

Musicking Tradition in Place:
Participation, Values, and Banks in Bamiléké Territory

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a linguistic and musical ethnography of Bamiléké people in Bangangté, a town in Cameroon where many musical groups are also rotating credit associations. These “musical banks” met each week to address financial matters and rehearse their chosen genre. I argue that the musicking of musical banks is a key site for creating and reproducing solidarity and moral values about kinship, place, “tradition,” and death. I bridge a theoretical gap between poetics, performance, and ideology in linguistic anthropology and the participation approach in musical anthropology.

My focus throughout is on the musical bankers’ major concerns, what people do with musical banks, and how these practices address the major concerns – all with special emphasis on music and language as forms of social action. I analyze song recorded at re-

hearsals, and discuss public appearances at funerals. I also use metadiscursive data drawn from a wide range of informal events.

“Traditional/modern” discourse shapes a lot of what musical bankers do and I discuss these terms as power-laden tropes, not analytic concepts. Positioning themselves in the semiotics of these tropes required considerable uncertainty and subtlety in choosing and negotiating particular signs which may index both “tradition” and “the modern” in contradictory ways.

Most of what musical banks do concerns funerals, which means that confronting the reality of death undergirds the musicking and solidarity of members. Musicking helps the bankers manage and accept the intensity of death and of their solidarity within the banks.

Musical bankers’ song relies heavily on inherited personal names, which index matrilineal and villages. They provide a crucial resource for the formal structuring of song, and constitute a major piece of the puzzle of what makes this musicking emotionally rich. Understanding why the musical bankers felt strongly about what they did requires appreciating the importance of place. The positive values many musical bankers associated with “tradition” were, in fact, rooted in the power and beauty of villages. It is specifically *the land* which my Bamiléké consultants understood to be essential for the continuation of their moral values.

chapter one

introduction

This dissertation is a linguistic and musical ethnography of musical groups in Bangté, a town in the Grassfields of Cameroon. An unusual feature of life in the Grassfields is that many musical groups are also rotating credit associations. I went there to study language and music as practiced by members of the Bamiléké ethnicity, but did not notice the connection with money until I was already several months into field work. These groups, which I call “musical banks,” met each week to address financial matters. Once this is accomplished, they would close their books and bring out musical instruments and rehearse.

I argue that the musicking of musical banks is, for their members, a key site for creating and reproducing solidarity and moral values about kinship, place, “tradition,” and death. My focus is on some of the members’ major concerns, what they do with musical banks, and how these practices address the major concerns – all with special emphasis on music and language as forms of social action. My principal research site was rehearsals and I analyze song recorded at rehearsals. I also participated at public appearances and received musical training and language training in groups of two to five. I discuss some of these events, as well.

In the chapters to come, it will become evident that these themes – kinship, place, “tradition,” and death – are co-constitutive, not modular elements to be dealt with in discrete sequence. At the root, this dissertation is about some people (musical bankers in Bangangté) participating in discourses about these themes. Discourse – defined appropriately broadly as “processual, real-time, event-bound social action” (Silverstein 2005a:7) – includes musicking and talking.¹ I will pay special attention to how feeling or emotion structures this participation and comes to be structured by discourse, understood semiotically.

participation

The term “participation” is fertile for uniting the concerns of musical anthropologists with those of linguistic anthropologists. This is not the place for a full-length exegesis, but briefly: students of language run the risk of under-appreciating the roles of sound and bodily movement in language, resulting in misleading characterizations of language as primarily psychological, and of psychology as independent of sound and body. Students of music run the risk of seeing language as nothing more than a semantico-referential tool, whereas language is actually part of social worlds of sound and bodily movement which constitute the domain “music,” however it may be defined by research subjects or researchers. Perceptive students of both music and language have been at pains to demonstrate that it is quite unclear where to draw the line between these two modalities, and that language is deeply embodied. My goal is to begin to lay out what it would mean for speaking and signing to be central to musical anthropology and for musicking to be central to linguistic anthropology by uniting them under a single analytic framework. In the process, I hope to show that this would be a positive development.

A participation approach to musicking is closely associated with Steven Feld and Charles Keil (see Keil and Feld 1994). There has been little scholarly discussion, though, of the fact that their understanding of participation seems to have two parts. By unpacking it here, I hope to (1) clarify some issues which have been unclear, (2) indicate how the participation approach is compatible with the phenomenology of musicking (a connection which is rarely more than hinted at in the scholarly literature), and (3) open a door to understanding music and language as a unified field in a way which will be inviting to both students of language as social action and of music.

Many previous attempts to bring music and language together have been accurate and insightful, but failed to convince large numbers of scholars to think differently. Either they focused so heavily on sonic form, cognition, or physiology that social processes were positioned as mere epiphenomena of the former if they have been dealt with at all: or they have failed to adequately address the flawed view of language as a domain of rational proposition, truth-values, abstract grammatical “rules,” and little else – also known as the referential ideology of language (see, e.g., Condon 1986, Friedrich 1986, Hill 1998, Jakobson 1987 [1960], Rumsey 1990, Silverstein 1979, Tannen 2007 [1989], Woodbury 1993) – thereby leaving intact the very apparatus which makes music and language *seem* to be essentially distinct modalities with some marginal, occasional, and unimportant convergences. The referential ideology of language is a stumbling block for scholars regardless of disciplinary allegiance.

In the work of Feld and Keil, participation, first of all, refers simply to what people are doing during musical events: “actively contributing to the sound and motion of a musical event through dancing, singing, clapping, and playing musical instruments” (Turino

2008:28). However, more elusively, they also refer to a “full” or “feelingful” participation – perhaps even “evaluative participation” or “euparticipation” – which seems to admit of degrees. Feld characterizes it as “a positive physical and emotional *attachment*” (1994 [1988]:111, my emphasis). Or, in Keil’s words: “participation is the opposite of alienation from nature, from society, from the body, from labor” (1994 [1987]:98). It is a deep,² subjective, polysemous engagement with sounds and movement, one’s own body and mind, one’s surroundings, and one’s co-participants.

Edward Schieffelin’s relatively recent theoretical formulation of performance includes a related phenomenon he labels *emergence*: “an irreducible change in quality of experience or situation of the participants that comes about when the performance ‘works’. It...cannot be reduced to any of its means (text, structure, or symbolic manipulation) by themselves” (1996:64). This reads very much like a definition of participation from Feld or Keil, so I borrow the term and will, henceforth, refer to the second type of participation as *emergent participation*. With this distinction made, one is in a position to clarify, if necessary, whether empirically observable practices are at issue (simple participation, defined above in Turino’s words) or whether subjective experiences which cannot be directly observed are at issue (emergent participation). More importantly, one is positioned to address questions of when or whether simple participation and emergent participation do or do not produce one another. Opening this up will facilitate asking ever more revealing social questions about participants’ judgments about which musical events were more or less subjectively satisfying.

Emergent participation, in Keil’s original formulation (1994 [1987]) and updates (1995, 2002) resonates with Blacking’s view of music as a “primary modeling system” –

something without which one could not exercise all one's human capacities (1995 [1984]) – and his evaluative distinction “between music that is occasional and music that enhances human consciousness, music that is simply for having and music that is for being” (1973:50). Emergent participation also refers to musicking that has at least the potential to result in “peak experiences” characterized by suspension of the feeling of one's self as separate from what one does or from other participants, also known as “flow” (see Csikszentmihalyi 1991, Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988).

Too, there is a compatibility with Steven Friedson's *musical experience*. In both of his books (1996, 2009), but explicitly in *Dancing Prophets* (1996:6), he points out that some analyses of musicking may brilliantly show what, and how, musical practices index, diagram,³ or otherwise metadiscursively “stand for” something. However, they may not discuss at all the possibility that there is anything *unique* to participatory *experiences*. This can give the impression that *nothing* is going on in musicking *except* “standing for.” He makes a phenomenological argument that there is something else going on, something “primary,” something present, that is not semiotic, strictly speaking.⁴

It is a unique experience in which “performers and listeners are ‘tuned-in’ to one another, are living together through the same flux, are growing older together while the musical process lasts.” Within this performed auditory field, an intersubjective objectivity becomes possible that binds people together in a commonality of experiential space and time (Friedson 2003:184, quoting Schutz [1964:174-5]).

He further argues that this presence/experience is crucial to ritual (and therefore clinical and social) efficacy, which means that it should be of great importance to anthropology and ethnomusicology. However, presence has been virtually ignored in studies of ritual and possession (2009:8). I intend emergent participation to theorize what Friedson is discussing, elaborating an important connection between participation and phenomenology which Feld and some of his students have discussed (see, e.g., Feld 1994 [1988], Feld

and Fox 1994, Feld et al. 2004, Porcello 2003). Anthropology and ethnomusicology would benefit from making this a more widespread and sustained conversation (also see Armstrong 1971). I return to the social efficacy of musical experience several times in this dissertation as it relates to musical bankers in Bangangté.

Keil and Feld have, among other things, attempted to explain how emergent participation can happen. They give a three-fold answer; first, “good” musicking always has a “groove,” which is to say that participants, in locally particular ways, implicitly work out patterns of (1) micro-timing in note placement which are importantly not perfectly, mechanically regular subdivisions of time: and (2) timbre. Keil has called these micro-patterns “participatory discrepancies” (1994 [1987], 1995).

The second part of the explanation is that, in cases of relatively high engagement, musicking is “iconically linked to the broader cultural production of local identity and indexically linked to contexts and occasions of community participation” (Feld 1994:269). It is in tight, complex relationship to ideologies of sociality which influence the participants. Talk about musicking glosses this in some local variant of “good music.” In other words, what people usually call good or successful music(king) is a semiosis of socially negotiated moral values. Indeed, it must be in order for emergent participation to occur.

Peircean semiotics has become core theory in linguistic anthropology and has many proponents in the anthropology of music. It provides a means to precisely describe the ways people inter-relate events, experiences, and objects they encounter, thereby unpacking concepts like “connect,” “mean,” “connote,” “evoke,” and “relate.” Semiotics also makes socially sophisticated accounts of emotional and bodily habits and experiences possible (Becker and Becker 1981, Blacking 1981, Daniel 1996, Lee and Urban 1989,

Mertz and Parmentier 1985, Ochs 1992, Singer 1980, Turino 1999), which is vital for understanding performance, poetry, music, and dance (Becker 2004, Blacking 1977b, Friedson 1996, 2009, Pierce 1987).

Feld calls the combination of the first two parts of their explanation – groove and this complex, ideologized semiosis – “stylization.” Stylization includes what (linguistic) anthropologists of performance mean by heightening, richness, intensity, or distillation (see Bauman 1977:43-4, Feld 1994 [1984]:90, Fox 2004:286, Keil 1994 [1985]:202). Formally, it means relatively rigid structuring, relatively more pattern and predictability, and loading with multiple levels of semiosis. Stylization integrates, however, attention to formal “heightening” with attention to ideology, and places the focus on the dialectical relationship between form and sociality. As Turino (2008) might put it, relatively highly stylized practice is relatively dense with indexical and iconic signs. Furthermore, stylization – which includes patterns of pitch, rhythm, and coordination of body movements – is central, continual, and crucial in language, not marginal or occasional. Language grooves, too (Erickson 2003). This indicates that music and language are best viewed as a singular field characterized by people moving and sounding together in time. Since musical and linguistic practice are always already social, to participate in extremely feelingful sounding or moving together in time is to enact one’s sense of self, of relationships, and of history in a markedly comprehensive fashion.

Ethnomusicology and the anthropology of music began with the argument that to answer even seemingly “pure” formal questions about musical sound or notation requires (1) some ethnographic or archival research and (2) understanding what “doing music” entails and presupposes – what it indexes (see Silverstein 1976, 2003 [1996]) – in a chosen

community of practice; this has remained basic and uncontroversial (e.g., Becker 1979, Blacking 1973, Jones 1959, McClary 1991, Merriam 1964, Nketia 1974, Roseman 1991, Seeger 1987, Seeger 1977, Stone 1982, Turino 1990, Walser 1993, Waterman 1990). What makes the legacy of Feld and Keil – in conjunction with Christopher Small (see 1996 [1977], 1998) – unique is how radically they have understood and pushed their conviction that there is no music, only musicking. It follows that the reality of people acting (sounding, thinking, moving) needs to be first and last, front and center, in the study of music (Feld and Keil 1994, Keil 2002). Recent semiotically and ideologically oriented linguistic anthropology is geared towards making people and power similarly primary in the study of talk, signing, and writing. I have attempted to integrate these two bodies of research in this dissertation.

performance

So far, I have outlined two components of the account Feld and Keil give of the conditions of possibility of emergent participation. The third component of the answer to the question of what makes emergent participation possible is “performance.” Performance, as an analytic term, uncontroversially pertains to both linguistic and musical anthropology, and helps us understand the social conditions of possibility for stylized social action, which is necessarily markedly special and significant for participants. High stylization can only occur in an appropriate situation because “emergence is what happens *by virtue of performance*” (Schieffelin 1996:64). Emergent participation requires stylization; stylization requires a performance situation. It is during performance that emergent participation is not only permissible, but potentially preferred.

Following the dominant theoretical perspective in linguistic anthropology (see Bauman 1977, 1993, Bloch 1974, Briggs and Bauman 1992, Fox 2004, Irvine 1989, Kuipers 1990, Tambiah 1979, Urban 1985), “performance,” in this dissertation, refers to a metasemiotic frame⁵ which is (1) ideologized as “special” in locally particular ways and (2) customarily set-off from discourse types and tokens ideologized as “normal” or “plain” (Bauman and Briggs 1990:73). Accordingly, people attending performances tend to expect that what performers do will be highly stylized (i.e., that performers are good at musicking, pretending, or orating, etc). Stylization is a concentration of emotionally loaded and bodily compelling, relatively non-arbitrary signs (icons and indexes). This makes performances and what happens during them extremely influential in shaping participants’ ideas, thoughts, feelings, actions, and assumptions even after the performance frame has closed: i.e., after the performance is over (Bauman and Briggs 1990:69).

Two papers by Edward Schieffelin and a less widely cited one by Charles Briggs, together, lend additional precision and insight to our understanding of what goes on during performance – specifically in reference to the “influence” of performances on participants, also known as the power or authority of performance (e.g., Tambiah 1979). Schieffelin writes that “through performance, meanings are formulated in a social rather than cognitive [read, ‘explicit, denotative’] space, and the participants are engaged with the symbols in the interactional creation of a performance reality” (1985:707). (It is necessary to know that he does not use “symbol” in the restricted, Peircean sense of a conventional, unmotivated, semantic sign. He is referring to all semiotic modes in this paper, the Peircean range [icons, indexes, symbols, rhemes, dicents, and arguments].) This state-

ment gives some hint as to the stakes of semiosis when it is viewed socially. Schieffelin continues instructively:

This, however, is not merely a matter of communication of information. Performance does not construct⁶ [read, “diagram or index”] a symbolic reality in the manner of presenting an argument, description, or commentary. Rather, it does so by socially constructing [read “framing”] a situation in which the participants experience symbolic meanings as part of the process of what they are already doing (1985:709).

Lest we make the mistake of viewing the “exchange” of signs as but the vehicle of social interaction, merely descriptions of what actually goes on, Schieffelin reminds us that the semiosis of performance actually diagrams or indexes an entire way of being which participants can (and often do) attempt to find or effect in other, non-performance contexts – often with considerable success (e.g., Askew 2002, Kratz 1994, Kuipers 1990, Turino 1999). The aspects of a performance most readily categorizable as language may include explicit arguments, descriptions, or commentaries, or they may not. They may or may not contribute to the non-explicit, diagrammatic or indexical effects of the performance through affective or ideological richness. Regardless of whether or not it is linguistically mediated, participants experience this diagram or index of a potential reality as being inherent in, or an aspect of, the highly stylized sounding or moving and its framing devices. In semiotic terms, this is to say that the performance indexes or diagrams negotiated moral values about sociality (Schieffelin’s “symbolic reality”) *in a dicent or rhematic manner.*⁷

Therefore, for deeply engaged participants, the experience of the performance is striking and undismissably evocative of their speculations or experiences of the reality or ideal diagrammed or indexed by the performance. Semiotic theory has sometimes been misinterpreted as apolitical and abstract, but in fact, it is well suited to the social or psychological analysis of people’s most pressing commitments, concerns, and identifica-

tions; semiosis is basic to the creation of subjectivities and power relations (Lee and Urban 1989, Mertz 2007, Mertz and Parmentier 1985, Singer 1980) and, therefore, is a high stakes game.

Performance, therefore, presents a kind of learning opportunity insofar as participants may exit the performance frame somewhat changed by the experience of confronting the emotionally loaded and bodily compelling rhematic or dicent indexing and diagramming of moral values about sociality (or “symbolic” reality). This learning can occur even if it is never explicitly described. In a chapter concerning the performance of healing among the Warao in Venezuela, Briggs argues that patients and clients of healers have relatively little grasp of the denotative content of healing ritual. However, he demonstrates that their non-denotatively explicit, socio-semiotically rich metapragmatic awareness, which emerges from engagement with the curer’s performance, is high enough for them to participate effectively in local situations. Briggs demonstrates that it is falsely reductive to:

suggest that only discursive processes...that can be expressed explicitly...*build awareness* of discursive properties and processes. The result is not only to privilege denotation, but also to assume that genuine reflexivity is predicated on the central role of the individual subjects who enter the scene fully formed and clearly defined and who shape but are not shaped by the discourse (1996:219, my emphasis).

Schieffelin says much the same thing, making it clear that there is more to “meaning” than denotation. Performances:

fundamentally aim to create or evoke an imaginative reality, a sense of presence, among the participants, in which their awareness becomes (for a time) situated away from the activities of everyday life. Participants undergo a heightening and intensification of experience, an altered awareness of their situation (1996:60).

For him (and Briggs) this sense of presence (or experience of rhematic indexicality and iconicity as part of the process of performance) is an awareness brought about by stepping into a special situation, the performance frame.⁸ To do so is intense and impressive.

Indeed, “performative authority [i.e., the influence or power of performance] is a fundamental condition of *emergence*....It is precisely the emergence of realities in performance and their movement into the domain of social historical events which constitutes the movement of ritual or symbolic efficacy into the human world” (Schieffelin 1996:81). Since emergent participation is likely to occur during performance, and marked emotional experiences accompany emergent participation, performance is doubly impressive and influential. Therefore, the striking and undismissible evocation of the reality or ideal the performance diagrams or indexes is quite likely to be taken seriously and affect participants’ actions outside performance frames.

Briggs’ and Schieffelin’s approaches must be distinguished from other approaches which look at indexical and iconic signs in performance as “duping” participants into uncritical, unknowing acceptance of some interested position, some hegemony. While their analyses do not preclude this as a potential outcome, they demonstrate that it is not a necessary outcome and that there is such a thing as local comprehension and criticism of the workings of relatively non-arbitrary signs (see Friedrich 1979). Indeed, they are arguing that such semiosis provides tools for reasoning and contemplation, despite the fact that its taking a non-denotatively explicit form is counter-intuitive when the referential ideology of language is hegemonic (see, e.g., Hill 1998, Rumsey 1990, Silverstein 1979).

I will argue in the following chapters that my consultants indexed moral values about “tradition,” kinship, solidarity, and death in performance. Doing this is socially potent discourse in Bangangté and entails and presupposes both explicit talk about “tradition,” and projects to promote it. Bankers’ musicking as metasemiotics of “tradition” is not just a presupposing representation of social action, but is entailing social action itself.

In my dissertation, I explore and theorize rehearsals. Making them an ethnographic site has implications which require clarification of the conceptual boundaries of performance. I do not use “performance” to refer to the end-point-event of a series of previous events known as “rehearsals,” end-point-events which both “performers” and “audience” attend, rehearsals having only “performers” in attendance. Rehearsals are performances. Bauman defined performance as “a metacommunicative [which I gloss as ‘metasemiotic’] frame, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative [read ‘semiotic’] competence” (1993:182). This implies that being audited in realtime is among the defining features of performance. Performances, therefore, entail the participant roles “performer” and “auditor (or audience-member)” and each has its own special task. Without realtime auditing, there can be no performance. It is one way to distinguish performance from text. On purely theoretical grounds, then, we could reasonably call the “performance” frame the “([meta]semiotic audit)” frame.

Judith Irvine (1996) cautions, though, against assuming that different participant roles are necessarily occupied by different individuals, and that an individual can occupy only one of them at a time. While a separation of “performer” role and “audience-member” role across different individuals is a feature of some performances, it is not a necessary condition of performance itself. Performers hold *each other* accountable for displays of semiotic competence: i.e., they are responsible to each other as well as to non-performing auditors for competence. This means that they are auditors, as well. The same individuals are both auditor and performer at the same time, in such cases.

Most of the musical banks' rehearsals were performances at which all participants occupied both roles simultaneously and continuously. Only occasionally was there anyone in attendance at a rehearsal who audited without performing. What distinguishes the participant role structures of rehearsal performances from that of public performances (such as funerals) is (1) the higher number of non-performing auditors at public performances, and (2) the inclusion of deceased people among the auditors at public performances: *not* whether the auditor role is filled. This role is always filled by someone, or the frame would not be a performance. Even a solitary musicker is performing so long as she or he is holding her- or him- self responsible for semiotic competence.

Rehearsals can also be distinguished by the fact that they presuppose and entail public appearances in the future. They are presupposing in that there is a repeated return to discourse about the public appearances throughout the rehearsals. They entail the latter because, what the groups do in public is, to a certain extent, what they previously rehearsed. More on this temporal trajectory below.

"participatory performance"

Musical bankers' performances (rehearsals and public) adhere to many traits of what Thomas Turino calls "participatory music" (2000:48, 2008:59). In consultation with some of his graduate students (2008:36), he developed this and three other theoretical terms which, he argues, meet the important theoretical goals of explaining large amounts of data and uniting salient aspects of them into one flexible framework. He calls them musical fields; they are "participatory performance," "presentational performance," "high fidelity recording," and "studio audio art recording" (summarized, 2008:90-1).

Turino noticed that some features of musical form tend to correlate with some features of performance practice and some aspects of musical metadiscourse about moral values and social structures. In participatory performance, everyone participates and there are no non-performing auditors. His consultants' musicking in rural Zimbabwe provides a case in point (see Turino 2008), as do some kinds of healing ritual in Malawi (see Friedson 2003), numerous contexts in Niger (see Garba 2004), and the rehearsals and funerals of the Bamiléké of Bangangté. Turino's musical fields motivate patterns which students of music have noticed in diverse ethnographic situations. He argues that there is a cross-cultural tendency for correlation between performances at which there are no or few non-performers, a range of formal elements, and a robust local discourse valuing egalitarianism. I observed all of these during my field work. In chapters three and four, I will describe and expand upon the significance of this formal and ideological complex for my consultants.

The wide applicability of Turino's musical fields indicates that the relative non-arbitrariness of some signs can lead to some cross-cultural convergence of interpretation. Nevertheless, such large-scale patterns do not imply that the interpretant of a sign can ever be self-evident: i.e., what a sign stands for to someone cannot be predicted from the sign's form. The validity of the musical fields is not a step towards a social science which develops predictive laws (see Graeber 2001:53 and *passim*). Therefore, ethnographic detail is still necessary to understand particular relations of sound, movement, and ideology.

The public appearances the musical banks' *orchestres* made may have had some non-performing participants, but they were few in number, and the full participation of everyone in the performance space was normative and commonplace. Discourse promot-

ing “tradition” included a critique of the inequalities musical bankers associated with “the modern,” such as vast differences in wealth due to capitalism, and vast differences in autonomy and rights due to (neo)colonialism and institutionalized racism. However, musical metasemiosis left some axes of power unchallenged; little was done to index or diagram gender-equality or age-equality, for example. The formal features of “traditional” Bamiléké musicking in Bangangté I discuss in chapter three.

participating in language

Linguistic anthropology encourages us to see language as participatory, too. Indeed, to answer even seemingly “pure” formal questions about linguistic sound or notation usually requires (1) some ethnographic or archival research and (2) understanding what talk, writing, or gesture as types entail and presuppose in a chosen community of practice. A participatory approach to language means grasping the ways language is embodied and feelingful, how forms, codes, and patterns are subjectively significant to people. Three non-anthropologists presaged this.

Under the rubric of the poetic function, Jakobson explored how Saussure’s axes of combination and selection are subjectively significant to speakers (Jakobson 1987 [1960], 1987 [1961]) because speakers, listeners, signers, and writers (co-)create parallelism, repetition, or figuration through (co-)participation. Anthropologists have used his ideas to deepen our understanding of how the poetic function is socially significant (e.g., Becker 1984, Caton 1990, Feld 1990 [1982], Friedrich 1986, Hymes 1965, Johnstone 1994, Mannheim 1986, 1998, Tedlock 1983, Tedlock and Tedlock 1985, Urban 1985, 1991, Woodbury 1987). More recently, linguistic anthropologists have emphasized Jakobson’s argument that “any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry...would be a

delusive oversimplification” (1980:84-5). They have called attention to how “prose” or “regular” talk is poetic, too, arguing that it is just as normal and basic in language to find the principle of equivalence in the axis of combination as in the axis of selection.⁹ Social actors use the poetic function to negotiate status, referential meaning, solidarity, and goals in realtime (e.g., Agha 2007, Erickson 2003, Fox 2004, Friedrich 1986, Hill 2000, Johnstone 1994, Lempert 2008, Silverstein 1984, 1993, 2004, 2005b). Indeed, Tannen writes that repetition “is the central linguistic meaning-making strategy” (2007 [1989]:101).

Bakhtin’s concepts of “voice” and “heteroglossia” allow linguistic anthropologists to analyze the subjectivity of speech and writing above the level of syllables, strophes, stanzas, and clauses. He wrote that:

language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word...but also – and for us this is the essential point – into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, ‘professional’ and ‘generic’ languages, languages of generations and so forth (1981:271-2).

Talking, signing, and writing, then, index salient social positions through large sociopoetic units – from single-word tropes right up to multi-“paragraph” sections – which can be formally distinguished as part of the stylistic repertoire of the discourse under analysis. That numerous such “voices” can be animated over the course of a relatively short bit of text or talk (to say nothing of a longer one, like some narratives) is what leads to the Bakhtinian characterization of language as “heteroglossic,” or “*double-voiced*...it serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions” (Bakhtin 1981:324). To analyze these voices and their inter-relatedness is to construct a partial model of participants’ (linguistic[ally mediated]) ideologies of their social situations. This provides a way to connect poetics to politics, sociality, and power (see Hill

1985, 1993, 1995, Irvine 1990, Pujolar 2001, Samuels 2004, Trawick 1988, Woolard 1998b).

A third crucial component in a participatory approach in linguistic anthropology is Peircean semiotics. Unlike in Saussurean and post-Saussurean structuralisms, there is no abstract, independently existing system or structure of signification in Peirce. Rather, human action and psychology remain at the core of the model, which means that his framework reveals both (1) that the *apparent* autonomy and fixity of systems or structures is actually an ideological effect of human action, and (2) that systems or structures can appear autonomous and fixed for understandable sociocognitive reasons (Parmentier 1985b, Urban 1991). This theoretical stance is consistent with the observation that people's moral values are neither randomly distributed nor entirely of their own choosing, and affect and are affected by human actions which, in turn, are historically consequential. Such a perspective facilitates resolving the problems of slipping back and forth between either completely discounting agency or championing heroic individualism.

Anthropological legacies of Jakobson, Bakhtin, and Peirce suggest that, even beyond the obviousness of gesture, conversation is actively, bodily, and feelingfully engaging. Much of contemporary linguistic anthropology argues *against* the objectification and reification of language "as structure removed from human communicative action" (Judith Irvine, personal communication). The sub-disciplinary conditions are ripe for central focus on "participation." Charles and Marjorie Harness Goodwin write that:

a comprehensive study of participation requires an analytic framework that includes...the forms of embodiment and social organization through which multiple parties build the actions implicated in a strip of talk in concert with each other...By lodging participation in situated activities it is possible to investigate how both speakers and hearers as fully embodied actors and the detailed organization of the talk in progress are integrated into a common course of action (2004:223).

The musical bankers were co-creating value-laden actions implicated in talk; the discourses I analyze in most detail being musical, the participants' bodily involvement in multiply indexical actions was all the more striking to me and all the more profound to them. My own participation in such events made this easier to understand. Conversation Analysis, proper (see, e.g., Sidnell 2007), and the "poetics of prose" literature I cited above as an extension of Jakobson's work, show formally that talk and signing do involve people intellectually, emotionally, and bodily with sufficient depth that emergent participation must bear on the social analysis of language, not only of music. While I do not micro-analyze conversation, such work is foundational for understanding how and why the musical bankers' engagement with such sociolinguistic matters as explicit metapragmatics about code-choice (chapters three and four), use of personal names (chapter five), and the poetics of song (chapter five) was compelling and feelingful for them.

What I do in this dissertation is view musical and spoken (meta)discourse as amenable to unified analysis. I do not separate, for example, code-choice, participatory discrepancies, and use of tropes on principle; I start with the idea that musicking, speech, (meta)pragmatics, and (meta)discourse all productively overlap as (meta)semiotic modalities. This does not mean I am ignorant of the disciplinary histories or metaphoric limits of the theoretical terms I use, but rather that studies of language inform my thinking about musicking and studies of musicking inform my thinking about language.

My approach builds on work originating in anthropology and ethnomusicology (e.g., Basso 1985, Erickson 2003, Feld 1994 [1984], Feld and Fox 1994, Feld et al. 2004, Porcello 2002, Samuels 1999, 2004, Stone 1982, 1986, 1988, Urban 1991, 1994) which shows that analysis of "talk about" some domain does not call for an understanding of

language as the pre-eminent intellectual/rational tool. Rather, language is a fully indexical, tropic, practical, processual embodiment of the interconnectedness of a social field. By the same token, the semiotics of musicking is “about” seemingly separate social domains. The result is a picture of human practice in which language and music are not ultimately separate, but rather a single, unified domain.

ideology

A theoretical concept which plays a major role in bringing participation, semiotics, performance, and embodiment together is language ideologies. Language ideologies “can be ideas, cultural conceptions, processes of meaning construction, implicit evaluations, and explicit comments ‘about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests’” (Spitulnik 1998:164, quoting Irvine [1989:255]), and “through which people interpret linguistic behaviors” (Irvine 1998:52). They bring attention to the fact that, at a basic level, conceptualizations of language are relative and partial. Further, they bring attention to the fact that awareness (denotative and otherwise) can be influenced by forms and formal patterning (see Schieffelin et al. 1998). “We call these conceptual schemes *ideologies* because they are suffused with the political and moral issues pervading the particular sociolinguistic field and are subject to the interests of their bearers’ social position” (Irvine and Gal 2000:35). All of this is semiotic (Irvine 2001, Lucy 1985, Silverstein 2003 [1996]).

These same points apply to conceptions of “the extra-linguistic,” and of other temporal modalities which can index “the linguistic,” such as musicking. Following Webb Keane (2003), I extend the language ideologies literature and speak of musical, semiotic, and sonic ideologies. Again, adherents to the participation approach to music have gener-

ally not worked with the concept of ideology. Linguistic and semiotic anthropologists interested in ideology have generally not worked with the concept of participation. This is despite the fact that both trajectories have drawn on Peirce, Bakhtin, and Jakobson.

While I have “an understanding of ideology as ideational or conceptual, referring to mental phenomena” (Woolard 1998a:5), in my thinking, “it is not necessarily conscious, deliberate, or systematically organized thought, or even thought at all; it is behavioral, practical, prereflective, or structural” (Woolard 1998a:6). The prereflective can *inform* explicit statements, but ideology’s genesis and embeddedness in lived experience are its defining features, for me. From this perspective (originating with Althusser [1971]), ideology is “a particular organization of signifying [or semiotic] practices which goes to constitute human beings as social subjects, and which produces the lived relations by which such subjects are connected to the dominant relations of production in a society” (Eagleton 1991:18). Ideology, subjectivity, and lived relations are in a circular relationship, each one contributing to the formation of the others. Therefore, ideology “must figure as an organizing social force which actively constitutes human subjects at the roots of their lived experience and seeks to equip them with forms of value and belief relevant to their specific social tasks” (Eagleton 1991:222-3).

Kathryn Woolard (1998a), Terry Eagleton (1991:58), and Susan Philips (1998) point out the similarities this usage shares with Williams’ understanding of *hegemony* and *structure of feeling* (see Williams 1977). John and Jean Comaroff, building on Williams, define “hegemony” as:

that order of signs and material practices...that come to be taken for granted as the natural, universal, and true shape of social being...It consists of things that go without saying: things that, being axiomatic, are not normally the subject of explication or argument...Hegemony, then, is that part of a dominant ideology that has been naturalized and...does not appear to be ideological at all (1992:28-9).

Appearing not to be ideological at all means that, while hegemony has everything to do with reproducing power imbalance, the relations of power are rendered nearly invisible. Ideology and hegemony have been useful for bringing analysts' attention to issues of power in, not only language and linguistics, but all corners of social inquiry (e.g., Irvine 1989, Kroskrity 2000, Milroy 2001, Silverstein 1996, Smith 1999, 2004, Stoler 2004). I understand hegemony as a type of ideology: a type so robust and so well hidden that the ripples of dissent and the cracks of inconsistency are almost unnoticeable. However, they are always present (Williams 1977:112-3).

