* women. In postslavery Niger, upon their first pregnancies, *iklan* women go through elaborate and expensive ceremonies to publicly acknowledge their change in status from girlhood to womanhood. Until the mid-twentieth century, nobles would finance these costs for the enslaved women who worked for them, but now *iklan* are doing this for themselves. The ceremony, called *tamangad*, involves hiring a specialist to braid a woman's hair and to adorn it with silver, agate, and plastic pendants purchased by her father (Bouman 2003: 168–72). The elaborate braiding is sometimes accompanied by headpiece made from silver coins, silver ornaments, agate pendants, with a conical tassel on top that is worn during the ceremony. Women then set it aside and wear it for holidays and very special occasions, demonstrating how some *iklan* in the Tillabéri region have managed to accumulate significant amounts of wealth in recent years (Fig. 16). Hairstyles have unique, regionally specific styles not associated with noble Tuareg; *iklan* incorporate new aesthetics into the rites they can now control and initiate themselves.

Innovation typifies *iklan* women's dress and jewelry in Ayerou as

individuals congregate and display their best looks for the weekly market day. Individual choice and purchasing power influence the development of increasingly diverse styles that can relate to gender-specific, age-specific, and locality-specific differences. Over time, the incorporation of *iklan* into the growing population in the area has led to some intermarriage and, in some cases, this is also reflected in the way that people represent themselves. For example, two young women in the Ayerou market (Fig. 17) colored their faces with yellow pigment typical across Kel Tamasheq areas throughout Niger. However, tattoos and other styles of permanent facial markings are not practiced by Tuareg women, and these women used the permanent facial markings of Kourtey, namely the cross motif found on the center of the cheek, for their temporary markings. Given that Kourtey are a relatively small ethnic group in Niger, found only along the Niger River, it is unusual that these girls would have borrowed this sign without having some type of familial connection to Kourtey, perhaps indicating intermarriage. Furthermore, the young woman on the left side of the photograph tattooed her bottom lip, which is a typical Fulani practice that can also be seen among Kourtey with Fulani familial connections.

The young woman on the right displayed one example of innovation by wearing small, colorful, red, yellow, and blue pendants on her necklace preferred almost to the point of exclusivity by the Wodaabe, a Fulani subgroup in northern and eastern Niger. In fact, they are so closely linked to Wodaabe identity that other groups living in proximity to the mostly nomadic Wodaabe communities in Niger, including *iklan* of the Agadez, Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder regions of Niger, would not consider wearing these pendants. *Iklan* women in Ayerou, however, appropriated them and created a new style. This is one example of how different pendants from the market can be incorporated into new fashion styles.

Iklan women in the northern Tillabéri region have some of the most intricately braided hair in Niger. Pendants made from plastic, coins, and pendants, some that were once the purview of *imajeghan*, are all woven into the hair of *iklan* women. Some of the more expensive items, like coins or agate pendants, often have a cheaper plastic equivalent, as seen with the colored plastic, coin-sized discs in Figure 18. Some of these patterns represent locally

20 The arduous process of constructing this style of home can only be accomplished through collaborative work, where the stick-pole frame is only the very beginning. The cross-thatched, millet-stalk dome frame that sits on the sticks, providing the structure for the roof, and takes coordinated effort, requiring some women to pass millet stalks while others weave them into each other so that the ends do not overlap; bunching them tightly, they then tie them together to secure the stability and durability of the structure. Ngari, Tillabéri region, 2009.

Photo: Cynthia J. Becker



specific styles that help to identify where someone lived or came from, and many styles are borrowed from nearby ethnic groups. For example, the young women in Figure 18 wore colorful fabrics with individualized hairstyles that incorporated materials influenced by the Fulani groups in the area, such as the rectangular orange agate beads seen descending from the long, thin braid hanging along their temples. Similarly, their incorporation of large coins is similar to those Fulani women in the area typically used; however, the patterns created by the arrangement of the coins are unique to *iklan*. These metal alloy coins were meant to replicate the older Maria Theresa thaler silver medallions that were once popular and highly valued by elite Tuareg. Accumulating this kind of jewelry shows status and also serves as an economic cushion, something to liquidate for quick cash in desperate times.

