

Linguistic warscapes of northern Mali

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In this paper I show that public writing (and its effacement) during a recent period of crisis in northern Mali constituted a powerful tool by which various factions attempted to inscribe political hegemony on the linguistic warscapes of three cities: Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu. The warscapes of these Saharan cities are linguistically complex: they are written in multiple languages, primarily French, Arabic and Tamasheq, and involve three different scripts, Latin, Arabic and Tifinagh, each of which is associated with a number of ideological stances. Within this context, linguistic warscape becomes more than the symbolic construction of the public space, it becomes symbolic control of the public space. The linguistic warscape of northern Mali stands in stark contrast to the linguistic soundscape which, in addition to Tamasheq, is dominated by languages that rarely or never appear in the LL. This paper shows that in multilingual, multi-graphic contexts, LL can only be understood against the backdrop of an entire linguistic ecology and its regimes of literacy.

Keywords: Mali, warscape, mediascape, soundscape, literacy, Tifinagh, *ajami*, French

1. Introduction

This paper is about writing, power and ideology in the public sphere in times of war, a topic that falls within the purview of what has come to be known as linguistic landscape (e.g., Calvet, 1994 (*avant la lettre*); Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Gorter, 2006; Backhaus, 2007; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Shohamy et al., 2010; Gorter et al., 2012). In the case study I present here, namely that of northern Mali during the 2012–2013 crisis, I build on Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) proposition that linguistic landscape (henceforth LL) is the symbolic construction of public space to develop the notion of 'linguistic warscape.' A linguistic warscape, as I propose the term here, is a LL that actors create in situations of war and which in some way reflects an experience of war. Such warscapes are

necessarily informed by conflicting ideologies, and as in the case of northern Mali they may also reflect bids for control of people, territory, or ideas. In this paper I show that public writing along with its effacement during the recent period of crisis in Mali constituted a powerful tool by which various factions attempted to inscribe political hegemony on the LL. Within this context linguistic warscape becomes more than simply the symbolic construction of the public space, it becomes symbolic control of the public space, thereby affecting the populations who live within its sphere in a number of profound ways.

The arena of contention discussed here comprises the cities of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu, the respective capitals of three eponymous regions, which together go to make up northern Mali. They are ethnically and linguistically diverse places whose main populations are Tuareg, Moor, Arab, Songhaï and Fulani. Both Gao and Timbuktu were commercial centers on the trans-Saharan trade routes that flourished up until Europeans attracted trade away from the desert and towards the coast of West Africa, and both have played central roles in West African history.¹ Gao was the capital of the Songhaï Empire that ruled much of West Africa from the mid-15th to late 16th centuries, and Timbuktu, a city of legendary renown and a synonym for remoteness in the West, was an important center for caravans transporting salt from the Sahara down to the Niger River, as well as a notable place of Islamic learning from the 13th to 17th centuries. The smallest of the cities, Kidal, was founded as a Saharan outpost after the establishment of a French fort there in 1908. According to the 2009 census, the last census carried out by the Malian government, Gao had a population of approximately 87,000, Timbuktu 55,000, and Kidal 26,000 inhabitants. Ecologically vulnerable, these cities have in recent times suffered from drought and continued desertification, which have threatened their physical infrastructure, and their inhabitants eke out an existence with the help of NGOs and government aid.

The urban focus of this essay continues a trend within the field of LL in which landscape is understood principally as cityscape and the public sphere as essentially urban (Coulmas 2009). Rural areas, of course, have their own LLs, but urban areas are characterized by denser, more complex LLs that reflect the fact that cities are privileged discursive sites associated with multiple forms of power, including symbolic power, and the construction of multiple publics, including, most pertinently for this study, a reading public.

The warscapes of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu are linguistically complex. They are written in multiple languages, primarily French, Arabic and Tamasheq, and involve three different scripts, Latin, Arabic and Tifinagh, each of which is associated

1. For more detailed information on the history of this part of West Africa see, *inter alia*, Fage (1969), Hama (1968), Hunwick (1999), Lecocq (2010), Mann (2015) and Saad (1983).

with a number of ideological stances. They stand in stark contrast to the linguistic soundscapes of the three Saharan cities which, in addition to Tamasheq, are dominated by languages such as Songhai, Fulfulde, and Hassaniya Arabic that rarely or never appear in the LL. This last observation raises an important question about the way in which the field of LL has developed. The seminal texts in the field have by and large dealt with environments in the developed rather than the developing world, and only a few scholars (e.g., Calvet, 1994; Juffermans, 2014; Lanza & Woldemariam, 2009; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009) have grappled with the realities of African environments where there is generally much less overlap, in terms of languages, between the LL and the linguistic soundscape. Conclusions about language vitality and robustness that have at times emerged almost naturalistically from investigations into the LLs of the developed world seldom hold in African environments for a number of reasons. The LL or written environment cannot be evaluated in isolation from the spoken environment because we cannot make the same kinds of extrapolations about the relationship between written and spoken language that we often can about the developed world. Africa is characterized by a high incidence of exographia (Lüpke, 2004; 2011), a situation in which the language a community uses for writing is different from the language(s) its members normally speak, thus the likelihood of a robust, vital, majority language being absent from the LL is high. Drawing inferences about spoken language or language vitality from the LL must be done with caution in such situations, and only in conjunction with an understanding of the linguistic soundscape, i.e.: the spoken environment. Importantly, the LL in the majority of African contexts can only be evaluated in light of a profound understanding of the regimes of literacy that hold within the linguistic ecology of a given context.

An important aspect of many African literacy environments, and especially those of the Sahel where this case study is situated, is that a given language may be written in more than one script, and writing in one particular script or language may be deemed appropriate for public writing, while a different script or language might be used in private writing such as record-keeping or personal letters. The choice of script is always linked to the writer's literacy resources, but it may also be linked to the construction of an ideological stance as Sebba (2006; 2007) has shown in the case of the Cyrillic versus Roman alphabets in central European contexts, or El Aissati (2014) has shown in the case of Latin, Arabic and Tifinagh scripts for writing Moroccan Amazigh. Within the warscapes of northern Mali different scripts may wield multiple and different symbolic values and are employed strategically to convey various ideological stances. These factors contribute in various ways to an understanding of the ecology of literacy that holds in complex language environments such as northern Mali, which are characterized by multilingualism and multigraphism or the use of multiple scripts.