Williams' approach to hegemony (and its legacy) also brings with it a way of seeing "the arts" "both as tradition and as practice...[they] are seen as much more than super-structural expressions...of a formed social and economic structure. On the contrary, they are among the basic processes of the formation itself" (1977:111). Williams reminds readers, here, that hegemony, ideology, and social structures are not "out there" autonomous, essential or underlying, imperviously shaping subjectivities without feedback. He makes it clear that practice – musical, literary, conversational, or otherwise – is a constitutive element of hegemony, which is crucial to understanding the social life of sounding and moving together in time.

structures of feeling

Williams also positions participation in (meta)discourses and hegemony in a way that requires some analytic focus on people's *intimacy* with, or *feeling* for, the forms and frames of discourse. "Hegemony is...a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values... experienced as

practices” (1977:110). Just as Briggs (1996:218-21) criticized the equation of awareness with denotative explicitness, Williams delves into a much broader category of ideological action than explicit statements or conceptualizations, alone, the social impact of meanings and values *as practices* (1977:130). Recognizing the social nature of meaning, Williams calls this broad category “practical consciousness.” Crucially, it is a *consciousness* even though it includes that what Briggs called non-denotatively explicit metapragmatic awareness (1996:220).

In such cases where metapragmatic awareness is non-denotatively explicit, disagreement and ideological clashes, and the struggles of oppressed people against dominant values, policies, or justifications register as “an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency” (Williams 1977:130), but this is still a consciousness or awareness. This kind of awareness need not only be unpleasant; feelings of ease, vitality, comfort, or resolution are also aspects of practical consciousness. “We need, on the one hand, to acknowledge (and welcome)...specific feelings, specific rhythms – and yet to find ways of recognizing their specific kinds of sociality” (133). Hence Williams coining the term *structures of feeling*: “specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought” (132).

I emphasize “structure of feeling” in my analyses for primarily three reasons. First, it recognizes the social significance of feeling and emotion without falling into the trap of trying to sort out “faked” feeling from “authentic” or “real” feeling (see Irvine 1982). Second, it brings into focus the fact that what someone feels in relation to some event has a lot to do with their cultural location: i.e., habitus, social structure, history. Third, structure of feeling reminds us that power is ubiquitous in culture, even when it comes to emo-

tion because Williams is clear that structures of feeling are part of ideology, which he has already established have the Althusserian character I described above. Ideology can oppose or accept dominance, and emotion is taken up into ideology, which means that feeling has potentially multiple relations to power, but is never insensitive to it. Feelingful qualities of social experience, as Williams might call them “do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action” (132).

Emotion and feeling¹⁰ have been compelling in my field work because I repeatedly noticed an intensity surrounding talk about, or performance of, “tradition” and “the village.” I wanted to explore this partly because my consultants were so adamant about these tropes, and partly because their projects and plans – like anyone’s – would have been incomprehensible had I ignored feeling. “Only through explicating the logic of key emotional and intersubjective constructs do major social dramas become intelligible; likewise, only amid such contemporary social enactments can we understand particular domains of affect and agency” (Biehl et al. 2007a:10). Discourses of “tradition” and “the village” were deeply feelingful among the Bamiléké of Bangangté because they were sites for creating or reproducing moral values. Moral values are not synonymous with feeling, but the latter is inextricable from the former. They would not be what we mean by “values,” if they were not emotionally loaded. “The inward reworkings of the world and the consequences of people’s actions toward themselves and toward others...is precisely where the moral comes into view” (Biehl et al. 2007a:15).

Among Bangangté’s Bamiléké people, discourse about “tradition” in music and other modalities was unmistakably emotional and moral. Indeed, “in performance, such judg-

ments [about the world] are always made in reference to a process of rhetorical self-definition...Sentiment is therefore a primary constituent of performance as a social practice” (Coplan 1994:28). From the fact that moral values are power laden and variable both interculturally and intraculturally, it does not follow that values are empty. Rather, they are nodal points of culture’s convergence with life-histories. The discourse on values which I mention throughout the dissertation reveals a concentration of semiotic signs which compel my musical bankers because moral values index both publically circulating events and the idiosyncrasies of particular biographical experiences.

Clare Ignatowski’s recent monograph on moral values, *Journey of Song* (2006), parallels my dissertation non-trivially. She also took a linguistic and musical anthropological approach to song in Cameroon. However, her field site was in the Far North Province and concerned a different ethnic group, the Tupuri. The Tupuri are part of the large latitudinal spread of Sahelian pastoralists, the Fulani, Fulbe, Puul, or Fulfulde grouping. The Bamiléké fit in with the large, more Southerly latitudinal spread of Equatorial-Atlantic farmers and hunter-gatherers. Ignatowski’s use of “morality” is different from mine, as well. She emphasizes morality and its discourses as a form of oppressive (albeit populist) social control or struggle for dominance and power. I use the term to approach the general issue of subjectivity formation, which includes more equivocal, more egalitarian, less rigid processes along with more legalistic ones.

“tradition”

In recent decades, research on African musicking has revealed a lot interest (among scholars and others) in “tradition,” “the modern,” and the tense relationships between them as concepts, moral values, and practices. The recent edited volume *Itinéraires et*

Convergences des Musiques Traditionnelles et Modernes d'Afrique (Kadima-Nzuji and Malonga 2004) demonstrates this amply. Chapters in this volume contribute by developing or operationalizing “traditional” and “modern” as theoretical concepts. What they do not do is give detailed accounts of how these concepts are implicated in social life in practice, which is the problematic of this dissertation, and occupies an important place in Daniel Reed’s study of Ge performance in Sierra Leone. In this case, “Gedro performers localize...the epistemological categories of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity.’ These concepts are...permeable, adaptable, and far from mutually exclusive” (2003:64). Ignatowski (2006) does this kind of work on “modernity” as it relates to musicking, in mirror image of my listing towards “tradition.” Such conceptual localization is an ethnographic issue for African studies because Bangangté musical bankers are far from alone in their passion for what they call “traditional” music or dance in their own lives. Here, I show what members of one community of practice think and do about this important trope. I do not present a definition of “tradition” intended for theorizing with.¹¹

This kind of inquiry has political ramifications because, from a simplistic, neoliberal perspective, the musical bankers appear to “be ‘traditional’” sorts of people, full-stop. I view neoliberalism as a recent development in capitalist ideology.¹² It is characterized by intensification of capitalist abstractions, reduced public spending, partnerships between government and corporations, emphasis on consumption (instead of production), capitalism as science, worker flexibility, privatization, markets as models for society, corporate personhood, positive valuation of economic self-interest, and disposability of the poor (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Ferguson 2006, Graeber 2001, 2004, Klein 2007, Pfeifer and Chapman 2010, Sader 2004, Sider 2004, Wacquant 2009). However, my con-

sultants' multitudinous perspectives on this matter (1) reveal subtlety and sophistication with respect to what "tradition(al)" can mean, and (2) foil any attempts to categorize entire people – much less entire "peoples" – as one way or the other. While it is true that many of my consultants seemed to maintain an overall bias on the question of whether "traditional" or "modern" is "better," the musical bankers of Bangangté (and other Bamiléké people I learned from) cast the actions and opinions of themselves and others in numerous lights, sometimes taking an opportunity to occupy a stance less habitual for themselves.

That this is an ethnography of (among other things) "tradition's" tropic uses does not mean that I accept the ideologies and power structures of cultural boundedness, authenticity, primordiality, or essentialism which often attend "tradition" discourse: or that I analytically align "tradition" with "good," just because I enjoyed the company, kindness, and assistance of so many Bamiléké who were wont to do that. "The very fierceness with which the authority of tradition is defended or rejected reveals its tenuous empirical status and the contestation underlying its invocation...Subordinate just as much as dominant sectors of society invent and reify tradition as ideology" (Coplan 1994:16). Tenuousness and contestations were quite evident to me – shaping my view of the people I worked with as "conscious, often conflicted agents in the making of their own history" (Coplan 1994:17) – and I have attempted to bring that out in the following chapters.

In his insightful, (ethno)musicological critique of "tradition," David Coplan noted that, "in the field of African auroiture,¹³ it is not at all coincidental that the genres most involved with the expression of dominant power relations...have lately become the embodiment of reified tradition" (1994:16-7). His work focused on a genre which his consul-

tants did not consider old – in fact, its colonial genesis is traceable – and which was explicitly a critique of Southern Africa’s aristocratic power bloc; the latter did mobilize “tradition” as a means of justifying inequity.

The genres I concerned myself with in Bangangté were positioned more equivocally in the politics of “tradition.” The trope could be used authoritatively, but the musical bankers were not simply “dominant” members of society. They could draw some power from identification with a sub-regionally dominant ethnic group (the Bamiléké), but they were not chiefs or the chief’s orchestra. An exception to prove the rule was Jean, a member of both groups I worked closely with. He was a titled noble, but so low-ranking that he had little chance of being enstooled.

Equally important in the context of the neoliberal “modern” discourse familiar in Bangangté is that the musical bankers were poor. Much of their “tradition” discourse was actually a quiet assertion of their worth as humans in defiance of the inequity with which they were painfully familiar. Such assessments of “the person” are tied up with power relations; therefore, they were also denouncing the contemporary power relations which keep them poor and make it acceptable for “modern” neo-liberal affluence to look down on them. Doing so in the name of “tradition” is to assert a different and (to them) more acceptable set of power relations which they were attempting to maintain in the present, but which references a past for part of its validity. This shows precisely the complexity of “traditional/modern” discourse because many of the musical bankers denounced sexism which was sometimes aligned with “the traditional,” whereas feminism was sometimes aligned with “the modern.” Some feminist women in Bangangté I talked to indicated that

a critique of patriarchy wasn't anti-traditional, while others argued that feminism was a "modern" positive.

temporality

Temporality cannot be ignored, given how large "tradition," "traditional" musicking, and rehearsal loom in this ethnography. There is more to the trope's temporality than the past, however. Part of Williams' intellectual labor which resulted in the concept "structure of feeling" was a search for "terms for the undeniable experience of...the specificity of present being, the inalienably physical, within which we may indeed discern and acknowledge institutions, formations, positions" (1977:128). Some theorization of the present which integrates sounding and moving together in time is called for.

The particular role of musicking in this temporality can be grasped with the help of Friedson's work on musical healing with Tumbuka healers, patients, and musickers in Malawi.

For Tumbuka healers and their patients, the art of music making...carries the possibility of creating a direct and powerful effect on the processual nature of lived experience. Its immediate presence can shape the very fabric of the on-going experience of the life-world...in their music making, spirit and Tumbuka meet and both are transformed (2003:187).

I did not work with mediums or healers, but part of what Friedson describes is relevant for all stylized sounding and moving together in time. His argument is that musicking gives one a more easily appreciated sense of continually being in a present which "is forever leaving" (2003:187). This does not entail forgetting what is past, but rather a similarly easily appreciated sense of how a present results from the alignment of myriad factors – both coeval and past – especially connections with other people. This appreciation is

ideologized and, in Bangangté, “traditional/modern” and musicking strongly indexed each other both discursively and metadiscursively (see chapters two and three).

Therefore, it seems reasonable that musical bankers, while musicking, would have been developing their understanding of how practices they call “traditional” were particularly potent in bringing people, tools, skills, and projects together for the intense presence of emergent participation. In other words, musicking would have been an ideal setting for musical bankers to develop their senses of history. Such senses or understandings do not disappear after the performance – even though they are non-denotatively explicit – but can effect transformations in mundane interactions, too.

My focus on rehearsals brings *future* temporalization into musical experience. Rehearsing certainly has its own experiential presence of this Friedsonian kind. In addition to their own intrinsic value, rehearsals involve looking ahead to the imagined future events for which the bankers rehearse. History and future fold in together with the present in the case of musical *rehearsal* experience. This applies equally to rehearsals for oratorical performances not normally considered musical. Since speaking is a kind of sounding and moving together in time, too, the temporalization of language should not be limited to historicity and the past, but should include ways of ideologizing the future.

All experiences of the specificity of present being are social and historical in nature (Williams 1977:128-9), not just musical ones. This implies that the past is necessarily “in” the present, which Malonga’s study of sung codemixing in The Congo exemplifies (2004). Inoue makes a similar point: “the construction and reproduction of contemporary social formations and the attendant practices of self-knowledge, identity, and politics...are inevitably predicated on a sense of time and history” (2004a:1). “Tradition”

discourse in Bangangté exemplifies both insights. The musical bankers, in “doing tradition,” are not only making a present, but making a past, as well.

When I heard “tradition” being explicitly denigrated or implicitly rejected, the “bad” traits were taken to originate in the past or contrasted with something more recent – something more industrial, more rationalized (in a neoliberal economic sense), more upwardly mobile, more cosmopolitan, more nationalist. By contrast, “good” traits ascribed to “tradition” were certainly taken, in most instances, to originate in a past, but this past was *placed*: i.e., “tradition” was always made by someone somewhere, which demonstrates “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” (Bakhtin 1981:84). For my consultants, good itself seemed to emanate from the villages of “Bamiléké territory,” and these villages are commemorated as the homes of matrilineages which are quite perduring.¹⁴

As I detail in chapter five, reference to matrilineages and villages, and use of inherited personal names are gateways to an implicit, alternative historiography. This historiography is so thoroughly “about” place that it is sometimes grammatically impossible – in French or Mèdèmbà – to choose a matriline-referring morpheme or word which does not also refer to villages, simultaneously. Explicit talk about matrilineages or inherited personal names was often simultaneously explicit talk about histories of villages, and both components contributed to my consultants’ projection of positive identity; in other words, for the Bamiléké of Bangangté, villages and histories as matrilineages were sources of pride. This supports Inoue’s claim that “far from being ‘ignorant’ of history, people actively produce a past in the act of speaking” (2004b:42). My research indicates that linguistic and musical anthropologists who make history a primary problematic would do well to

attend to the ways it is entangled with place. Work which began with place as a key term did tend to theorize history and the past as issues of emplacement (e.g., Feld and Basso 1996).

The musical bankers saw their participatory performance as “traditional.” “Good” was a more dominant index of “traditional” than “old,” I would say, for them. (What this entails will become clear in the next two chapters as I describe Bangangté discourse and metadiscourse on “tradition” and “the modern.”) In general, they saw “tradition” as a vibrant bit of the present, not a preserved relic or dogma, despite temporally distant origins. This is clearer nowhere than in musicking and (meta)discourse concerning it. Indeed, some people accepted the idea of “new traditions.” Significantly, the person who most decisively rejected this idea, Pierre, was not a musical banker, but a fairly cosmopolitan man who had had reasonable successes in presenting himself as “modern” – for example, his style of dress, his livelihood, and his education (this incident is contextualized more thoroughly when it recurs in chapter three). While he was invested in “tradition” as a “good” in numerous ways (Pierre returns again in chapter six), he did not make it his business to publicly and powerfully proclaim “tradition” in performance, which the musical bankers did. The musical bankers, in this sense, are in a primary role as “tradition’s” musical agents, rather than its keepers. Perhaps this made them more critical than Pierre about the temporality of performance. Entering Friedson’s continuous present was frequent, for them, and that may have created a unique vitality in respecting the past as “tradition”, *and* using “tradition” for future-oriented action in the present.

Ethnographic focus on rehearsal in the following chapters also forces an integration of Friedson’s phenomenology of musicking with the historicizing of (meta)discourse I

have based on Coplan, Inoue, and Williams. Rehearsals explicitly imagine a future (public appearances), which is to say that they presuppose it. This is a semiotic inversion not unlike what Inoue describes in reference to the ideologization of “women’s language” in Japanese public spheres (2004b). She points out that many configurations of indexicality implicitly temporalize it by invoking causation as an indexical mode: i.e., rain indexes/causes wet roads by raining *earlier*; the wet roads come *later*. Rehearsals are partially caused by public appearances since the former are preparations for the latter. However, they *occur* earlier. Phenomenologically, then, not only pasts and presents are folded into the continuous presents of sounding and moving together in time, but so too is an imagined future.

a case in African studies

This research connects with several issues in African studies. Most broadly, relatively few linguistic anthropologists have been Africanists. This is primarily due to disciplinary genealogies. The situation is starting to change, but every new addition to the small body of extant socially savvy research on language in Africa (e.g., Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Blommaert 2004a, 2004b, Blount 1975, Chimhundu 1992, Finlayson 1995, Goodman 2002, Herbert 1990, Hirsch 1998, Irvine 1998, Kapchan 1996, Kratz 1994, Madumulla et al. 1999, Mbangwana 1991, McIntosh 2009, Spitulnik 1999, Vail and White 1991, Yankah 1995, Youssouf et al. 1976) is welcome. My dissertation illuminates ways in which linguistic practice is “about” something other than its referential content. In the Bangangté case, code choice and personal names index strategies for managing one’s identity-positions in light of mass mediated and face-to-face discourses of “modern” and “traditional.” They also index modes of livelihood and dress, for example.

Studies of African music which explore ways in which musicking is “about” language are few and far between (e.g., Barber 1991, Coplan 1988, Furniss 1996, Irvine 1990, Meintjes 2003, Yankah 2001). Performing “traditional” music properly, for my consultants, is not just an achievement of sonic and bodily form, or a statement about identity categories. It is also to adopt or project, in a Goffmanian sense (see Goffman 1959), complex messages about health, kinship, and beauty as they relate to place and history. “Tradition” and moral values have a homeland: Bamiléké territory, the Eastern section of the Grassfields. Each matriline has its homeland, too: a particular village in Bamiléké territory. I worked almost entirely with Bamiléké people who trace their matriline back to the part of Bamiléké territory sometimes called the Mèdǎmbà region, but the situation is much the same elsewhere in Bamiléké territory. Place – “the village,” in particular – is a lynchpin for creating and reproducing positive value in languaging, musicking, health, and kinship. While in Cameroon’s metropolises, Yaoundé and Douala, I saw that the situation is much the same for Bamiléké people living outside of Bamiléké territory (see Baker and Claeson 1990, Eyoh 1998, Franqueville 1987, Geschiere 1997, Geschiere and Gugler 1998a, Monga 2000, Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998).

In approaching the relationship of musicking to mourning in these chapters, I have relied again on Friedson’s phenomenology. He sought an “*understanding of music as mourning*” (2009:117). His argument, to which I return in chapter four, is that musicking very well may release “negative” energy in a catharsis or a therapeutic “cleansing,” as in more familiar treatments of musicking, trance, flow, emergent participation, or healing; more importantly, though, it *creates* an energy which was not there before. It is this energy that makes musicking *into* mourning, not just *for* mourning. Thrane reports something

very similar for Shona performance (2003:119). Musical bankers' practice in Bangangté surrounding death and mourning suggests that they were creating an energy through sounding and moving together which played a non-trivial role in the management of intense, unpleasant emotion.

Banking, too, comes into play for both music and mourning in chapter four. The juxtaposition of musicking and money in the Grassfields is not very well known other than among people with close knowledge of Nigeria or Cameroon. My exploration of this interface constitutes a modest contribution to the anthropology of money and the anthropology of music. There is significant similarity between how Bangangté's musical bankers use money and how they use musicking. First of all, both of them are indispensable for proper Bamiléké mourning, since the living need money and musicking in order to stage an event which will please the deceased. Second, both cash gifts and communal musicking help create solidarity. Having come into social contact through a cash gift or through musicking can create warmth of affection and trust. To be sure, some cash transactions create exploitation, anxiety, indenture, and hierarchy, but the range of effects of cash exchanges should be kept in mind. Third, the simple fact that banking and musicking were services of the same institution is noteworthy.

Finally, this dissertation examines the interconnections of place, personal names, and kinship. Bamiléké names index these other two domains in a way which makes it very difficult to view them as separate at all. My secondary research in the anthropology of names has revealed nothing quite like this. How widespread the phenomenon is, I do not know – perhaps it exists outside the Grassfields, perhaps not – but this is a potentially

stimulating case study for anthropologists interested in naming, place, or kinship in Africa.

subjectivity

What emerges from this discussion of participation, ideology, temporality, and performance in Bamiléké territory is a circularity in the semiotic constitution of practice and structures of feeling. In the present study, this type of circularity pertains to place, kinship, solidarity, moving and sounding together in time, “traditional/modern,” and mourning. This suggests a larger point about subjectivity, which I define as “the experiences of having a certain history at a certain place and time;” subjectivity influences people’s actions (actions including discourse, work, and ritual, for example). The discourses, social and environmental conditions, organisms (including one’s own body), and relationships to which a person is exposed influence subjectivity. Therefore, these experiences are not housed or formed within biological individuals. Rather, they are made by, and exist in, interactions – best understood as conjunctions of human capacities on either side of the problematic sociality/biology divide (see, e.g., Damasio 1999, Noë 2009, Schepers-Hughes and Lock 1987) – between individuals and events, objects, and relations in the world; these processes are perfectly consistent with Eagleton’s roughly Althusserian view of ideology and with contemporary semiotic anthropology (see Singer 1980, and citations above). The world which plays this shaping role is constituted largely by the actions of individuals, which are based on how the world and its relations seem. How the world and its relations seem is based on the subjective position of an individual, in turn shaped by histories of relationships, actions, and conditions. This “dynamic and unsolved tension

between...bodily, self, and social/political processes...is the core of subjectivity” (Biehl et al. 2007a:15).

My use of subjectivity, then, is not a means of emphasizing agency, “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001:112). Rather, it is an umbrella term for the experiences of being which include intentional decisions *and* not being fully aware of why one does what one does. Therefore, it includes the socialized spontaneity of leaping to one’s feet in some moment of inspiration. It includes the quasi-conditioning which results in the easy and speedy participation in brief, familiar interaction rituals, to use Goffman’s term (1967). It certainly includes structures of feeling and moral values. All of this is created and motivated by ideological processes, grammars, poetics, grooves, institutions, mediation of and by biology, modes of production, histories, and the idiosyncrasies of biographies. I foreground subjectivity, then, as a perspective on how all the issues of contemporary ethnography, social theory, and historiography converge so that their interconnections and discontinuities can be appreciated intellectually, intuitively, or artistically. It is a synthesizing concept for those who would put humans and animals, their actions, and their experiences in the center of their own understanding of the world and how and why to know it and act in it.

field work

My field work in Bangangté started in June, 2005 and lasted fifteen months. My interest in Cameroon was kindled by a Cameroonian ex-patriot I met while an undergraduate. He put me in touch with his family in Douala, Cameroon’s largest city, at the time of my first visit, the first of two pre-field work, preparatory trips. These people, agreeing to help me, introduced me to other kin in Bangangté and helped me to settle. This con-

nection made it possible for me to request room and board, rather than start out living on my own. I first lived in a spare room in a house with a family. In February, 2006, I moved into a rental apartment on my own.

Once through the initial settling in period of a few weeks, I had quite a bit of routine in my field work. I attended the weekly meetings and rehearsals of two musical banks – one on Tuesday evenings (the *mangambeu* group, AM) and one on Sunday afternoons (the *benskin* group, AB) – and occasionally visited a few others. Every Wednesday morning, I would play *mangambeu* with Joseph, a member of AM, at his house. Twice a week, I would have musical training with Marc, the musical director of AM, which occurred at either my house or his. He, at first, taught me two genres, *mangambeu* and *ndanji*. Later, with the help of members of AB, these became *benskin* lessons (more on the genres in chapter three).

My basic language was French, but I also acquired some conversational Mèdêmbà. All the song I worked on was in Mèdêmbà. I had language training with a linguistically-oriented NGO, which I describe in chapter two, for most of my field work. The schedule was variable. For many months, I had formal language training five days a week.

Almost every day except Sundays, I would patronize a coffee-shop in the center of town and talk with the staff and clientele. Wednesdays and Saturdays were market days, and I developed a mental list of vendors to make a point of always visiting at their stalls. Some of them lived in Bangangté, and I would visit them at home, sometimes, too. Visiting people at home was something I did often, but not on a fixed schedule.

There were special events, of course, too, that did not recur weekly. My music and language teachers were on the look-out for happenings that might benefit me. These

usually took the form of funeral performances, but I also attended some weddings and festivals in and near Bangangté. As an honorary member of two musical banks, I attended and performed at the public appearances of both groups. These were mostly connected with mourning, but AB was once hired for the entertainment after the ordination of a Roman Catholic Priest. AM received the opportunity to participate in the musical welcome for the Minister of Agriculture, who came through Bangangté on a tour. Both groups appeared at the two-week “arts and culture” festival which occurs every two years in Bangangté (more on this in chapter two).

I made recordings of musicking at rehearsals. This was the major site of my research. When I was ready to start transcribing them, I started by taking my equipment and supplies to the house of my consultant, but this proved impractical. Once I had moved into my own apartment, I began inviting consultants over to do transcriptions on my dining-room table.

plan of the dissertation

The next chapter (two) serves to properly introduce Bangangté and the tropes “traditional” and “modern.” I do not employ these in order to enter into anthropological debates on how best to understand tradition or the conditions of (post)modernity as analytic terms. Rather, I explore instances and patterns of their use in discourse at my field site. I seek to understand and analyze them semiotically as my consultants – the musical bankers and anyone else I worked with in Bangangté – used them.

Chapter three describes “traditional” musicking and contrasts it to “modern” musicking. I also link musicking to ideas and practices pertaining to other aspects of social life, things putatively “extramusical.” Like any ideology, my consultants’ ideologies of mu-

sicking inform and are informed by various discourses and practices distributed across their entire sociopoetic field: i.e., their entire reality. I argue, in this chapter, that performing “tradition” is one of the primary goals of musical banks.

Chapter four goes deeper into the workings of the musical banks and focuses on some major concerns of the members and on the role of money. This, too, is related to musicking. Funereal ritual receives a tremendous amount of attention in Bangangté daily life and most of what musical banks do concerns funerals, which means that confronting the reality of death undergirds the musicking and solidarity of members. By the same token, the musicking they do helps the bankers manage and accept the intensity of death and of their solidarity within the banks.

Chapters two, three, and four build to the poetic analysis of transcribed song-texts in chapter five. Musical bankers’ song relies heavily on the complicated semiotics of personal names. Inherited, predictable names, called *ndab* in Mèdâmbà, index both a matriline and a village. Furthermore, they are not grammatically marked for number, which means that they are referentially ambiguous between individuals or whole matriline. The analysis of the song-texts requires exposition of the names, aspects of kinship, and another trope – “the village.” The main argument of the chapter is that *ndab* provide a crucial resource for the formal structuring of song, and – due to the fact that they index “village,” kinship, and place – constitute a major piece of the puzzle of what makes this musicking emotionally rich for the bankers.

The following chapter (six) provides a different angle on the tensions of “traditional” and “modern” the musical bankers face by looking at an entirely different site, the coffee-shop I mentioned, above. While some of the bankers did patronize this place from time to

time, none of them fit in easily with the regulars. Getting to know the latter productively complicated my sense of the options for thinking and doing “traditional” and “modern” in Bangangté. Chapter six shows that positioning oneself in the semiotics of these tropes is not a simple binary decision, but rather requires considerable uncertainty and subtlety in choosing and negotiating particular signs which may index both “tradition” and “the modern” in contradictory ways.

Finally, chapter seven provides a summary of the dissertation and highlights the contributions to scholarship I make. Then, I outline some possible directions for future research in Bangangté. The chapter and dissertation conclude with a brief discussion of the relationship between musical and linguistic anthropology and social justice.

notes

¹ Christopher Small coined the verb “musicking” in order to get away from idealizing, objectifying, reifying ideologies of music common in the academy (1998). He argues that music is best seen as an activity, not a “thing” to be delimited, and gives the following definition: “to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (1998:9). The same critique of objectification has been made for language and linguistics (e.g., Becker 1984), and is just as important. Possibly because of the familiarity of verbs such as “speak,” “sign,” and “write,” adoption of the verb “language” has been less common, although Judith Becker uses it (2004).

² I allude, here, to Becker’s concept, “deep listeners...a descriptive term for persons who are profoundly moved...by simply listening to a piece of music...These folks...experience a nearness to trance” (2004:2). She makes it clear that she does not conceive of listening as a passive, non-participatory, semi-practice – as in a normative view of a concert hall audience – but rather as a mode of action.

³ I evoke, here, Peirce's distinction between diagrammatic and imagistic icons (Parmentier 1985a, Peirce 1955). An image simply directly shares some feature with its object, whereas, what a diagram shares with its object is relationships between parts. For example, a model of the composition of a chemical such as carbon dioxide with color-coded bars and spheres is diagrammatic in that there actually are connections between atoms, but there are no bars positioned at right angles, etc.

⁴ However, "musical experience" is similar in some ways to Peircean firstness and secondness (see Daniel 1996:104-53, Peirce 1955, Turino 1999).

⁵ See Bateson (1972), Feld (1994 [1984]), and Goffman (1986 [1974]) on frames.

⁶ Confusingly and unfortunately, Schieffelin uses the verb "construct" in two different senses in this passage. They are non-trivially distinct when viewed from linguistic anthropology.

⁷ Dicents, rhemes, and arguments are Peircean sign classifications which have important ontological values from the perspective of those interpreting them (Lee 1985, Mertz 1985, Peirce 1955, Turino 1999). An argument is a sign which, in the estimation of some person apprehending it, stands for its object by virtue of logical or inferential relationships. A rheme is a sign which, in the estimation of some person apprehending it, stands for something which *might* actually exist now or in the future, which is possible. A dicent is a sign which, in the estimation of some person apprehending it, stands for something which *does* actually exist, which is already actual. They overlap with the more widely known Peircean terms, icon, index, symbol, any of which can be dicents, rhemes, or arguments.

⁸ Briggs' analysis focuses on a multilevel arrangement of classic Jakobsonian parallelism, iconic indexicality in choices about vocal timbre, and a semiotics of the body. "The role of parallelism...emerges...from its close connection with the musical patterning of the song, as well as vocables and the curer's movements" (1996:216). Note also that Schieffelin's use of "presence" is productively paralleled by Friedson's use of the same term in relation to musical experience (see page five of this dissertation).

⁹ See Saussure (1959).

¹⁰ There are a number of reviews and programmatic statements on emotion and affect in linguistic anthropology (Besnier 1990, 1994, Irvine 1982, 1995, Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990a, McElhinny 2010). Feeling and emotion have long been central concerns in musicology and in public discourse about music in Europe

and North America: so central that early anthropologists of music (and ethnomusicologists) were at pains to point out that there is much more to musicking than emotion. This created a situation in which emotion was of little interest to socially oriented students of musicking. Feeling and emotion were theorized as social and ethnographic issues in musicology largely due to the impact of some chapters in *The Anthropology of the Body* (Blacking 1977a) and *Sound and Sentiment* (Feld 1990 [1982]). Formal analysis of the emotion “in” and “of” music has more recently been brought into dialogue with an anthropological approach to Peirce (e.g., Becker 2004, Feld 1994 [1988], Fox 2004, Samuels 2004, Turino 1999, Urban 1991, 1994).

¹¹ See Coplan (1994:19) for a critical definition: “tradition is not simply the reified emblems of authority but the immanence of the past in the cultural certainties of the present. It is what persists by virtue of both deliberate and undeliberate handing down, the metaphors of others with which our mouths are full.”

¹² Jim Stanford (2008) considers it to have begun in 1979 when Paul Volker became head of the American Federal Reserve bank, and was consolidated throughout the Reagan and Thatcher administrations. As an academic theoretical movement, its origin is closely associated with Milton Friedman and the “Chicago School” of economics (Klein 2007, Stanford 2008).

¹³ Coplan coined this term as an attempt at an analytic category more appropriate than ‘oral literature’ or ‘song’ to his consultants’ conceptual/analytic categories (1994:8-10).

¹⁴ In the Mande region, too, villages are “the symbolic space of tradition,” although, there, village opposition to “the bush” is more semiotically salient than its opposition to “city” (Charry 2000:57-8, 347), which is more salient in Atlantic and Central Africa.

chapter two

locating Bangangté

In order to discuss aspects of them in detail, I must locate participation and performance among Bangangté's musical bankers in various processes. In the first section, I situate the musical banks geographically, economically, ethnically, sociolinguistically, and sociomusicologically, which sets up the tension between "traditional" and "modern." The second section explores this tension itself. It is a tension because what the tropes index is controversial and shifts even for the same person from moment to moment.

topographies

Where in space are the musical banks and their members? Cameroon is often called "Africa in miniature," as I experienced (also see DeLancey and Mokeba 1990:17-8). One reason for this is that its borders enclose an amazing array of habitats. The southern, Atlantic coast is tropical swamp and rainforest interspersed with farms, towns, and cities. A bit farther north, the western side of the country is still very wet, but mountainous and correspondingly chillier. Bangangté is there in the West Province, its capital, Bafoussam, is at about 2000 meters. Even farther north, the land begins to dry out and Cameroon's border with Chad is well into the desert.

Bangangté is in the West Province's *Ndé département*, which provides very rich farmland. It is also one of the provinces covered by the large geographical feature, *the Grassfields*. Bangangté is near the eastern edge of the Grassfields and they continue west through the Northwest Province into Nigeria. While different colonial and postcolonial states have made longitudinal incisions through the Grassfields, significant latitudinal continuity of practice endures despite administrative and nationalist divergence. Comparison between practices in Bangangté with those even in the far west of the Grassfields turns up many parallels.



Figure 2.1 map of Cameroon. Bangangté is south of Fomfong and northeast of Nkongsamba.

Another reason Cameroon is called Africa in miniature is linguistic diversity. According to an estimate published in 1992, Cameroon had approximately 270 African languages (Krauss 1992:6), representing three phyla: Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo, and Afroasiatic (Heine and Nurse 2000). It has two official languages, French and English.

English is widely used in only one of Cameroon's ten provinces, the Northwest Province. French is the commonest language of state in all the rest. However, the official languages are not very useful as *lingua franca* in the North Province and the Extreme North Province, compared to elsewhere. Fulfulde is more useful, there. Islam is dominant in these provinces. In the remaining ones, Christianity dominates. Indigenous cosmological and religious configurations continue to thrive alongside Christianity and Islam or intermingled with them.

These features point to ethnic diversity, in which Cameroon, like most African countries, is rich. Public discourse is full of talk about ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity and the musical bankers – like everyone else – have little choice but to understand themselves as positioned in an ethnic field. “Being Bamiléké,” for example, means, among other things, “being outside” ethnic categories such as “Bulu,” which is associated with land farther East in the country. Some of this field is “imagined” in an Andersonian sense, but some of it is apprehended with the senses. Many people in Bangangté travel around the country somewhat and have contact with lands normatively “belonging” to other ethnic groups. However, showing the cracks in this normativity, Bangangté itself is multi-ethnic.

