

TROUPE ÉCOLE TUDU OYIWANE

In 1985 Agadez hosted a musical school competition between various neighborhoods. Each school was tasked with presenting a song. École Tudu, a small school in the neighborhood of the same name needed a musical group. The director turned to his friend, Kader “Barmo” Balla, a young Tuareg guitarist. Along with the school director Elhadji Gondji and principal Mohamed Aïttoc, the three composed a song for the competition. They selected a group of girls, all around the ages of 10 and 11, to form the choral group and present the song.

Their composition, titled “Oyiwane” (“Greetings to Everyone”), won first prize. Seraji Madobi, a Nigerian producer, heard the group, and invited them to record an album. Six members of the troupe traveled to Northern Nigeria and performed a number of the songs that would become their debut release. The following year, the small boutique label Hasada (known for their seminal work with Mamman Sani Abdoulaye) released a limited edition cassette.

The compositions mixed traditional folksongs and new creations, all with fundamental lyrical messages, praising culture, but emphasizing importance of education. Barmo was relatively new to the guitar, and the guitar was very new to Niger, so he turned to Malian folklore for inspiration. Barmo played simple melodic accompaniment to mirror the vocal line, creating an instrumental call and response. The troupe drew inspiration for their percussion from the *tende*, the traditional Tuareg goatskin drum and rhythm.

The group continued to win accolades for their music throughout Niger and were beloved by the state. They competed in the renowned Dan Gourmou music competition, winning the first prize in 1988. Following their success, a number of other school groups created similar guitar/vocal folklore groups (Dagamanet, Tasko d'Agadez, Albichir de Tchirozérine). This

style of music became popular throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, evolving into a genre independent of its “scolaire” origins.

After their release of this cassette, Troupe École Tudu renamed their group Oyiwane. Nana Mallam Garba, one of the original members of the Troupe (and featured on the cassette) left to found Sogha Niger, one of the more popular female led groups in Niger today. Today's Oyiwane is made up of new vocalists, but is still led by Barmo, performing the guitar and composing songs. The group has toured across the African continent and Europe, and continues to perform.

The following translations have been provided by Kader Balla, and adapted into English by Christopher Kirkley. They are approximate summaries of the songs, but should provide some context to the lyrics.

Oyiwane

This song is about the schooling of children in urban and rural areas. The singers call on their parents to enroll their children in school: “The future of the children must be your priority. The must go to school to learn to read and write. A educated child is the future leader. To educate a girl is to teach the nation.” The singers evoke the images of past leaders who have gone to school, and that parents should understand that one day their children will run the state: “Dear parents, register your child at school.”

Hemi Helale

Dedication to a young man who dreams of leaving the village to go in exodus. He crosses the desert to Libya, and spends

many years abroad. His return to the village is celebrated as a monumental event. After a short return, he leaves again, but this time going south to Nigeria, passing through Kano until Zaria.

Arikawat

A song for the orphan. She hates to see when the orphan cries. She wishes him a better future. She asks her guardian to look after his education, his health, and his future. She sings his praises: "Arikawat Yaro, what a little orphan, please take care of him."

Bili Manane

In 1985, Niger suffered a great drought, causing a massive exodus of young people to Libya. This was of great concern to the village. This song is a cry of alarm to the people who have left, calling them to return home. According to tradition, the brave do not leave during difficult times. The girls sing that those who have gone have failed at "achak" or the bravery of tuareg men: "You have left your women and children and your parents, get back to your country. Remember the imzad of Adjo and the tendé. This history will catch up with you in front of the charming women of the Tuareg world."

Medan Niger

This song expresses the joy at the return of winter. The appearance of the first cloud in the sky is the first sign of hope for the imminent arrival of the rain: "We implore God to grant us a joyous fertile winter with much rain, because when all the ponds are full of water, the animals will graze, the farmers will go to the fields, the pastoralists will return to the pasture. This is the time of a feast, by the grace of Allah."

Tiolent

Traditional folksong performed by on the occasion of a wedding ceremony or a popular celebration, announcing the arrival of distinguished guests. The singers invites everyone to express their joy by dance and sing the tendé and listen to the imzad.

Nikini Dada

A song of unity and belonging. The singers invite all the races of Niger to unite: "We are indivisible, we all belong to the Nigerien nation. We who are here and those who have gone before us, together are one people. Avoid quarrels and conflict and create our dear country of Niger."

Lae-Lae

A song to encourage the caravaneer. The women evoke the difficulties the caravan encounters while crossing the Sahara: "The caravaneers are the natives of the Sahara. They have no modern means to guide them, but they cross the desert. They travel as far as Bilma to search for dates and salt and their return is an event in the village. The brave men with achak have arrived. Applaud and cheer their return."

Cover Photo

Top row (left to right): Hamissa Wahil, Haoua Magaji, Aichatou Aboubakar, Mariama Almoctar, Nana Mallam Garba, Tambche Aboubakar, Elhadji Gondji

Bottom row (left to right): Kader Balla Barmo, Fatima Boukar, Mina Magas, Rabi Soumeila, Hadiza Aboubakar, Aichatou Bagnou, Haoua Adamou

Cassette provided by Djadjé, Grand Marché, Niamey Niger
Original released by Hasada, 1985
Re-released by Sahel Sounds & Imouhar Productions
Mastered by Timothy Stollenwerk
SS-047