In this article I explore the ways in which diverse actors created a complex warscape by harnessing and effacing languages and scripts in a bid for hegemony in the Malian crisis of 2012–2013. I begin by situating the crisis in its geopolitical and historical context as a consequence of local and global events, and introduce the primary actors before moving to a discussion of the sources of the data and the way the database was constructed. I follow with a sketch of literacy and writing in northern Mali, and move into the heart of the essay to discuss the ways in which competing visions for the future of northern Mali were played out in the linguistic warscape. I end my discussion with a consideration of how regimes of literacy inform the LL, and what this case study can tell us more broadly about multilingualism and the use of multiple scripts in Africa and what its implications are for the study of LL.

2. Things fall apart

Remoteness and peripherality are always relative, but there are few places more remote and peripheral than the Sahelo-Saharan cities of northern Mali. Several recent sociolinguistic engagements with the concept of peripherality such as Blommaert (2008, 2010) and Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes (2013) are informed by a Wallersteinian ‘world systems’ perspective in exploring the dynamics of center-periphery relationships insofar as language is involved. While Blommaert (2008, 2010) deals extensively with East and Southern African contexts, Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes’ volume focuses primarily on minority language sites in the European periphery and includes only a single study from the global south. In particular they articulate a constructivist view of center-periphery relations in which centers and peripheries are constantly negotiated and constantly shifting. These shifting relationships, however, are predicated on resources, and although it is beyond the scope of this paper it remains to be seen whether materially impoverished places such as northern Mali, which currently occupy the global periphery, are subject to the same kinds of shifting center-periphery relationships as those described in the case studies of Europe. In addition to its position on the global periphery, northern Mali is far from Bamako, the national capital, and has thus always remained peripheral even within its national boundaries, and although efforts to include representation from the north in the national government have been successful to a degree, the region has still not been well integrated into the national scene. Perhaps the only immediate way in which the sites discussed in this essay might be considered centers is the fact that they are cities, and thus serve as poles of attraction for the surrounding countryside. It is against this backdrop of peripherality and material poverty that the events of 2012–2013 unfolded.

On the 22nd of March, 2012 Amadou Sanogo, a captain in the Malian army, staged what had in reality started out as a mutiny by junior officers but came to be viewed as a coup d'état. His stated grievance was a lack of adequate materiel for fighting a Tuareg-led rebellion in the north of the country. The Tuareg rebels were well armed, a significant number of them having returned from Libya with weapons after the demise of Libyan president Muammar Qaddafi, an event that had repercussions throughout the Sahel.² Although Mali had undergone a highly touted transition to democracy in 1992, the Malian state had in fact become increasingly weak and ineffectual and unable to control the north. Tuareg rebellions in Mali (as well as in neighboring Niger) had punctuated the political landscape periodically since the 1960s, with periods of crisis in 1963–64 and from 1990–96, and the rebellions had often been brutally repressed by the Malian army, adding to the grievances (Lecocq, 2010). Long periods of drought in the 1970s had left Sahelian populations vulnerable, their herds were decimated and smuggling and human trafficking had become rampant in the Sahara (Scheele, 2012; McDougall & Scheele, 2012). At the same time, the internal dynamics of the highly stratified Tuareg society had started to erode, and nobles in particular found themselves ill-adapted to these profound changes. The 2012 Tuareg rebellion took the form of a liberation movement dubbed the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), formed in October of 2011, whose stated goal was to liberate a territory known as Azawad from the control of the Malian government.

Sanogo's accidental coup removed Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré from power just two months before elections were scheduled to take place, and the resulting situation was one of near paralysis as politicians and military shared an uneasy power in Bamako, moving from crisis to crisis. Meanwhile, things spiraled out of control in the north of the country and the MNLA declared Azawad's independence from Mali.

In addition to the liberationist ideology of the MNLA, Islamist and jihadist ideologies were also at play and were propagated by several armed Islamist factions whose stated goal was to instate sharia or Islamic law, beginning in the north of Mali and eventually spreading to the south of the country. These groups who formed a coalition during the 2012–2013 crisis included principally Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Although there are many other smaller Islamist factions, AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJAO were the principal actors in the Mali conflict of 2012–2013, forming a coalition that controlled most of the northern part of the country from spring 2012 until January 2013.

2. For a historically grounded and informative overview and chronology of the Malian crisis see Thurston & Lebovich (2013).

As proponents of both ideologies vied for power, they each emphasized those aspects of their respective agendas that set them apart from each other. The MNLA appealed to widespread anti-jihadist sentiments both at home and on the international scene by stating that it had no interest in implementing any kind of religious ideology, and that it respected the right of religious freedom. The Islamist groups, on the other hand, appealed to those who upheld the integrity of the Malian state by stating that they were not interested in revising Mali's borders but in spreading sharia throughout the national territory. Both ideologies were brutally implemented at the expense of the local population who suffered atrocities and severe restrictions on personal freedom at the hands of both the MNLA and the Islamist factions.

It is important to point out that the groups, especially the jihadist ones, were neither ethnically nor linguistically homogeneous. The MNLA was overwhelmingly Tuareg, but also included at least some Hassaniya-speaking Moors in its numbers, and the jihadist groups involved various nationalities (Algerian, Malian, Mauritanian, etc.) and ethnicities (Arab, Moor, Tuareg, etc.), and recruited aggressively from local populations of Songhaï and Fulani. Furthermore, many of the Tamsheq-speaking MNLA members had resided for a number of years in Libya and were also quite competent in Arabic. The linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity of these factions allows us to see the ways in which written language in the warscape constructs an ideological stance rather than an identity based on language or ethnicity.

The first actors to move towards control of northern Mali were the MNLA in January of 2012, followed swiftly by the Islamist groups. At first, the Azawad nationalists and the Islamists worked together, but the latter soon took over, with MUJAO ultimately driving the MNLA from Gao in June of 2012. From that point on, the Islamist coalition was in control of northern Mali, and began to move southwards, eventually taking the town of Konna in the region of Mopti. At this turn of events French President François Hollande and his advisors deemed the situation critical, and in January of 2013 the Islamist advance was thwarted by a French-led military intervention, *Opération Serval*. The French-led coalition aimed to take back the northern cities as well as to secure the entire northern territory.

3. Documenting the linguistic warsapes of northern Mali: constructing a database

The data that form the basis of this study are drawn from the mediascape of the northern Malian crisis. Because of the danger associated with doing research in a

war zone, I was unable to travel to the area during the crisis to collect firsthand data; instead, I relied on journalistic sources accessible through the internet. The methodological disadvantages of such an approach to LL are immediately apparent, since the researcher has only second-hand control over how the database will be constructed and has to rely on journalistic choices that are dictated by non-scholarly concerns. The main risk is, of course, that the mediascape presents an exoticized or estheticized view of northern Mali, focusing on ‘unusual’ writing in Arabic and Tifnagh scripts that catches the eye of the Western reader, or selecting appropriate illustrations for specific stories rather than taking into account the more banal, everyday types of writing in the public sphere that have informed the field of LL. But insofar as the mediascape offers the researcher an otherwise precluded possibility of engaging with the graphic environment of a context that could not be experienced firsthand, it is an extremely valuable resource. We might be reminded here of Labov’s (1994:74) statement that, because of the haphazard way in which they have come down to us, ‘historical data are inherently bad’ and say the same of digital data from the mediascape. Linguists have nonetheless valued such imperfect historical data and fruitfully exploited them. When field sites are endangered, researchers must turn to alternative possibilities.