Since as far back as historical records go, the Grassfields has been home to people organized into what have sometimes been called “complex societies” or “chiefdoms.” That is to say, they were primarily farmers who recognized the heritable nobility of some people who bear the privilege or responsibility (depending on whom you ask) to be chiefs; this situation continues. Today, many inside and outside Cameroon – and inside

and outside the academy – call the contemporary descendents of the members of these first “chiefdoms” in the West Province *the Bamiléké*.

This ethnic designation, though, is problematic. Egerton (1939), who did fieldwork in Bangangté in the 1930s, reports that the term “Bamiléké” was not very widely known, and mysterious in its origins, and that actual inhabitants of Bangangté identified ethnically as *the Bangangté*. Thirty years later, Brain’s monograph of nearby Bangwa (1972) suggests that “Bamiléké” was of little relevance to his consultants. By this time, however, the term was accepted among sociocultural anthropologists and administrators (e.g., Hurault 1962, Littlewood 1954, Soen and Comarmond 1972, Tardits 1960).

Even as recently as Feldman-Savelsberg’s fieldwork in Bangangté in the 1980s, “Bamiléké” resonated for few inhabitants of the town and was only beginning to catch on (1999). Its eventual popularization was secured because of the large number of migrants from Ndé to the metropolises, Yaounde and Douala; these diasporic communities emphasized their connectedness through use of the term “Bamiléké,” and downplayed – without denying– their different histories in various ancestral villages (Feldman-Savelsberg, personal communication, 2005).

Claudette Njiké-Bergeret’s memoir (2000), too, makes Bangangté, as place and ethnicity, the salient identification. Njiké-Bergeret was born in France to missionaries who were stationed in Bangangté during her childhood. As a young adult, she returned to Bangangté to teach school, but decided to accept the marriage proposal of the then chief and settle there. She lives in Bangangté, today.

At the time of my fieldwork, the situation had changed again. “Bamiléké” is now an everyday word heard often in Bangangté. Many people have no trouble with calling

themselves Bamiléké, but they also think of themselves as Bangangté people, and use that term sometimes. Bangangté ethnicity, then, is embedded within Bamiléké ethnicity and has by no means faded out of currency. I met few residents of Bangangté who were Bamiléké but from outside Ndé.

Any village in Ndé, actually, is a salient means of making social distinctions. Each had its own chief arranged hierarchically under the high chief of Bangangté. Stereotypes of people from one village differ from those of another. For example, during one conversation in a coffee shop in Bangangté, I overheard the following: “if you want an honorable wife, choose [one from the village of] Bazou. If you want a wife with a pleasant personality, choose Bangangté. If you want a wife who will stay at home, choose Bamena.” The list was longer than this but, since I was an unratified hearer, it was inappropriate for me to ask for repetition or elaboration.

Members of the *Fulani* ethnic group also inhabit the Grassfields; many of them are herders. This mode of production, in the Grassfields, is dominated by people who identify as Fulani. They are ideologically indigenous to the North and Extreme North Provinces. However, Fulani are fully integrated residents of Bangangté.

The Grassfields in the West Province is explicitly considered by everyone I met to be in *Bamiléké territory*. However, the archaeological record makes it very difficult to simply call the Bamiléké the indigenes of the Grassfields and be done with it. Warnier (1992) argues that, before five or six thousand years ago, we do not know who lived there. We do know that the land was forested before this time and relatively sparsely populated. No critique of ethnicity and its connection to place ever crossed my path while there.

The system of chiefs and exchange which colonizers encountered began developing five or six thousand years ago. Around the same time, the region began undergoing rapid and profound changes due to the introduction of metallurgy and agriculture, and due to deforestation (Warnier 1992). Warnier also asserts that in- and out- migration and in- and out- marriage have been common since at least this long ago, further eroding a sense of ethnic boundedness or primordiality. This shows the difference between normalcy and normativity of ethnic presence. Fulani residents in Bangangté are normal, but not normative. 6,000 years ago, farmer presence in the same region may or may not have been known, but it is now certainly normative.

Today, Bangangté is the largest town in *Ndé*, but establishing its boundaries is not an easy or simple matter. Stating the population of the town is, therefore, problematic. One reckoning puts it at about 40,000. Another way Bangangté is problematic is that it is not clear if the place is urban or rural. While its middling size is part of this, Bamiléké kinship and, by extension, ethnicity play a role, too (I treat this issue in more detail in chapter five). Bamiléké matrilineages are named after villages or neighborhoods of large villages. Part of what made Bamiléké territory feel powerful and important to Bamileke people was that being in it meant being in proximity to one's matrilineal village. Bangangté is large in comparison to other towns in *Ndé* such as Bazou and Bangoulap, but it is a "village" in this kin-indexing sense, and "village" indexes the rural and the "traditional." Similarly, being large, Bangangté attracts residents from outside *Ndé*, but even for Bamiléké whose matriline "lives" outside *Ndé*, Bangangté is not really leaving home because they're still in Bamiléké territory. Bangangté's few residents whose matrilineal village is outside of *Ndé* (in the area of, for example, Dschang or Bafang), but in Bamiléké

territory, were hardly more than “just down the road” from their matrilineal village. While the Bangangté sub-grouping may be dominant in the eponymous town/village, a Dschang Bamiléké person is still dominant at the “Bamiléké level.” Not so in the metropolises.

The situation for Bamiléké who relocate southeast or south to Yaoundé or Douala, respectively, is starkly different; going there is a definitive separation from the village sources. While metropolitan Bamiléké are involved in discourses of migration and create various novel links among themselves and back to Bamiléké territory, this is not what goes on in Bangangté. The musical bankers I worked with were “at home,” ethnically, in this way; they were not involved with (discourses of) displacement or nostalgia, which is the case for Bamiléké in Douala and Yaoundé.

(socio)linguistic overview

Similar dynamics of emplacement, displacement, normativity, and authority play out with respect to language. Explicit metalanguage and metapragmatics comprise much of my data. I will contextualize this in an overview of Bangangté linguistics and sociolinguistics.

People engage in explicit metalanguage often in Bangangté. I suspect that they do so more often than is average for similar towns. The reason is that Bangangté is home to an NGO devoted to the preservation, study, and legitimization of Ndé’s indigenous language, Mèdâmbà. It is called *Le Comité d’Etudes et de la Production des Oeuvres Mèdâmbà* (CEPOM) and was founded in 1973. In professional linguistics literature (e.g., Hyman 1985, Nissim 1975, Voorhoeve 1965, 1967), Mèdâmbà is usually known as “Bamiléké-Mèdâmbà” or Bamiléké-Bangangté” and considered a dialect of the “Ba-

miléké language.” However, there are many who contest this designation (e.g., Lewis 2009). One estimate puts the number of native speakers at 210,000 (Lewis 2009). “On the ground,” the most common designator is variations on “Bangangté language.” On this ideological schema, other towns such as Bazou, Bahouac, and Bangoulap, etc, all have their own languages. I never heard a resident of Bangangté refer to “the Bamiléké language.”

CEPOM’s official position is intermediary between these two. It asserts “language” status, as opposed to “dialect of...” status for this code, calling it Mèdâmbà. However, they call speech patterns associated with Bazou, Bangangté, Bahouac, etc., *dialects of* Mèdâmbà. This usage had caught on somewhat in the streets of Bangangté. CEPOM chose the Bahouac dialect for standardization on the grounds that it was “the standard” before colonization. What exactly they had in mind as precolonial standardization, I was never able to discover.

The Bamiléké codes are in the Niger-Congo phylum, and the South Volta Congo family. Increasingly narrowly, they are East Benue-Congo, Bantoid, and Eastern Grassfields. I follow Williamson and Blench (2000) in this classification, while recognizing that Voorhoeve prefers “semi-Bantu” to “Bantoid” (1967). Like all Bantoid languages, they are tone languages with a register system (Clements 2000). Only high and low are lexical, resulting in high, mid, low, rising, and falling tones in output (Nkwilang et al. 1998). Voorhoeve (1965) reports that Bamiléké codes have fewer tonal minimal pairs than most Bantoid languages. Unlike Bantu, Bamiléké words have few morphemes, putting it towards the analytic end of the morphosyntactic spectrum.

The vowel repertoire includes a high central vowel with rounded and spread variants, but spread and rounded vowels are otherwise confined to the front and back of the mouth, respectively. The consonant repertoire is not very large; there are no rhotics and voicing is not contrastive at the bilabial position.

Very few morphemes are multisyllabic. Branching onsets are always NC, never CC. There are five noun classes which surface as nominal prefixes; they do not appear to be semantically motivated, based on extant research.

CEPOM also does some work on “cultural preservation” and legitimization of Mèdêmbà as “a culture,” which many people appreciate, but Mèdêmbà had not taken off as a term for an ethnic group when I was there. CEPOM’s small central office is on the main thoroughfare next door to the mayor’s office and the radio station; it is hard to miss. The continual presence of CEPOM may have been priming townspeople to reflect directly on language and its use.

CEPOM’s co-founders were undergraduates together at the University of Yaoundé and all hailed from Ndé (Francois Nkwilang, personal communication, 2005). I saw several of them regularly, throughout my field work, but spent the most time with Francois Nkwilang and Pierre-Mopelt de Bafetbah Mbetbo. “Mèdêmbà” is a term which CEPOM’s founding members developed and began using to refer to what professional linguists call “Bamiléké-Bangangté.” This neologism is a conjunction of three morphemes which already existed: “Mè+dû+mbà” means “I speak like that.”

CEPOM’s primary focus is to encourage functional knowledge of the code through literacy training, publication, and – to a lesser extent – conversation classes. Classes are available for native speakers interested in acquiring literacy in Mèdêmbà and for second-

language learners. As I discovered first hand, the beginner classes are geared towards people who are already native speakers of other related languages, or toward semi-speakers with regular, but infrequent exposure to fluent speech. In addition to attending two CEPOM courses during fieldwork, I received intense private tutoring from two CEPOM-certified instructors.

Due to ideologies of nativism and ownership, many people consider Mèdâmbà *the* code of the region. It is not the case, however, that this is the only language regularly spoken in Bangangté and Ndé Division. The other major contenders are French, Fulfulde, pidgin English, and other Bamiléké codes.¹ However, in popular understanding, languages have a “home” – at least African languages do. If French has a home, it most certainly is not in Africa; it came with Europeans and clearly is outside of “tradition” and local “authenticity.” A handful of my consultants were surprised to hear that English, French, and German were anyone’s cradle language. They thought that Europeans used some other languages at home, which are never “brought” to Africa.

Fulfulde and pidgin are also not “tradition” for those who identify as ethnically Bamiléké or Bangangté. This is despite the fact that one hears them often in the market. Pidgin is clearly not “authentic” in Cameroonian subjectivities. Furthermore, the close connection with a colonial language may preclude any possibility of pidgin gaining the status of any “people’s language.” In other words, pidgin English has no “home.”

Fulfulde provides a more telling case. Fulfulde is an African language and Bangangté is home to numerous native speakers. The crucial social difference between it and Mèdâmbà is that Fulfulde’s “home” is Northern Cameroon – very far away, and markedly divergent in history, practice, and ecology – and thus the language and ethnicity with

which it is associated are counter-normative in Bangangté. My research directly concerns only French and Mèdâmbà, however.

There is noticeable functional differentiation of French and Mèdâmbà. French is more common in state interactions, in hospitals and churches. Public school is also conducted in French. However, there is a complete Christian Bible in Mèdâmbà, thanks to CEPOM and SIL. It also seems as though French is for sports – soccer and track and field, mostly.

My consultants also used French for talking to white people. This is very largely based on accommodating to interlocutors who probably do not know any African languages. However, many locals recounted with amazement, despite the fact that she's been a full-time resident of Bangangté for decades, that Njiké-Bergeret is fluent in Mèdâmbà. It was also typical for bilingual adults to address very young children in French even when the adult was aware that the child was bilingual, too. Very little fiction, poetry, or exposition is written in Mèdâmbà. This, too, is mostly done in French. Mèdâmbà literature seemed to be mostly oral, but writing in Mèdâmbà is becoming more common.

There seemed to be a slight dispreference among some people for using Mèdâmbà in public; it was more common at home. It is strongly preferred during meetings of musical banks; in fact, it's a rule that only people who can't speak Mèdâmbà may speak French during a meeting. The elderly were commonly addressed in Mèdâmbà even if the speaker was aware that the addressee was bilingual. Oral poetry was usually in Mèdâmbà. However, there were some French or English songs that were well-known in Bangangté. Also,

less marked performance genres such as joking and personal narrative were common in either code. More on this below as it relates to codeswitching.

musical overview

My consultants in Bangangté organize the music in their lives into three categories. The one I had least interaction with was “Christian music.” I had considerable interaction with “modern” music – mostly mediated by CDs, television, VCDs, or the radio. I focused on the category of “traditional” music. “Pop” music is not a term my consultants had any familiarity with.

It is a cliché of ethnomusicology and the anthropology of music that, in Sub-Saharan Africa, music is constant. This is, of course, not literally true, and was probably of limited use in illuminating the social life of sound even in the early days of Europeans’ contact with Africans. Furthermore, this stereotype is laden with naïve, colonial, social evolutionist ideologies (Agawu 2003b, 2003 [1995], Rolph-Trouillot 1991). Mass mediation, however, has made it relatively easy for millions of people in the world to turn on a radio or CD–player at practically any moment for the sake of hearing music. Bangangté is no different. Walking down the street in the center of town (if the power is working) means hearing the disk or radio station of choice in practically every shop, restaurant, office, and bar. Many of my consultants have this technology at home. Where I rented the spare room in a local family’s house, the radio was only off if there was no electricity or I asked to turn it off.

The bulk of this mediated music was “modern” Cote d’Ivoirean music with a large dose from Cameroon and the USA. Big hits were well known to all kinds of people. This

music was a big part of life for everyone, and important to many. International songs were frequently hummed or belted-out in living rooms, street corners, and country lanes.

This was the extent of the “modern” music performances I attended in Bangangté, though. Had I taken a different direction in my research, it would have been easy to hear Christian music every week in local churches. By far the majority of performances I attended, though, were of “traditional” music. This includes the occasional soft rendition of a song in Mèdâmbà at home, but also includes a long list of recognized genres – almost canonized or official genres – in the “traditional” category.

Every traditional genre featured singing and had at least one instrument required as accompaniment. Maracas were the only accompaniment for some genres. Another indigenous instrument is the *kalimba*, a lamellophone very similar to a thumb piano, but bigger. Groups of hand-drums played by one or two people were also very common. A xylophone was the centerpiece of one genre’s accompaniment. All traditional music I encountered was polyrhythmic.² The accompaniment consisted of the repetition of a basic set of inter-locking figures, but considerable variation was permissible, depending on the genre and the instrument.³ All traditional music I encountered was either in something like 12/8, with beats 2, 5, 8, and 11 coming behind the metronome: or 4/4 with off-beats coming ahead of the metronome.

livelihoods

I will be making frequent reference to the unequal division of wealth in Cameroon because it relates importantly to the emotions which participation in musical banks helps manage. Some insight into the ways people in Bangangte make ends meet will ground that. The majority of Bangangté’s residents make at least some of their livelihoods from

farming. Many of them grow more than their household needs and sell the rest in town. Many others run small shops of supplies or clothing bought wholesale. There are many food stalls, bars, and restaurants which are completely locally owned, managed, and staffed. The local herders butcher and sell meat. Bangangté also abounds in service-providers; taxis and buses, mechanics, carpenters, craftspeople, musicians, healers, sorcerers – each of these tasks can provide part or all of a livelihood. The utility companies also pay salaries to run their local offices and machinery.

Bangangté has no shortage of public institutions and NGOs. Churches of many denominations employ clergy. Schools need teachers. The mayor's office and the *département* administration - including a post-office, prison, court-house, and *gendarmerie* – provide additional wage employment. There is also a radio station, a small university, and a handful of clinics and hospitals.

Literacy is relatively high in Cameroon due, largely, to the efforts of the administration of Ahidjo, the previous President. He placed a lot of emphasis on formal education and it paid off. Many of my consultants have college degrees, but not most. Far fewer women than men went beyond secondary school. Almost every member of the musical banks I worked with had completed elementary school. Only one, to the best of my knowledge, was unable to read and write French. Literacy in an indigenous language was far more rare.

“traditional” and “modern”

People in Bangangté invoked “traditional” and “modern” in reference to the sociolinguistic and sociomusical features I've been describing. These tropes are crucial to explicit and non-explicit metadiscourse about talk and musicking, there. I analyze their uses

as part of my data on life in Bangangté. In Bangangté, many phenomena index the “traditional/modern” dynamic. However, there is no consensus on exactly what is traditional and what is modern. Indeed, their shifting nature is very much in keeping with the vagaries of discourses of “the modern” and “modernity” worldwide. Eric Charry captures this in reference to Mande musicking, thus: “traditional and modern...do not refer to opposing sides of battle with impenetrable lines, or to blind adherence to colonial lexical categories and mentalities, but rather reflect states of mind that can be fluidly combined and respected” (2000:24). This section provides an introduction to how and what the two tropes index. In the next chapter, I go into more detail about how they operate in performance and talk about performance.

Explicit use of the terms “traditional” and “modern” as binary opposites, always (from what I can tell) used the French cognates, *traditionnelle*, and *moderne*. Code choice, is significant because of what the French language indexes: e.g., colonialism, white people, the state and its institutions, wealth, Europe, geopolitical power (see below). “Traditional” and “modern” as a binary power relation was introduced due to European colonialism’s insistent comparing and contrasting of colonizers and colonized, and the forced, large-scale, rapid changes it brought to Bamiléké territory and elsewhere (see Cooper and Stoler 1997). This does not imply that, before European colonialism, “cultures” were “pure” or isolated; they were not. Empire and long-distance trade and travel are not recent inventions. European colonialism brought a large scale of domination, an intensity of violence, and an assiduity of “Othering” which, in balance, tended to ascribe difference from a Euro-bourgeois norm to being acultural (closer to nature), ahistorical (stuck in the past), or wrong (evil, irrational). “Tradition,” in development discourse has

often been aligned with cultural stasis (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994), and is now sometimes a sign of shame or powerlessness (see below and Ferguson 2006). Therefore, explicit talk about “tradition” and “modernity” uses a colonial language because the idea of a rupture and this kind of comparison came with colonialism.

“Traditional” and “modern” are value-laden signs. My fieldwork included countless conversations debating the relative merits of this or that “modern” something and its “traditional” counterpart. As James Ferguson demonstrates in *Global Shadows* (2006, esp. ch. 6), in scholarly usage, there are two indexical chains branching off the sign “modern.” One is the now well-worn – but accurate – anthropological perspective on “alternative modernities;” contemporary people in the global South are not stuck in the past as though their social forms are outside of history (Wolf 1982), as though only Western European/European-American, white, middle class, scientific social forms are rational and changing. All co-eval social forms equally deserve the label “modern” insofar as everyone is embroiled in history (Fabian 1983, Piot 1999), according to this important perspective. Anthropology, however, has often under-emphasized an alternative set of meanings, one influencing many Africans today.

In this other scholarly sense, “modernity” does not mean simply the creation of discourse in or about recent world events and technological changes, but also *a privileged place* in the global *hierarchy* of dominance, wealth, influence, and status. In other words, many Africans are painfully aware of the power of “Western” states and the higher average wealth of their citizens and institutions – as manifest in flashy clothing and gadgets, access to medical care and education, and high industrial productivity – and of how they are looked down upon by many “Westerners” for a perceived *lack*. Therefore, the musical

bankers' valuation of "modern" is tied intimately to the strong desire many Africans feel to be accepted into this global élite – the élite that controls these "modern" things.

In many cases, then, for an anthropologist to argue that some practice is properly modern (because occurring in the present in response to global flows) in order to honor it can be the result of failing to hear or understand Africans' statements of dissatisfaction with the world order: an order which identifies status and wealth with "the modern." There arises an embarrassment, for some Africans, in knowing that this lack is on display, be it in the form of houses made of earth, unpaved roads, rituals to find witches, corrupt civil servants, or any number of other "aberrant" "deviations" from the élite, liberal norm. And "liberal" it most certainly is. Ferguson, in the same book, further argues that the scientific capitalism of the World Bank had the effect of altering – in some instances, heightening – the ways Africans could be made to feel embarrassment for their practices. Not long after numerous activists, policy makers, and scholars in Africa and "the West" welcomed national independence as the great solution for Africans suffering under colonial racism, exploitation, illness, and poverty, the World Bank began forcing trade liberalization through structural adjustment programs on many states in the global South (Pfeifer and Chapman 2010), including Cameroon (DeLancey and Mokeba 1990:81, 166-7). This contemporary, large scale domination of the global South by the governments and corporations of the global North is not primarily in a discourse of "civilization," but of "modernization," Ferguson argues. His ethnographic research in Southern Africa revealed a strong pattern of "modern" indexing the prestigious and comfortable things that many Africans want but can't have, due to poverty entrenched *and justified* by the exploitative and oppressive structural adjustment programs. Again, this

second sense of “modern” as a global system of dominance conforms more closely to usage “on the ground” than the usage in the “alternative modernities” literature does.

All of this resonates resoundingly with my ethnographic data from highland Cameroon. I had numerous conversations with urban-based and rural-based Bamiléké about social problems in Cameroon – mostly poverty, reliable utilities infrastructure, access to education, and corruption – which transitioned seamlessly into contrasting and comparing Cameroon (one of the forty “poorest countries”) and Canada (a G8 country). Time and again, it was, for example, “does the electricity go out in Canada?”

“Yes, but not nearly so frequently or for so long as it does in Cameroon.”

“Do you have to bribe police officers in Canada?”

“Not with the ubiquity and regularity one does in Cameroon.”

“We are poor, here, in Cameroon.”

“I know, but there is plenty of poverty in Canada.”

“It’s not this bad, though, is it?”

“No, not in the sense of the rate of poverty, it’s not.”

“Are the roads disastrous like this in the middle of a big city like Montreal?”

“No. No they’re not. [Sigh]”

Most of the Cameroonians I met are very aware, like the Zambians and Basotho Ferguson knows (Ferguson 1994, 1999), that they are getting the short end of the stick when it comes to global access to resources and influence. They have also noticed the discourses of equality, fraternity, and prosperity from politicians and development agencies in the mass media, which many interpret as hypocritical and false. This is a large part of why, in Bangangté, the “modern” sometimes indexed immorality. The situation was a

complicated one, though, in which either “traditional” or “modern” could be used as praise or pejoration. From the perspective of the “modern,” “tradition” can look squalid, nepotistic, sexist, ignorant, irrelevant, or outmoded. Conversely, from the perspective of “tradition,” the “modern” can look cruel, ugly, trivial, foolish, destructive, racist, classist, or profane. As chapter six describes, I had several conversations which went directly to the ambivalence of people’s feelings towards their current state of affairs: which is to say, living in a place and time riven by complex and contradictory value systems.⁴

However, what I encountered in Bangangté suggests a tipping of the scales slightly in favor of “tradition” in the minds of, at least, the musical bankers. Countering the desirability of things “modern,” I came across strong sentiments that the “traditional” ways are good ways – preferable to “modern” ways. Indeed, the bulk of this dissertation concerns itself with these discourses which assert (explicitly and non-explicitly) the positive value of “tradition.” Rather than simplistically asserting that “traditional” is better than “modern,” or that “traditional” is African and “modern” is “Western,” what they are actually doing is working out on their own terms, for their own uses, what they want and don’t want – both as analytically separable individuals, and collectively in their communities. It is not a simple choice between “modern” and “traditional” – leading to the abandonment of one side of the binary – but rather a careful sifting and placement of choices as good, bad, “traditional,” or “modern.”

It is unmistakable that much of what people in Bangangté conceptualize as “modern” practices or objects are strongly associated with colonialism and its affects. This includes both directly imported objects – such as modems – and influence on practices which pre-exist colonialism – such as capitalism’s influence on economies. The “modern,” then is

intimately connected with ideas about “outsiders,” “whites,” or “non-Africans.” For example, there is a very widely shared notion that “whites” are highly individualistic and don’t share when sharing is appropriate. On the other hand, Africans – so the stereotype goes – are impolite and aggressive. This connects to the rough sketch of values I made above because the immorality of the “modern,” at the level of social structure and resource distribution, indexes “individualistic.”⁵

Despite the contested nature of the valuation of “traditional” and “modern,” there was a noticeable bias towards aligning “tradition,” not “modernity,” with “good.” For example, coming across Marc one afternoon sharpening tools with a file behind his house, he told me that the tools of his grandparents were better than those of today. In particular, he was referring to the practice of sharpening machetes with a whetstone, rather than a file. The stone, he said, did a great job – the implication being that he questioned why anyone bothered with the file, at all, and wondered how it had happened that the whetstone had fallen out of use.⁶

Very often, it seemed to me, when people were being negative about something which – I would have thought – fit in perfectly with the semiotics of “tradition,” the term was not used. Instead, the critique was put in terms of race or geography: the power of “whites, Americans, or Europeans” versus the weakness, dishonesty, or foolishness of “blacks or Africans.” I suspect that this was a strategy used by many in Bangangté to avoid expressing negativity towards “tradition.” “Tradition” is so powerfully connected to “good” for some people that they experienced a strong affective disincentive to commit to a criticism of anything called “traditional.” A way to express yourself, then, is to make it difficult for anyone to call the object of your scorn “traditional.” The fact that it is

preferable to be negative towards the “African” shows the intensity of racism in the post-colony and the ambivalence experienced by those who have been co-opted by racist discourses.

A large scale example of aligning “tradition” with “African” is the biennial *Festivale d’Art et Culture Mèdùmbà* (FESTAC), founded in 1995. The festival also revealed something about performance practice and “tradition.” CEPOM takes credit for the idea of FESTAC, but it has since enjoyed the support of other organizations and individuals with interest in Ndé. For two weeks every second July, in the complex of buildings comprised of fair stalls, the local radio station, the CEPOM office, two town squares, and a cyber café, much of the West Province turns its focus towards a full itinerary of public performances, public discussion fora, vendors of arts and crafts, displays of chiefly regalia, and an enormous “food court”. The express purposes of FESTAC are fostering unity in what the organizers call a culturally homogeneous region, and nurturing and passing on “traditional” art and culture (including language). The “culturally homogeneous” region in question is the thirteen chiefdoms located in Ndé Division – Bangangté, Balengu, Bazou, Bamaha, Bagnoun, Bangoulap, Bangwa, Batchingou, Bamena, Bandomba, Bangangfokam, Bahouse, and Bakong – and one more located outside it – Bahouac. Ideologies of ethnic essence and distinctiveness seem to have successfully been lodged in people’s practices in Bangangté.

FESTAC, at one level, is a delimitation of the “traditional” in “culture” and “the arts,” but presented in a decidedly “modern” way as invented tradition. At least in the sense of “practices underway before colonialism,” nice rows of chairs for spectators are not “tradition.” Nor are musicians and dancers taking a stage to perform without the con-

text of ritual. Nor is the sharpness of the divide, typical at the festival but not in ritual, between audience and performer. The *style* of presentation at FESTAC is “modern,” in these ways.

What receives attention at FESTAC as “tradition” is product, not process and participation. “Why we’re doing this” at FESTAC is not at all the same as “why we’re doing this” at a memorial service, but I didn’t encounter any discussion of these differences, as though they weren’t important. What did seem to be important to a great many people was this assertion of “tradition” in the public sphere, this proclamation of “our thing.” Such concretization of “culture” met with a lot of explicit approval. This is not surprising given the amount of prescription and proscription these people face from the state, from the World Bank, and from mass media. For example, I met a child in a CEPOM course who asked me why I’d want to do research in as lousy a place as Bangangté. FESTAC is a loud, assertive way of resisting such devaluation.

However, while I encountered no explicit criticism of the “modern” style of this presentation of “tradition,” it seemed to be fairly empty for many townspeople. To be sure, many people were having fun and felt engaged at these staged events, but many more were adopting postures and facial expressions that bespoke (at least to me) boredom, subtle dissatisfaction or disappointment. This performance frame clearly distinguished musickers from non-musickers, which meant that the ideal of full participation by all in attendance could not be approximated. In Turino’s terminology, this was a presentational performance, not a participatory one (2008), and funeral performance – the prototypical musicking for Bamiléké who value the “traditional” highly – is extremely participatory. These correlations of bodily habits and performance types suggests the im-

portance of participation in making music and dance good, beautiful, appropriate, effective, valuable, or satisfying for the Bamiléké of Bangangté.

Attending this top-down, bureaucratized, state-sanctioned, postcolonial affair seemed to affect people in complex and varied fashions. Nation, ethnicity, and display clearly resonate for many people, but for some – even, possibly, for the same people – there was a conflicting feeling that all was not well. Perhaps the stylization and performance structure at FESTAC were a bit off, for them.

local understandings of time and history

Two of the most basic concepts indexed by “traditional” and “modern,” respectively, are “old” and “new.” “Modern” things are – ideologically, anyway – only recently part of life in Cameroon. “Traditional” things are, in some instances, believed to have been around for a long time. An example would be the “traditional” musical genre, *lali*, versus the “modern” genre, *makossa*, which has a documented history as a popular music emerging from the city of Douala since the second world war (Dibango and Rouard 1994). A more ideological example concerns homosexuality. I had several discussions of homosexuality and queer rights in Bangangté. More than one person was convinced that homosexuality has only been present in Africa since European contact. However, this is contested in some academic communities (see Epprecht 2008, Murray and Roscoe 1998a).

As in many sites around the world, “old” and “new” can further index “past” and “present.” This leads to commentary to the effect that people who prefer or hope for a decent livelihood as a subsistence farmer are “living in the past,” whereas those who seek a

formal education at a business school are “moving with the times” and doing the “modern” thing. I encountered much the same thing in Bangangté.

Mapping these temporal issues on to people produces an association between youth and “the modern.” Marc once told me that he believed young people were typically uninterested in the music played by musical bankers; this was most certainly a negative state of affairs, in his view. He went on to remind me of a relevant datum we had both observed some time earlier.

A Bamiléké friend of mine, Roger, had gotten to know Marc through helping me make contacts in Bangangté. Roger was in his early 20s and was born and raised in Douala, which is not in Bamiléké territory but is home to a large migrant Bamiléké population. From time to time, he would visit and stay either with me or with family residing in Bangangté. Through association with me, Roger began learning to play traditional music for the first time. What Marc reminded me of was that Roger’s lack of facility with any instrument revealed his lack of experience, which was evidence of his lack of interest in “traditional music” until only very recently. For Marc, this gap in Roger’s skills fit in perfectly with a pattern of youth going astray from what is good (in this case, read, “traditional”).

What Marc may not have known is that Roger really wasn’t very interested in membership in orchestras or musical groups at all – “modern” or “traditional.” He loved to dance and sing in the crowd, but the world he passionately wanted to be deeply into was that of football. I spent a lot of time with Marc and I predict that his opinion of Roger’s prioritization would still be scornful. Football and professional footballing are still “modern” and letting music slide (regardless of the genre) is still a failure to appreciate what’s

truly good (in his view) and a symptom of “modernity,” which entails damage to “tradition.” This is not to say that Marc abhorred all change or was a reactionary. He was quite open and positive to some “modern” things and to changes within a living “tradition.” There was certainly no doubt that, for him, “tradition” was quite simply good.

A similar dynamic applies to languages. The “traditional” languages are, of course, the “African” ones, which, for most of my consultants, meant Mèdûmbà. French, in this part of Cameroon, is the most common “non-traditional” language. There is a good deal of discussion in Bangangté about the possibility that young people aren’t learning Mèdûmbà and that the language will soon be lost. Roger is a good example for those who hold this view because his native language is French, and, while he has been surrounded by both languages his whole life, he is a semi-speaker of Mèdûmbà. More on musicolinguistic shift in chapter six.

“traditional” and “modern” in talk about musicking

When I first began talking with Cameroonians about music, I got the sense that (1) there was a widely shared and clear distinction between “traditional” and “modern” music and I assumed that (2) it would be quick and easy for me to pick this up and use these terms emically, even if only as they apply to the maintenance of musical genres and styles. I still think (1) is a correct statement. Experience showed that I was wrong about (2). By the end of my fieldwork, I had not learned to predict with 100% accuracy if a musical moment was “traditional” or “modern” in the public discourse of Bangangté.

Initially, I thought that the genre *mangambeu*, for example, was “traditional” and that *bikutsi*⁷ was “modern.” Neither is true; *bikutsi* has “traditional” and “modern” forms. The former uses indigenous instruments, the latter is guitar-based. *Mangambeu* is more com-

plicated; I remain unable to distinguish “traditional” from “modern” *mangambeu*. The defining feature seems not to be instrumentation because some examples presented to me as “modern” appeared to be the same in this regard. However, all *mangambeu* using guitars is “modern.” Neither is the defining feature amplification or mass mediation. Both “traditional” and “modern” *mangambeu* can be amplified or recorded.

The same is true for *benskin*, another genre I focused on in the field. An important difference, though, is that *benskin* is considered a new form of “traditional” music by Bangangté music specialists. Correspondingly, it is more popular with younger people than older. Marc, to my surprise, was unable to teach me *benskin* and we brought in two younger musicians, Jean and Martin, for this purpose.

Among Bangangté residents, there is a list of genres which is “traditional” at least in genesis. This includes the three I worked on the most, *mangambeu*, *benskin*, and *ndanji*, but also includes several others with which I had minimal or no contact. Any of these genres of “tradition” can be played in a “modern” variant, but they can also be used as means to support, maintain, perform, or “do” “tradition.” This is not the case for all genres. *Makossa* is a “modern only” genre, for the people of Bangangté.⁸ Popular music on the radio from Cote d’Ivoire, especially, and many other countries – featuring guitars, keyboards, and programming – is unequivocally “modern.”

