

In the creative realm of the Kel Tamasheq, also known as the Tuareg, the lines between music and politics not only vacillate but often meld and dissolve altogether until they are as hazy as flickering mirages on the desert horizon. As exemplified by now-popular, internationally acclaimed performers such as Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, Bombino, and Mdou Moctar, the “ishumar” movement, which is both a musical genre and historically a mode of decolonial praxis, is the most potent example of this fluid intermingling. This paper examines the role of exile in the decolonial imagination of the ishumar and demonstrates the ways in which they have developed an idiosyncratic strategy that leverages movement across the desert—stasis, exile, and return—as a forum for formulating a vision of Indigenous sovereignty that challenges the constraints of both colonial and postcolonial configurations of power. Through a close investigation of historical poems, songs, and chronicles of revolt, the research traces a renegade shift that occurred in the Kel Tamasheq social milieu in the 1960s. This shift, while in some ways connected to the insurgences of the early 1900s, more importantly, allowed for artistry and militancy to coalesce, which in turn radically disrupted traditional class distinctions and social roles. The paper argues that the ishumar, through their music and poetry, fashioned a new playbook of resistance that transcended the political liberation ideals of the early twentieth century and pivoted to a more capacious philosophy of freedom, cultural continuance, and contemporary relevance.

*Keywords:* Ishumar, Tuareg, guitar music, exile, anticolonialism