In attempting to offset some of the possible biases and lacunae within the data that come from the mediascape I consulted a broad combination of local Malian websites and international news sources. These included Malian sites such as Maliweb, Maliactu, and Malijet; Sahara Media, which followed the crisis very closely and is based in neighboring Mauritania; and major international news sources such as Al Jazeera, *Le Monde*, *Libération*, the BBC, *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, Reuters, and Agence France Presse. Using Google as a search engine I conducted searches in English and French for images from Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu, cross-referenced with key words such as the names of the factions and individual actors involved in the war, specific events such as the damaging of a mausoleum in Timbuktu, and specific themes, such as sharia (Islamic law), and selected all those that reflected in some way the linguistic warscapes of the three cities by documenting writing in the public sphere.³ While the first selection process was shaped by the journalistic gaze, I carried out the second stage of the selection process by choosing any photograph that included writing or graffiti, whether it appeared on signage or billboards, stones, walls, vehicles or even clothing. Many of the images were published in multiple venues and some eventually became iconic symbols of the crisis in northern Mali. The total number of images I examined was in the range of four thousand, and those that

3. As Lameen Souag (p.c.) rightly points out, conducting an additional search in Arabic, a task that will be left for future research, could potentially change the database.

met the selection criteria, by including any kind of writing (or effacement of writing), numbered close to two hundred.⁴

In the absence of a well-defined standard methodology for carrying out research on LL, the construction of a database drawn from the mediascape of the recent crisis in northern Mali joins a plurality of previous approaches that have yielded significant results. The time period covered by this study begins with the coup d'état in March of 2012, and ends in early February 2013, shortly after French-led military forces, in conjunction with the Malian army, reclaimed Gao and Timbuktu from Islamist militias. Opération Serval, as the military intervention is known, ended in July of 2014 and was replaced in August 2014 by Opération Barkhane, a French-led operation to combat extremist violence in the Sahel, based in the Chadian capital, N'Djaména. Already a very poor country, ranking 182 of 186 on the UNDP Human Development Index in 2012, Mali was further weakened by these events, which resulted in human rights abuses and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. At this writing there are still French-led troops in northern Mali, and the situation remains unsettled.

4. Literacy and writing in northern Mali

There is a long history of writing in northern Mali, beginning with medieval epigraphs found on rocks in both the Tifinagh and Arabic scripts (de Moraes Farias, 2010) in what is now the region of Kidal.⁵ These inscriptions, which often took the form of graffiti, have been interpreted in different ways to legitimate specific views of history, including those that claim a prominent role in Islamic history for the Tuareg; they also, according to de Moraes Farias (1990), are the first examples of writing in West Africa. Rock inscriptions, which constitute the original LL of the Sahara (Biagetti et al. 2015) recur as a significant motif in contemporary Tuareg society. For example, Nigerien artist Rissa Ixa, whose paintings document an idyllic but endangered Tuareg way of life, often includes Tifinagh inscriptions on rocks and boulders as a motif in his paintings of the desert. Writing on rocks is also a contemporary practice, as illustrated by the inscriptions in Tifinagh and Latin

4. The exact number of images depends on whether different photographs of the same object, cropped photographs, single photographs published in multiple sources, etc. are included. Here I have estimated the number of occurrences of writing in public space that were photographed, regardless of how many times.

5. Here, of course, I am considering writing that leaves a durable trace. Actual writing practices in the Sahara also involve tracing letters in the sand with a stick or finger and leave only a short-lived trace.

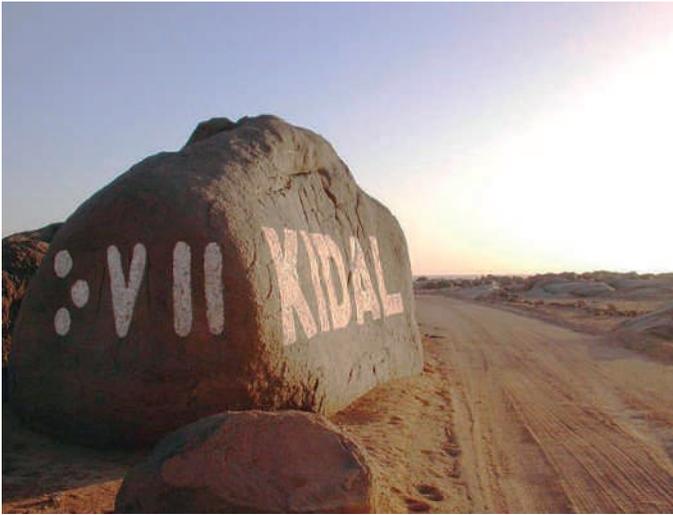


Figure 1. Rock marking the entrance to Kidal

scripts that mark the entrance to Kidal (Figure 1), a part of the LL that predates the 2012–2013 crisis.

Manuscripts in Arabic are a second important element in the history of writing in northern Mali. Many collections of manuscripts were and still are owned by individual families who carry their libraries with them as they move from place to place. These mobile Saharan libraries are cherished possessions and often contain a wealth of religious, historical and scientific knowledge. As a site of scholarly Islamic learning, Timbuktu also housed a number of libraries containing Arabic manuscripts on a multitude of topics, including mathematics, astronomy, grammar and music, as well as texts of a religious nature. Many of these manuscripts formed part of a significant collection housed at the Ahmed Baba Institute which had, in the years leading up to the crisis, received substantial funding for manuscript preservation, and had become more widely known through recent books on the collection such as Hunwick & Boye 2008 and Jeppie & Diagne 2008.

A robust *ajami* tradition has long existed in parallel to the written expression of Arabic in northern Mali. *Ajami* refers to the use of the Arabic script to write a language other than Arabic, and is a widespread tradition in much of Muslim Africa (Cissé, 2006; Mumin & Versteegh, 2014) including Mali, given the prestige associated with Arabic as a religious language. Tamasheq, Fulfulde, Songhaï and even Bamanankan, the dominant language of southern Mali and the capital, Bamako, are all languages that people write in the Arabic script, and have been

used in a wide range of contexts from commentaries on legal and religious texts appearing in the margins of manuscripts (Berndt, 2008) to personal letters and business records (Mbodj-Pouye, 2008; 2009).⁶ This type of literacy does not necessarily entail the ability to read and write in Arabic; it is a consequence of attendance at Qur'anic schools where pupils learn how to write and recite at least some of the Qur'an. In learning the Arabic alphabet, pupils have access to a writing system that can then be used to write their own languages. While not completely standardized, West African language writing in ajami is nonetheless fairly conventionalized and is a widespread and useful tool for people who do not attend French-language schools.