There is a stereotype that the elderly enjoy “traditional” music the most and possess the most knowledge of, and skill in, it. However, *mangambeu* is very popular, universally, despite some bias towards the aged. Marc told me that *mangambeu* was created to help convince young people to stay in the village, rather than seeking fortune, fame, or excitement in cities.

Age, too, goes to the issue of distribution of knowledge. Knowledge of some genres is very obviously concentrated amongst the elderly. One of these is the music of women-only associations.⁹ Another is the genre *lali*. The lack of younger people in the *lali* performances I witnessed was easily noticeable. Both Jean and Martin, *benskin* aficionados, are very dedicated younger musicians, but I believe neither of them were heavily involved with a *lali* group. Marc – old enough to be their father – is fully competent in *lali*, but (as mentioned above) only marginally competent in *benskin*.

Perhaps most telling is that the processual style of *lali* and *benskin* are unmistakably divergent. I use “processual” in the sense of the micro-rhythmic, temporal variations possible between “attacks,” the placement of attacks very slightly before or after when they would occur if separated by a strictly mechanical division of time, also known as groove or participatory discrepancies (Keil 1994 [1987]:96-7). Unfortunately, my methodology did not facilitate my gathering the right data to formalize and measure this difference between the genres, or to compile a corpus of local commentary on this phenomenon. However, this processual divergence is apparent to any attentive listener.

Musical knowledge is distributed unevenly in more ways than this. Even knowledge of basics such as the names of genres and instruments is not to be assumed. Near the beginning of my field work, while I was still building up contacts among the musicians of Bangangté, I would ask practically everyone I knew if they were musicians or if they could take me to performances, or if they could introduce me to any “traditional” musicians. Quite a few people – especially young adults – claimed to be unable to help me; they just didn’t know how to make contact with traditional musicians.

Performance and rehearsal are also uneven. It is not the case that everyone is a master of music in Bangangté – a common romantic stereotype in some discourses about “Africans” or “traditional peoples.” While many people have at least passing competence on some percussion in at least one genre, quite a few limit their musical participation to dancing and response-singing. There is, however, a group of people whom I refer to as “vocational musicians.” Vocational musicians are the leaders and “masters” of “traditional” musicking¹⁰ for Bangangté. They are people who have chosen to focus as much of their energies as possible into musicking. Vocational musicians have sufficient depth in at least one genre that they can play any instrument involved with it, dance it, or sing it. Many vocational musicians, such as Marc, had this level of knowledge about several genres. At least one younger vocational musician, Jean, was actively engaged in expanding his coverage of the “traditional” genres. He has already mastered *benskin* and, when I first met him, was already well down the path of mastering *mangambeu*.

I do not conceive of vocational musicians as “better” than non-vocational. Obviously, since the former, as a group, spend a lot of time musicking, they become skillful. This emphatically does not mean that the latter universally fail to become skillful; many of them are. After all, even a run-of-the-mill, rank-and-file member of a musical association attends a rehearsal 2-4 times a month depending on the group, and participates at many performances of their own and other ensembles throughout the year. I witnessed numerous fantastic performances by women and men who appeared not to have the experience with musicking or identification with music as vocation that the likes of Jean, Marc, and Martin undoubtedly do. The crucial distinguishing trait of vocational musicians is an atti-

tude towards music and selfhood – their presentation of self is very bound up with their musicking.

I had more trouble engaging women on these topics than I did men. The difficulty I had gaining close connection with all-women associations shut me off from opportunities to observe what happens when there aren't men around dominating the musicking. Therefore, it was difficult for me to know much about how different women position themselves in relation to this vocational mode of musicking. For the associations with which I spent a good deal of time, three women seemed to me to be eligible for this category.

Because of my difficulties accessing the musicking of women, many of my judgments about women's self-orientations to musicking could be inaccurate. One of the women I worked with who might be a vocational musician is Christine. Christine was a revered singer in multiple genres. Her knowledge of *benskin* was clearly deep, she received a lot of respect from other members, and had a degree of musical authority. She was not, however, the musical director (*chef d'orchestre*) of the group through which I met her.

Musical directors are always, from what I can tell, vocational musicians. Martin was AB's; Marc held that office for both the *mangambeu* (AM) and *ndanji* associations he introduced me to. Jean and Guy (another vocational musician in the *benskin* group I worked with) were not the musical director of any associations. Musical directors must know all the instruments and be able to sing in the genre a given association works with. While the membership discusses most decisions facing an association during meetings, it is sometimes possible for a musical director to put his (or her¹¹) foot down on musical matters, claiming the right to unilateral authority. Marc attempted this far more often than

Martin, but he did not always succeed. The president of AM, Jules, also had quite a bit of musical authority and had no qualms about going toe-to-toe with Marc. A rank-and-filer, Marguerite, often supported Jules in his disapproval of Marc.

There is considerable ambiguity, disagreement, and confusion surrounding the issue of where “traditional” musicking is being done. A simple ideology that, since “the village” is “traditional” (more on this in chapter five), “traditional” musicking occurs there, is *not* what I encountered. Early in my relationship with Cameroon, while I was first asking around about music and language and choosing a field site, I started to get contradictory advice. Some people did say that, if I wanted “traditional” music, “the village” is where I should go. However, many people – perhaps half or more – told me that this kind of music is actually being maintained by people based in major cities, many of whom were raised in a small village, but left in the hopes of making a living solely as a professional musician. I did observe an abundance of “traditional” music associations in Douala. The brief but relatively intimate contact I had with them suggests that the members of these associations tend to focus on keeping the urban-rural connection strong; some of the names of the associations include a village, and the members are – at least ideally – members of that village’s matriline. (Chapter five also includes a fuller discussion of the emplacement of kinship.)

None of this suggested, to me, an actual shortage of “traditional” musicking or musicians in Bangangté, but it illustrates the complexity and “fractal recursivity” of semiotic relationships between practices, concepts, places, and spaces. Susan Gal and Judith Irvine introduce and illustrate the theoretical salience of the concept of fractal recursivity for semiotic ideologies, broadly speaking (see Gal 2005, Irvine 2001, Irvine and Gal 2000).

A fractal is a pattern which repeats *within* itself: i.e., elements *occur* over and over; concentric circles are a simple example. The orbit of star systems around galaxies, of planets around stars, and of subatomic particles around their nuclei is a more complicated one. It also applies to conceptual or practical organization, not only visual patterns. For example, within a normative European art-music concert hall, audience members normatively pay attention to the orchestra, and members of the orchestra normatively pay attention to the conductor. Fractal recursivity appears to be an organizing principle of general applicability in studies of ideology. Awareness of it helps analysts understand the social fields of ethnographic and historical inquiry. In Cameroon, the urban associations' members create "traditional" spaces by enacting "traditional" performances and practices within them, even if they are nested within "modern" places – cities.

codes and "traditional/modern"

Code choice indexes this semiotic tension, as well. Indigenous languages – in the case of this fieldwork, Mèdûmbà – were an uncomplicated index of "tradition." As will become clearer in chapter five, Bamiléké territory itself was generally considered a place "of tradition." As is now well-known, code-switching is sensitive to situations of speaking, and it is true that Bamiléké people use French more in big cities than they do in Bamiléké territory. However, to say that the Bamiléké of Bangangté use Mèdûmbà in Bangangté, and that they use French in a big city, would be misleading. A finer-grained consideration of "situations" is necessary.

Addressee is one of the factors determining which language bilingual people will choose. As in Puerto Rican neighborhoods in New York City, speakers usually accommodate addressees who command a different repertoire (Zentella 1997). This meant that I

heard a lot more French than I suspect is typical in the absence of *un blanc*. There is a common – and not unwarranted – assumption that white people do not speak African languages. While I never became fluent, my competence in Mèdêmbà was consistently underestimated by people who were meeting me for the first time.

Another factor is topic. Some topics, as I wrote above, index “the modern” and it is common – although not necessary – to discuss them in a language which does the same, such as French. I know that this sort of codeswitching carries on in my absence because of what faced me when I walked into the coffee shop I frequented. Customers were almost always talking with each other and a conversation *in French* about “learned” or nation/political affairs was frequently already underway. Bangangté children are only extremely rarely taught in an African language, and so discussion of lessons tended to be in French.

A situation that demanded use of Mèdêmbà was meetings of the musical banks. Although the prescription was trumped by accommodation to semi- or non- speakers, it was a formal (as in “written down and supposedly agreed-upon”) rule of both the groups I worked closely with. Members could be fined for breaking it or required to step outside for a few minutes. I expect that, in extreme cases of repeated violation, suspension would be considered. However, this never occurred while I was there. More on these rules in chapter four.

Code-choice during ritual is careful, too. Christian ritual, in this part of the world, is usually in French or English. This might be less common than my own observations reveal because there has been a New Testament in Medumba for some time. I did see a great many study groups which used the Medumba New Testament exclusively. A large

percentage of the few who are literate in Medumba became so solely so they could read the Medumba scriptures.

“Traditional” rituals of mourning require use of an indigenous language, however. In these cases, using a language other than Medumba carries with it a distinct sense, for most of the people I worked with, that something was going or would go wrong. Even instances where a participant knew French and another Bamileké language, such as Fe’Fe’,¹² were less than ideal.

Another factor in code-choice was speakers’ preference in presentation of self. Some people orient themselves more toward having a “modern” persona, others more toward “traditional.” From what I can tell, the former choose French more often than the latter did, and Mèdêmbà more rarely than the latter did. This choice is in keeping with the indexical relationships between places and codes. Villages are the pre-eminently “traditional” places, and African languages are the languages of “tradition.” Colonial languages, used more in the cities than they are in the villages, index modernity at some level even when used in the village.

Similarly, “traditional” music seems almost to require use of an African language. Only once did I encounter any “traditional” genre being played with French words. It was during my private instruction in *benskin*. Martin and Jean taught me a Christian song that was appropriate for *benskin*’s rhythmic framework. What is significant about this is that they did not improvise at all during this song; even on the solo drums, they taught me to maintain a certain pattern without variation. French didn’t easily or often go with *benskin* or *mangambeu*, in Bangangté. There seemed to be a distinct reduction in excitement when we played this song. However, there was an increase in solemnity, suggesting sig-

nificant divergence between the significance of Christian and non-Christian aspects of ritual and performance for the Bamiléké of Bangangté.¹³

disavowal of “traditional” knowledge

Every Cameroonian I met had some involvement in negotiating the moral valuation of “traditional” and “modern;” nobody was indifferent. People’s actions indexed stances within this dynamic without explicit statement, which demonstrated that knowledge of “traditional” and “modern” was distributed widely. This is the kind of knowing I discussed via Briggs, Scieffelin, and Williams in the introduction (Briggs 1996, Schieffelin 1985, 1996, Williams 1977). Despite all this felt, non-denotatively explicit knowledge of “traditional/modern,” *authority* on “tradition” was distributed quite unevenly. Many people claimed that they, themselves, didn’t know much about it and that there was someone else I should ask about it if I was interested. This display of ignorance seemed to fly in the face of the subtlety of understanding displayed non-denotatively in participatory frames like musicking and the negotiation of rules in musical banks. Had I taken these disavowals on face value, I would have understood little about “tradition” and its implications for participation and performance in Bangangté. I delve into this discourse of authority for two reasons: the first is to show that non-explicit discourse is essential for my ethnography; the second is that the discourse itself played a role in constructing “tradition” at a non-denotatively explicit meta-level.

Disavowal of personal authority was clearer in no domain than that of the “traditional ‘rules’” and calendar. Since before colonialism, there has been an eight-day week in Bamiléké territory. The days of the week and a summary of what activities pertain to them are on display in some chiefs’ compounds in the region. Various individuals and

organizations keep track of the cycle, and calendars with the “traditional” week are available to those who know where to ask. I found two of these calendars in Bangangté, and they were in agreement on the names, order, and phase of the days. As I write this – on a Thursday – it is *ntanbu*. Next Thursday will be *nzinyam*.

One of the most important features of the ideology of the Bamiléké week is that certain activities are prescribed or proscribed for each day of the week, depending on what village one is in. Many towns have their market days on the eight-day cycle. Bangangté is big enough to have two markets per week, but they are on the occidental calendar – Saturdays and Wednesdays. There are also days appropriate for holding meetings of rotating credit associations and for farming. Another frequent consultant, Elise, treated me to an extended discourse on the prescriptions and proscriptions for certain days. Interestingly, she wasn’t too sure about what activities were right or wrong for which days; she only knew that these relationships exist and – happily for her – where to go to find out the details. To the best of her ability, she does observe them, though. For example, in Bangangté, it is forbidden to work in the fields on *nga* or *nsigha*. She said that if you do, a large snake might eat you.¹⁴ She also had heard of someone who farmed on a forbidden day and unearthed a child’s corpse in the field; this happened, so the logic of local metaphysics goes, because it was a forbidden day for farming.

An aspect of “traditional” rules that is especially revealing of the importance of place is the fact that several people I spoke with who frequently travel between Ndé and major cities report that, in addition to not being experts on such matters, they knowingly ignore the “rules” when in the city. The importance of following them, it seems, is only active while in the quasi-sacred “village” places. One of these frequent travelers added that

there is a class of special rules governing actions and behavior in the presence of a chief. For example, he was aware that walking behind a chief's stool is forbidden, unless there's a screen protecting his back. In that case, one may walk behind the screen. Again, he told me all of this after disclaiming authority and comprehensive knowledge of "traditional" rules.

All of this deferral of authority on "traditional" rules raises the question of who, if anyone, is thought to actually keep this knowledge. The simplified answer is "chiefs and elders." However, there is a difference between answers to direct questions from a meta-pragmatically floundering ethnographer and practices of actually finding out when you need to know are not the same things. One of the official roles of the chief and his close officers is, indeed, to keep this sort of knowledge. Going to see an officer at the chief's compound may not be convenient, though. For one thing, there's no guarantee that anyone will be around the compound when you drop in. The current chief of Bangangté is quite mobile and cosmopolitan, being involved in numerous political and public ventures relevant to the lives of his subjects. (Bangangté's "modern" chief creates palpable semi-otic tension, but is quite popular, nevertheless.)

Second, the compound is about a mile from the center of town, and – unless you happen to live or work out that way – it may be easier to find another qualified person close by. Elders can be called up for an informal, practical answer. Younger people who do not trust their knowledge of the rules of "tradition" usually have some elderly kin who are more comfortable answering questions of this nature. To be sure, there are some younger people who are quite well versed in the matter, and some elderly people who

might sometimes “bluff” their authority on “tradition.” Nevertheless, young and middle-aged people often turn to grandma or grandpa for “traditional” knowledge.

Interestingly, there are intellectuals in Bangangté who seem to wish to *gain* authority as keepers of this knowledge, but, from what I encountered, it is not working. CEPOM keeps a lot of this knowledge in its library, but I never heard anyone except CEPOM’s founders recommend going to the library to look up what days are wrong for a burial, for example. Similarly, one of my consultants has written a short ethnographic monograph of the Bamiléké (Wansi Eyoumbi [no date]), which includes much relevant information. However, the people in his life consider him a committed, knowledgeable, enthusiastic equal, not a superior authority.

These data show that, while I did collect a great quantity of explicit commentary on “tradition,” my understanding would have remained shallow had I limited myself to that kind of discourse. People “know” “tradition” partly because they negotiate its constitution and reconstitution every day of their lives. That people disavow this kind of knowledge indicates a few important things about how and what “tradition” indexes. The abstracting, reifying knowledge of scholarship does not fit with “tradition.” Briggs (1984, 1986, 1996:219-20, 2007) argues that such knowing is culturally specific to possibly as small a group as the middle classes of Europe and its diaspora. Practical or embodied knowledge (Williams 1977) seems to be “traditional” for the Bamiléké of Bangangté. Positioning chiefs and the elderly as authorities reinforces age and the nobles/commoners system as indexes of “tradition” (see chapter five for more on nobility and ideology). The rules and the Bamiléké calendar are “tradition,” but there are not rules about everything

contemporary Bamiléké do. The rules pertain to such domains as farming and supernatural forces, which are both “tradition” indexes.

conclusion

This chapter has introduced and sketched some of the major tropes which will be important throughout this dissertation. Each of the next four chapters focuses on the semiotics, discourse, and metadiscourse of different ways musicking, speech, belonging, place, poverty, and death are connected to the “traditional/modern” binary. The next two chapters focus on the musical banks’ musicking, the major concerns of their members, what the members do together, and the effects and significance of musicking in relation to all of this.

notes

¹ These are Dschang, Fe’fe’, and Ghomala, in recent professional linguists’ nomenclature. Again, *pace* Lewis (2009).

² Following Agawu (2003c), I avoid polymetric, additive, and cross rhythmic analyses, for present purposes. However, Friedson’s (2009) critique of Agawu on this point is compelling.

³ Describing time in African music has been beset by numerous theoretical and political problems (Agawu 2003 [1995], Shelemay 2008), which I regret that I have not resolved any better than my numerous predecessors. The “translation” of Bangangté’s “traditional” or “organic” musical theory into musical metadiscourse familiar in “the West” will be hamstrung right away by the fact that, to the best of my understanding, my consultants do not count their music, so the whole idea of a time signature does considerable violence to the subjectivities of my consultants.

⁴ See Ignatowski's *Journey of Song* (2006) for another look at competing value systems refracted through musicking in Cameroon. This field work was carried out in the Extreme North Province with members of the Fulani ethnic group.

⁵ Once, one of my language tutors, Hector, looked with great admiration at the minidisk player I used for field recordings and remarked with wonder on the powerful and amazing things "white people" have. Perhaps confirming, for him, the stereotype of "white" selfishness, I refused his request for the minidisk player as a gift when I left the country at the conclusion of my fieldwork.

⁶ In the same conversation, Marc also gave me a Mèdûmbà vocabulary lesson. Interestingly, he went "up" a metalinguistic level and told me (in French) that this is the "real Mèdûmbà." This was not the only time I encountered statements that there was "the real" language for such and such a village, but what people currently use is either a different language, or so me other kind of language than the "real" one. While Marc only indirectly indexed the past in this conversation by juxtaposing it with a discussion of his grandparents and older technology, some other conversations included an explicit statement that the "real" language was used in the past.

My first encounter with this "real language" phenomenon occurred in Toronto, Ontario. I know some Bamiléké-Canadians living there, and I arranged for some language training in preparation for my fieldwork. At the time, I was planning to work in Bazou, which is not far from Bangangté. The arrangement was that this fellow in Toronto, Henri, would teach me what he could of "Bazou-language." In one of our first sessions, he told me that today, in Bazou, the true language of Bazou is not spoken *any more*. Rather, the daily language was something else. He did not provide a label or characterization of the contemporary vernacular. This became very familiar to me in Bangangté discussing Bangangté-language.

This absence of commentary on contemporary Bangangté, too, persisted. It wasn't only that many people, including Marc, talked about the "real language" as something that was absent from Bangangté's public spheres, but also that no one had anything to say about what *was* being spoken. No one said anything like "fake" or "blended" or "Europeanized," and I never learned how to ask (Briggs 1984, 1986) about this. There was just clearly a feeling, from some people, that authenticity had been compromised.

⁷ *Bikutsi* is, on the one hand, the name of a “traditional” music associated with the Beti ethnic group, found well East of Bamiléké territory. “*Bikutsi* rock” emerged in Yaoundé. This genre became internationally known in the 1980s thanks to *Les Tetes Brulees*. Cameroon’s national football team invited them to be an official cheering squad during the World Cup. Shanachie Records released their album, *Hot Heads*, in 1990.

⁸ Makossa does have antecedents in indigenous music associated with the Duala ethnic group, but that doesn’t make it traditional for anyone I met in Bangangté. It may be that contemporary Duala people recognize a “traditional” mode of Makossa.

⁹ This genre is vocal music accompanied only by maracas played by all members of the ensemble. The gendering of this genre impeded my learning about it. I certainly witnessed many performances of it, but no one ever suggested taking me to an event specifically so I could gain some exposure to it. I certainly had no sense that anyone would have encouraged me to sing with the women. This was very different from how locals related me to other genres. Many times, Marc or Jean arranged to take me to a mourning event so I could hear a good ensemble or a genre I didn’t know much about. It is difficult for me to say much about the economy of status for “traditional” genres. Pierre and Marc were forthcoming with their evaluations of genres, but most people were not. Marc – more than most people I encountered – made brazenly misogynistic statements from time to time. Therefore, I wouldn’t be surprised to encounter direct evidence that he considered “women’s” *a capella* music sub-standard. On a few occasions, Marc and Pierre listed for me “the genres” of traditional music; neither of them mentioned it at all.

¹⁰ There are vocational musicians who work predominantly in popular or “modern” musics. I have marginalized them from this dissertation partly for the sake of research feasibility and partly because of the salience of the “traditional/modern” divide for my consultants. This salience makes it possible, I believe, to fruitfully explore the content and use of one or the other category of music, so long as one recognizes that a full account of musicking in Bangangté would have to include “modern” music, and the networks of family and friends which stretch between places like Bangangté and the two metropolises (Douala and Yaoundé).

¹¹ I never met a female musical director. I don’t know if women’s associations have them. It’s not hard to imagine the use of a similar institutional structure. However, it could be quite different for women’s associ-

ations. Musicking is very obviously gendered in Bamiléké territory, as it is in much of Western Africa (Charry 2000, Chernoff 1979). Indeed, there were many situations which, I think, indicated that many women positively valued forming groups and engaging in activities without men.

¹² Fe'Fe' is dominant in the next *departement* over. Bafang is the largest town, there.

¹³ This example is complicated by the fact that the song was Christian and the other singing was not. This would have conditioned a different affective response than the typical themes of *benskin* (mourning, money, gender relations), which would have had an impact perhaps connected to differences between “traditional” music and church music, for these people. At this point, I can't do much more than speculate because my fieldwork did not focus on church music.

¹⁴ This actually isn't very far from being a realistic possibility. I once saw photos of a captured and killed boa constrictor which had entered the city of Bafoussam and, unfortunately, managed to kill and ingest a school-aged child.

chapter three

“tradition” in musicking

Both music clubs and informal banking institutions are common throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (Askew 2002, Erlmann 1996, Guyer 1995, 2004, Peebles 2010, Soen and Comarmond 1972, Waterman 1990). What is less common outside of the Grassfields is finding the same group of acquaintances undertaking both together, a phenomenon which was the primary focus of my field work. This chapter and the next one deal directly with the musical banks. Here, I will argue that their musicking is crucially bound up with “performing ‘tradition.’” Therefore, I will describe and analyze aspects of musical sound and linguistic and musical ideologies (including Turino’s musical fields, which I introduced in chapter one) as they relate to the construction of “traditional” and “modern” in Bangangté, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Affirmation and alignment with the values of “tradition” is a basic stance which any member of a musical bank occupies with familiarity; their musicking is a strong indication of this. Why their musicking is the way it is becomes clearer through the ideological analysis. Treatment of financial practices will wait until the following chapter.

Musical banks usually had between fifteen and forty members. Membership was formalized in that a prospective member was required to ask to join at a meeting. This in-

cluded a statement of what musical role was desired. If accepted, her or his name was added to the financial books and, if necessary, a program of musical training was arranged with the musical director. Membership, then, was clear cut.

The sex-ratio among the members was usually close to evenly balanced. However, there was considerable gendered division of labor. Women played lead instruments such as drums and xylophones only exceptionally rarely, and were under-represented on accompanying percussion such as maracas and rasps. Offices (see chapter four) were also dominated by men, but not exclusively. AB's vice-president was a woman, for example.

There are some exceptions to these patterns. One genre, *lali*, seemed to be heavily dominated by men, but I am not aware of any discourse suggesting that there were expressly all-male musical banks. There were musical banks for women only. Most of them eschewed genres requiring the lead instruments, but I did observe two all-female groups performing with drums.

Slightly over fifty percent of the musical bankers I worked with were in two banks, however, some of these did no musicking at all. A large minority were only in one bank and a smaller minority were in three or more. Some vocational musicians were members of groups which were solely musical. Those who were members of two or fewer banks tended to aspire to achieving more memberships. What deterred them was difficulty raising the capital for the minimum investment each bank required (more on this in chapter four). No musical banks required its members to limit their memberships in other banks. However, AB had an interesting and controversial rule which damaged them musically.

AB's genre was *benskin*, and members of AB were free to be members of as many other groups as they liked, so long as none of them were *benskin* groups, too. Jean, for

example, was also in AM, which played *mangambeu*. However, Jean, Martin (AB's musical director) and two other vocational musicians in AB were members of CB, a purely musical *benskin* ensemble. These four were told that if they did not quit CB, they would lose their memberships in AB. I discussed this situation in great length with the four men in question, with other members of AB, with vocational musicians in other groups, and with members of other groups. Everyone except members of AB thought it was a bizarre and destructive rule. Jean, Martin, and one of the others decided to quit AB. At the end of my field work, AB was feeling the loss of three central figures and I do not know what has happened to their musicking, since.

Why was “performing ‘tradition’” so important for the musical bankers? There are three reasons: the first is that the bankers and their musicking were strongly oriented towards “tradition” as a positive moral value. In general, they were deeply invested in their particular musical banks, or musical banks in general, understanding them as important, valuable institutions. As will become clear over the course of this chapter and the following two, “tradition” discourse as practice constructed a model of a “good” life which was deeply satisfying for many Bamiléké people in Bangangté. This ideal for life included supportive connections between people, beauty in temporal and visual modalities, management of the supernatural, and feeling “at home” on the land.

The second reason relates to the musical bankers' public appearances, most of which were at funeral events. It is important that these events please the deceased. That the mourners music acceptably is one of the necessary components of pleasing dead ancestors. For the vast majority of funeral-planners in Bangangté, “traditional” music was preferable to “modern,” and the musical bankers provided the former. This relates directly to

the third reason they committed to performing “tradition,” they believed it was lucrative. The demand for what they were doing was high in Bangangté.

“Tradition” entails a wide range of practices and choices. It entails code-choice and clothing. It entails participant structures in performance. With respect to musical form, there are choices to be made about genres, instruments, and participatory discrepancies. These entailments suggest a broader ideology of sound. Committing to all of this opened the musical bankers up to criticism, however. While there was no shortage of people in full support of “performing ‘tradition,’” there were some who took a different stance, attempting to raise their status by drawing on “modern” authoritative discourse. Not coincidentally, use of this discourse of disdain for “tradition” was concentrated among powerful, affluent, cosmopolitan, urban-based people. For example, an aspiring pop star, Luc, who was based in Douala, but visited Bangangté frequently, knew about my research interests and sought me out to discuss culture and musicking. When I mentioned that I was learning the “traditional” genres *mangambeu* and *benskin*, he said that he thought they were a bit vulgar.

Members maintained their involvement despite knowledge of powerful discourses which compared “tradition” unfavorably to “the modern.” I take such involvement as a subtle defiance of or resistance to those who denounce “villagers,” “tradition,” and associated practices. For example, a young mother, Belle, in the family I boarded with asked me where I’d been one evening after returning from an AB meeting. When I told her, she said that I should cease to have contact with any such groups because they are all involved with witchcraft.

Participation in musical banks was an affirmation of the values “tradition” indexes. In the case of Belle’s attitude, the musical bankers would say that there’s nothing dark or anti-Christian about what they do. They are Christians! So, when someone seeks and maintains membership in such groups, with the support of the rest of the membership, they create excitement and high status by “doing tradition.” This is compelling for people who already feel invested in the values of “tradition,” but also feel the authority coming from various sources which judge “tradition” unfavorably; being in a musical bank resolves the dissonance and valorizes “tradition” and “traditional” musicking. At the same time, it talks back to discourses – neoliberal and others – asserting the negativity of “tradition” and what it indexes, including the low worth (or, “disposability” [see Klein 2007:15]) of poor and “villagey” people.

canon and composition

My training in “traditional” musicking was organized around mastering genres, which were canonical. In the case of genres taken to be older (more on this, below), there were different ways or styles within genres. The styles could come in and out of fashion, according to Marc and other musical bankers I spoke to. Much more ephemeral than the styles – to say nothing of the genres which were ideologized as perduring – were songs.

Long instrumental sections were common, but my teachers would sing songs as part of my training so I would have something to accompany. With very few exceptions, they had composed them personally or had improvised them. All of the singing at musical banks’ rehearsals and funeral appearances was heavily improvisational. Fully improvised song would draw, of course, on familiar phrases or themes arranged and elaborated with greater or lesser novelty. There were relatively entextualized songs, though, which had a

composer and could be repeated. Even they, however, constituted a framework which required considerable flexibility, improvisation, and variation. Songs had a known composer and there were no canonical songs that I was aware of. Usually, people sang their own compositions, but this was not always the case.

“Composition” by no means implies writing. It was rare, but not unheard of for songtexts to be written down. Even these songs were only a framework, in most cases. “Composition,” in this context, includes any premeditation on what to sing. This could be the selection of an anecdote using people’s names, perhaps, or a discourse on a moral principle. Examples are to be found in this chapter and in chapter five.

genres

Each musical bank I encountered played one and only one “traditional” genre, never a “modern” genre. One group I worked very closely with played *mangambeu* (AM, for “*association de mangambeu*”); the other played *benskin* (AB, for “*association de benskin*”). I also interacted occasionally and unsystematically with a *ndanji* bank (AN), and two *lali* banks. Various formal and ideological features of these genres distinguish them from the “modern” musicking I and the musical bankers encountered around Bangangté and around Cameroon.

mangambeu: lamellophones

All “traditional” genres require singing, dancing, and instruments. I spent significant time and effort on three, *ndanji*, *benskin*, and *mangambeu*. *Mangambeu*, uses large lamellophones as its central instrument, a class which has virtually no representation in “modern” music, as my consultants understood it. Unlike the more widely known, and smaller

mbira of Central and Southern Africa (Berliner 1978, Kaemmer 2008, Kubik 2008, Turino 2000, 2008), Bangangté lamellophones – *loŋə*, in Mèdâmbà, sometimes called *kalimbas* – are mounted on a wooden resonator case, are played with the index and middle fingers, and have only one manual. The musical bankers preferred to make keys from metal umbrella staves. According to Marc, the ideal number of *loŋə* per ensemble is three; every *mangambeu* group I saw in Bangangté used that number.

The *loŋə* is a pitched instrument and it must be kept in tune. Tuning implicates the relative pitches between keys and between instruments. It also includes the absolute pitches because the tension on a key affects how much sustain and buzz results when it is struck. A key with too much tension will be quiet and – past a certain point – cease to have a pitch. A key with too little tension will also be quiet and – again, past a certain point – become floppy and cease to have pitch. Some *orchestres de mangambeu* had a bass *kalimba*, which had larger resonating cases than the standard ones. Their lowest pitch keys were made from bamboo because this material can get low pitches while still under high pressure. This made them louder than metal keys at the same pitch.

Also in contrast to *mbira* (Berliner 1978, Turino 2008), the lamellophones of Bangangté did not have any attachments to increase buzzing, such as bottle caps or rings. The musical bankers did not seek to eliminate or reduce buzzing when it arose due to structural features of the instruments, though. Buzzing is a timbral effect that indexes “tradition” in musicking.



Figure 3.1 myself and a *mangambeu* ensemble in rehearsal: some in performance attire (yellow shirts)

Musical bankers did not tune *loŋə* to the “tempered” scale, another practice distinguishing what they did from the studio-produced radio hits that are “modern” prototypes. The *kalimbas*’ keys were tuned at intervals roughly equivalent to degrees I, II, III, and V of the ionian mode. All ways of playing *mangambeu* that I encountered alternate between chords composed of degrees I and III, on the one hand, and II and V, on the other. Therefore, a syntactic, tonality-based analysis (e.g., Meyer 1956) would not be revealing for this genre, despite its productivity for social analysis of some other musics (e.g., McClary 1991, Walser 1993). The same goes for the other “traditional” Bamiléké genres.

Such de-emphasis of harmonic “movement” also distinguished the bankers’ repertoire from musicking they classed as “modern.” Tonality is a musical principle particular to the histories of those social contexts in which it arose, not a generalizable basis from

which to understand or evaluate musical performances or styles throughout history and the world (Blacking 1973, Keil 1994 [1966], Small 1996 [1977]). Agawu (2003a), Keil (1994 [1966]) and Small (1996 [1977]) argue that “Western” preference for tonal musicking has become tangled up with (neo)colonial and racist discourses justifying the oppression and disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, and the working classes. However, it is equally important not to perpetuate neocolonialism by denying the importance of structured relations of pitches in those examples of African musicking which display it (Agawu 2003b, 2003 [1995]).

Mangambeu’s percussion, too, is radically different from “modern” percussion, of which drum-kits and drum-machines are emblematic. *Mangambeu* calls for two people to beat rhythms with thick wooden sticks on dried bamboo trunks (usually two of them) lashed together with rope or wire. One person plays the rhythm best notated in the Western system as follows:



The person playing this part uses two sticks, each hand playing the same rhythm, but slightly out of synchrony, which means that the sticks never hit at precisely the same instant (“flams”). This, to the subjectivity most common amongst the musical bankers, adds excitement. This part is the back-bone of the genre at the formal level. Its “timing is the hinge of a suspended musical world around which all else turns...It is something in between a meter and rhythm, something that at once defines a rate of motion and gives that motion a life of its own” (Friedson 2009:137-8).

The other person playing sticks taps this rhythm:



The right hand plays steady 8th notes, with the left hand adding the 16th notes. The result is that the right hand makes twice as many hits as the left. Everyone I saw playing this part executed every attack solely from the wrist with all fingers remaining in contact with the stick throughout. There was no technique of strong and weak hits for the right hand achieved by “dropping” the stick or playing from the fingers, as observed in some communities in, for example, Ghana (Chernoff 1979, Friedson 2009), and among many North American kit drummers. At the fast tempos the musical bankers preferred, this part was a challenge.

The maracas are also important. It is “the same” as the second sticks part in terms of attacks, but is interesting in terms of how the musical bankers moved their arms and wrists in order to produce it. The “beats” were played by the right hand on a down-stroke. The “off-beats” were played by the left hand on an up-stroke. The 16th notes emerged on both hands – a down-stroke on the left, an up-stroke on the right as it “wound up” for “beats.”

