



## Music Review: Terakaft - *Akh Issudar*

Author: [Richard Marcus](#) — Published: [Sep 15, 2009 at 6:24 am](#)

I've never seen a desert, save for on film, let alone set foot in one, so have no understanding at all of what life in that environment would be like. Sure, I have a vivid imagination, and looking at the endless vistas of sand under an unremitting sun I get the general idea. However, I seriously doubt anybody who hasn't lived with those conditions for an extended period of time can ever fully appreciate or understand what it's really all about. Even if I were ever to spend any time in the desert it would only be as a tourist not someone who lives there without the escape clause of coming back to a life where sand isn't everywhere and water is usually no further away than the nearest faucet.



The Tuareg people of the Northern Sahara desert have been there for as long as anybody can remember - which means dating back prior to Mohamed and the coming of Islam. Their traditional territory spanned the caravan routes from the Mediterranean Sea in the north which carried trade goods and produce from the port to countries in land.. Mainly herds people, they would move with their flocks of goats and camels from water source to water source in a perpetual cycle of the seasons. However with the discovery of Africa and the eventual break up of the land into countries - primarily Algeria, Mali, and Niger - their mobility and land have been restricted. Since the 1960s there have been three armed uprisings among the Tuareg because of persecution and loss of territory, with the most recent still simmering in Mali.

It was the second generation of rebels, those who fought in the uprisings in the middle of the 1980s, who began the musical rebellion which brought the Tuareg and their music into the public eye. The most famous of these groups is [Tinariwen](#) who were formed in 1982 but spent the first seventeen years of their existence underground as their music was banned by the Algerian and Malian authorities because of its political nature. Two of the original members of Tinariwen, Kedou ag Ossad (guitar and vocals) and Liya Ag Ablil (guitar, and vocals), have joined forces with Sanou Ag Ahmed (guitar and vocals) and Rhissa Ag Ogham (bass and vocals) to form [Terakaft](#), which gave its first concert in 2007 at the now famous [Festival Au Desert](#) in Mali, and recorded their first album, *Bismilla (The Bko Sessions)* later that year.

Having been a fan of Tinariwen for a few years now, I was very excited to stumble upon Terakaft's second release, [Akh Issudar](#), at their label's, [World Village Music](#), website while preparing another review. Released almost a year ago in October of 2008, this disc will come as something of a surprise to those expecting all Tuareg music to sound alike. While there are some similarities in sound between

Tinariwen and Terakaft (Tinariwen's leader Ibrahim Ag Alhabib contributed a song - "Islegh Teghram" - to *Akh Issudar*), and their songs share the same concerns and address the same themes, you're not liable to mistake one for the other any time soon. The potency and the power are the same, as is the obvious urgency of their message, it's the manner of its delivery that's different.



If Tinariwen are the rallying cry that travels across the desert like a wind, than Terakaft are the whisper spoken around a campfire passed by word of mouth from encampment to encampment. For those of us who don't speak Tamashek, the language of the Tuareg, we might not understand the specifics of the messages being given in each song, but that doesn't prevent us from forming an overall impression. Listening to the songs you can't help but form images in your head of the desert they and their people have walked through for centuries. You

may not be able to understand what they are singing about, but you can't help but feel how important it is to them.

Listening to Terakaft I hear a sound that echoes with the resonance of the wide open spaces around them and the high vault of the sky above them. It's not necessarily a pretty or pleasant sound either, for there's nothing particularly attractive about emptiness. Sure it implies freedom and quiet, but it also suggests a barren and stark environment where life is harsh and difficult. That they love their land and take pride in who they are is obvious through the sounds of their voice ringing in harmony, yet they don't project any illusions about their reality either.

While each of the fourteen songs comes with a brief description of its theme, the lyrics supplied in the booklet accompanying the CD are all in their original Tamashek. For example the title song of the disc, "Akh Issudar" has a brief statement telling us the Tuareg have a saying; "Aman iman, akh issudar": Water is life, milk is survival". Other songs are accompanied by what I can only assume are quotes from their lyrics like: "The desert is my country, I love it and I will never divide it" ("Tenere Wer Tat Zinchegh"), or, "The roads are cut off, and the borders closed. It's forbidden to travel" ("Haran Bardan"), and "My soul burns while my people are under the yoke." ("Arghane Manine"), which tell you all you need to know in order to understand what they are about.

Terakaft were supposed to be touring the Unites States in the next little while, but have unexpectedly cancelled. When I heard that piece of news I didn't think twice, stuff like that happens all the time in the music industry. However after listening to this disc, and knowing that the Tuareg rose up again this year in Mali and Niger and some fighting is still ongoing [in Mali](#), I have to wonder what's become of the band members. Francois Bereron, the French director of the film [Desert Rebels](#), a documentary about Tuareg and French musicians playing together, was arrested and jailed for six month when he went to Niger in 2007, as was one of the people interviewed in his movie on suspicion that they were sympathetic to the rebels. Terakaft are not only sympathetic with the rebels, but two of its members

took part in the armed uprisings in the 1980s and their music is overtly political in a way that Tinariwen's isn't. There's also the fact that they aren't as well known on the world stage as their compatriots, so could possibly disappear without there being too much fuss made about it internationally.

I hope I'm wrong and nothing has happened to any of these men who make such glorious music. However, when you love something as much as they love their people and their land, and are as obvious about it as these men are, there are those who will see you as a threat and act accordingly. When you listen to the music of Terakaft on their CD *Akh Issudar* the depth of their passion for their subject is obvious. Unfortunately for them what they sing about is a land without borders and a people who aren't defined by a state, and that's not welcomed in the twenty-first century.

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