Mali is officially a francophone country, and French is thus the language of the Malian state and bureaucracy as well as the formal educational system (Canut, 1996; Skattum, 2008). But as in many other parts of so-called francophone Africa, this fact does not translate into competence in French for the vast majority of the population. The Malian education system is notably weak, and has been so for quite some time. Dumestre (1997) cites a 1993 UNESCO survey which places Mali second from the bottom of all countries in the world in terms of schooling: only 18% of the school-age population at that time were in school. This is the generation of those who would now be in their mid- to late twenties, namely those who could potentially be actors in the linguistic warsapes, so it is not surprising that much of the French we see in the LL shows characteristics of grassroots literacy (Fabian, 1990; Blommaert, 2008) such as variation in spelling and non-systematic use of capital and lower-case letters, typical of those who are not fully inserted into a regime of literacy. The vast majority of the population in this youthful country were born after independence in 1960 and have no firsthand experience with colonialism; the status of French as the official language of Mali is thus much more important to Malians than its status as a former colonial language, although the latter can always be invoked in discourses that denounce neo-colonialism.

5. The linguistic warsapes

The linguistic warsapes of northern Mali are inscribed primarily in paint on a variety of surfaces, almost none of which are paper. Some of these surfaces are fixed and semi-permanent, such as the walls of buildings; others, such as the signs erected at city entrances, are less permanent but still fixed; and yet others are mobile and even ephemeral. I have taken a broad view of the linguistic warsapes

6. Bamanankan and other Mande languages are also written in the N'ko script, created in 1949 by Guinean Souleymane Kanté. (Wyrod, 2008).

because in addition to more conventional media such as walls and billboards, writing on media such as cloth, cars, clothing and bodies was intended for display in public space, whether to instill compliance with certain ideologies, as in the case of the well-marked Islamic Police cars in Gao (Figure 2a); the jackets of the Islamic Police in Timbuktu (Figure 2b); the headbands of Ansar Dine members (Figure 2c); or to protest sharia and show support of the MNLA as in the cloth banner used in the Timbuktu women's demonstration (Figure 2d). The materials used in the linguistic warscapes of northern Mali are, to paraphrase Stroud & Mpendukana (2009), materials of necessity. They are hand-painted, hand-written or hand-sewn and bear the hallmarks of grassroots literacy (Blommaert, 2008).

In appearance and content the signs that constitute the linguistic warscapes of northern Mali are thus very different from the top-down (Gorter, 2006; Ben-Rafael, et al., 2006) signs that emanate from corporate entities in the sites of luxury of the developed world, and their materiality reflects that of their immediate environment. I turn now to addressing the ways in which competing ideologies were inscribed on these various surfaces in multiple languages and scripts.

The warscapes of Azawad

As the name straightforwardly reflects, the political goal of the Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) was to liberate the territory known as Azawad from the Malian state, and thus to form an independent Tuareg



Figure 2. Clockwise from top left: a) Islamic Police in Gao and b) Timbuktu; c) Ansar Dine members in Kidal; d) Women's pro-MNLA demonstration in Timbuktu: 'The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad — it represents our vision and our voice.'

state. The Tuareg, or Kel Tamasheq as they call themselves, are related to the Amazigh of North Africa, and their languages are classified as southern Berber languages.⁷ Space in northern Mali has long been imagined as a place of Tuareg agency, defined by trajectories of transhumance and dynamic relations of alliances and dominance between social groups rather than clearly delineated geographic boundaries, and it was thus subject to alternating cycles of expansion and shrinkage over time according to changing ecological and societal conditions (Grémont, 2012; Rasmussen 2008). Grémont (2012) argues that ways of expressing territoriality changed as a consequence of French colonial interventions and the ways in which the Malian successor state ascribed land rights to agriculturalists rather than herders. A series of droughts in the Sahel during the 1970s and 1980s left pastoralists in a precarious situation, and the first Tuareg settlements began to appear near permanent water sources in the early 1980s. As a direct consequence of these factors, the internal dynamics of a highly stratified Tuareg society underwent some profound changes, and a younger generation (known in Tamasheq as *ishumar* from French *chômeur* ‘unemployed’) turned its back on traditional ways of life in the Sahara. Feeling all but abandoned by the Malian state many of them headed to Libya and Algeria in search of any kind of work that would provide them with a means of subsistence, while others started to settle in urban areas in the region, primarily Kidal, as well as Timbuktu and Gao.

Azawad differs in some fundamental ways from the imagined transnational space of Tamazgha, a greater Amazigh land invoked by Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian and Libyan activists that includes North Africa and the Sahara, and of which Azawad is considered a part. For political reasons, Amazigh activism in Morocco, for example, is circumscribed to the linguistic and cultural arenas, thus the space of Tamazgha is imagined through language (Cornwell & Atia, 2012) and tends to correlate with multiple national boundaries to include those states that have a Berber-speaking population; Tuareg agency, on the other hand, along with an endangered way of life, has shaped the imagined space of Azawad. While the name, Azawad, refers geographically to a wide plain north of Timbuktu, it is also considered to be the Kel Tamasheq heartland. During the Tuareg rebellions in the second half of the 20th century the term was appropriated as a synonym for Tuareg country in general and was used by rebels to refer to a substantially larger area of Tuareg agency. As Lecocq writes of these earlier rebellions:

7. The term Berber (cognate with barbarian) is rejected by many activists who prefer to use the all-encompassing term Amazigh to refer to the indigenous people of North Africa and the Tuareg. I use the term Amazigh except when referring to the language family, which is conventionally referred to as Berber.

The name Azawad can be found in the names of practically all the rebel movements coming into existence after the outbreak of rebellion in Mali and in Niger, even when they were not based in the Azawad. (2002:211)

The organic borders of Azawad in the Tuareg imagination had at times included parts of northern Mali, western Niger, and for some even southern Algeria (although the Algerian Kel Hoggar Tuareg themselves never considered it part of a greater Azawad), yet when the MNLA declared its independence in April of 2012, the territory they laid claim to was presented graphically in multiple media as coterminous with the borders of northern Mali, and Azawad did not impinge on the national territory of either Niger or Algeria. Clearly, the MNLA's grievance was with the Malian state.