Maracas, the second part for sticks, the dancing, and the bass *kalimba* all maintain a strong 4/4 beat. The divisions of time made by attacks, though, especially in performing the first part for sticks (what Friedson called the “hinge,” above) are not mechanically equal as in “ideal” mechanical 4/4. In practice, the feel is somewhere “between” triplet-feel and equal 16th notes. It is most noticeable with the second note of the hinge part, which came quite “early,” depending on who was playing it. This sort of rhythmic practice was immediately striking to early European and Euro-American ethnomusicologists

of Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Chernoff 1979, Jones 1959, Merriam 1959) and was once thought to be peculiar to the region. However, it turned out to be basic to musicking, globally, including marginalized musics of Europe and North America. There also turned out to be much less uniformity across Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of rhythm in particular and musicking in general, than these early scholars recognized (Agawu 2003 [1995], Stone 2008). Generalizations made by early African ethnomusicologists of Sub-Saharan Africa tended to be more complicated (see, e.g., Bebey 1975, Nketia 1974, Stone 1982).

That the musical bankers timed attacks – with hands, maracas, sticks, or fingers – in such a way that they were clearly playing neither 16th notes or triplets was an ingredient in the excitement they generated. Such micro-regularities – Keil’s *processual participatory discrepancies* (1994 [1987], 1995) – partially account for the effectiveness of the musicking, and provide metadiscursive data to an anthropologist because people interested in equal subdivision of “note durations,” or some such concern, can develop the skills to make it an available choice in their participatory repertoire. The fact that the musical bankers did not do so is significant for understanding music ideologies influencing them. The pursuit of mathematically equal “subdivision” of beats is antithetical to the “grooves” and musical structures of feeling the musical bankers created and developed.

I do not believe that my consultants theorized sound and time in their musicking mathematically or spatially at all. No one ever in my presence figuratively “divided” time up or otherwise spatialized rhythm during talk about correct playing. When things were going poorly during rehearsal, no one ever counted along to help. There was no “down beat,” as is normative for “Western” musicking, insofar as, while it was normal for the bankers to discuss “beats,” they were all of equal strength.

Interestingly, ensembles were sometimes “counted in,” but the tempo at which the group started was usually nowhere near the tempo of the counting. This suggests that a concept similar to that of “bar” or “measure” was not useful or interesting to them. Counting in was a practice that presumably became familiar during colonialism, but did not make much of an impact on musical ideologies or practices in Bangangté.

Some “modern” African hits heard on Cameroonian radios and CD-players used live percussion; in those cases, processual participatory discrepancies were audible. However, a huge percentage of these hits relied on drum-machines, not drummers or looped samples. Sampling may be electronic, but it retains the participatory discrepancies of the original performance, which is a large part of its appeal among those musicians who favor it. Popular music from North America or Europe on Cameroonian radios and CD-players, even if it did not feature programmed percussion, were venues for North American or European drummers. The participatory discrepancies of those performances were, of course, quite different.

Processual participatory discrepancies performed by Bamiléké people (and those of people from elsewhere in Africa) were found in “modern” musicking, then, in some cases. “Traditional” musicking always had them, though. They may not have been a sufficient condition of the latter, but they were a necessary condition.

ndanji: xylophones

Of these three genres, I am least knowledgeable of *ndanji*. I only occasionally attended the meetings of Marc’s *ndanji* bank, but he did teach me to play it in our private sessions. The principal instrument of *ndanji* is a xylophone played by two people at once, using thick wooden sticks to hit the edges on the ends of the keys, which were rough-

hewn boards: about 1½ inches deep, three inches wide, and two to three feet long, always made from the same type of tree. No additional resonators were included; the keys, being so large, were loud. My consultants called their xylophone a *balafon*, no doubt partly due to colonial contact.

The number and order of the keys and the scale were variable. Twelve was a typical number of keys. There was considerable disagreement among *ndanji* experts on the order of keys and when to consider a key in tune. These disagreements meant that it was difficult for me to get a handle on what any individual's ideal scale for the instrument was. Sometimes, it was tuned in a heptatonic, equitonal scale.¹



Figure 3.2 myself and some consultants rehearsing *ndanji*

It was standard to keep the keys in a sack. At every performance (including rehearsals), someone would chop down two banana plants, lay their trunks on a table, and at-

tach the keys to the plants by banging steel pins through holes drilled in the keys for this purpose. The pins were kept in the sack along with the keys. I found myself wondering how long the banana plant population could withstand this aggressive culling. However, banana plants grow very quickly because they're not actually trees, but are much more like very large, very sturdy reeds. Second, on agricultural land, people leave banana plants to grow and fruit. There seems to be little cause for worry about the future of bananas in *Ndé*.

I found *ndanji* extremely difficult to master because I had trouble feeling how the different parts fit together. The ensemble also included maracas, sticks banging the nearest convenient table-top or bench, and an optional drum. The sticks and drum played this rhythm:



The same thing was in *mangambeu*. I could play the sticks to Marc's satisfaction in *ndanji* if I locked myself in strictly with a solid drummer, but I never got the maracas right. This meant that I was hopeless at the dance, because it and the maracas were "the same," as far as my consultants were concerned. Marc and other members of AN also judged my performance on the *balafon* to be minimally satisfactory, but even after weeks of practice, I wasn't tapping my foot when the musical bankers and other locals tapped theirs.

Ndanji is one of the genres for which proper attire is necessary – in this case, a full-length, white tunic, usually custom-made by a local tailor, as such garments are not available "off the rack." All dancers were required to have a shaker in one hand, as well. Such attire is "traditional" because it is not trousers or a skirt with a shirt or blouse made in a

factory. Most people caught without their tunic at a *ndanji* event would either consider themselves out of luck or go home and get it. However, I usually saw a few people without white tunics or shakers dancing anyway, but together in a separate group away from the main circle of dancers.

Attire is a domain in which it is easy to notice slippage between the tropes “traditional,” “villagey,” and “poor” as they are conceptualized in hegemonic discourse. Discourse on what counts as “fashionable” or “preferable” clothing was not unified. It, too, is sensitive to how and where an individual can be (or wishes to be) located with respect to the ambiguous opposition between “traditional” and “modern.” “Traditional” clothing for women is mostly dresses and head wraps. For men, it’s long tunics and baggy trousers with a floppy cap. Members of both sexes typically wear brightly colored patterns, when it comes to “traditional” dress. Such garments were normally commissioned from a tailor and, therefore, fitted to the wearer’s measurements. People who projected a “modern-oriented” identity were much more likely to prefer slacks and button-up shirts, or jeans and tight t-shirts when dressing their best. “Modern” style came “off the rack.” Going about normal daily affairs, almost all men in Bangangté wear trousers and a shirt most of the time, even the most “villagey” of them and the poorest of them. However, the torn, dirty, or casual trousers and shirts often worn by male farmers or poor men would never be called “modern” attire, even though they are not “traditional,” either.

Farming and poverty are quite antithetical, semiotically, to what people in Bangangté usually mean by “modern.” This is because “modern” authority and values are tied up with affluence and dominance, which is very similar to neoliberal “development” logic (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994, Gardner and Lewis 1996, Gupta 1998). Under neoliberal-

ism, poverty itself is a sign of having failed, due to willful irrationality or woeful ignorance, to take the actions which scientific capitalism predicts will inevitably lead to rationality and affluence. And scientific capitalism is a pre-eminently “modern” discourse. Only clean, well-maintained trousers, skirts, blouses, and shirts would be considered a “modern look” for my consultants.

benskin: drums

Benskin occupies an interesting place in the complicated semiotics of “tradition.” First of all, it, like *mangambeu*, has a “modern” variant. “Modern” *benskin*, though, is much more popular, nationally, than modern *mangambeu*. Many *benskin* albums have been recorded by Cameroonian record companies and you can hear *benskin* hits on the radio. Second, many Bamiléké believe that *benskin* is a new “traditional” genre, meaning that its origin is fairly recent. Pierre, for example, said that it was a recent combination of *mangambeu* and *makassi*. For him, this meant that, unlike *mangambeu*, *ndanji*, *ko’nga*, and *lali* (for example), it was not authentic. He was in a minority, however, in finding an authenticity problem, here.

Marc thought that *benskin* was created at a chief’s compound by the chiefs’ wives, which is a powerfully “traditional” site, and may be part of why it feels authentic, to him. On another occasion, he said that an *orchestre de ndinga* originated *benskin* by collectively adopting one person’s style or innovation. In other words, an old(er) genre, *ndinga*, became *benskin*, in Marc’s version of history.²



Figure 3.3 a *benskin* ensemble and myself in their rehearsal space, in performance attire

Benskin features a lead hand-drummer along with the singer. The accompanying musicians cover one or two double cowbells, a maraca part played by three or four people simultaneously, and a higher-pitched drum just like the ones used in *mangambeu* and *ndanji*. Drums are “traditional” instruments, but they sometimes turn up in “modern” *benskin*, nevertheless. I have heard examples of “modern” *benskin* which had no hand-drums at all. However, I remain completely in the dark about what made some other recordings which musical bankers firmly placed in the “modern” category different from “traditional” examples. I know that it was not simply being recorded that made it “modern,” though.

My consultants “domesticate”³ *benskin*’s polyrhythm so that it is mostly in 4 with a “triplet feel,” but the cowbells suggest “straight” 4/4. Most of the time, the first cowbell plays:



The person playing this part is expected to improvise on this basic figure. The second cowbell-player invariantly plays:



The processual variation between different cowbell players is more pronounced in *benskin* than in *mangambeu*. Furthermore, performances on the second cowbell tend to be more discrepant – to use Keil’s terminology – in *benskin* than in *mangambeu*. What I mean by this is that the microtiming of attacks could be *very* far from equally divided 16th notes without becoming equally divided triplets.

The principal maracas part exemplified what is sometimes called “playing two against three,” although this phrase’s connotation of clashing or conflict is inappropriate.

The left hand plays:



Whereas, the right hand plays:



Both hands coincided on counts “one” and “three” of the measure or bar.

It would be reasonable to argue that the small drum, structurally, plays quarter-note triplets. This notation, however, does not capture the fact that every drummer I encountered “laid back” noticeably on the “middle” note of each triplet, which means that they played it “late” relatively to a mechanically equal subdivision of note-durations (see Keil 1994 [1966]). Performances on this organ were, by extension, “between” kinds of note-duration in Western transcription conventions. This processual discrepancy is essential to correct participation. During my training I experimented with strict regimentation of “true” triplets and 16th notes; neither was acceptable. The participatory discrepancy is structural, in other words.

No one considered me to have learned the part until I was laying back and accenting. In 2002, during a pre-field work excursion, I had some training with a group in Douala. The same thing applied; laying back with correct accenting was necessary. Embodying these subtleties goes beyond where on the head of the drum the hand makes contact. It includes what parts of the hand touch it, how forcefully it hits, which muscles are relaxed or not, and what shape the hand assumes at the moment of contact.

The part is usually played by alternating right and left hands so that the pattern repeats every two beats, or every half “measure.” The first and fourth attacks are in the center of the drum and low-pitched. The first and third attacks are accented. I saw one exception to this execution. Once, a guest at a funeral performance took a turn on this drum. He played the first and second notes with his right hand, the third with his left. He veered much closer to a 16th note feel than anyone else I encountered.

The lead drummer usually has three differently-pitched, low drums, occasionally two or four. He (I never saw a woman in this role in *benskin*), unlike the accompanying

drummer, would sit on a chair or stool. The lead drummer was still subordinate to the singer, the true soloist. He was to use improvised variation to complement the singer and inspire the dancers when the singing stopped.

lali: slit-gongs and drums

I tried to become more involved with two other genres. One of these was *lali*, which drew me for three reasons. The first is that its rhythmic style struck me as being much more like *ndanji*'s than *benskin*'s, but it featured hand-drums, not a xylophone; delving into *lali* would have increased the diversity of the drumming styles I had intense involvement with. Second, *orchestres de lali*, included a slit-gong, which the other three genres did not, which would increase the diversity of instruments I could be learning. Finally, *lali* enthusiasts were, on average, quite a bit older than *benskin* enthusiasts, which raised the issue of age cohort and musical form having some social connections. Surprisingly, Marc strongly discouraged me from getting involved with *lali* even though (1) it was very popular, and (2) he and Jules (among others) were adept in the genre. I was unwilling to strain our relationship by pushing to get involved with a *lali* ensemble. Marc contrasted it with the “noble” *ndanji* and *mangambeu*, explaining that *lali* was “savage” and “dirty.” One factor in this judgment was the special attire *lali* musicians ought to wear. Unlike *ndanji*, *lali*'s special clothing was, itself, “dirty.” This was at least partially due to the fact that it was commonly made from cow-hide. Marc would point to these garments and tell me that after the performance, they would be put away and never washed. He also said that the dance was very fast, which might have had something to do with calling it “savage,” not “noble.”

Lali was unquestionably “traditional,” Marc seemed to value his own involvement with it, yet he was criticizing it. It is significant that he did not say something like “this attire and dance are two of the very few bad things about ‘tradition.’” In chapter two I suggested that people who tend to orient towards “tradition” also tend to find alternative conceptual schemes when criticizing something that could easily be considered “traditional.” This critique of *lali* as “savage” is another example of replacing “traditional/modern” with a more palatable distinction. Also note that he did not say that *ndanji* is “civilized,” but rather, “noble.” Nobility is often grouped into “tradition” because of its association with chiefs (more on this in chapter five). By using this term, Marc ended up indexing “tradition” as a good even as he criticized a “traditional” practice.



Figure 3.4 a *lali* ensemble in full regalia playing out

sorting genres and codes

I have already mentioned some of what the various banks had in common, musically, as it relates to “performing ‘tradition.’” One such commonality was in the domain of processual participatory discrepancies (microrhythm). Two more were in the domain of textural participatory discrepancies (timbre and microtuning). More commonalities than this, however, are relevant for my present purposes. To begin with, the bankers never sing in French during a formal appearance at a burial or memorial event. Since the bulk of the musical banks’ opportunities to play out are at funerals – and expectations for them are probably often at the backs of bankers’ minds during rehearsals – nor do they ever sing in French during a rehearsal: this despite almost all members having native or near-native fluency in the language, and despite knowing many French songs. The only exceptions are occasional use of an idiomatic phrase such as “bougez bougez,”⁴ with which a singer might encourage the other participants at a rehearsal or burial. These phrases provide a Bakhtinian voicing effect for indexing mass mediated hits sung in French. It would be misleading to say that an insertion like this means the song is in two languages or that the bankers sing in French. It does indicate a few important things, though.

First, this is a small stretch of French embedded in a basically Mèdêmbà discourse concerned mostly with local or “traditional” themes like mourning and kinship. Including “bougez bougez” here indexes a familiarity with modern, cosmopolitan domains. This contradicts the criticism that “traditionally” oriented people are ignorant of the world beyond their farmlands and unfit to have any say in policy or politics. Second, this snippet of French is *absorbed* and *subordinated* by the Mèdêmbà, indexing *control* of the “modern” by the “traditional.” The message, then, is: not only do these musical bankers

know what's going on, but, thanks to their maintenance of "tradition," they have a power and comprehension which may surpass what "modern" practices can bestow.

There was one time I heard AB together singing French songs. It was in a friend's living room just hours after an elderly family member's death. The assembly sat in the living room for some time singing songs that I had never heard before, many of which were in French. Women closest to the deceased performed sung-texted weeping (see Feld 1990 [1982], Feld and Fox 1994, Fox 2004, Wilce 2005) – also known as "ritual wailing" (Briggs 1993, Urban 1988, 1994) – in Mèdâmbà. Use of the colonial language in this context was acceptable because the musical bank had not been formally engaged to appear. They were there to provide emotional support (more on this in the next chapter) not "perform 'tradition,'" and exclusion of the "modern" from the situation wasn't important.

Given that guitars, keyboards, trumpets, and tubas etc. are well known in Bangangté, it is also significant that the musical bankers only welcome "traditional" instruments. Indeed, brass marching bands find work at mourning rituals, too, and people frequently encounter live and mediated guitar- and keyboard- based musicking. In general, they greatly enjoy the "modern" variants of *benskin* and *mangambeu*, which can include guitars and drum-kits. The husband of the vice-president of AB, Paulette, is a founding member of what is arguably the most commercially successful *benskin* group of all time. The bankers do amplify singers and some instruments, but this causes no conflict with the pervasive choice to view the banks firmly as venues for "traditional" music only; and that means no guitars.

The proscription of French equally means no French songs during a formal appearance. Languages are grouped and separated just as genres and instruments are. Therefore,

code choice, genre choice, and instrument choice unmistakably index a stance in and on “modern/traditional” tensions. These choices come into play for funeral planners, as well.

Mourning in Bangangté usually progressed through four main ritual phases. The first is for mourners to parade with the corpse from the morgue to the site of the wake (usually the deceased’s residence; if the deceased died at home, there is no parade). Parades home from the morgue always include musicking. Sometimes, people sing as they walk. Other times, a marching brass band (definitely a “modern” choice on the part of a funeral planner) will lead the parade. An acquaintance in Douala told me that they are much more expensive to hire than “traditional” ensembles which play *mangambeu*, *lali*, or the like. Hand drums, *balafon*, and *loṅṅ* are not portable, however, so these instruments can’t be used during the walk from the morgue.⁵ Use of the marching band signals that someone well-heeled was close to the deceased, but its instruments index “the modern,” which would not be acceptable to everyone, depending on what “message” one wishes to send about one’s positioning in relation to “tradition.” It is conceivable that some funeral planners who can afford a marching band would choose not to hire one.

The second phase is a wake, which lasts all night and has little in the way of formal prescription.⁶ As soon as possible after the wake, the burial occurs. Most burials started early in the morning, very often with a Roman Catholic mass. After this, a procession to the grave. Once the corpse was in the grave and everyone had paid respects, musicking, eating, and drinking would usually begin, and formality would decrease for talk and ritual; it would shift over to the bankers’ musicking. From this point until dawn, the order of the day was usually healing the wounds of grief through eating, dancing, and drinking.

The fourth phase – memorial services – is iterative. A family might mount memorial services for a deceased relative as soon as a few weeks after the burial and might keep doing so every few years for decades. Memorial services usually took the form of overnight parties for dancing, eating, and drinking, too, with concern for formal observation of “traditional” musicking.

It was extremely rare to see a brass band at a burial or memorial. I never saw this in Bangangté and only once or twice in Yaoundé and Douala. At these stages of mourning, “traditional” musicking is present in so many cases as to be normative; it is, *a fortiori*, “a time for ‘tradition.’” This has nothing to do with a lack of financial investment in rituals held in Bangangté; rich and poor families alike often choose to hold mourning rituals – especially burials – at “the village,” regardless of where in the world the deceased resided (Geschiere 1997, 2005). Hiring a brass band for the burial, therefore, strongly indexes an orientation toward “the modern.” The livelihoods of musical bankers partially depended on the continuation of demand for “traditional” *orchestres* at the vast majority of mourning events. So far, it’s working out.

rehearsing and playing out

AM’s rehearsals and AB’s rehearsals occur immediately after the conclusion of that week’s financial matters in the same room. The same member hosts the meetings every time. AM’s hosts were their president, Jules, and his wife, Sylvie. Theo, a general member who lives alone, hosted AB’s meetings. Only members attend rehearsals. Occasionally, local children who hear the musicking come by and look in the window or sit near the doorway. It was very rare that an adult passerby would show any interest in a rehearsal.

demands and stakes of performance

The demands of these performances are high with respect to the complexities of bodily movement and sounding which go into making a groove: the micro-timing of rhythmic attacks and the subtleties of harmonics, “process” and “texture,” respectively (Keil 1994 [1987]:96). To begin with, pitched instruments must be in tune. Every part must be played at the right tempo relative to the rest of the ensemble. Instrumentalists must also accent the right notes in their ostinato. Everyone must play the part she or he has committed to. This means making acceptable variations and avoiding the attacks or pitches which are the exclusive terrain of another part. Among *kalimba*-players in *mangambeu*, the lowest pitches are for whoever was assigned the bass part and the highest pitches are for the soloist. In other words, they have to play the music correctly.⁷

The best “traditional” singers sang stories, but this was not a requirement. Song had to be processually skilled and appropriate every bit as much as the instrumental parts did. This and vocal timbre were the most important traits.⁸ Lyrical content does matter, as the analyses in this chapter and chapter five show, but I never encountered anyone criticizing a singer for mentioning, alluding to, or omitting something she or he shouldn’t have. Unlike much African song (e.g., Askew 2002, Opland 1983, Yankah 2001), this is a low stakes performance situation with respect to the risk of insulting anyone. I am not aware that insult ever occurred during any performance I attended during fieldwork. The topics people chose just weren’t controversial in a way that would bring about a “scene.” Storytelling singers told fictional stories. Singers who focused on moral epithets, proscriptions, lessons, or proverbs did so apparently with such seamless brilliance for the nuances of

roles and responsibility (see Hirsch 1998, Irvine 1993, 1996) that they had no reason to fear disruption or scolding.

The following is a brief example of such “instructive” lyrical content. It occurred at an AB rehearsal. The singer was Serge, a man who sang often in rehearsals, but rarely in public and did not display the skills of a vocational musician on instruments. Interestingly, vocational musicians tended to the opposite practice – rarely singing in rehearsal, but dominating the microphone in public. The recording conditions at mourning events being much more challenging, I have very few transcribable recordings of two spectacular singers, Christine and Jean. Serge often chose patriarchal or misogynist lyrics and this passage has him correcting childless women on their behavior:

1. ma kə mən ɔ
Women without children, oh!
2. kâ kwə' yam
Cry no more.
3. mən mvelu kə yu gi
Your sister's child is not your child?
4. mən shunu kə yu gi
Your co-worker's child is not your child?

Debate and disagreement on moral issues in other contexts was commonplace in Bangangté, however. For example, women's rights received a lot of attention during informal talk and both feminists and misogynists were outspoken. Feminist or misogynist lyrics did not seem to lead directly to a debate. They were more grist for subsequent debates. Dissent seems to have been suppressed during performances at which the imperative to “perform ‘tradition’” was highest – such as burials – although it could be safely aired during a meeting or at a bar. On the issue of feminism and misogyny, the risk of endangering “tradition” was often a successful strategy against someone arguing *for* femin-

ism and women's rights. Probably not coincidentally, despite the powerful influence of female dancers, singers, organizers, and debaters, it seemed to be impossible for a woman to request – let alone actually receive – instruction on a lead instrument (drums, xylophone, *loḡə*) in a mixed-sex musical bank. I only witnessed women playing lead drums in women-only *orchestres*. It is likely that this gendered division of musical labor was “traditional,” according to many men, justifying its reproduction, in their view. As a decades of feminist anthropological research on gendered subjectivities, ideologies, and political economies have shown (see, e.g., Hall and Bucholtz 1995, Lancaster and Leonardo 1997, Lewin 2006), (1) some women might have felt the same way: and (2) for some of the many women who did not feel that the gendered division of musical labor was justified, the gravity of the “traditional” stance among the musical bankers would have made challenging this status quo extremely difficult.

The need to perform “well” and the expectation that rehearsals lead to specifically *funereal* performances converge in the financial domain. Musical banks charged a fee to appear in public, but guests showed their approval of an *orchestre* by donating cash during performances. The total donations typically matched or exceeded the fee. At a self-consciously “traditional” event like the burial rituals I attended with musical banks, being “good” enough to draw in lots of donations meant “doing ‘traditional’ musicking” properly in the ways I have been discussing.

It is customary for people to spontaneously give money based on their respect for a particular soloist – a singer or an instrumentalist. So, in *benskin*, the lead drummer and the lead singer, if doing well, bring in these special gifts. For *mangambeu*, it would be the lead singer or a lead *kalimba* player. This took a form familiar to many people to who

have attended a musical event in Equatorial Africa; an audience member takes a bill out of her or his wallet and holds it aloft, dancing into the center of the performance area. Then, she or he places the bill on the forehead of the soloist they wish to honor. Ideally, the soloist will be so sweaty that the bill sticks by itself. If not, the audience member holds it there for a while. After a few seconds, one of the association's back-up dancers comes forward to take the bill, possibly holding it to the soloist's forehead a bit longer, or immediately tucking it away safely.

Getting a lot of this money depended mostly on making a good "traditional" groove. The topics of song texts could also influence income for the ensemble, but this variable should not be over-emphasized, compared to process and texture, which were the primary factors. The following incident is suggestive of this fact. Paul, the founder of AM, once expressed his boredom with the repetitiveness of the text of a song from a rehearsal he and I were transcribing. The membership and I had planned to record this rehearsal in advance, and Paul said that the singer, Joseph, ought to have prepared a story because he knew it was a recording session. He went on to say that what Joseph was doing – "animating" the participants to dance and feel good without providing much for the intellect to chew on – was fine for playing out at a funeral, though.

sonic and musical ideologies

Over the course of the last three pages, I have repeated that the semantico-referential content of song was less important in making musicking "good" in this community than processual and textural participatory discrepancies ("groove" and timbre, respectively) were. In this final section I will explain this and unite it with some other features of the performances I participated in by referring to ideologies of music and of sound. Ideolo-

gies valuing dense, loud soundscapes,⁹ ideologies of musicking as healing, and Turino's musical fields (which are ideologies about what those in attendance should be doing during musicking) all converge at funereal performances.

First, another look at singing; singers in any genre must be loud. The "best" singers had "rough" vocal timbre, an effect created when overtones are concentrated at very high frequencies (Feld et al. 2004:335-6). This kind of vocal production is part of what made a "traditional" singing style distinctive. "Modern" Cameroonian music abounds with love songs and ballads featuring male singers who do not produce many overtones at high frequencies. Jacky Kingue, a *makossa* singer, is part of this trend. Richard Bona and Henri Dikongue, possibly the two most commercially successful Cameroonian singers alive, also display possibly the least "rough" vocal timbre in "modern" Cameroonian song.

This timbre preference is actually predicted by Turino's musical fields (2008). He and his students found that musicking based on an ethic of full participation by all in attendance usually features instruments and vocal production which are "rough" or "dense" in this way. He contrasts this with musicking based on musicians' wish for opportunities to display their skills to a non-participating audience, the "presentational" field. Instruments and voices with less dense timbres are easier to distinguish within the total sound of an ensemble, which is necessary for the presentational ethic to be successful. In participatory performances, so many musicians may be playing simultaneously without prior rehearsal that maintaining this clarity might be impossible. Dense timbres manifest at numerous levels in participatory performances, which I describe below as it was manifest during my field work. This feature of sound subsequently indexes the participatory ethic, itself, at a high order (see Silverstein 2003 [1996]).

Paul Berliner's monograph about Zimbabwean lamellophone players (1978) mentions their preference for buzzing. They attach rings or bottle caps to their instruments to increase density of timbre. He contrasts this practice with the relatively recent preference of removing buzzing agents from lamellophones because of a preference for "clear" timbres. Berliner argues that this preference is an index of "modern" identity and its practices, which Turino would call "cosmopolitan" identity (see Turino 2000). Berliner associates the "modern" with an ideological wish for control over nature and culture and argues that musicians who prefer buzzing lamellophones are oriented towards "tradition." This preference is grounded in an ideology that, rather than emphasizing a constant quest for control, seeks to understand and accept those features of the world that cannot be controlled. This is iconized in sound with buzzing, a phenomenon which is, indeed, much more difficult to control than such phenomena as the timing attacks on the lamellophone's keys. Maracas and other things that shake are similarly "out of control" and may fit in with Berliner's ideology of engaging with lack of control. I suspect that this applies to people in Bangangté who are oriented towards "tradition," which makes their use of dense timbre in voices and percussion a non-denotatively explicit critique of the "modern," in this complicated way.

In keeping with the relatively low importance of lyrical content, a singer's words are extremely difficult to make out, anyway, at a typical funeral because of textural choices about amplification. There seemed to be a general preference for quite a bit of feedback and natural overdrive. At one funeral I attended in Douala, the speakers were placed on the perimeter of the musicians' area facing inward, towards the microphones. This, of course, maximized feedback. The result is that it's easier to make out the singer's text in

an unamplified *mangambeu* performance than an amplified one. On the other hand, *bens-kin* percussion almost completely drowns out unamplified singing.¹⁰

It cannot be convincingly argued that the Bamiléké people I met put up with feedback and overdrive because they lacked the know-how to adjust the amplifier, microphones, and speakers, or lacked the money to invest in repairs or replacements. Numerous times I observed Bangangté musicians working with their technology and finally saying “that’s good” in response to a highly “distorted” timbre. Other students of amplified musicking in Sub-Saharan Africa have experienced similar practices (e.g., Waterman 1990).

The musical bankers’ preference is grounded in ideologies of sound, which of course implicate musicking. Under these amplification conditions, people in the *orchestre* or dancing close by would experience a storm of loud sounds – some with a lot of attack (drums, sticks, xylophone), others with a lot of sustain (voice, feedback), some pitched (voice, drums, xylophone, kalimba), others mostly white noise (maracas, sticks, overdrive), some under tight human control, others possessing an entropic dimension (maracas, feedback, overdrive). Many of these sounds, in isolation are dense in timbre – many overtones are present. I have already described this for vocal production. The same applies to maracas and buzzing sounds like some kalimbas and anything overdriven through the speakers.

Such aural hyperstimulation was desirable in the form of loudness because, in many cultural contexts, loudness indexes that something special or unusual is going on (Attali 1985, Corbin 2003 [1988], B.R. Smith 2003, M.M. Smith 2003, Stone 2008). In many other contexts, loudness is primarily a cause for alarm, but in my field site, the most

common affective index was exciting fun. To be sure, there are times when someone might want some peace and quiet, or might complain about noise. Nevertheless, the association of loudness with feeling good is strong. For example, it is typical in Bangangté for a handful of funeral participants to bring flintlock rifles or pistols with them and fire blanks during the festivities at their discretion. Initially baffled by this, I began chatting about it while getting my hair cut one day. The *coiffeur* said to me that the loudness of guns was what made this practice desirable, “one chases away unhappiness like that.”¹¹

Why were dense timbres preferable? Recall that dense timbres are a cross-cultural feature of Turino’s participatory performance. Also recall that the defining and necessary feature of this musical field, for him, is that all or almost all in attendance should participate; the musicking would be considered a failure if this didn’t occur, which is most certainly the case for Bamiléké mourning. In other words, participatory performance was a moral value, for them. The musical bankers were fined if they didn’t dance, sing, or play an instrument and crowds of funeral attendees would gather around them to dance as well. Turino positions this ideology of universal participation as the foundation of the participatory field, in distinction to his presentational field, the foundation of which is an ideology that highly adept musicians should have a venue to display what they do to a relatively non-participating audience. He rightly points out that, in situations where any number of people can grab an instrument or sing along or clap, it will be extremely difficult to make it possible for the sounds of each individual’s contribution to be clearly distinguishable from those of every other individual. This “piling on” of sound(er)s creates dense timbre and loudness. Therefore, these traits index the moral value of partic-

ipation, which was a rich structure of feeling in my field site. This partially explains the enjoyment of dense timbres and loudness.

There is another order of indexicality at play, though. Turino's analysis is unidirectional. He makes the participatory ethos the foundation and shows the ways that the sonic features of participatory performance emerge from this moral value – the n -th order, entailing indexical. He does not raise the issue of the sociosemiotic effects of the soundscapes, themselves. At the $n+1^{\text{st}}$ order of indexicality, density and loudness indexically presuppose participation and all its positives as a moral value. What results, however, is the $n+2^{\text{nd}}$ order indexical in which these sonic traits indexically *entail* participation and the accompanying structure of feeling. At this point, two things happen. Density and loudness become desirable in their own right, and effect highly participatory musicking: i.e., they encourage mourners to enter the dance floor or pick up a spare set of maracas, etc. For this reason, I consider it more accurate to consider the participatory ethos as being in a co-constitutive relationship with sound and ideologies of sound than to view these elements as unidirectionally related.

The musical healing ideology is part of this circle of semiotic mediation as well. Marc said to me more than once that musicking had a psychotherapeutic effect. “Music chases away cares,”¹² in his words. Pierre, too, made similar comments. “For us Africans, music is very spiritual...It really does things for us. But, it's not for joyful circumstances, because, for us in Africa, music lifts the people's spirit.”¹³ Part of the reason my consultants encouraged themselves and others to music (including dancing) was to “work through,” or heal, grief. This, too, puts a particular spin on the participatory ethos, suggesting that it is constituted by other ideologies in a circular fashion because the ideology

of music therapy seems just as “foundational” for musicking as anything else, when it comes to the Bamiléké of Bangangté.

If musicking is so very largely based on the moral value of the full participation of all attendees and on the goal of psychological healing in the Bamiléké context, then of course sound and movement – i.e., participatory discrepancies (timbre, loudness, “groove”) – are more crucial than semantics, reference, and narrative structure: especially at an actual funereal event, but also in rehearsal. The former elements are the ones that get people excited about joining in the sound and moving together in time (the participation), and the healing requires the dancing in groups. While a moving story may certainly bring about a bodily response, without the right “groove,” and all that it entails in Bangangté about “tradition,” attendees will not dance, sing, and play instruments.

conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to argue that “doing ‘tradition’” is a basic stance for musical bankers. I have done this by explaining what is “traditional” about their musical sounds and (linguistic) code choices through contrasting them with aspects of musicking they deem modern, and by explaining some of what is “traditional” about funereal performance. Furthermore, I have shown that there is material motivation for musical bankers to take this stance; “tradition-positive” stances are common among Bamiléké funeral goers and planners all over Cameroon. Musical bankers engaged to perform at funerals make more money if they successfully index “tradition” in music. Seemingly disparate features of musical sound and of ways of participating are related through ideologies of music and of sound. In the next chapter, I continue with the theme of the financial significance of membership in a musical bank. I will also show in the

next chapter that “traditional” song in Bangangté principally effects solidarity-building, providing little opportunity to build factions or compete for status.

notes

¹ Also called equiheptatonic, this scale is comprised of seven equally “spaced” pitches to the octave. Some controversy has arisen among Africanists over correctly identifying this scale. Early ethnomusicologists had difficulty distinguishing between equihexatonic scales and *gapped* equiheptatonic ones (Kubik 2008:339-40).