Iklan women in this region typically fix the ends of the thin braids with a natural, homemade paste called *tikarawrawan* (pl. *isakarawrawen*) created by grinding seeds from the *acacia nilotica* tree, a thick oil (such as butter or shea butter), and charcoal (Figs. 16–18). The mixture is cooked, kneaded, and placed at the bottom of a woman's braid to prevent fraying and provide an aesthetic of movement as they work or walk. In an interview with the former president of the antislavery NGO Timidria, Weila described the braid-fixers used by women in this region as backwards and dirty and he felt they should no longer be worn, seeing them as a remnant of the women's slave past.⁸ While Timidria has done important work drawing attention to the ongoing prevalence of slavery, its rejection of visual culture associated with *iklan* does not fully capture the dynamics of identity and agency that characterizes contemporary Niger.

CONCLUSION: DYNAMIC IDENTITIES, MUTUAL COOPERATION, AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

As the examples presented from the Tillabéri region demonstrate, *iklan* do not rely on the government, the courts, or consciousness-raising seminars held by NGOs such as Timidria to reform old hierarchical categories by imposing changes from above. Communities are aware of their previously marginal position within Kel Tamasheq society. While many elite Tuareg and neighboring ethnic groups continue to see *iklan* as the lowest-status group in the region, they themselves have created a system of mutual cooperation, self-agency, and socioeconomic stability.

Iklan in the northwestern Tillabéri region have benefitted from the diversity of ethnic groups and the availability of goods in local markets in the establishment of new livelihoods and aesthetics, which has helped to sustain and increase the vitality of their own communities. As consumers, they have influenced the products that vendors supply as well as creating *iklan*-to-*iklan* internal economies, assuring that wealth circulates within the community as they continue to define their place in a postcolonial, postslavery society. As both consumers and producers, they have control over how they self-identify, situating themselves within the diversity of their own communities and neighboring ethnic groups, benefiting from the decades spent in the area and the relationships they established. They may have been encouraged by the success of their dramatic exit from bondage and the new land that they were able to secure.

In contrast, along the Tahoua-Agadez border region, the

NGO-led initiative allows *iklan* to benefit from the sociopolitical clout of the organization, and some receive support through the transition process, yet there are also constraints placed on them. As they leave the judgements of those that dominate them, Timidria also influences and even imposes change, leaving *iklan* with a new set of characteristics to fulfill that are not initiated by individuals in the community itself.

During our time in the Tillabéri region, we happened upon a partylike atmosphere in the small, rural village of Ngari. The women were working together to construct a large home for one woman's family (Fig. 20). Made from sticks, palm-frond rope, and millet stalks, this style of home is typical of the agropastoral *iklan* in the area. This communal housebuilding is not unique to the *iklan*, but in many ways the context represents the coming together of individuals, families, and environmental and sociocultural resources to support, improve, and shape lives. After many months of living a single-parent lifestyle, the home owner was preparing for her husband's return from an annual coastal migration. Like other desperately poor communities in Niger, subsistence lifestyles no longer provide enough food for the year and adult and young men travel to countries along the Atlantic coast for months to secure income, especially Côte d'Ivoire (Boyer 2005: 44–46).

This new home represented a new beginning for this family and invoked the solidarity of women in the community to support each other. Like an agricultural harvest, the returning husband will bring home what he has earned, marking an important moment in the annual cycles of subsistence for this family and demonstrating self-agency. The majority of *iklan* in the northwest Tillabéri region have created a livelihood that is no longer bound by linkages to a Tuareg elite or the stereotypes forced upon them; it is a lifestyle that is not hierarchical but one of mutual aid.

In some cases, vestiges of the Tuareg hierarchical system still exist. As previously discussed, when we visited the Bankilaré department of the Tillabéri region, an upper-status Tuareg man retained his hereditary tribunal position of leadership, known as the *amenekol*. Despite the 98% *iklan* demographics, he held onto political clout and dominance. To *iklan* in the area, this man and his position represented a vestige of former hierarchies; however, *iklan* have also worked their way into local politics and have acquired political and administrative positions. Eighty years removed from the rebellion in Mali that initiated a large *iklan* migration and reinforced the development of this *iklan* dominant area, individuals have significantly succeeded in entering the local government, sixty years after independence.