When it is written, Tamasheq, the language spoken natively by most Tuareg, is usually written in Arabic or Roman scripts, although the writing system symbolically associated with the Berber languages is Tifinagh, an ancient script used by Amazigh to write their languages (Savage, 2008), and which appears on medieval rock inscriptions in the Sahara, North Africa, and the Canary Islands. As a uniquely Amazigh script, and thus an object of considerable cultural pride, Tifinagh is easily recognizable and has high symbolic value for speakers of Tamasheq despite the fact that it appears to be rarely used other than in an emblematic way.⁸ While there are few studies other than Elghamis (2011) that document the extent to which Tifinagh is currently used in Berber-speaking Africa, its use, not only in Mali, but in other Amazighophone areas of North Africa, regardless of the message, makes a pro-Amazigh, often anti-Arab political statement (El Aissati, 2014; Ouaras, 2009). In a study of graffiti in Algiers, for example, Ouaras (2009: 11) comments on the fact that a message written in Tamazight (a northern Berber language) in the Tifinagh script on a wall in the El Biar neighborhood is unlikely to be understood by potential readers, but it nonetheless accomplishes its goal of indexing Amazigh identity in that the script chosen is more important than the message to be transmitted. Here, as in northern Mali, the writer is counting on the fact that passersby will have what Blommaert & Backus (2013) term 'recognition competence' of the Tifinagh script and the ideology that it entails. The medium here *is* the message.

The iconicity of the Tifinagh script makes it a symbolically charged index of Tuareg identity, and it is highly visible in the linguistic warscape. However, in reality it is little used and then generally only for private writing, and Tamasheq is more often written in the Arabic and Latin scripts. While Tifinagh is abundantly present in the linguistic warscape, it has more often than not been reduced to a single

8. Tuareg silversmiths are one notable exception since they often sign their jewelry with the Tifinagh script. Such inscriptions, especially when intended for an international market, lend an aura of authenticity to the pieces.

character, ⵝ, *yaz* or *ezza*, depending on the language and dialect, which serves as a kind of synecdoche for the writing system and by extension the Tamasheq language and Tuareg identity. Yaz, a somewhat anthropomorphic character which designates the phoneme /z/, has a high symbolic value all across Berber-speaking north Africa and appears in red on a blue, green and yellow background on the flag used by Amazigh communities from Morocco to Libya.⁹ Elghamis (2011:221) remarks on the symbolic use of the character in North Africa and the Sahara, and especially its employment as an emblem of Amazigh identity and Tuareg political contestation. Yaz consequently appears in the linguistic warscares of northern Mali both to index support of the MNLA, as for example where a Tuareg woman wears the letter painted on her face, and to mark control by the MNLA, as in the tri-scriptal image in Figure 3a, which shows the wall around the MNLA's headquarters in Kidal. The word Azawad appears here in both Latin and Arabic script in conjunction with yaz. The most sinister rendering of yaz appears in Figure 3c, where a machine gun forms the vertical column of the letter, and two magazines of ammunition form its curved 'arms' and 'legs'; other letters made from piles of stones combine with the yaz to form part of the word Azawad in one of the rare pictures that actually depicts a word written in Tifinagh. Because of its reduction to an emblem, yaz generally conveys only a symbolic message, and therefore it frequently occurs in the same visual field as inscriptions in other scripts and languages that more directly convey information. Figure 3b depicts a prominent monument in Kidal that has been appropriated by the MNLA and is particularly dense in inscriptions. Azawad appears four times on the front face of the monument, twice in Latin script above the painted Azawad flag, and once in Latin script and once in Arabic script below the flag; it also appears vertically on a column at the front of the monument in Latin script. A yaz appears to the left of the flag, and another, larger one claims the highest spot visible in the photograph, and is flanked by the English word *free* on the left, and the French equivalent, *libre*, on the right. The Islamists have also made their mark on the perpendicular face of the same monument where the Arabic phrase, *Allahu akbar* 'God is great' appears in Arabic script above a second Azawad flag.

In the image in Figure 3d, which depicts UN troops outside the former MNLA headquarters, the final 'd' in the word Azawad written in Latin script among multiple instances of yaz, appears to have a superimposed 'k' within it. This bivalent word (Woolard, 1998) thus spells both Azawad and Azawak, suggesting solidarity with Nigerien Tuareg, some of whom joined the MNLA. A similar liberation

9. The Amazigh flag was not, however, adopted as the flag of Azawad, although the two were sometimes flown or painted together. The Azawad flag bears a striking, and no doubt intentional, resemblance to the Palestinian flag.

movement in Niger known as the Popular Movement for the Liberation of the Air and the Azawak, two northern regions of Niger inhabited primarily by Tuareg and Fulani, was active from 1991–1995.



Figure 3. Clockwise from top left: a) MNLA headquarters in Kidal; b) Monument in Kidal; c) A sinister rendering of Azawad; d) UN troops outside the former MNLA headquarters in Kidal

Finally, Tuareg separatists do not always use the Tifnagh script when conveying their message, as the image in Figure 4 shows. Here we see only the Arabic script, a script that is used much more than Tifnagh for writing in Northern Mali. The top line is ajami Tamasheq and reads *Tenere taqqim* ‘The desert remains.’ The word Azawad is written in large letters on a wall, under which the writer expresses his opposition to the Malian state by writing and then crossing out the word Mali, and in two instances placing the word ‘no,’ which is most likely ajami French meant to depict the French *non*, in front of it.

The warscapes of Azawad as imagined by those who inscribed the surfaces discussed in this section are marked by multiple scripts. The symbolic power of Tifnagh and its distillation in the letter *yaz* plays a dominant role in marking MNLA territory, but the communicative needs of the MNLA, as well as their literacy resources, are better reflected in the Latin and Arabic scripts.¹⁰

10. The MNLA created a highly professional website <<http://www.mnlamov.net/>>, whose default language is French, with options to view the site in English and Arabic. The header, which announces their name, lists it first in Tifnagh, followed by Arabic and thirdly in French, as if to offset the choice of default language for the website. Of course in this endeavor their audience



Figure 4. A wall showing graffiti in ajami Tamasheq and ajami French: *Tenere taqqim, Azawad, non Mali, non Mali* ‘The desert forever, Azawad, no Mali, no Mali.’