² None of this is to assert the actual time-depth for any aspect of Bamiléké musicking. Indeed, another consultant said that *mangambeu* – a genre considered to be old by Pierre, Marc, and many others – emerged in 1942. He claimed that the originator was a single individual, and that she was still alive. He even went so far as to give me her name. I do not go into the issue of the veracity of these historical accounts. To do so would require a much more sophisticated inquiry than just asking people. Such data, while important, are not the only relevant data.

³ This metaphor is Agawu’s.

⁴ “move [it] move [it]”

⁵ Unlike the well known, goblet-shaped *djembe* important in the Mande region (Charry 2000), Bamiléké drums cannot be worn by attaching a strap because they are so large. This makes playing while walking impossible.

⁶ I use “formal” here, and throughout this description of Bamiléké mourning rites, to refer to both “increased code structuring” and “code consistency” (see Irvine 1979:776-7).

⁷ If things get off to a bad start or fall apart, the musical director will stop everything quickly. On the occasional very bad day, people were yelled at for playing poorly.

⁸ “Timbre in African musics – and for that matter most musics – is an ill-defined area of scholarship at best, and needs much more attention” (Friedson 2003:188n3). There have been several important beginnings in the development of timbre as an analytic concept (see Bull and Back 2003, Fales 1994, 2002, Feld 1994

[1988], 2000b, Feld et al. 2004, Fox 2004, Keil 1994 [1985], Samuels et al. 2010, Schafer 1993 [1977], Urban 1985, 1988).

⁹ This is Schafer's coinage (see 1993 [1977]), and see Samuels et al. (2010) for an anthropological review.

¹⁰ Participants at a funeral may, occasionally, be able to make out references to people or to matriline in song. Chapter five focuses on this "calling out," which is a ubiquitous feature of "traditional" song. While singers often mention absent people, to call out to someone in attendance is to encourage a donation from her or him. However, donations flow to any group that gets everyone dancing. A singer's choice of topic has little economic impact compared to process and texture (participatory discrepancies). It is during rehearsals that people really listen and respond to what anyone sings *about*, an issue which is another focus of chapter five.

¹¹ On chasse, comme ca, le malheur.

¹² La musique chasse les soucis.

¹³ Pour nous Africains, la musique est tres spirituelle...Elle donne pour nous. Mais elle n'est pas pour les circonstances de joie, parce que pour nous en Afrique la musique enleve l'esprit des gens.

chapter four

musical banks in members' lives

In this chapter, I look at the internal operation of the musical banks, what they are for and what goes on during meetings. Working from what I understand to be the major concerns shared by almost all members, I show how these institutions' purposes and the musical bankers' concerns fit together. I argue two major connections. One of them is that, for the musical bankers, *death and ancestors mediate money, musicking, and solidarity*. Therefore, a major component of this chapter will be to explain and explore mourning and ideologies of death.

In the second half of the chapter, I will discuss musicking from another angle. My aim is to show that it was both intrinsically rewarding and a means to achieve goals. This argument is that *musicking mediates money, death, and solidarity*. While in the previous chapter I focused on how "tradition" and musicking importantly shape one another, in this chapter I focus on how musicking has important effects on the whys and wherefores of musical banks themselves. In this context, musicking deepens or brings about feelings of solidarity. While I am not saying that musicking was the bankers' only means of doing this, or that solidarity resulted from every instance of musicking in Bangangté, I am saying that the musical bankers' "traditional" musicking tended to have this effect.

I use the term “mediation” in a loosely Peircean sense: the ways signs “stand between” objects and understandings of the world. I say “loosely” for two reasons. First, Peirce’s own analyses of mediation are more complex than is necessary for this dissertation and changed over the course of his life (Parmentier 1985b). Second, a look at the foundational edited volume *Semiotic Mediation* (Mertz and Parmentier 1985) reveals not only the four levels of “mediation as standing between” which receive explicit attention (Mertz 1985), but also an entirely different, and much freer usage as synonymous with enabling or shaping (Lucy 1985:74). While the free usage is adequate for many fine semiotic analyses, as the contributions to *Semiotic Mediation* demonstrate, it sometimes merely leaves implicit some of the entities involved in the “standing between” relations in the Peircean analyses. I could simply say that *death and ancestors* enable and shape *money, musicking, and solidarity* and it would be adequate for most of the following analysis. What I actually intend is that *death and ancestors* stand between *each of money, musicking, and solidarity, serving to make sense of them and motivate them in locally specific ways*. Death and ancestors are not only a large part of the *raison d’être* of, for example, microcredit, they bring it into connection with, for example, musicking because death is a large part of the *raison d’être* of musicking, too.

Similarly, *musicking* shapes *musical bankers’ understandings and practices surrounding money, death, and solidarity*. Additionally, it *stands between*, for example, death and solidarity since it makes mourning rites and rehearsals for them into opportunities to build solidarity. In the case of musicking, though, the mediation has an additional character. Through basic semiotic processes in Bangangté, death indexes both musicking (i.e., musicking pleases the dead and heals the bereaved) and money (i.e., funereal ex-

penses, funerals as income-generating opportunities for *orchestres*), and then comes to stand between them because, via this initial indexing, musicking and money can index each other *through* death *qua* sign. While musicking is semiotic in exactly this way – changes in ideology, structures of feeling, or metapragmatic knowledge can occur *through* it – musicking mediates in another way more properly called phenomenological. Other effects occur *in* it (Friedson 1996:99).

In *Dancing Prophets*, Friedson (1996) argues that musicking makes Tumbuka healing in Malawi effective because locals understand it to be both “cultural” and “natural.” Healing focuses on, among other operations, restoring order and balance between two kinds of spirit which represent the two domains, respectively. Part of what musicking does is bridge the gap between the “cultural” and the “natural” as a mediator which comes into contact with both poles; in healing performance musicking establishes and puts right the boundary between them (169). Other sections of the book look at other ways musicking is ritually effective and at other ways musicking is a phenomenological mediator, which leads him to conclude that “mediation is a musical paradigm that resonates throughout the *vimbuza* [ritual healing] complex” (169). This sheds some light on “traditional” Bamiléké musicking in Bangangté.

A “culture/nature” opposition is not salient in a similar way (see chapter five on nature, culture, and chiefs), but musicking does bridge between money, death, and solidarity for the musical bankers. *In* musicking, my consultants make their understandings of how these three concepts and associated practices fit together. More than that, though, musicking plays a role in creating and reproducing solidarity as a manager of tension and unpleasantness surrounding death and money and encourages musical bankers to see their

solidarity as bound up with some of their troubles, and their troubles as complex opportunities for solidarity, not just as simple burdens. This is the additional sense in which musicking is a mediator for the musical bankers.

major concerns of members

To appreciate the importance of the musical banks for their members, it is necessary to have a sense of what is life like for most musical bankers. What challenges or problems occupied them? One such challenge is the quest to be well regarded by themselves and by others through appearing powerful and morally “good;” I’ll call this *status*. As much as anything else, status is the grounds on which one can expect respect.

status

Status can be raised through musical banks at a number of levels and in response to various pressures in addition to those imposed by neoliberalism. Neoliberal values – e.g., intensification of capitalist abstractions, consumption, capitalism as science, worker flexibility, free markets, privatization, market as society, corporate personhood, economic self-interest, disposability of the poor (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Ferguson 2006, Graeber 2001, 2004, Klein 2007, Pfeifer and Chapman 2010, Sader 2004, Sider 2004) – are complicated by the ambivalence of “tradition” at this historical moment in Bangangté. “Tradition” can have either or both of positive and negative connotations in Bangangté, depending on the situation. In some instances, either side of the opposition might prevail quite dramatically, although the tension between values, in another instance, may remain unresolved.

I argued in the previous chapter that musical banks and their musicking were strongly oriented towards “tradition” as a positive value. Their members, in general, were deeply invested in their particular musical banks, or musical banks in general, understanding them as important, valuable institutions. Successfully presenting musical banks as worthwhile enables members to effect in-group/out-group distinctions which are arranged fractally. Fractal recursion (see Gal 2005, Irvine 2001, Irvine and Gal 2000) of in-/out-grouping creates the situation in which the largest level of inclusion/exclusion – for example, Africans and non-Africans – has other binary levels within it, such as Cameroonians and non-Cameroonians. Depending on contexts, within nation-states, ethnic groups make another level. Some ethnic groups, such as the Ojibwe or Annishnabe of Canada and the USA, are “above” nation-states in that their lands cross international boundaries. In these cases, identification with one nation-state or the other could be nested within ethnic identification, although the same fractal pattern exists. For my consultants, the distinction is Bamiléké and non-Bamiléké people. And so on. Practicing this convergence of money and musicking makes a distinction between “we who do and they who do not conjoin these spheres.”

Within in that distinction, many locals take “Bangangté culture”, or “Mèdèmbà culture” to be bounded off from other Bamiléké ethnic groupings. They may see themselves as included in the very large number of Bamiléké people, but they see particularities distinguishing different sub-groupings. Here, then, my consultants detect something distinctly “Mèdèmbà” in what they do – linguistic distinctiveness being perhaps the most obvious emblem. This was a sufficient, meaningful contrast with, say, the “Bamiléké-Dschang” sub-grouping.

The next level of in-/out- grouping is based on the multiple ways of categorizing the musical banks of Bangangté or the Mèdâmbà region. Categorizing musical banks is based on:

1. sex(es) of the membership
2. age cohort of the group (if any)
3. matrilineal association of the group (if any)
4. musical genre of the group (if any¹)
5. neighborhood (*quartier*) from which members are exclusively drawn

Gender is an axis of domination and struggle in the Grassfields (see Feldman-Savelsberg 1999, Goheen 1996). My own experiences and observations of gendered discourse and metadiscourse I discuss in chapter six. Gendering of the musical banks, however, was part of the good feelings people might have about different groups, and therefore, decisions about which ones to petition for membership. Women displayed excitement and pleasure with notable intensity while discussing all-women musical banks.

Second, some musical banks were based on age cohort. AB's real name included a reference to an age category. This is interesting partly because the group had been in existence long enough, by the time I arrived, that the limits of this category were being pushed, to put it mildly. Age, too, is a social equity issue in Bangangté (see Argenti 2007). For example, it is relatively easy for an older person to marshal the authority to dismiss a younger person's ideas, experiences, or feelings simply on the grounds of age itself. There are distinct hierarchical rules of conduct limiting what a younger person can politely do in front of an older person; one of these is that a younger person must keep her or his hands visible.

Genre choice: relations between musical genres are not exactly conflictual or oppressive. However, many people do have clear preferences for particular genres over others. Some people knew they wanted to be in, for example, a *benskin* group over and above groups doing other genres. Others said that the music of their particular bank was their favorite genre, without elaborating a hierarchy of values. Marc preferred to be in groups whose musical genre was both very popular for dancing, but did not require special clothing. He, however, as I discussed in the previous chapter, had developed his preferences into a hierarchy of value. Marc was music director of an *ndanji* group and a *mangambeu* group, but, while *ndanji* was “very noble” music according to him, it had the drawback of requiring special clothing, a full-length, white tunic. *Lali* he considered an ignoble genre despite the fact that he played it often and, seemingly, joyfully.

Another factor that motivates some is allegiance to their neighborhood in Bangangté. AM and AB were named after the *quartier* where their respective meetings were held. *Quartier* could be part of identity, for some. Musical banks from the various *quartiers* occasionally competed, informally, amongst themselves. I participated in one of these competitions, which was also illuminating on the issue of what effect my presence could have.

This event was a welcoming ceremony for the Minister of Agriculture. He was touring several sites in Cameroon, and Bangangté was one of his stops. All the *orchestres* (about eight) in AM’s neighborhood were designated to play for the Minister. We arranged ourselves around the edges of a clearing in a residential area where several small roads met. Everyone was set up early, so I wandered around. I noticed someone I knew in one of the other groups – a *lali* ensemble – and spent some time chatting with him. The

Founder of AM, Paul, sidled over and quietly reminded me that I was with him and that I had agreed to play with AM. Reassuring him was easy since I had no intention of playing *lali* (as I barely knew how) or of walking out on AM. Paul was worried, though, which I think is because, in the eyes of many, it raised the group's status to be seen with *un blanc dans l'orchestre*.

There were other incidents consistent with this. At FESTAC, the arts and culture festival, I played with AM, and the members made sure that I was plainly visible to the audience. One of the vocational musicians who was in both AM and AB invited me at the last minute to play with his other benskin group, which I'll call *Les Champions de Benskin* (CB), at FESTAC. The other members of the group, most of whom I'd never met before, seemed pleased and were very encouraging. Every time I played with an orchestra in public, I received a lot of positive attention. Many people cheered me on, nodded approvingly, gave me a thumbs up, or clapped me on the back. However, this kind of reaction was not universal. Occasionally someone criticized me to my face. Presumably there were others who reacted negatively, but said nothing.

Just as important as the status-factor in having *un blanc* on hand was a financial factor. I think I brought in a little extra money for AB and AM. I never saw an accompanying musician receive a payment on her or his forehead while playing out (see chapter three), and I never became good enough to take a lead part in song or drumming. However, sometimes the audience member dancing forward with the bill came and put it on my forehead when I was playing the maracas or the accompaniment drum or *kalimba*. This occurred, I think, because of the surprise of seeing a white person playing "traditional" music.

Many people interpreted my participation as a great show of respect for the Bamiléké and Africans, or simply a marvel, since so few white people seemed to be *able* to play their music, even if willing. One way this came up was when Roger, a young urban Bamiléké man in his mid-twenties, joined me in my music lessons with Marc. Marc, in private, commented with some disbelief, frustration, and sadness that even I, *un blanc*, was better at *mangambeu* and *ndanji* than this young Bamiléké person.

Finally, kinship could also form the basis for a musical bank. Some of them only included people with the same lineal name, or *ndab*. Christine, AB's top singer, was in one of these groups. It was a group for women called *mba'kob*. This is the *ndab* shared by women in the Bakong matriline. Descent lines are not in conflict the way gender and age can produce conflict, but they are objects of identification and resources for identity-work. As such, a descent-based membership can be a way to engage with the great importance of ancestors in the company of distant kin. Engaging with such an ideology of self in relation to others can both expand one's sense of being supported and safe through sociality and relationships, and provide an opportunity to escape from the tensions which sometimes arise with close kin.

Finally, people are able to jostle for status based on which specific musical bank(s) they are in. The number of musical banks is an indirect index of a person's affluence or poverty, another major concern for my consultants. Listing these means of making in-/out- groupings does not imply that this is a "finishable" identity project resulting in a final list of who one is in and out with. It is rather an on-going resource for identity negotiation. One is, of course, in and out with the same person relative to different simultaneously valid social distinctions. A native Mèdûmbà speaker is out with a native Ba-

miléké-Fe'fe' speaker based on this sociolinguistic variable, but they are together in identifying with the Bamiléké ethnicity, in contrast to, for example, the Fulani ethnicity. Which groupings matter at any given moment depend on what situations people find themselves in.

poverty

Concern with status is tied up with poverty because the musical bankers are exposed to discourses which attribute poverty to intellectual or moral failures of the poor. This comes in the form of local élites who brag about affluence, and mass mediated and face-to-face advocacy of development projects and public policy supporting them. Every single member of all the musical banks I came in contact with was facing scarcity. The gap between the richest and poorest citizens of Cameroon is immense and my consultants are forced to confront this continually. However, not every bioregion of Cameroon is equally difficult to survive in. Actually, Bangangté is in Cameroon's "breadbasket;" the farmland in the Grassfields is very rich. More importantly, though, since at least the middle of the twentieth century, food insecurity has ceased to be solely an issue of actual global – or even regional – food *scarcity*; it is, rather, an issue of equity resulting in differential access to means of acquiring nutrition (Baro and Deubel 2006, Escobar 1995, Lappé and Lappé 2003). But what does this relative scarcity for the members of AB and AM look like?

These are people who eat every day, but it's not too rare that the number of meals is only one. They regularly eat protein, but red meat is luxurious for some of them, and many children show signs of protein deficiency. The politics and symbolism of food are very interesting, on this point. First of all, it is not unusual for the highest quality, most

desirable food to go to the highest status member of a gathering, and then down the hierarchy. What this means, in practice, is that the youngest children or women may get little or no meat, or only the least satisfying parts of an animal. Second, many locals prefer to give children – especially babies – very sweet, very starchy foods: for example, white bread dipped in sweetened, condensed milk. The nutritional content of such food is low.

At any given moment, my consultants may have so little cash that buying prepared food outside the home is impossible. There is a clear price hierarchy at food stalls and restaurants in the market and along the streets. An entire meal at a restaurant was a rare luxury. Getting one's fill at a sit-down restaurant cost between US\$4 and US\$10. The next step down would be a barbecued fish sold at a grill set up outside a bar. Depending on the size, this would have been US\$1.50 to US\$3. All the cheaper options are for small meals or snacks.

Cafés, in Cameroonian vernaculars, are small, covered, but not enclosed, restaurants with benches and counters providing informal, short-order service; they specialize in omelets and sometimes salads with options of avocados, canned sardines, white bread, and hot drinks. An omelet was smaller than a typical fish, but only half the price, at most. Around the same price range, were a variety of stalls serving "traditional" hot meals which also tended to be small. For a snack, there were many relatively nutritious options, including barbecued pork strips, hard-boiled eggs, pieces of fruit, peanuts, chickens' feet, and termites. While *cafés*, peanut vendors, and barbecued pork strip vendors did a roaring trade, the sit-down restaurants had a very limited clientele and were often nearly empty. French-inspired bakeries were common and a sugary cookie or pastry was a popular snack.

All the adults I knew had socially appropriate clothing, but there was a clear status hierarchy surrounding how new and well-maintained one's attire was. Many adults wore garments which were showing signs of wear or which were not fashionable. This goes to the issue of how one acquires clothes. Secondhand clothing was considerably cheaper than never-worn clothing. Most, but not all children had an outfit or two that were neither torn nor stained. This excludes the uniforms school children had to maintain. Most, but not all, children were in school; some households couldn't afford to educate all their children, and a few could afford to educate none.

Sending children to school was very important for everyone I met, and children's tuition was a major expense. The amount of schooling one had had, and what institution(s) ones attended, therefore, were indicators of wealth and privilege. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy, of course, because people with advanced degrees find that they are taken much less seriously if completed at any African university than at a European or North American one. Steady, better-paying wage labor was very difficult to find for people who lacked clerical skills. Complete illiteracy was rare, but many adults read and wrote slowly and with difficulty.

The only one of my consultants whom I know can neither read nor write was one of the poorest members of either musical bank. Leo, born in 1962, told me that he had had zero schooling. He lived in a shared house with five or six other people whom he didn't know well because he had recently moved. He had never been married and had no children. All of his family had died and, while he knew what (and "where") his matriline was,² he described himself as an orphan. He did not know what/"where" his patriline was. This

family situation would be devastating for anyone, but it has particular impacts based on one's cultural context.

For Leo, in this Bamiléké context, it means being cut off from a hearth group, the social unit most emblematic of affection, and the one where it is easily produced. It also means a lack of access to information and guidance with respect to family history, ancestors, and how to honor ancestors. It means, furthermore, that one's position among living and dead relatives and how to understand and negotiate it can no longer be directly specified in present and future life experiences. Leo is limited to memory and extrapolation from ideology. I do not know what access, if any, he has to his late mother's fields. Being cut off from his field has the potential to create stress, sadness, fear, and illness. Perhaps tellingly, he did not mention farming when I asked him about how he made a living. He mentioned only the most insecure means; he was among the ranks of men who looked, as often as necessary, for whatever short-term employment was available. This often meant waking up in the morning with no idea of what he would be doing that day or what his next source of income would be. Much of what people in this situation find is manual labor, for which safety equipment and clothing were usually unavailable. For Leo, solidarity with other members of AB was extremely valuable both emotionally and materially.

Affluence and poverty were also implicated in healthcare. There were primarily two tiers of healthcare available in Bangangté: the scientific, medical, "modern" tier, and the herbal, magical, mind-body, "traditional" tier. The former was much more costly than the latter. There is no doubt that scientific, medical healthcare was very prestigious and almost everyone considered it extremely useful, depending on the situation. I never met

anyone who completely discounted it, while I heard many people denouncing “traditional” healing in its entirety.³

One healthcare-related indicator of household wealth was how many beds had mosquito nets above them. These were available for sale, but, of course, not everyone can afford one. The Red Cross distributes as many of them as possible for free, but few households had one for every bed. In some households, only the most senior man’s bed was protected.⁴

Bangangté is a small center. As such, it does not attract a lot of big business attention relative to a provincial capital. Nevertheless, it is a hub in comparison to small villages such as Bazou, and there are local élites who signal their distinctiveness with clothing, a well-maintained Mercedes, or an enormous house placed clearly visible from the highway. Urban élites come to or through Bangangté bearing similar markers of wealth. Mass media from the global North – easily available in some shops and households via radio, print, or television – predominantly feature images and narratives justifying and normalizing privilege, wealth, and over-consumption. Every subsistence farmer, manual laborer, sex-trade worker, and peanut vendor in Bangangté is keenly aware of the differences between their lives and those of the neoliberally normalized lives of a Rigobert Song (captain of the national soccer team), a Chantal Biya (first lady of Cameroon), or a Celine Dion (Canadian Top-40 singer).

As stratifying discourse has shifted from the “savage” and “civilized” of neocolonialism to the “traditional” and “modern” of *neoliberalism*, many Africans’ sites for resistance or shame have shifted from food, ritual, the body, cosmology, language, and performance to poverty itself (Ferguson 2006). What was once evidence for “savagery” is

now the neoliberal warm fuzzy of “distinctive culture,” and poverty is the fault of the poor and the sign of unworthiness, from a neoliberal perspective (Klein 2007).

Therefore, while it’s obvious that many members of these musical banks may have moments of yearning for wealth, this is only the tip of the iceberg. In neoliberal discourses, poverty can become a sign that they are less valuable people in their own right, not just less “fortunate,” and definitely not exploited or dominated. Such justifications of inequality are by no means restricted to neoliberalism. There are some parallels with aspects of Indian caste systems, of some Christianities (Weber 2002 [1920]), and of aspects of colonialism and European class systems (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, Stoler 2002). What these cases affirm is that understanding particular manifestations of poverty – whether from the stance of “analyst” or “participant” – requires positioning, contextualizing, and theorizing much more than quantifiable, material conditions and human physical adaptations. One must also come to grips with discursive struggles for control over narratives of poverty, the contingency of ideologies of needs and priorities, the social effects of poverty, and the emotions of poverty (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994, Gardner and Lewis 1996, Gupta 1998).

How emotion is keyed, understood, and produced is historically contingent (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990b, Lutz and White 1986). Scarcity can be anxiety-producing and physiologically damaging. Economic insecurity brings about another set of anxious reactions; uncertainty about where next month’s, next week’s, or (in some cases) tomorrow’s food (and much more) will come from can be a draining, degenerative experience for the mind and body. For example, while I was living with a family in Bangangté, the head of the house, Claudette, was hospitalized for some weeks by a car accident. After a couple

of days, I noticed that very little food was emerging from the kitchen. I attributed this to the loss of Claudette's income. At this point in the various in- and out- migrations the household witnessed, Claudette and I were living with three children in grade school, two high-school students, and one unemployed adult. I unilaterally decided to double my rent so that everyone could get some protein at least twice a day.

The members of musical banks can expect an impressive degree of material generosity from one another. This is hugely important in their development of solidarity and intimacy – as important as an “in-group” feeling, the collaboration in confronting death, and the musicking. Any member – even those on probation – can expect a cash gift from the rest of the membership in order to help pay for mourning rituals. This is significant because (1) the recipient is in great financial need, and (2) the recipient is in an emotionally intense state – navigating the tensions and pressures of a large family event, dwelling on a range of possibly conflicting memories of, and feelings for, a deceased relative.

For these reasons, a cash gift can have emotionally warm and relationship-affirming connotations and effects, for my consultants. In contrast to what may be a familiar indexical chain in other socio-historical contexts – “cash and gifts can be a way to ‘buy people off’ and therefore disrespect a relationship” or “gift-giving or financial support may be an important part of a relationship, but what really matters is intangible emotional or coalitionary support” – material support was very much part of the “real thing” in musical bankers' relationships because, for them, material support indexed an affective investment in the recipient's well-being. This further indexes the Bamiléké prototype of love and affection (mother, maternal siblings, and the provision and sharing of food around mother's hearth) – more on this in the next chapter. The logic of this semiosis is as fol-

lows: “if you care about me and our relationship, you will want me to succeed in my endeavors. This will be reflected in your behavior in a way that I understand. One of these ways is that, if some endeavor requires cash I don’t have, you will give me some if you have any. When I receive it, I know you want me to succeed, because I can interpret that action as an index of your caring about me and our relationship.”

For this reason, the Bamiléké people I met tended to value proper adherence to form in *conduct* more highly than proper abstract *intent*. Being “good,” then, in many situations, for many people, meant a lot more emphasis on doing the “correct” thing than on having good intentions (i.e., “meaning well”) – not that intentions were irrelevant. When there is a breach, the apology “I didn’t mean to offend or hurt anyone,” is all but empty. A successful apology goes more like, “I see what I did wrong and will try not to repeat this behavior.”

To return to the topic of the gap between rich and poor, awareness of this gap and awareness of the implications of being poor in the neoliberal world order brings another level of potential suffering into the emotional complex of poverty and generosity. This is the level of experiencing being judged and put-down for being poor. It sometimes leads to self-consciousness or shame. Financial support in the form of savings, loans, and gifts takes on a double significance as a way of standing up to the class-based prejudice so common in their lives in the Cameroonian state and the globalized world. Having access to cash, then, is a means of raising one’s status in the eyes of others or possibly even oneself.

the high stakes of mourning

My consultants' financial situations were tied up with their statuses, but also with their ideologies and practices surrounding death and mourning. Significantly, anyone in Bangangté hears discussion of death and experiences reminders of death frequently. The reason for the former is that it is commonplace for Bamiléké people to attribute the causes of life events to the actions taken by the deceased. A deceased relative who has been properly honored after death will use her or his power to bring fortune to their living kin. By the same token, it is common to attribute misfortune to the actions of an unhappy deceased relative. Therefore, it becomes extremely important to know what to do for one's ancestors and to know how to do it – usually in ritual.

Reminders of death and the deceased occur so often for two reasons; (1) mourning events are very well attended and characterized by, among other things, attention-grabbing visual, corporeal, and aural performance; (2) a single deceased individual can reasonably expect quite a number of funereal events in their honor continuing possibly for decades.

A recapitulation of the basic components of the funereal rituals on which so much depends for the Bamiléké of Bangangté: starting immediately after the death itself, kith and kin spread the news and begin “crying” the deceased at her or his house. This is solemn and sad for all involved; sung-texted weeping occurs during this phase and may continue. Next, if the deceased died in the hospital, there is a parade from the morgue across town to the house where the wake will occur, which is usually where the deceased resided. During wakes in Bangangté, I noticed that the ratio of crying or somber partici-

pants to participants engaged in producing joyfulness begins to drop. A wake typically lasts all night and usually has loud music.

At a burial, typically, the closest kith and kin may be very sad or crying, but most people will attend the Christian ceremony feelingfully, pay their respects at the grave, and throw themselves into the feasting and musicking with joy and abandonment. As Brain said about Bangwa – another chiefdom in Ndé – the burial “is a splendid and festive affair, where celebration and display displace grief and mourning” (1972:42). The situation was the same during my field work close by. To recall a point from chapter three: sound, especially music, plays a major role in how my consultants manage grief. “Traditional” musicking (which implies dancing) and other loud sounds chase the tears away.

At least in the domains of death and mourning, the similarities between what Fardon observed among the Mapeo Chamba in the Western Grassfields (Eastern Nigeria) and what I encountered in Bangangté are striking.⁵ As among the Bamiléké, “death is made to seem pervasive in Mapeo daily life” (Fardon 1990:107). Also like the Mapeo Chamba, there is an honorable tradition among the Bamiléké of exhuming a corpse two to three years after burial to remove its head (Brain 1972:109-10, Fardon 1990:113, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999:255). This, though, is a quiet and small affair. The head is then transferred to another location of significance and power for special tending by the living. Twenty years elapsed between my fieldwork and Feldman-Savelsberg’s – thirty between mine and Fardon’s – and I suspect that exhumation and skull-care are becoming less and less commonly and enthusiastically practiced. I can attest that it is not close to abandonment, but the popularity of Christianity in Bangangté has led some locals to denounce

this practice. Furthermore, skull-care is particularly troubling to a “civilized,” “cosmopolitan,” “modern,” or “neoliberal” subjectivity. Indeed, the practice was made illegal by the French administration after Germany was ousted (Brain 1972:11).

What social explanation is there for this attention to and emphasis on death? I and other ethnographers preceding me (e.g., Tchegho 2002, Wansi Eyoumbi [no date]) place great weight on the capacity the dead have to influence the living. During Feldman-Savelsberg’s fieldwork with the Bamiléké of Bangangté, “ancestral wrath...[was] the most common cause of misfortune” (1999:106). The dead expect their children, nieces, nephews, and grandchildren to pay them proper respect for two generations (Brain 1972:107-11). If the untimely death of a child made this impossible, it would certainly be sorrowful, but it would also be threatening and inauspicious. “Parents *should* die before their children or sisters’ children, and the efforts of these latter should assure that their deaths are celebrated and their memories cherished” (Fardon 1990:91, my emphasis).

Celebration, cherishment, and paying respect entails burying the corpse on the family’s land (more on the land in the next chapter), exhuming the skull and re-burying it appropriately, performing the correct ablutions over the exhumed skull, and sponsoring large-scale memorial events from time to time as finances allow. The memorials, like the burials, are high energy venues for celebration, dancing, imbibing, and enjoyment. The close family, of course, goes through the anxiety of covering expenses and negotiating decisions together *on top* of the potential pain of renewed mourning.

Successfully maintaining these shows of respect for the deceased does wonders for convincing them to aid their living descendants. If the dead are displeased about what has or has not occurred, punishment of the living descendants could very well be the result.

“Commemorations of death[, then,]...demonstrate the status of the late person and his or her kin, deflect misfortune or plead for blessings” (Fardon 1990:107). The kinds of support musical banks provided were invaluable.

Another dimension of the importance of mourning to what musical banks do is that funereal ritual is expensive. The sponsoring family must pay musicians and keep a lot of people fed and intoxicated. Renting a p.a. system, chairs, or a large tent might be necessary. The money for this doesn't only come from the sponsors' savings; it also comes, as in Ghana, “from numerous gifts and contributions from association members, close kin, congregation members, friends, and so on, all of whom are partners in ongoing gift exchange at one another's celebrations” (Guyer 2004:124).

Securing gifts and contributions can be a tense and demeaning process. If the amount provided by the membership of one's musical banks doesn't cover the entire budget, one must go through the difficulty of asking – eventually, in many cases, begging – one's wealthy acquaintances for financial help. There is notable stylization of this process involving appropriate use of facial expressions, gestures and speech which index humility and social lowering, and carefully timed vocables which index frustration at being denied the speedy transfer of a large sum. On the other hand, it can be a supportive and gratifying experience to experience the generosity of those who do contribute.

As in the above-cited study by Guyer, the family sponsoring a Bamiléké funeral shoulders a huge financial burden. However, those who keep in the habit of providing help for the mourning expenses of group members generally do well at receiving the same help in return. Maintaining this cycle of reciprocity has deeper implications. The “wealth in people” concept (Guyer 1993, Guyer and Eno-Belinga 1995) provides a way

of connecting cash transactions to social practice. My fieldwork in Bangangté suggests that this social practice can involve musicking, implicating the latter in the anthropology of money.

In many Equatorial African contexts, local theories of self and person value influence and popularity highly. For example, one afternoon, Marc said, totally out of the blue, “j’aime la popularité. C’est la richesse.” The young man with us agreed. On another occasion, Marc made “wealth in people” explicit; he said, “you can have millions, but it means nothing without relationships and connections. They are the real riches.” So, having the connections to gather money from numerous sources reflects positively on the gatherer. The contacts, themselves, the relationships, are a kind of wealth insofar as they “come with” cash reciprocity. Wealth in people is another dimension of the emotions of poverty. “The ethnographic task...[is] to study how the credit/debt nexus is productive of social ties, allegiances, enmities, and hostilities, rather than to make normative pronouncements concerning whether credit is liberating and debt is debilitating” (Peebles 2010:234).

Finally, funereal events are enormous; in Bangangté, as among the Mapeo Chamba, anyone may attend, but attendance “is obligatory for kin...affines, co-residents...age mates and friends” (Fardon 1990:110). Just as in Bangwa, in Bangangté, a particularly important part is played by the members of the “associations and societies [which the deceased] had belonged to, since they dance...to honour their dead friend” (Brain 1972:42).

The importance of funerals is reflected and constructed by the rules musical banks have concerning participation in them. Every member must attend every funeral the group is performing at and stay until the end of the event. Everyone must actually do

some musicking – be it dance, chorus singing, instrumental accompaniment, or one of the various opportunities to solo. These are all punishable offenses. So, people in Bangangté, especially those in multiple music groups spend a lot of time at mourning events.