As noted by Bouman in her work in Burkina Faso, no single *iklan* identity exists. Some groups are looking to leave their servile past behind and others try to expand their boundaries to turn *iklan* identity into something positive (2003: 280). Since 2012, new security threats posed by jihadists and bandits are undermining the fragile stability of Niger, especially in the Tillabéri region, escalating to the date of this article. Based across the border in Mali and Burkina Faso, attackers continue to wage terrorist campaigns and stage assaults involving theft, extortion, kidnapping and murder. In 2020, one *iklan* described the compounded situation:

Currently, we can no longer go to areas where we used to pasture our animals—the conflict situation makes transhumance very difficult. We are facing two problems. On the one hand, the existence of

bandits or jihadists—I do not know what to call them—who take *zakat* samples [obligatory religious offerings] from our animals; on the other hand, there are the SDF [Nigerien Security Force] operations which persecute us. These SDFs confuse any Fulani or Bella with a jihadist, they commit atrocities in our area (quoted in Boas, Cissé, and Mahamane 2020: 122).

Insecurity concerns are intense and it becomes clear that new opportunities for oppression through religious and political instability introduce new acts of domination through increased banditry, coerced religious extremism, and modern politics that lead to the fear of new structures of exploitation returning to old frameworks that were in the process of being dismantled to varying degrees. They clearly impact the weakest and most discriminated-against and hinder communities' determination to

create better lives for themselves.

Rural *iklan* communities confront compounded challenges of environmental degradation, increasing poverty, and a lack of quality education and health care opportunities to improve the quality of life. As *iklan* adorn themselves with new, innovative aesthetic styles to establish a sense of independence and self-identity, they succeed in liberating themselves from imposed identities that labeled them as subservient. In the struggle to escape from generations of domination and servility, as well as the contemporary struggles that mount up against them, *iklan* negotiate their own identity as they search to improve their lives and assert self-agency, expression, and pride as they reevaluate and redefine a new visual culture for themselves.

Notes

This article is dedicated to Sue Rosenfeld, who passed away before its completion. A longtime friend of Nowak, she spent the majority of her life in Africa as an educator and opened her house to visiting scholars in Niamey, including Becker.

1 The hierarchical classifications present in Tuareg society are so well established across Niger that Songhai, who share the same territory, have their own indigenous words for them. *Bella* is a general word used by Songhai to refer to all Tuareg, including nobles and slaves, but they distinguish between the "red" *bellas* (*bella cirey*) and the "black" *bellas* (*bella bi*), and also have specific names for each of the subcategories associated with stratification in Tuareg society.

2 Both authors engaged in independent research on the topic of *iklan* visual culture, speaking with organizations, local leaders, and rural communities and individuals in Niger. The sensitive subject matter required that we pay special attention to our relationship to people and our approach when talking to upper status or lower status individuals. Similarly, *iklan*, whether someone who has recently removed themselves or somewhat removed themselves from bondage, or those that have been generations removed from bondage, all have different sensitivities and responses to questions of identity and the history of slavery. Becker interviewed members of the international antislavery NGO Timidria, who facilitated some of her contacts in northern Niger. In response to the activism of Timidria in this region, people with a history of enslavement actively looked for her to tell their stories. Some of Nowak's research included experiences in Tuareg villages and camps through his work with development organizations in various roles. These contexts can impact people's responses so care was taken to distinguish between development narratives and ethnographic information. Both authors' independent field research included preselected and randomly selected villages in different regions, including individual and small group interviews, and homestays, spending time in different communities, markets and small towns.

3 See Rasmussen (1997: 15) for a discussion of how *iklan* and smiths served as informants due to their lack of a reserve, a quality greatly valued by Tuareg elite.

4 See Hall (2011a) for an overview of slavery and the complex racialized dynamics in West Africa.

5 Interview with Ilguilas Weila, July 1, 2009, by Cynthia J. Becker. Niamey, Niger.

6 Interview with Assibit Wanagoda, July 26, 2009, by Cynthia J. Becker. Tamaya, Niger.

7 *Ighawalen* is a name given to a class that practices agropastoralism while supplementing income by producing lower-status crafts, such as pottery and basic reed mats. *Ighawalen* are typically the descendants of the servile class who have gained manumission.

8 Interview with Ilguilas Weila, July 1, 2009, by Cynthia J. Becker. Niamey, Niger.

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