Inscribing sharia

In stark contrast to the aims of the MNLA, the goal of the various Islamist factions who sought control of northern Mali was the instauration of sharia or Islamic law. The populations of northern Mali have been predominantly Muslim for several centuries, and Timbuktu in particular was a noted center of Islamic learning, boasting a university that dates from the 12th century, and two of the oldest mosques in West Africa, the Djengerey Ber and the Sankore mosques, as well as the tombs of a great number of Sufi saints. More recently, Timbuktu had become known for its extensive libraries of Islamic manuscripts, many of which were housed at the Ahmed Baba Institute, (Hunwick & Boye, 2008; Jeppie & Diagne, 2008) and constituted a rich religious and cultural heritage of which the inhabitants of this holy city were and are proud. The Islamist agenda, however, devalued the Sufi Islamic traditions to which most West African Muslims subscribe, and sought to impose a severe, anti-Sufi interpretation of sharia that involved a number of highly publicized brutal punishments for infractions such as immodesty, theft, adultery, and the like. So severe were these punishments, which included

was an international one, quite different from the local audience of the linguistic warsapes on the ground in northern Mali.

amputations and stonings, especially in the northern town of Aguelhoc, that even leaders from within the Islamist movements chided the perpetrators for their overly zealous actions that only served to alienate them further from the local populations. Other practices included killing dogs, restricting women's mobility in public space, imposing the wearing of hijab, banning cigarettes, alcohol, and music — including cell phone jingles — and, perhaps most notoriously, the burning of the Ahmed Baba library and the desecration of saints' tombs in Timbuktu following a UNESCO declaration that these sites were in imminent danger.

The Islamist groups, which included Ansar Dine, MUJAO, and AQIM, were alleged to have foreign origins, coming from Algeria, Mauritania, and other parts of north and west Africa, and although there is little doubt that many of them had their origins in the Algerian civil war and had at one time been associated with the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, they had had a more benign presence in parts of northern Mali prior to the escalation of events following the coup. In many instances they had built mosques, provided resources for health care, and married into the host communities, thus they could also be said to have local roots and counted a sizeable number of Malian recruits in their ranks.

In addition to the violence and restrictions on personal freedom they imposed, the armed Islamist groups garnered symbolic control of the towns of northern Mali through two principal strategies. The first of these was the use of public signage on billboards, banners, and on clothing, and the second was effacement, or the removal of previously existing aspects of the LL. Public signage, placed strategically at the entrance to town or in a main gathering area (Figure 5 a-d), announced that the town was now subject to the jurisdiction of sharia. Such signs, sometimes written in white on a black background like the Al Qaeda or Islamic State flags, were more often than not in classical or standard Arabic, the language iconically associated with Islam. As the language of the Qur'an, believed by Muslims to be the word of God, Arabic holds a privileged position within Islam. The Islamist factions included speakers of various Arabic dialects such as Hassaniya and Algerian Darja within their ranks, but those varieties rarely appear in the linguistic warscapes. Many of these signs were no doubt copied, given their uniformity, but in others there are sometimes traces of calques from other languages or local terms.



Figure 5. Clockwise from top left: a) ‘Timbuktu (the beacon of Islam and) gateway to the application of sharia, welcomes you’; b) ‘The Islamic state of Gao welcomes you / Welcome to the Islamic state of Gao’; c) ‘The application of sharia is the path to happiness. It is the path to paradise’; d) ‘The city of Timbuktu is founded on Islam and will be judged only by Islamic law (sharia)’.

Many of the Islamists’ signs are bilingual, written in Arabic and Mali’s official language, French, and some exhibit characteristics of grassroots literacy, such as the French sign in Figure 5c, where the word *bonheur* ‘happiness’ is written as *bon-neheur*. More than simply marking territory as the MNLAs’ inscriptions tended to do, signs written by the Islamist coalition made explicit statements about the rule of law (sharia) that they were attempting to impose within a city, thereby dictating multiple aspects of personal behavior, such as the wearing of hijab and the interdiction of smoking and drinking alcohol. The bilingual signs placed Arabic on top, symbolizing its superiority as the language of religion to French, or else the signs were in Arabic on one side and French on the other. The photograph in Figure 5d captures the striking juxtaposition of a billboard announcing that Timbuktu will be judged only by sharia, and the international hip-hop graffiti in English that reads ‘MILLIONAIRE’ and ‘GANGS STAR’ on the wall beside it, which speaks to the cosmopolitan yearnings of the city’s youth.

The Islamists’ application of sharia was carried out through a variety of authoritative bodies, including Islamic courts and Islamic police who patrolled the cities in search of offenders. The Islamic police wore jackets that identified them as such (Figure 2b), and their cars were similarly marked (Figure 2a). Others identified themselves as members of the Islamist factions by writing on their clothing, like the Ansar Dine members depicted in Figure 2c wearing headbands that say *Laa ilaha illa Allah* ‘There is no God but God.’ Finally, although street signs are

few and far between in northern Mali, Islamists sometimes renamed public spaces such as Gao's main square which was given the new name, Sharia Square.

Whereas the MNLA use three scripts, Tifinagh, Arabic and Latin in the warscapes of northern Mali, the Islamists use only the latter two, Tifinagh being irrelevant to their inscriptions since even when used by the MNLA it often has only a symbolic rather than a communicative function. Arabic is privileged over French by the Islamists, but often appears in tandem with it. In addition to their inscriptions, the Islamists altered the linguistic warscape in other ways, as the following section illustrates.

5.3 Effacement as counter-ideology

In addition to inscribing the linguistic warscapes of northern Mali with ideological positions, actors in the Mali conflict used a second strategy to counter ideologies to which they were opposed. These actors effaced or erased previously existing aspects of the LL, thereby creating palimpsests that reveal traces of competing ideologies. When used in conjunction with inscription, effacement is a powerful strategy for symbolic control of public space because as an act of opposition it inherently proposes a counter-ideology to what was there before simply by erasing it.

Given the goal of the MNLA to liberate Azawad from the Malian state, actors from within this movement made some attempts to efface the words Mali or *malien* 'Malian' from buildings that housed regional or local branches of state structures. In so doing, they marked their opposition to the Malian state and attempted symbolically to strip it of hegemony in the northern cities and send the message that this was no longer Mali but Azawad. But it was the Islamist factions, and in particular MUJAO, who employed the strategy of effacement more prominently to index both their jihadist zeal and their opposition to Sufism. The well-known interdiction on the portrayal of human faces, subscribed to in some interpretations of the Qur'an, was at play here, and many shop-fronts in Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu depicting human faces were painted over. The portrayal of human figures in shop-front advertising (hair salons, clothing shops, tailors, etc.) in West Africa is very popular, since it often serves as a visual cue of what is being advertised for the many who are unable to read (Juffermans, 2014). In Timbuktu, a prominent monument to Al Farouk, a mythical winged horse and legendary protector of the city, was first defaced — the horseman's head was chipped off — and eventually knocked down, and the accompanying text in Arabic on a low cement panel was removed. Finally, in a public health billboard promoting protection against the transmission of HIV-AIDS, the faces of two turban-clad men were painted over.