This chapter has begun to show the connections between death, money, solidarity, and musicking by outlining some major, interconnected concerns of the musical bankers: status, poverty, and mourning. Unhappy ancestors can set in motion unfavorable events which can lower someone's status or make them lose money (which can lower status, in itself). One of the most important ways to please ancestors is to put on a memorial event in their honor, but this is expensive. Another effective means is skull-care, but this is heavily stigmatized in some “modern” discourses and can lower one's status with some people even though it raises it with others. Recalling chapter three, mourning ritual includes participatory performance, though, which is intrinsically rewarding and helps with the psychological management of stress and grief. The next step in developing an understanding of these connections to is to look at musical banks' operation as institutions.

what musical banks do

My consultants set up musical banks to help them with their major concerns in several specific ways. The principal ones are:

1. a weekly, rotating pay-out of a small sum of cash to each member in turn
2. savings accounts that can be withdrawn from at any time
3. savings accounts that annually return each member's accumulated investments
4. occasional, small loans
5. gifts to help fund mourning rites

6. emotional support with life's trials and tribulations
7. musicking at mourning rites

Only one of these actually involves giving credit, despite how much emphasis informal banks in West Africa tend to give this practice. The last three seriously destabilize neoliberal assumptions about what banks are. How many North Americans think of gift-giving – much less building solidarity through mourning and musicking – as a primary purpose of their bank?

Every week, each member of each musical bank puts in a small sum of money: about 40-50 cents. This is called *la présence*. Each week it is someone's turn to take the sum of everyone's *présence* home with them. Turns rotate so that each member has equal access to the pay-out. Members take this very seriously; if someone must miss a meeting, they either send their *présence* with someone else, or they bring double the next week. These debts are settled as quickly as possible. This is the first of the three savings opportunities the banks provide.

The second is called *la tontine*. In *la tontine*, there is no set amount that must be deposited on a schedule. Any member participating in that year's *tontine* may deposit as little and as infrequently as she or he wishes. Withdrawals from this account can be made at any time. The bank's capital is guarded (I don't know how securely) in the house of one member. Quite a few members were not wealthy enough to participate in *la tontine* at all.

La banque is third. It is very like *la tontine*, except for two things. Money saved in these accounts is always used for paying children's school fees, and all the money is withdrawn on the same day by every single member. This day is in August: in time to prepare for the new academic year.

Small loans were available, if the members deemed there to be genuine need. No one could receive a loan if in default on a previous one. Typically, the amount was between about US\$1 and US\$6 from each member.

Any member – even a new member still on probation – had the right to request a cash gift from the membership to offset the cost of mourning rituals. These were usually granted. The gift would be between about US\$3 and US\$8 from each member. How they decided what the sum would be at each request I was not able to determine. Since these are larger sums than *la présence*, paying them was much more difficult. However, after usually only two or three weeks, all the payments would be made. In a few awkward and funny instances early in my fieldwork, I was the last person to pay. This was because I didn't realize that the negotiation between me and the banks' members as to what I was doing there would eventually lead to my being a paying member, rather than just an observer. Sure enough, even I got my turns to take home *la présence*.

Outside of the cash realm is the provision of emotional support to the bereaved. This is not to be under-appreciated; while emotional support is also available with kin, musical banks were a significant source, too. The bankers confront the state and neoliberal hegemony, together. They confront illness and deprivation, and the fear of them, together. They confront racism, sexism, and classism together. They confront death and its risk together. The few occasions on which I had the opportunity to be at a family's house during the first couple of days after a death were extremely moving and inspiring. The understanding and compassion given and received were as fine examples of affective solidarity as one could wish for.

The *orchestres* performed for free at any mourning event planned by a member, or if the deceased had been a member. When the bereaved was a friend or acquaintance of several members of a musical bank, but not a member, it was common for the membership to attend some of these events as a group and as representatives of the bank, itself. However, in this situation, attendance at the burial seemed not to be mandatory, unless they had been formally hired to play. Part of a musical director's responsibilities were to secure paying jobs for the *orchestre*. When there was a paying job, attendance from start to finish was mandatory.

Money and its appropriate exchange and distribution, then, are not neutral, asocial calculations of literal balance sheets. For the Bamiléké of Bangangté, they index functional relationships and the meeting of social responsibilities, which is intensely emotional.

institutional structures of musical banks

Each musical bank had at least three offices, president, treasurer, and musical director. Some had a secretary. In AM, but not AB, the founder took a very strong leadership role and personally wrote all the entries in the various accounts books. Every group I worked with had a male musical director. Members – new or old – who wanted to increase their proficiency would formally ask the musical director for the training. The training was given in every case I witnessed. “Below” the musical director were the more highly skilled musicians among the members; while the musical director was at least nominally given the power to make unilateral decisions about musical matters, these others often made decisions on their own. Furthermore, the musical directors' authority was challenged now and again by general members.

The total membership of the groups I had contact with seemed to average between twelve and fifteen. In addition to members who didn't hold office, there were also new members on probation. Probationary members are entitled to much less than full members. This brings me to the subject of rules and regulations in musical banks.

rules and the breaking of them

Musical banks had a set of rules written down which were part of the contract of the groups. The schedule of fines for breaking them was written down, too. One group's rules are in the appendix. Some main rules in both AB and AM were as follows: attend the meeting every week. Be punctual. Pay *la présence* every week. Before entering the meeting room and before speaking, perform a specific greeting. The first part of AM's greeting was "*mangambeu*," and everyone would say it somewhere between a shout and a murmur on the threshold of the room. It was a formal rule that everyone else responds with "*a nde*," which is a common respectful response in Mèdâmbà greetings, generally. As a means of taking the floor, one would also say "*mangambeu*" and rightfully expect an "*a nde*" in return. However, in this situation, the call and response were repeated. AB had one of these as well, but I can't disclose it because it would clearly identify the group; interestingly, it was in French.

Other rules: don't speak without gaining the floor properly. No overlapping speech. Stick to the agenda. Speak in Mèdâmbà and no other language. New members go through a three-month probation during which they may not participate in decision-making or ask for loans but they may ask for funeral expenses.

There is an interesting set of rules applying to funerals and performances at them. They will be important to the component of my argument in this chapter which rests on

the high importance of mourning for sociality in Bangangté; when the group has been hired to perform at a funeral, all members must attend and stay all through the night to the end of the event; everyone must eat, and everyone must participate in the performance by dancing or playing instruments. All members attended any mourning event in the family of another member. The membership was there, if possible, for the procession of the corpse home from the morgue (if applicable) and would at least drop by for the wake. The burial, however, was the main event and one simply couldn't miss that or make a brief appearance and leave; all members had to attend and stay overnight.

Musical banks also had a clear schedule of punishments. A member could be required to step outside for five minutes during a meeting if she or he was breaking rules of conduct concerning getting the floor and sticking to the agenda. This happened practically every week in AB. There were fines, as well, for every single infraction. In general, these were not empty threats; many people were fined during my time in Bangangté. Interestingly, there was a lot of lenience for punctuality and for speaking out of turn. Most people were at least twenty minutes late every single meeting, but no one was ever fined for tardiness, to the best of my knowledge.⁶ Failure to take the floor properly and overlapping speech were commonplace, but fines for these infractions were only levied in extreme circumstances. In one very extreme case of repeated violations of conduct, a member of AB was suspended for three months.

One of my reactions to the musical banks' sets of rules and regulations is that their relationship to practice illustrates how rules are meant to be broken. However, after further reflection, I feel otherwise. (1) The way rules were placed and enforced *or not* is suggestive, at the very least, of how and to what extent a regulation resonates with mem-

bers' values as they apply to particular domains of social life. (2) It shows that the strategic use of regulations and punishments by members as means of nudging institution-wide practices in one direction or another is nuanced. (3) Finally, it reveals where contestations and power-struggles lie among the members of the musical banks.

The rules have several implications for an understanding of “tradition” and musicking as the musical bankers understand and practice them. First, the banks themselves are firmly in the “traditional” category, which makes the rules themselves a discourse on “tradition.” Second, the bulk of the rules pertain to conduct, or pragmatics. “Tradition” being a source of moral values for the musical bankers, the rules, therefore, prescribe a moral pragmatics, or moral conduct. To be sure, there’s an irony surrounding the fact that the rules are written down and those rules which most seem to evoke colonialism – time discipline, for example – but they, nevertheless, are part of the constellations of authority which go into negotiations of moral values. There’s another segment of rules which all prescribe sociality itself – for example, attend every meeting, use formal greetings, eat and drink at every public performance, and participate in musicking. By emphasizing sociality, bank practices emphasize relationality and its importance as a support system from which everyone benefits. The formal manifestations of relationality are loans and gifts, the intrinsic reward of emergent participation, solidarity in grief, pride in membership, etc. This is another facet of the complex embedding of musical banks in their members’ most pressing concerns.

death and ancestors mediate money, musicking, and solidarity

It is important to appreciate the central, mediating role death and ancestors play in the workings of musical banks in Bangangté.⁷ Death is the reason for most of the public

appearances the musical banks make. Death is the reason people ask their musical bank(s) for cash gifts. Support during mourning is one of the main benefits people gain from the solidarity between members. In response, it is a solemn social duty to attend mourning rites for the sake of the bereaved. What goes around does come around. And the remarkable frequency with which mourning rites are staged speaks to the near-consensus on the importance of periodically honoring an ancestor with another ritual.⁸ It is imperative to hold the event and to do it right. Many of these memorial events – held years or decades after death – happen because someone in the family feels that life hasn't been going their way and there's a suspicion that some of the ancestors are unhappy with how the living have been honoring them. Others put the rite on to prevent such a circumstance. Then comes the anxiety of having to find money for a p.a. system, the tents and chairs, the food and drink, and the *orchestre(s)*. Certainly, for some, spending a lot of time thinking of long-dead loved-ones could be poignant. Rituals and the planning of them have supernatural, social, and personal significance, then.

Furthermore, funereal practice crystallizes the semiotics of kinship, “village,” and place, which I will elaborate in the next chapter. While there is nothing wrong with wakes or memorials occurring in cities outside of Bamiléké territory – I attended several of them in the earliest phases of my fieldwork – most Bamiléké considered events which occur in “the village” more powerful, more beautiful, or more appropriate. Crucially, Bamiléké *burials* in Yaoundé or Douala (not even in the same provinces as Bamiléké territory) are exceedingly rare. Every Bamiléké person with whom this topic came up indicated that she or he considered it very important to be buried on family land; this always means in Bamiléké territory. Sometimes, as Brain, too, observed (1972:41), the grave

was right beside where the deceased lived. In other cases I witnessed, the grave was in a field in the appropriate village. Burial on kin-associated land is not limited to those Bamiléké who live in “villages;” members of the Bamiléké diaspora go to great pains to return to “the village” before death, even if it means flying from France or Canada, for example. This practice is common throughout Equatorial Africa (Baker 1990, Geschiere and Gugler 1998b).

“At a funeral we have a good example of the intermingling of kinship and communal loyalties” (Brain 1972:42), but that’s not all we have. Kinship and communal loyalties also intermingle with cash transactions and musicking. Death is one of musicking’s major *raison d’être*. To recall aspects of the previous chapter, the requirements of funereal performance influence formal aspects of musicking; for example, “traditional” Bamiléké funeral music is highly repetitive and populist. Since therapeutic goals loom large in the “why” of musicking for these people, the sounds must be conducive to long, unbroken periods of dancing, and they must be acceptable to as many people as possible.

Mourning events bring about confrontations between (i.e., mediate) accountability to deceased and living kin, the awe resulting from facing death itself, the material generosity of kith and kin, competitions for status, anxieties attending poverty and scarcity, the comfort of “my people” doing “our thing,” grief, emotional support from kith and kin, and musical healing. Contradictions and conflicts may not be eliminated, but participating in a burial or memorial in this sociohistorical context is a way to understand experientially or intellectually the many rich ways seemingly disparate relationships, feelings, and practices are interdependent. These interconnected elements are metadiscursive in the fundamental sense of being “about” one another.

musicking together mediates death, money, and solidarity

To conclude this chapter, I will explain and support what I take to be a fairly modest claim – that one of the effects of musicking together, for these people in these situations, is to contribute to the management, comprehension, and regulation of the intense emotions brought up by poverty and death and by disagreement during meetings (which I will elaborate in due course). In other words, it forms a significant part of how they create solidarity among non-kin – each other.

One of the striking features of musical banks' meetings, for me, was how often disagreements lead to all-out, shouted arguments, which could easily last for thirty minutes, and sometimes lasted longer. Most AM meetings I attended had some shouting, and practically every AB meeting did. Those involved in the argument displayed anger and frustration to the utmost. The topics over which people most commonly achieved this pitch were:

1. what to do with the money the group earned through performing at a mourning event
2. whether or not to accept a certain offer of musical employment
3. whether or not a given action constitutes a breach of the rules of conduct and order
4. how to punish someone who, it is agreed, has broken a rule
5. an imbalance in the account books
6. a formal decision about musical sounds
7. who should play what part in *l'orchestre*

Arriving at the following analysis of this interaction style took a relatively long time because I needed to go carefully a lengthy process of analyzing and contextualizing my own reaction to being party to relatively long sessions of angrily raised voices in “concert.” After a while, I came to dread attending meetings each week, especially those of AB. During the shouting, I felt almost literally battered and crushed down into a corner or my seat. My own anxiety and tension surrounding these interactions mounted almost to the point of panic or tears. The intensity of my experience compelled me to take a step back from my initial and uncritical characterization of shouted arguments as a negative that participants needed to counteract, “heal,” recover from, or “repair” (see Pagliai 2010). Is it always and only a negative? Is getting through the business of the meeting as quickly and painlessly as possible actually a goal for anyone? Is arguing even painful or bothersome to anyone? If “yes,” why? Does anybody even consider adhering to the rules of conduct important?

My field notes contain several data relevant to these questions. For example, there were a number of members in both musical banks who made great efforts to reduce the loudness and tension, and get people back in line with the rules of conduct. In AM, the most tireless of these was Max, a school teacher. On many occasions, during an eruption of shouting, he disengaged completely from the substance of the debate. The only contributions he made were to urge people to remember the rules and behave in the manner he thought they had agreed was appropriate. Marc, although he was sometimes an enthusiastic participant in these high-affect moments, often commented negatively on the conflict and its frequency.

In AB, there were several members who put a lot of energy into adhering to the rules. One was the President, the other was the treasurer. In a conversation I had with just the treasurer, he brought this issue up, and told me that the group was hot-headed, but regulated; discipline reigned. He went on to say that when there are no problems (meaning, raised voices and conflict), things are good. This interested me because these were declaratives. Such a construction suggests a description. However, the truth-value of what he said about regulation and discipline was questionable. Pragmatically, this is prescriptive and normative, at least at some level. For him and Max, there does seem to be something undesirable about unresolved conflict and broken rules of order.

I cannot say the same for everyone. Most people participated with a raised voice when the proceedings went in that direction, though there were several in particular who tended to start things off. There were moments when I thought conflict might have been enjoyable or even a goal for them. The individuals I have in mind were on the outs with their respective groups, however. One of them was suspended, and another was fined. It was only a few individuals who could be counted on to refer back to the rules when the group was in the heat of argument. It was only this same few who commented negatively about the shouting outside of the meetings. Some others tended to completely withdraw and quietly wait out the storm. While displays of frustration (assuming I correctly identified them) during these episodes were nearly universal, it was striking how the pattern of blowing up into conflict persisted, throughout the duration of my fieldwork.

Perhaps, then, at least some members were content to go through these conflicts. Perhaps they experienced it, at least partially, as a *creative* tension. Or perhaps, an opportunity to yell at the top of one's lungs, for some, was sufficiently cathartic that the release

outweighed the tension. This contrasts with my habitus, as a result of which, I find conflict unpleasant and try to minimize tension, while hoping that conflict can be productive, in some sense. In sum, then, the issue of conflict in Bangangté, itself, was conflicted for these people.

While the intensity of the shouting, itself, made a strong impression on me, I was also struck by the seeming ease of transitioning back to friendly, relaxed, affectionate interactions at the end of the meeting. After tempers had cooled, it only took a few minutes – or even seconds – for most participants’ jovial demeanors to return.⁹ Faces remained dark for only a brief period. The fiercest of combatants never remained grumpy through the end of a meeting; it was as though affection and solidarity were the permanent ground, and upheavals only temporarily obscured the ground from sight. What often happened was this: financial matters were finally concluded; some were weary, others frustrated, some seemingly unperturbed, only a few still fuming. Then, the instruments came out and the musicians took their places in the center of the room. Maybe a brief warm-up was needed, but it did not take long for the ensemble to find a groove and get everyone out of their seats to dance or sing. After a few minutes, all the frowns had disappeared and the entire group was sweating and smiling together. It is socially and biologically significant that everyone was able to display happiness and affection once the musicking was underway.

The groups’ musical practices facilitated their maintenance of affection and solidarity. While I am not claiming that it was essential, I am claiming that musicking, along with generosity and grief support, was important for members’ affective bonding. “Talking things out” and “making up” was not a normative means of conflict management for

these people. Among the means they did favor was musicking. My evidence for this comes from a combination of metamusical discourse and a theoretical approach to the social effects of musicking which emphasizes three things: (1) how music is always semiotically entangled with seemingly separate social domains, (2) the centrality of emotion in a comprehensive theory of semiosis in music (e.g., Becker 2004, Coplan 1994, Feld 1990 [1982], Turino 1999), and (3) the particular relation musicking has to the interface of emotion and the body (e.g., Becker 2004, Blacking 1977b, Keil 1998, McNeill 1995).

Talk about music in Bangangté – mostly from vocational musicians, Marc and Jean, primarily – suggests that many members of musical banks in Bangangté take social cohesion and solidarity and the collaboration of various musicians playing different, but interlocking parts in an orchestra as rhematic, iconic indexes (Peirce 1955, Turino 1999) of each other. In other words, solidarity and collaboration in financial or planning domains bears a kind of resemblance to the cohesion and interlock of satisfying musicking.

During his time instructing me, Marc placed a lot of emphasis on the fact that a group of musickers must come together, but each one does something different in order to make a good experience. The basic manifestation of this, for him, was the complementary balance in *mangambeu* of the solo *kalimba* and the two accompanying *kalimbas*. In an ideal *mangambeu* ensemble, the soloist uses the highest pitched keys, the first accompanist stays on the middle pitches, and the bass accompanist uses the lowest pitches. I translate one of the longer exegeses Marc gave me on this theme. “Everyone is dancing something different.¹⁰ But it all comes together into a single thing, a single dance. It’s one single dance when everyone fits together. Tapping your foot while playing the *kalimba* is like playing two instruments at the same time, which is a good thing.” This resonates

unmistakably as a metaphor for a functional, pluralist society with multiple roles, positions, and talents. What evidence is there, though, that the potential iconicity as actually taken up in this way by anyone in Bangangté?

The clearest indication I have comes from a conflict that went on for months in AM's rehearsals concerning what role Joseph should have in the *orchestre*. Joseph, a popular singer and *kalimba*-player around town, had a unique and memorable singing voice. Every local person I encountered loved it. Whenever he sang at a funeral (or even rehearsal), there were cheers and the participants danced harder. His playing seemed to be equally widely considered virtuosic.¹¹ However, some dedicated and vocational musicians had problems with how he played his *kalimba* when he joined other musicians.

Despite the seemingly universal approval of his singing and virtuosity, his ensemble work (to use a term from “western ‘art’ music”) was questionable – at least according to Marc, Jean, and Jules. Marc explained to me in no uncertain terms that “one doesn’t go all over the instrument, playing high, medium, and low pitches. Everyone is in [her or] his place; a good musician *stays* in place. Only when playing *alone* does one use the whole range of the instrument.”¹² This became concrete for me when Marc, in his role as AM's musical director, started to keep Joseph off the *kalimba*, asking him to sing only. Joseph was unhappy, and so were some of the members, but Jules and Jean agreed with Marc that there was something wrong with Joseph's playing; *he was not* staying in his place [on the instrument]. I discussed this with Marc and Jean on various occasions and they, two vocational musicians, were in complete agreement that something needed to be done. I do not assume that the preferences of vocational musicians are the absolute, correct, or more discerning ones. However, since they have a great deal of influence over

musicking, their positions are intriguing. Jules, whom I do not place in this category, agreed as well; his opinion was obvious from his gestures and backchanneling when the issue arose during rehearsals. Marc, Jean, and Jules were quick to link Joseph's playing to speculations about his personality and biography. Marc and Jean said, "maybe he learned to play this way...maybe he is this way."

I believe the category of "vocational musician" is socially significant because of the patterned social distinctiveness that presented itself on a range of issues, not limited to this one. Jules was on the border of the category, so, assuming my analysis is salient, it makes sense that he would not always align himself with the more populist actions of those members who wanted to keep Joseph on the *kalimba*.

These data indicate that, at some level, how Joseph played the *kalimba* indexed his behavior, personality, and relationships. Several months later, Marc seemed to be increasingly frustrated with the situation and said to me in private, "Joseph doesn't respect others. One mustn't play only for oneself. One must search for a means of letting others play, too." The slippage, here, between respect for others in musical banking relations and respect for others in musical relations is both striking and strategic. In Bangangté, then, as in some other Sub-Saharan African contexts (e.g., Barber 1991, Chernoff 1979, Coplan 1988, 1994, Friedson 2009, Turino 2008), to music is to celebrate, participate in, and nurture appropriate sociality. Given the tensions and emotions of poverty, money, and mourning, musicking about appropriate sociality is of great social significance for my consultants.

This returns me to the significant fact that, in musical banks, *everyone must participate* at rehearsals and public appearances. Marc and the other musicians I quoted seemed

to be concerned that Joseph's playing was jeopardizing this. I also mentioned in the previous chapter that my consultants understood and experienced musicking as therapy for the stresses and strains of poverty, mourning, and social inequity. They made stylized sounding and moving together a primary means of commemorating ancestors, and affirming the values of "tradition" and kin both living and dead. Some people participate by dancing and singing in the chorus, rather than taking up any instrument. Others may have mastered only one of the accompaniment instruments, while others are equally adept no matter where in the *orchestre* they end up. Regardless of this variation, no one may join a musical bank solely for financial reasons and eschew the musicking. Musicking is the public face of the bank and an important practice for building and maintaining solidarity and affection among members; it may be extremely enjoyable, but it is also serious for them.

This *participation ethic* implies that sociality itself is mandatory. No one may opt out of occupying their place in the network of relationships. The musical bankers rely on each other; musicking together is a way of solidifying that notion in themselves and each other: and a way of compelling those who may be reluctant to commit to meet their responsibilities of generosity and solidarity. Participating in sounding and moving together in time (music and dance) is, at some levels, more convincing than making impeccably logical arguments. This is because musical participation is mostly a matter of iconic and indexical signs. They have a tendency to appear incontrovertible and necessary because what they stand for is relatively non-arbitrary and because their interpretants and objects can be emotions, memories, or bodily movements (Becker and Becker 1981, Feld 1990

[1982], 1996, 2000b, Fox 2004, Meintjes 2003, Trawick Egnor 1986, Turino 1999, Urban 1985).

I follow semiotic anthropologists of musicking in taking it as axiomatic that, for any given social context, the musicking that has the most impact on a person or within a social group is always richly layered with intense emotional significance. In other words, the musicking that most powerfully directs ideology and moral values is the most intensely *felt* musicking in the social universe of the involved parties. This is not to invoke emotion as an asocial, “private,” primordial domain set off from institutions, history, macro-sociological processes, or power relations. All of the latter play a role in constructing feeling, and feeling plays a role in constructing them (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990b, Stoler 1995, 2004). The musicking of musical banks is precisely the most intensely felt musicking in the social universe of many or most of the banks’ members. It indexes some of the most intense domains of these people’s lives, poverty, solidarity, and death. In fact, it indexes much more than this, as chapter five will show, but even what I have described so far is enough to make this music a powerful mediator, manager, and shaper of participants’ experiences and ideologies of what is most important to them.

In order to give the most complete account I can of how musicking can be such a powerful mediator of solidarity, death, and poverty, I also need to address the effects of the *body* musicking on feeling and sociality. McNeill (1995) argues that “keeping together in time” – synonymous with “rhythmic entrainment” – tends to bring about feelings of euphoria and tends to facilitate the bonding and solidarity-building among those who keep together in time. Becker (2004) adds two important dimensions to McNeill’s presentation of very similar issues: first, she looks in detail at neurobiological processes with-

in musicking bodies. Second, she makes clear the importance of the stylization of participation and the heightening of attention which are basic to musicking.

Her discussion of rhythmic entrainment includes entrainment in speech and gesture outside of a performance frame (see, e.g., Condon 1986, Erickson and Mohatt 1982, Merker 2000, Richman 2000). However, entrainment in less stylized, non-performance practice is less impressive, less powerful, less affecting than that of semiotically and emotionally complex musicking. She writes that, “if speech rhythms can entrain, if rhythmically flashing lights can entrain, if bodily gestures can entrain, how much more powerful is musical ritual entrainment with a pulse that penetrates to our bones, with melodies that thrill, and a cosmology that gives life meaning and purpose?” (2004:129). This is what “traditional” musicking with fellow musical bankers is for my consultants. Becker argues that the discourse and framing – always already social – of musicking, while essential, are not *sufficient* as a theory of musicking. She shows that the biology of musicking complements musical discourse:

Emotion, music, and dance become one system of ontogenic coordination of actions. Together, they bring about changes in being and changes in the music event. Although it is the individual who experiences the emotion, it is the group and its domain of coordinations that triggers the emotion. The changes in the neurophysiology of the listener... occur through the group processes of recurrent interactions between co-defined individuals in a rhythmic domain of music... Bodies and brains synchronize gestures, muscle actions, breathing, and brain waves while enveloped in music. Many persons, bound together by common aims, may experience revitalization and general good feeling (127).

This research suggests that when members of a musical bank have a tense meeting with much discord and raised voices, their transition into rehearsal sets the stage for a potent means of reaffirming solidarity and the discourses of value – “tradition,” generosity, support, family, participation – which brought them into collaboration in the first place, and easing the anguish and tension that potentially arises for some of the participants in a conflictual event. This potent means is musicking, the participation in stylized patterns of

sound and movement. At a funeral, entering into musicking facilitates the emergence of all this and more. While there is plenty of conflict, anxiety, and tension for the sponsors of such events which is managed through musicking, so also is visceral grief potentially managed, mediated, and healed, at least in part, through musical participation. What this means is that the musicking my consultants do, their joyful enthusiasm for it, and the discursive contexts in which it occurs play a large role in building solidarity, and coping with the intense experiences of poverty, identity, mourning, and death.

notes

¹ I have knowingly omitted from my study those informal banks in Bangangté which have no musical function. They do exist, however, and are a significant minority of the “informal” financial scene in Bangangté. This dissertation is about the musicking associations, only.

² It was the one “from” the village of Bazou. This makes his lineal name “Tabankwi.”

³ An interesting project, which I did not do, would be an inquiry into how and why people choose one tier over another in a particular situation. While I can’t answer these questions, it was clear that the decision was tricky and interesting.

⁴ My landlady and landlord when I was renting an apartment on my own both worked for the Red Cross. They gave me a mosquito net and had one for every bed in their house. What’s more, they gained a granddaughter while I was there and were even able to find a net designed to clip onto her bassinette.

⁵ Despite the considerable differences in colonial and state history separating the Bamiléké from the Cham-ba, it is commonplace in anthropology to consider the entire Grassfields a salient languacultural sub-region. The titles of numerous books speak to the acceptability of this bounding (for example, Argenti 2007, Goheen 1996, Kaberry 1952, Nkwi 1976).

⁶ Capitalist time-discipline is historically contingent, not inevitable (Braverman 1974, Fabian 1986, Frykman and Löfgren 1987, Richards 1969, Thompson 1964, Weber 2002 [1920]), and can hardly be expected to be practiced the same or at all in every context.

⁷ The major exception is *la banque* insofar as the importance of sending as many of one's children to elementary school as possible has little articulation with these cosmological themes. The drive to educate comes primarily through modernization discourses and the wish to have a "modern" kind of affluence and prestige.

⁸ Compare with the Chamba case; "if Chamba rituals are to have a dominant concern, and their explanations and practices a recurrent source, we would have to say that all this occurs under the sign of death. The worlds of the living, above ground, and the dead below are parallel planes of existence and cyclically related. The life cycle involves a prolonged attempt to exert control over this relation which becomes particularly fraught at death. Death must be co-opted and its instrumentality put at the service of men's attempts to master their lives. Death... is the critical condition" (Fardon 1990:92).

⁹ Not everyone had the same temperament and baseline mood, of course. It would be more accurate to say that they returned to their own "default," in a sense. The President of AM, for example, was quick to scowl, seemed impatient, and had a short temper. However, he loved a good joke and was eager to get the musicking started. Once the instruments had come out, and we'd managed to get the orchestral engine into gear and settled into a groove, his face became the very ideal of peace and serenity – and *mangambeu* is highly danceable party music. Musicking seemed to provide him with something very precious and calming.

¹⁰ This idiom means very much what I mean with the verb "to music." It includes "dancing," playing instruments, and song.

¹¹ I also trained every week in *mangambeu* with Joseph, not only Marc. These sessions were often extremely challenging. My role was to accompany him while he sang or soloed. The difficulty arose at the processual level, the level of participatory discrepancies (see Alén 1995, Gaunt 2002, Keil 1994 [1987]).

¹² This applies to *ndanji*, as well, because two people have to share one xylophone.

chapter five

naming, place, kinship and song

In this chapter I explain how the major themes and concerns of the previous two chapters –ancestors, mourning, poverty, solidarity, “tradition,” musicking – are manifest in the poetics of song at some of AB’s and AM’s performances. I will argue that the semiotics – which I understand broadly to include poetics (see Agha 2007, Lempert 2008, Silverstein 1993, 2005b) – of proper names are at the center of the feelingful significance of song for members of the musical banks. One of the principal, richly indexical structuring devices in this stylized discourse is the business of referring to people by name. Use of names is an important aspect of macropoetic structuring, and will be prominent in my formal analysis, later in the chapter, of song texts from rehearsals. To prepare for the transcription, a look at Bamiléké naming.

personal names

Typically, Bamiléké people have three or four names. Here are two plausible, but fictional Bangangté names:

first name	last name	maternal <i>ndab</i>	paternal <i>ndab</i>
Collette	Nyami	Nteshùn	Tônntàn
Georges	Kwadjeu	Tâbankwe	[none]

Table 5.1 example names

Both the “first” and “last” names are given names, which is to say that they are not predictable from kinship. The difference between them is that, whereas the former is of European or Biblical origin, the latter is of African origin. So, while “Collette,” “Georges,” “Nyami,” and “Kwadjeu” may have great importance to some people and there may be stories associated with their bestowal on babies, they were the choice of a namer. Bamiléké given names are not gendered; I met both a man and a woman named “Nyami.” Similarly, I met both a man and a woman named “Njiki.” Not so for the third and fourth names. “Ntshùn,” “Tônntàn” and “Tâbankwe” are publicly intelligible indications of relatedness and gender; they are inherited, family names which no one has any say over. Despite the fact that the state does not recognize them, they are the interesting ones for this research. In Mèdâmbà, they’re called *ndab*. I also call them “lineal names.”

Bamiléké lineal names index both a matriline¹ and a village. Every man has one, and every woman has two. The one that the men have is matrilineal in designation, and so is at least one of the two that women have. The majority of people I worked with said that mothers, not fathers, bestow *ndab*. However, some women thought that one of their *ndab* was her father’s matriline, which is no different from saying that it was bestowed by the father. This seems inconsistent with the former notion, that *ndab* come only from mothers. I was unable to get to the bottom of this disagreement.

Every *ndab* reveals something about the bearer’s kinship. So, knowing someone’s lineal name means knowing where her or his matriline is widely thought to have originated. These locations are not idiosyncratic or vague; I encountered no disagreement over what any specific *ndab* “means.” Each one indexes one village or chiefdom and one only. In the case of primary or secondary chiefdoms like Bangangté or Bangoulap, *ndab* index

some neighborhood or *quartier* under the purview of a sub-chief, rather than the whole village. In any case, everyone called her or his “matriline place” *mon village*.

The *ndab* which every person has and is an undisputed index of the bearer’s matriline I uneasily call the “maternal lineal name.” While both men and women have one, the forms they take are gendered; a matrilineally Bazou woman and a matrilineally Bazou man have different maternal lineal names, even if they are full siblings. From the *ndab* Tabankwe in table 5.1, we know that Kwadjeu is male and of the Bazou matriline. Likewise, as a Nteshùn, Nyami must be a woman of Bangoulap’s matriline.

The following chart has more examples. It is reproduced from a previous description of Bangangté *ndab* (Voorhoeve 1964), a brief article which includes some social anthropological analysis.² It is only a partial list, but it gives a clear idea of the phenomenon. I have retained his orthography even though it is not the one I’ve adopted elsewhere in this dissertation.

Feminine	Masculine	Origin
Nké'nzi	Tàlenga	Balengou
Sènnke'	Tàbu'ntum	Ntum (a Bangangté <i>quartier</i>)
Màbu'kam	Tàntshà'ton	Bakong
Ntshanko'	Tàlennjà'	Bangangté high-chief's <i>quartier</i>
Tshà'nga	Tàngafèn	Ponpà' (a Bangangté <i>quartier</i>)
Tsho'ntàne	Tàtshàpnzwim	Bangwa
Nteshùn	Tàmàntsho	Bangoulap

Table 5.2 some maternal *ndab*

Much difference of opinion among my consultants emerged when it came to the fourth name, the one borne only by women, the “paternal *ndab*”. The next list, too, is adapted from Voorhoeve (1964). It shows that paternal lineal names index something other than a village and matriline.