The Islamists' specific opposition to Sufism took the form of an attack on the practice of the veneration of saints, which includes pilgrimages to their tombs

as holy sites, a widespread practice in much of the Muslim world. Timbuktu in particular has long been known as a holy city that houses numerous saints' tombs and mausoleums, and in May of 2012, less than a week after UNESCO placed the city on their list of endangered world heritage sites, members of Ansar Dine attacked the mausoleum of Sidi Mahmoud and vowed to destroy all shrines in Timbuktu. Their actions shocked, angered and saddened not only the local Sufi population but that of West Africa in general, and drew much international attention. Parallel to the physical attack on their tombs in Timbuktu, saints were also effaced from the LL. An iconic sign painted in French above the arcade of a prominent building welcoming visitors to the city proudly proclaimed BIENVENUE A TOMBOUCTOU CITE DES 333 SAINTS 'Welcome to Timbuktu, city of 333 saints,' but Islamists painted over the number 333 and the first three letters of the word 'saints' (Figure 6a). This small act of effacement effectively communicated the message that the city was now under the jurisdiction of Ansar Dine's interpretation of sharia and that Sufi practices were no longer tolerated.

When northern Mali was first liberated from Islamist control in early 2013, the urban populations in turn attempted to reclaim their public spaces in a number of ways. Women walked in the streets without hijab, men smoked cigarettes in public, and people began to alter the signs that had been installed by the jihadists. The large signs announcing that the cities were subject to the rule of sharia were scribbled on or painted over, as was the sign for Gao's Sharia Square (Figure 6b).



Figure 6. a) Defaced sign reading 'Welcome to Timbuktu, city of [333-sai]nts'; b) Painting over 'Sharia Square' in Gao

The layering and effacement of texts has thus created a linguistic warscape of palimpsests, where multiple inscriptions have left traces of their writers' ideologies, political and religious positions, and ultimately their bids for hegemony.

The francophone state

As Mali's official language, hence the language of government and education, French played an important role during the 2012–2013 crisis. As discussed above, many of the signs that appeared in Arabic also included a French version of the message, either underneath or on the opposite side of the panel. While the translation facilitates understanding of the message, it also indicates a covert recognition of the Malian state as an interlocutor that parallels the ways in which discourses about the goals of various factions were articulated. In drawing the borders of Azawad as coterminous with the borders of northern Mali rather than a greater territory of Tuareg agency that encroaches into Algeria and Niger, the MNLA engaged with — and hence recognized — the Malian state, even as it opposed it. Likewise, the Islamists explicitly recognized the sovereignty of the Malian state even as they attempted to implement their agenda of bringing the state under the jurisdiction of sharia. The Malian state with its rule of law is thus a constant interlocutor in the linguistic warscapes.

The use of French in the LL under these circumstances indexes the symbolic representation of political authority as well as wider communication. Both the MNLA and the Islamist coalition used French — in conjunction with other languages — in their communiqués. The MNLA in particular made public statements in French and created a website in French (<http://www.mnlamov.net>) to document their progress and make proclamations about which territories were under their control. The Islamist factions favored Arabic but, as mentioned above, also used French in parallel with Arabic (although the two are not always identical) when putting up public signs announcing the implementation of sharia in various cities. Beyond the added communicative function of French, it seems clear that it is being used in its capacity as an official language to convey the trappings of authority. The status of French as the official language of Mali, regardless of the low numbers of speakers within the general population, makes of it an instrument of authority such that its use by the MNLA and the jihadists imbues their respective missions and statements with an aura of authority; if these groups can appropriate the official language, then they can appropriate the state function. French is thus an extremely important instrument for opponents of the Malian state as they attempt to usurp state authority.

For the general population of northern Mali, especially after the French-led coalition forces moved into the area, the use of French had a two-fold purpose. First was the symbolic reestablishment of the authority and legitimacy of the Malian state, or at least an expression of allegiance to it, evidenced primarily in the erasure of Arabic inscriptions announcing sharia and their replacement by signs in French; second was a more overt solidarity and appreciation of France's role in reclaiming

Gao and Timbuktu from the Islamist factions evidenced in a great number of official and informal signs directed towards the French. The large sign on a main thoroughfare in Timbuktu (Figure 7a), for example, publicly thanks Damien Boiteux, the first French casualty in the military operation, for sacrificing his life to help liberate northern Mali, and Franco-Malian solidarity is symbolized by the colored stripes representing the French and Malian flags respectively. Other hand-made signs appear in a variety of media, including cardboard (Figure 7b) and embroidered cloth (Figure 7c), thanking French president, François Hollande, for his intervention. As it became clearer that the French were tacitly allowing the MNLA to retain a certain control over Kidal, accusations of favoritism towards the Tuareg — a complex affinity that dates from the colonial period — were voiced by the Malian population who in public protests reminded France and Hollande that Kidal was also part of Mali. Signs created for these protests appeared in French, thereby reinforcing the authority of the message through use of the official Malian language, and directly addressing the French in their own language as well. Rather than indexing prestige, as is so often claimed for former colonial languages in Africa, French as it appears in the linguistic warsapes of northern Mali symbolizes primarily political authority and legitimacy, with a secondary function of symbolizing solidarity with France, François Hollande, and the French-led forces who intervened. The political message



Figure 7. Clockwise from top left: a) ‘Hommage to Damien Boiteux and all who died for the liberation of northern Mali. Thank you Hollande. Thank you France’; b) Gao, ‘Yes to Opération Serval, but no to the partiality of France in the Northern Mali crisis. WE WON’T BUDGE’; c) Embroidered message of gratitude; d) French army vehicle, ‘Keep your distance. Stand back.’

in Figure 7b is further enhanced by the use of a line in ‘approximate French’ from a famous 1989 protest song against the French deportation of Africans by Malian singer, Salif Keita. The song, entitled *Nous pas bouger* ‘We won’t budge,’ is primarily in Bamanankan, punctuated by the defiant refrain that gives the song its title.

6. Regimes of literacy and the linguistic soundscape

As discussed in the introduction to this essay, what is striking about many African situations, including the case-study at hand, is that the LL often appears to be very much at odds with the linguistic soundscape or spoken environment in terms of the languages that are represented in each. Exographia (Lüpke, 2011), or the use of a written language that differs from a community’s spoken language(s), is widespread, and even if members of that community can write in the language(s) they speak, they may also be reluctant to do so in public writing. Consequently, interpretations of what the LL might mean in such African, or more broadly global south, situations is best mediated through an understanding of the full linguistic ecology of a given community, including the regimes of literacy that hold there. The more the written environment differs from the spoken one, the more complex the relationship between the two becomes and the less one can extrapolate solely from the LL.

With the exception of Kidal, which is a predominantly Tamasheq-speaking, Tuareg dominated city, northern Mali has an ethnically and linguistically diverse population who speak Tamasheq (an Afroasiatic language), Songhaï (a Nilo-Saharan language), Fulfulde (an Atlantic Niger-Congo language), and Bamanankan (a Mande Niger-Congo language), as well as various other languages. As we have seen, Tamasheq appears in a reduced fashion in the linguistic warscape, where its value in association with the Tifinagh script is primarily symbolic. Within the corpus of images under discussion, Fulfulde and Bamanankan are completely absent from the linguistic warscape, and Songhaï appears in only one illuminating instance that illustrates an important difference between conceptions of the relationship of spoken to written language in the First and Third Worlds. Literacies in First World languages are backed by authoritative institutions, texts, and discourses, (e.g.: the Académie Française, the Oxford English Dictionary), that regulate multiple aspects of language, ranging from spelling and grammar to the use of loanwords, while literacies in Third World languages seldom have such institutional support and therefore exhibit many of the general characteristics of grassroots literacy (Blommaert, 2008). The relationship of the oral to the written is also less fixed (Calvet, 1994), and therefore there is less standardization and more variation.

The sole sign in Songhaï (Fig 7d), the main language of Gao, appears on the back of a French military vehicle. The sign is a bilingual warning with a large exclamation point inside a triangle and reads first in French *Gardez vos distances* ‘Keep your distance,’ followed by a Songhaï phrase written more or less in French orthography that says, *Wa morou* ‘Stay away.’ It is not difficult to imagine the circumstances under which the French soldiers manning the tank created the sign. They first used the official language, French, to post their warning, and then, in what they no doubt thought would be a more direct means of communication that would be more widely understood, found out how to say the same thing in the main local language, Songhaï, which they then added to the sign. Their assumptions about Songhaï were based on their experience of French, where the spoken language is the written language and most anyone who speaks it also reads and writes it. For Songhaï speakers of northern Mali, their first literacy may be in Arabic or French, and they may rarely or never write in the language they speak. The Songhaï message, *Wa morou*, is then redundant for them because if they can read it or sound it out, it means that they have already acquired reading and writing skills in French, and would therefore be able to read *Gardez vos distances*. It is telling that the only sample of Songhaï in the linguistic warsapes of northern Mali appears on a French tank, and the presumed circumstances and context of its appearance offer an important insight into the ways in which the relationship between spoken and written language differs vastly from a French speaker to a Songhaï speaker. This example illustrates in a concise way why we need an ethnographic approach to the study of LL in Africa (Juffermans, 2014), and why the LL cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the linguistic ecology of a community.

7. Summary and conclusions

In this paper I introduced and defined the notion of linguistic warscape as a LL produced in times of war and which in some way reflects the experience of war. In examining the complex linguistic warsapes of northern Mali during the 2012–2013 period of crisis with the goal of providing an answer to how competing actors harness their linguistic resources to inscribe and communicate their own vision of the future within the linguistic warscape, I have shown that the choice of both script and language are associated with multiple ideological stances, and that their implementation serves to reinforce certain political positions and leads to symbolic control of public space. Moreover, I have shown that in addition to inscribing the LL, actors in the warsapes of northern Mali also used erasure as a means of representing specific ideologies and effacing others. I also made a case for the

importance of considering the entire linguistic ecology of a community when studying the LL, and especially for taking into account the ways in which the LL does or does not reflect the spoken environment and why this might be so. When coupled with this broader understanding of the kinds of literacy regimes that hold in a place such as northern Mali, research on LL has the potential to become an even more useful component of our understanding of language in society. The value of investigating such environments lies in their potential to provide us with new ways of thinking about LL, and ultimately to come to a better understanding of what LL can and cannot tell us about language.

There are some broader conclusions to be drawn about this relatively complex case study, however, which attempt to answer one of the major questions implicit in the introduction: what can this case study of northern Mali tell us about multilingualism and multigraphism in Africa? In his 1994 study of the graphic environment, a conceptual precursor of LL, Calvet discusses the seemingly indiscriminate use of the Latin and Arabic alphabets to write Wolof, French, and Arabic in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, Mali's neighbor to the west. He attributes what he interprets as an uncertainty in the relationship between written and spoken language as evidence of a society in transition between orality and literacy, a society whose relationship to the written is not yet fixed, but also one that involves a great deal of fluidity between languages (1994: 177–178). The advances that have been made in our understanding of language ideology and literacy in African contexts since Calvet formulated his analysis, usefully summarized in the introduction to Juffermans, Asfaha & Abdelhay (2014), allow for a more nuanced understanding of what is going on in such environments. In this case study of northern Mali we see that various actors have used language and script to position themselves in relation to the Malian state, but far from revealing a one-to-one relationship between ideology, language, and script, we see that there is indeed a great fluidity between all of these. With the exception of Tifinagh, the use of which is primarily emblematic, the scripts and languages in the linguistic warscape all have multiple functions and construct multiple ideological stances. French is used both to contest and uphold the sovereignty of the Malian state, and both to show solidarity with and critique the French-led military intervention, while Arabic script is used both to inscribe sharia and to advocate for the liberation of Azawad from the Malian state, and this in Arabic, Tamasheq, and French. We cannot, in other words, make the kinds of correlations between language and script that Calvet also found lacking in Dakar's graphic environment. But rather than considering this a deficiency, I propose that it actually provides us with some important insights into multilingualism and multigraphism in Africa. To view a context such as northern Mali as a society in transition between orality and literacy or one where the relationship between language and script is not yet fixed, as Calvet has done

for Dakar, is to impose a Western expectation of such relationships, along with an implicit trajectory of progression from unfixed to fixed. Let us focus instead on the second part of Calvet's formulation, namely that such societies are characterized by a great deal of fluidity between languages. From what we have seen in this essay, this appears to be true also of scripts and their relation to language. Rather than drawing parallels between the use of written language in societies where robust regimes of literacy are in place and those, like northern Mali or Dakar, which lie at the periphery of such regimes, a more fruitful parallel might be drawn between multigraphism and multilingualism in such societies. As the many case studies in Lüpke & Storch (2013) attest, linguistic plurality, both spoken and written, is a correlate of social life in Africa, and has been so for a long time. That such societies have not moved towards either monolingualism or a single writing system suggests that linguistic plurality is an active and useful strategy for participating in social life, including political and ideological conflict.

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