<i>ndab</i>	Gloss
sòknjo'	"washed and oiled," meaning, "well cared-for"
ngonntsho	"a girl from the war," usually borne by women from subchiefdoms which fought to defend their independence
tsho'sàn	"born in the rainy season"
ngonkwà'à	"a girl from [Banganté's] Kwa'a [<i>quartier</i>]"
ngontene	"a girl from a place to find palm-trees"
tônntàn	"tills the marketplace," which is to say, "market-based livelihood (as opposed to living from farming and its products)" [applies only to women from Bazou and Bangoulap]
ngontshùà	"hooded girl"
ngo'sàm	a kind of termite which saved this family during a war
nké'ngo'o	"illuminates termites (in order to trap them)"
nyatnyàm	"buffalo," for a family which crossed buffalo territory during its migration
ndù'nyí'	"grows hay"
njônmbàb	"hunter of meat"

Table 5.3 some paternal *ndab*

A few points stand out in these data. First of all, although Voorhoeve's chart does not consistently link paternal *ndab* with villages, my consultants were very clear that *all* lineal names index a village, even when they recognized semantico-referential meanings such as those identified, here. For them, the various "meanings" lineal names index are bundled together. Second, it may initially seem that the glosses of the names fall into four categories: some pertain to family history. Others refer to activities or livelihoods. Others refer to events of chance or coincidence. Next, there are a number which "mean" a place and kin-group just like the other kind of *ndab*. Finally, within each of these categories, there is no apparent systematicity: e.g., does crossing buffalo territory have something in common with being saved by termites? Nor do we have any sense of why these categories exist in the first place. For example, why isn't every group marked with its history? Why isn't every group marked with an activity? Why don't all the paternal *ndab* index a place, instead of just some?

"Oral traditions, by the very nature of their transmission, cause discursive history to become tacit knowledge. Over time, history as narrative becomes naturalized as cultural

structure, manifested in lived experience” (Coplan 1994:13). Therefore, I understand each of these glosses as a historical micro-narrative. To begin with, they are interesting in light of the village-based stereotypes I encountered occasionally during field work (see chapter two). Traits such as “well cared-for” are exactly the stuff of social stereotyping (see Fiske 1993, Hilton and Hippel 1996) and fit in perfectly with the other stereotypes in my data, such as “pleasant personality.” Social stereotyping tends to have an essentializing effect: i.e., this conversation I described in chapter two presented pleasantness of personality as though it inheres in the children of Bangangté (and by extension, the matrilineal lines of Bangangté. However, stereotyping always emerges interdiscursively in history; stereotypes don’t pop into existence lacking antecedents. The lineal names, then, which seem to have trait-like glosses could also be records of a history, one characterized by equivocally productive tension between chiefs, chiefdoms, and their people, today marked in this semiotic conjunction of kinship, place, and naming.

This semiotic-discursive perspective on micro-interactional history suggests an equitable and politically radical understanding of historiography. While table 5.3 at first seemed to contain four distinct categories of gloss, it is in fact a list of historical data. It bears on the history of (1) migration of people into, out of, and through polities, and (2) struggles for dominance, status, and subsistence between those with political interests in macro-political structure. The presentation of these data displays stigmatized register and entextualization conventions, but they constitute, nevertheless, a viable counter-hegemonic historiography because:

language as culture, its categories and the way they are used in social process, shapes the style of historical construction. So we are faced with the striking differences from Western narrative history of the aural forms and manners by which Africans represent history, power relations, and the pre-occupations of licensed intellectuals (Coplan 1994:11).

We can now see that naming has multiplex social significance for the Bamiléké of Bangangté. One of its effects is to essentialize descent groups. Paternal lineal names are heritable and come with socially consequential glosses. The seeming self-evidence of this for my consultants ends up iconizing (see Irvine and Gal 2000) the relationship between the transparent heritability of names and the contestable and ideologically unstable *seeming*-heritability of character traits and activity traits, thereby erasing the inaccuracies of essentialist stereotyping. Furthermore, understanding lineal names as emplaced historical micro-narratives is one way to appreciate their semiotic richness and the depth of feeling my consultants had surrounding their circulation in discourse. This necessarily emerged over time and has been reproduced over time. The historicity of *ndab* makes it possible for naming to imply and concretize a feeling of place and relatedness for the musical bankers.

Name-based historiography makes an interesting parallel with how names are implicated in genealogy as historical record among the Wolof of Senegal. Irvine (1978) reports that, among the responsibilities of the *gewel* caste is the maintenance, clarification, and recitation of genealogies. While, in several instances from her corpus, there was some pressure on the *gewel* to say what the employer wanted to hear so that future employment is a possibility, Irvine argues that what most *gewel* privately believe to be accurate probably is. When a *gewel* is hired by a noble to sing or discuss genealogies, he can, much of the time, avoid both outright falsification *and* displeasing the noble by playing on ambiguities in the Wolof naming system. Like in Bangangté, we can learn something of history from the indexicality of inherited names. Such “alternative” data have been used in many critical, Africanist historiographies, not only Irvine’s (e.g., Argenti 2007,

Blommaert 2004a, Diagne 1990, McCaskie 2000, Shaw 2002, Vail and White 1991, Zeitlyn and Connell 2003).

Members of the musical banks also told me about their given names. Post-colonial names sometimes had significance, such as the sort of meanings one might find in a baby-names book. In the case of biblical names, positive traits of the saint in question were important. This, however, was the exception, not the rule. When asking about post-colonial names, most people told me that theirs had no special significance. Nicknames, too, were common in Bangangté. Some people were almost never known by their legal names socially. In many cases, I discovered legal names only by asking directly for them, even with people whom I'd been close with for months.

Most people's African name had some significance more profound than being pleasant to whoever named them. For example, there are special names to give twins. More commonly, people are named after an ancestor or older relative. It was unusual, though, to meet a young adult or child who used her or his African name as the primary, casual, unmarked choice for face-to-face interactions. There was much variation in this for people in old age and late middle-age, although use of African names was relatively more common among the elderly. Some elderly people called others by their African name even if the same individuals were known by their post-colonial names to younger people.

Bamiléké-Bangangté names and naming can be compared with other African cases in the anthropology of names and naming. For example, unlike some African communities, my consultants in Bangangté did not perform elaborate naming rituals. Nor do their names change at any time during life, as in the Baatonu case (Schottman 2000). I observed only limited use of teknonyms,³ but at other sites, everyone has a teknonym in ad-

dition to given, nick, or kin-group names (Parkin 1989, Schottman 2000). Similarly, incorporating something of the circumstances of birth into names was not unusual, but hardly systematic in Bangangté, unlike among the Bwa (Onukawa 2000).

On the issue of semantic content and complexity, Bamiléké names are unremarkably moderate. The phenomenon of compounding lexical items to form personal names is common the world over; Sub-Saharan Africa is no exception. While the referential content of some *ndab* is fairly rich and complicated, on a comparative continuum, they are far from extreme. Yoruba names and Igbo names can be as semantico-referentially rich as a clause (Akinaso 1980, Onukawa 2000). The other extreme is attested in Africa, too; “virtually all” Baatonu “real” names are devoid of referential meaning other than the deictic indexing of whoever bears the name (Schottman 2000:80).

Also notable for comparison is the fact that the semantico-referential differences between the paternal and maternal *ndab* almost exactly parallel those between the Ndebele *isitemo* and *isibongo*, respectively (Lindgren 2004). The former, which Lindgren glosses as “family name,” refers to traits, qualities, or actions, just like paternal *ndab*. Whereas, the latter (Lindgren’s “clan name”) has no meaning other than indexing a clan, just like maternal *ndab*. The Bamiléké integration of place with kinship names, though, is absent from *isitemo* and *isibongo*.

The particular ways my consultants conjoined and bounded gender, kinship, and place in phonology and semiotics might be unique to the Bamiléké ethnicity. Elsewhere in Africa, people do derive one or more of their names from their membership in relatively perduring kinship units. However, Giriama (Kenya) men and boys (but not women and girls) derive one of their names from patrilineal (not matrilineal) clans (Parkin 1989).

Analogous names used among the Sabé of Benin (Palau Marti 1968, 1971) and the Zimbabwean Ndebele (Lindgren 2004) also index a patrilineal entity. In Tanzania, the Kaguru, like the Bamiléké, derive a name from a matrilineal clan (Beidelman 1971, 1974). Their matrilineal clan names have gendered forms, too. However, the Kaguru names are phonologically derived from the names of the clans, themselves (Beidelman 1971). Bamiléké *ndab* are not derived phonologically from any matriline's name because Bamiléké matrilines do not have names. Nor are they derived from the names of the villages they index. The Kaguru even maintain an ideology linking kinship with place, insofar as their clans "own" a particular piece of territory. These places are not named the way a Bamiléké village is, though (Beidelman 1971).

Another comparative axis is pragmatics – in what situations are what kinds of name commonly used, and by whom? In Bangangté, to use a *ndab* is always a show of respect for the addressee, and can simultaneously be a show of solidarity with her or him.⁴ Sabé pragmatics are similar in this regard; for them, "when a mother or father addresses their child with the greeting derived from his lineage, the latter is flattered and pleased; he feels the solidarity of all his kin with the rights and obligations they share" (Palau Marti 1971:324).⁵ However, informal use of *ndab* is much more common than that of African given names, particularly among the middle-aged. Some male members of musical banks (and other Bamiléké men in Bangangté) were known almost exclusively by their *ndab*. I never discerned a pattern in why some, and not others, were known widely by their *ndab*. I also don't know if this actually was rarer among women or if bias in my "sample" kept me unaware of women like this.

Such informality as I observed is in sharp contrast to naming pragmatics among the Baatonu. “Only a social equal or superior can use a Baatonu's [real] name to address its bearer. An inferior uses a term of address derived from kinship terminology.” This is important because Baatonu names can be used to harm the bearer through sorcery (Schottman 2000:80). In contrast to the *ndab*'s public circulation, among the Sabé, the general view is that it's best not to share one's *eéki èyilé* very widely; it's for intimates only (Palau Marti 1971).

Both Voorhoeve and my consultants called Bamiléké lineal names *éloges* when using French. I have deliberately avoided referring to them as “praise names,” though, because I don't want them to be uncritically grouped together with Bantu praise naming (see, e.g., Barber 1991, Opland 1983, Vail and White 1991). While it could be said that *ndab* do, in a sense, provide a means of praising their bearers, they are not descriptions of excellent traits or deeds, as, for example, Xhosa praise names are. They are more reminders of the bearer's value as a child of a place and a history. The value of this history in place is not unique to any individual, but merely bears a generalized, but feelingful sense of “we who do this naming practice and share this ethnicized history in this place” and of the embodiment and continuation of these practices in living persons. It would be misleading to say that this is glorious or status-enhancing like the traits and deeds indexed by a Bantu praise name because Bamiléké matrilineal names are not in competition in any way that has outcomes for privilege, hegemonic power, or access to resources.

Ndebele clans and clan-names, *izibongo*, however, are competitive and do impact privilege of various kinds (Lindgren 2004). *Izibongo* are kinship names and their use is fundamentally responsive to the fact that Ndebele arrange their clans in a status hie-

rarchy. One of the results is that people play on grey areas or loop-holes in the system to justify changing or negotiating their *isibongo*. This is totally foreign to Bamiléké naming in Bangangté. What matters in the use of the *ndab* is people's structure of feeling for villages as sovereign spaces and places of power and value (to be developed later in the chapter). While the *boundary* between, for example, the two *ndab* Tabankwe and Talenga is hegemonic, Tabankwe honors Talenga just as graciously as he would another Tabankwe, and vice versa. Which matriline is "better" seems not to be a question that would make sense for the musical bankers I worked with. The existence of these social distinctions is accepted as a non-antagonizing feature of the way things are for "we the practitioners of Bamilékéness." Sabe practices surrounding their *eéki èyilé* names are similar (Palau Marti 1971:324):

Through his *eéki èyilé* the individual feels solidarity with all the members of his lineage, dead or alive, imagining those yet to come. It is names and greetings which constitute the common heritage of everyone in his lineage, and which link them all together, thereby making the significance of social personhood felt reality.⁶

The "action" which use of a *ndab* "performs" (and I mean this in a "speech acts" sense [see, e.g., Austin 1961, Finnegan 1969, Rosaldo 1982]) is not praising, but rather thanking or appreciating. While reviewing my transcriptions of song-texts, I noticed that different transcribers did different things with lines containing a *ndab*. Consider this example:

"oh, Tabankwe, oh"

Some of my consultants translated this simply as vocables bracketing a proper name. They would then explain that this is a lineal name and perhaps say a few words about what that means. Some, however, translated it as:

"[vocable], give thanks to the respectable man of Bazou [vocable]"

Why? First of all, Tabankwe is the lineal name a man receives if he is from the matriline of the village of Bazou. “Man of Bazou” works as a translation of “Tabankwe” because, while the singer is referring to a specific person, it’s not a name like “Simon” or “Robert,” over which those naming a baby have some control. It does, in some sense, “mean” Bazou. Second, *ndab* are gendered, so it can’t be a woman. And finally, the verb that means something very like “to thank,” in Mèdûmbà is /ne labte/. The noun, *ndab*, is derived from this verb.⁷ *Ndab* in use honor living individuals by linking them to their kin and to places which are understood to be powerful (the villages of Bamiléké territory). The praise-names of Southern Africa, while certainly honoring living individuals, do so without necessarily evoking the histories of places back through innumerable generations. These praise-names are mostly focused on exploits of one person during her or his life.

There is another comparative axis in the anthropology of African naming which sheds light on the situation among the Bamiléké of Bangangté. It is the relative amount of *individualization* a name effects. Many of my consultants were named after an older relative. However, David Parkin reports that *all* Giriama babies, normatively anyway, are named after a grandparent. Reflecting on this lead him to develop individualization as a theoretical tool for the anthropology of names and naming:

One must wonder how far we can even refer to the existence among the Giriama of personal names which are the sole property, so to speak, of any one individual...and not already ‘owned’ by an ascendant...personal or proper names do exist, but only as exceptions to the rules. Otherwise the orthodox names, as I have called them, either identify people with the alternate generations of grandparents and grandchildren, or distance them from the immediately adjacent ones of parents and children, in both cases fitting them into a system of relationships. Apart from the exceptions, then, *all such names play a part in subordinating expression of exclusive selfhood* (Parkin 1989:86-7, emphasis added).

To members of some social groups, the phrase “subordinating expression of exclusive selfhood” may immediately elicit a strongly negative response (Ewing 1990, Ochs and

Capps 1996). However, this response is culturally contingent. Giriama and Bamiléké ideologies of self and sociality leave much room for appreciating the positives of one's integration with a group of people and one's indistinctiveness within it, one's integration. The logic of this is that, by emphasizing similarity, proximity, and integration into social groups, one is quite likely to feel protected and supported by intimacy and solidarity, rather than threatened by the proximity and potential intrusions of others. In these African cases, people find it much easier to view their selves as being created and nurtured by similarity, proximity, and integration. Whereas, people strongly influenced by the heroic, autonomous, liberal ideology of the *transcendent* self (see Murray 1993:6), tend to find it easy to view their selves as being threatened with annihilation by similarity, proximity, and integration.

Lineal names are not individualizing at all; no individual owns a *ndab* and, by Parkin's formulation, they fit people into a system of relationships, identifying them with other members of their matriline and distancing them from the members of other matriline. For my consultants, this is a strongly positive state of affairs; among them, feelings of being threatened by the proximity and potential intrusions of others are rare and mild, generally speaking. The support available from the system of relationships into which they are fit outweighs the anxieties of loss of individuality so familiar to those influenced by the liberal ideologies of the sovereign self or of the rugged individual. In addition, as a member of a community in which the ideology that similarity, proximity, and integration create and nurture the self is dominant, one's need to worry about others' destructive "expression of exclusive selfhood" is low because people don't act that way very often. Such an ideology – such a structure of feeling – is, indeed, in play for the musical bank-

ers I worked with. Many of my consultants said that it was quite unlikely that anyone would violate their obligations to others for the sake of individual gratification. This is not to deny the existence of tension surrounding the issue, but rather to re-inscribe an ideology of “comfort through membership.”⁸

Ndab are central to this chapter and this dissertation because they are a surface-segmentable (see Silverstein 1981) index of the interweaving of place, history and kinship in hegemonic structures of feeling active at my field site. This plays out dramatically in the poetics of song. Song is an important site for maintaining and negotiating the affective intensity and pragmatic effectiveness of naming. We will see this in two performances which occurred at AM rehearsals.

Joseph’s “calling out”

The first song-fragment displays, in an exaggerated fashion, the prominence of lineal names in the poetics of song. The song takes neither a moral nor a narrative stance. It is devoted to what I call “calling out.” Here, Joseph, the singer, rarely goes much beyond listing names as a show of respect for the referent. Looking across the numerous occasions I heard him sing and my corpus of recorded song, Joseph uses this device more often and for longer durations than most other singers. It puts into focus poetic figures which appear much more subtly in the work of other singers. The fragment is long, but it is necessary to grasp the repetitiveness of Joseph’s style, since the repetitiveness, itself, is of sociopoetic significance.

fragment one

1. ɔ bin na' ncob mɛ̀ la mbà ɔ
voc 2nd.pl aux.MODERATELY TALK 1st.sg.obj loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME
talk to me a little bit like this
2. ɔ bin na' ncob mɛ̀ la mbà ɔ
voc 2nd.pl aux.MODERATELY TALK 1st.sg.obj loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME
talk to me a little bit like this
3. la mbà watɲgwatu
loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
about (the) watɲgwa'tu(s)
4. la mbà watɲgwatu
loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
about (the) watɲgwatu(s)
5. sho'tamusa bə a ya
prp BE x WHERE.q
Where is sho'tamusa?
6. tankotad bə a ya
prp BE x WHERE.q
Where is tankotad?
7. m-vən munda bə a ya
(1,4).sg-pos.CHIEF prp BE x WHERE.q
Where is the chief of munda?
8. m-vən munda bə a ya
(1,4).sg-pos.CHIEF prp BE x WHERE.q
Where is the chief of munda?
9. la mbà bānduku
loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
about (the) bānduku(s)
10. la mbà bantandjə'nu
loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
about (the) bānduku(s)
11. *maire* nca'cwa bə a ya
MAYOR prp BE x WHERE.q
Where is Mayor Nca'cwa?
12. *maire* nca'cwa bə a ya
MAYOR prp BE x WHERE.q
Where is Mayor Nca'cwa?

13. a yog zə ndo di
 3rd.sg.sub LIVE 2nd.sg.-dem x loc.NEAR
 Has he had a good day?
14. a yog zə ndo di
 3rd.sg.sub LIVE.aspect? 2nd.sg.-dem x loc.NEAR
 Has he had a good day?
15. o məŋkacob bə à ya di o
 voc prp BE x WHERE.q loc voc
 oh, where is menkacob, oh?
16. la mbà ntakinya'
 loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
 about (the) ntakinya'(s)
17. o m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀ m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀
 voc [1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp [1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-
 prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp
 oh, m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀ m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀
18. o m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀
 [1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp voc
 oh m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀
19. la mbà m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀ ɔ
 loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME [1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp voc
 about m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀, oh
20. la mbà m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀ ɔ
 loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME [1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp voc
 about m̀d̀d̀m̀b̀, oh
21. ɔ bin na' n-dab takinya
 voc 2nd.pl.sub aux.MODERATELY x-THANK prp
 oh, respectfully thank (the) takinya(s)
22. la mbà watŋgwa'tu
 loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
 about (the) watŋgwa'tu(s)
23. la mbà tâcɔdnko
 loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
 about (the) tâcɔdnko(s)
24. la mbà tâcɔdnko
 loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
 about (the) tâcɔdnko(s)

25. la mbà watɲgwa'tu
loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
about (the) watɲgwa'tu(s)
26. *Monsieur René* bə à ya
MISTER prp BE x WHERE.q
Where is Mister René?
27. diba zəŋgantʉ' bə à ya
x prp WHERE.q
x, where are the bazəŋgantʉ's?
28. ɔ la mbà *Monsieur* nyat
voc loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME MISTER prp
oh, about Mister Nyat
29. ɔ la mbà *Monsieur* nyat
voc loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME MISTER prp
oh, about Mister Nyat
30. ɔ bin na' n-dab i
2nd.pl.sub aux.MODERATELY x-THANK 3rd.obj
oh, thank him respectfully
31. bin lab tâzin nyat
2nd.pl.sub THANK prp prp
thank Nyat of the tazins
32. n-dab tacədnko
[nom-THANK]LINEAL_NAME prp
the respectful thanking of the tacədnkos
33. la mbà watɲgwa'tu
loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME prp
and about (the) watɲgwa'tu(s)
34. mə-dâ-mbà ɔ
[1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp voc
mə̀dâmbà, oh
35. ɔ bin na' ncob mə-dâ-mbà ɔ
voc voc 2nd.pl aux.MODERATELY TALK[1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp voc
talk mə̀dâmbà just right
36. bag takinya bēn mbə a wə za co' *morgue* di
1st.pl.sub prp x comp 3rd.sg.sub? WHO.q x OPEN MORGUE loc.NEAR
we takinyas, and no others, are the ones who opened the morgue, here
37. a bə à co'ta musa bēn co'o
3rd.sg.sub BE x prp prp x OPEN
it is Shutamusa; he opened [it]

38. a shu'ta musa
 3rd.sg.sub prp prp
 it's shuta musa
39. ngondja'bu
 prp
 (the) ngondja'bu(s)The first song fragment
40. ma-ma mbə bo na' n-dab i
 MOTHER-1st.sg.pos comp 3rd.pl aux.MODERATELY x-THANK loc.NEAR
 my mother, whom they, here, respectfully thank
41. bin lab m-vən tokɔ
 2nd.pl.sub THANK (1,4).sg-pos.CHIEF prp
 thank the chief of toko
42. m-vən bûsa bə à ya
 (1,4).sg-pos.CHIEF prp BE x WHERE.q
 where is the chief of busa?
43. m-vən munda bə à ya
 (1,4).sg-pos.CHIEF prp BE x WHERE.q
 where is the chief of munda?
44. mēnkâcob bə à ya
 prp BE x WHERE.q
 where is/are (the) menkacob(s)?
45. ɔ la mbà *Monsieur le maire*
 voc loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME MISTER def.sg.masc MAYOR
 oh, about Mister Mayor
46. ɔ la mbà *Monsieur le maire*
 voc loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME MISTER def.sg.masc MAYOR
 oh, about Mister Mayor
47. a cob mèdâmbà
 3rd.sg.sub TALK [1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp
 he speaks mèdâmbà
48. a cob tɔ *radio Medumba*
 3rd.sg.sub TALK LAMENT RADIO[1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp
 he performed a lament on 'radio medumba'
49. *radio Medumba* ɔ
 RADIO [1st.sg.sub-SPEAK-prep.LIKE/AS/SAME]prp voc
 radio medumba, oh
50. o bin na' n-dab tacədnkɔ
 voc 2nd.pl.sub aux.MODERATELY nom-THANK prp
 oh, respectfully thank (the) tacednko(s)

51. bin lab watɲgwatu
 2nd.pl.sub THANK prp
 thank (the) watɲgwatu(s)
52. ɔ bin lab *Monsieur* nyat
 voc 2nd.pl.sub THANK MISTER prp
 oh, thank Mister Nyat
53. nyat *de Bangangté* bə à ya
 prp prep.OF prp BE x WHERE.q
 where is Nyat of Bangangté?
54. nyat *de Bangangté* bə à ya
 prp prep.OF prp BE x WHERE.q
 where is Nyat of Bangangté?
55. ɔ bin lab m-vən nga
 voc 2nd.pl.sub THANK (1,4).sg-pos.CHIEF prp
 oh, thank the chief of Nga
56. a bə m-vən ncwəd la
 3rd.sg.sub BE (1,4).sg-CHIEF aux.pr.prog PLACE/HOME/TERRITORY
 he, the chief, is at home
57. ɔ bin na' n-sə' mebwə la mbà
 voc 2nd.pl.sub aux.MODERATELY x-COME GOOD loc.NOT_FAR prep.LIKE/AS/SAME
 be properly welcome, just like
58. ɔ m-vən ntaŋku ɔ
 voc (1,4).sg-pos.CHIEF prp voc
 oh, the chief of ntanku, oh
59. ɔ menkâcəb ô
 voc prp voc
 oh, (the) menkacəb(s), oh
60. ɔ bin nêŋ sə'mbà n-cobə
 voc 2nd.pl.sub GO prp x-TALK
 go to Bassamba and speak
61. a bə à mangambu
 3rd.sg.sub BE x prp
 it's mangambu

Most of the formal features I'll mention in this analysis are kinds of parallelism. Jakobson asserted that parallelism, "equivalence in sound" repeated in or throughout a performance or text, is the fundamental operative of poetry and of the poetic function of lan-

guage (1987 [1960]:83, 1987 [1961]). The importance of this is still being asserted and refined, under a variety of names, in linguistics and anthropology: e.g., poetics, repetition, text-metricity (see Agha 2007, Erickson 2003, Fox 2004, Friedrich 2002, Hill 2000, Johnstone 1994, Lempert 2008, Mannheim 1998, Silverstein 2004, 2005b, 2005c, Tannen 2007 [1989]).

The first kind of parallelism is that this text – and indeed, Joseph’s style – is highly repetitive. He often sings the same text twice in a row with identical pitch and temporal structures, which is to say: melody/tone, and rhythm/metrics. See lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8, for example. He also returns to lines, people, or names used earlier at a later point in the performance. See lines 22, 33, 11, 52, 32, and 50.

The second is the repetition of *la mbà*, a locative and a preposition, respectively. It first appears at the ends of lines 1 and 2, but begins line 3 and many others. This two-word sequence cannot, grammatically, be sentence-final. Therefore, pragmatically, they indicate that other lines to come are related back to lines 1 and 2 as “the rest” of that “thought.” In line 3, *la mbà*, which cannot, grammatically, be sentence-initial, comes first. This links lines 2 and 3, indicating that line 3 is “the rest.” *La mbà* comes back again and again as the beginning of a line, linking each of these lines back to lines 1 and 2, even though they are the only ones which end with this sequence.

As is often the case in stylistics, knowing what to call this parallel figure is far from self-evident. Quinn calls the “repetition of an end at the next beginning” *anadiplosis* (1982:). *Epanaphora* is Levin’s term for “beginning...successive clauses with the same word or group of words” (1982:114).⁹ Finally, a sentence which runs across more than one line most analysts call *enjambment* (e.g., Fox 2004). All three of these terms capture

something of what Joseph is doing with form. Regardless, it is a master figure of his song-segment since he returns to it numerous times.

The segment has superlineal scaffolding. *La mbà* lines act as separators between sections. Repeatedly, Joseph abandons this structure for some other figure of sound, which he repeats and develops for a few lines. He soon returns to *la mbà* for a couple of lines, though. This marks the end of a section. Some of the sections are fairly long, but he always reminds auditors that the master figure is the “hanging” sentence of the first two lines by “calling out” a few more times. The repetition of *la mbà*, therefore, is a diagrammatic icon of structuration above the level of the line.

Within the scaffolding made using the preposition, Joseph goes on side-tracks of various kinds. The first of these, asking the whereabouts of someone, employs its own parallelism, the repetition of a “where question” template. This language does not display auxiliary-raising or “wh”-raising, so the repeated element, *bə a ya*, is sentence-final, unlike in English. Bamiléké languages are usually considered SVO languages (Nissim 1975). Therefore, in, for example, line 5, the inter-lineal translation shows that each element of the sentence, including the “wh-word” stays where it was base-generated in deep structure. The result – as in lines 5 to 8 and 42 to 44, among other places – is strings of grammatically parallel lines varying in the sentence-initial semantic agent occurring at the beginning of the line. At the sonic level, this is antistrophic parallelism (Levin 1982:114).

At the semantic level, it resembles a sort of parallelism which Greg Urban (1991) called *patient centrality*. He suggested that orally performed myths could be categorized based on whether they relied poetically on the repetition of a semantic *agent* performing one or more actions on a variety of semantic *patients*: or on the repetition of a patient re-

ceiving the repeated performance of one or more actions by a variety of agents. The former is agent centrality: the latter, patient centrality. He called the repeating element the *center*. It “forms the principle basis of continuity of the narrative discourse” (Urban 1991:32).

In this segment of Joseph’s singing, “where questions” vary only in the occupant of the agent-position, suggesting patient centrality. However, in these lines, a “wh-word” is the verbal complement, rather than a pronoun or lexical noun (as in Urban’s data), and the verb is the copula, which isn’t typically considered to assign a patient role at all. Urban mentions neither of these possibilities in his analysis of Amazonian Brazil, and they may never have appeared in his data. While, formally, Joseph’s song has similarities with patient centrality, something about a form as referentially empty as a “wh-word” being “the principle basis of continuity” seems wrong. This made me consider positing verb-centrality as the pattern of this song segment, but it is also jarring that the repeated verb does not encode an action of the sort that the verbs in Urban’s data do (for example: hit, break, pierce). It seems to me, rather, that the center of this segment is “wondering where:” the entire predicate, in other words. I suggest that Joseph performed examples of *predicate-centric grammatical parallelism*. Indeed, wondering does constitute a socially significant continuity through the minimal narrative of Joseph’s song. Like in the myths Urban analyzed, the lines of Joseph’s song segment, “as isolated parallel units...[do] not pertain to a coherent thought...What turns the otherwise disparate parallel units into a continuous thought is the presence of a single topic or center” (Urban 1991:35), in this case, wondering about someone’s location.

Of course, the wondering is rhetorical. The answers to these questions are either patently obvious (the referent is a few feet away) or irrelevant. Joseph isn't expecting or hoping to be informed, here. The actual pragmatic effect of these grammatical questions is not information-seeking, but rather to draw attention to the referent. This, then, is another form of "calling out," constituting a pragmatic parallelism with the "calling out" effected by the *la mbà* lines. It is not so much a figure of meaning as a *figure of performativity or pragmatics* which carries throughout much of the musical bankers' song. (It is present in the next example, too.) Calling out to people and their matrilineal lines asserts their importance, which is what this singing is about. Actually, Joseph's lyrics taken in isolation give the impression that this is what almost all singing is about. My field recordings include approximately 1000 transcribed lines of Joseph's singing and hundreds more untranscribed. About half of them are a form of calling out. The sixty lines reproduced above are typical.

Notice that Joseph almost exclusively fills the "slots" in *la mbà* lines and "where questions" with proper names and titles. The vast majority of his choices are lineal names. The only time the referent is not a person is in lines 19 and 20 when he chooses *Mèdâmbà*, one of the names for both the language he is using and ethnic (sub-)group with which he identifies. What can we glean from how tightly he limits the choices of what his constructed interlocutors can talk to him about, and what to wonder about?

As I detailed in chapter four, musicking provided my consultants with an effective means of (1) coping with the sensibility of kinship, poverty, death, and belonging; (2) semiotically and phenomenologically mediating these themes; and (3) building and affirming solidarity among the membership. Joseph's figures of performativity are relevant

to these processes in three ways. Some of the referents are office holders – in this case, mayors (lines 11-2 and 45-6) and chiefs (lines 7-8, and 42-3). Calling on these élite authorities underscores the significance and power of the state, chiefs, and cosmological processes in the lives of the musical bankers. He mentions chiefs a number of times outside of the “where question” template (lines 41, 55-6, 58), emphasizing an approval and acceptance of their authority, however complicated and ambivalent he actually understands power in his life to be. In doing this, Joseph also asserts the legitimacy of “common people” (such as musical bankers) as member-constituents of the respective geographical constructions. However, the bulk of the place-filler terms are proper names. There is tension between, on the one hand, the set of meanings these references to the state index, and on the other hand, the set of meanings given names and lineal names index.

Other segments in my corpus of Joseph’s singing make calling out to co-present and absent members of the ensemble central, whereas this one relatively de-emphasizes it. Line 26, however, is a call-out to a present member, the President of the musical bank, Jules. Since attendance at each meeting and rehearsal is mandatory for members of the banks, “wondering about” absentees is the performance of a wish for their presence; “wondering about” those co-present is a performance of approval that they showed. The same can be said about the *la mbà*, “talking about,” figures. The honor of being poetically talked about in public is great, so, essentially, it is disappointing to miss it. The implied critique of the absentees is grounded in the necessity of musicking *together*. Musicking must be collective for it to be one of the bankers’ successful strategies for making kinship, poverty, death, and belonging intelligible and bearable.¹⁰

When Joseph used a lineal name possessed by a fellow member, it was an honor to that member. In realtime, participants usually looked towards the member or members in question upon hearing their lineal name. Calling out does two complementary things. Individuals present who are named thus are honored simply by the use of their lineal name; it is a context-creating index of respect and solidarity. Second, the ambivalence of the “where question” publically concretizes this individual’s link to a history in place. To be a part of a matriline of a sovereign Bamiléké chiefdom was a wonderful aspect of identity and belonging, for my consultants. To be born of such ancestors and places and their histories, and embedded in the relations they generate is a large part of their sense of what’s good and nurturing, of moral values. It provides comforting spaces and some guidelines for action in challenging or confusing situations. To be sure, the bankers also find themselves limited or burdened in some ways and at some moments, but the positives of relatedness loom large.

Filling the slots with lineal names produces a significant referential ambivalence. Number is not mandatorily marked on nouns in Bamiléké languages as it is in English. Therefore, no grammatical, single-clause, English utterance could be ambiguous between the senses of the following:

Where is Jo-Keeling?

Where are the Jo-Keelings?

The “where questions” and *la mbà* lines are referentially ambiguous because they do not contain the forms which would determine whether Joseph is referring to a particular individual of a given matriline, or if he’s referring to the entire matriline, or to both. This *referential* ambiguity is deliberate, however, which means that the questions are not *prag-*

matically ambiguous. Rather, they are strategically *ambivalent*, which is to say that, for those who “get” the figures, they are interpretable as indexing two distinct sense-references, not interpretatively suspended *between* two distinct sense-references. Joseph called out to entire matriline *and*, in most cases (perhaps all), to particular individuals who are members of these matriline. This is an enactment of his sociopoetic skill, not an unfortunate fall-out from grammatical constraints in contact with metrical constraints.

Joseph’s strong preference for calling out to people, rather than, say, institutions, suggests the importance of sociality and relationships and the need to manage them. That he usually chooses lineal names suggests their importance over other kinds of naming. It’s not the case, though, that he’s worn this territory out and bores everyone around him. Joseph is a popular singer around Bangangté. His work is well-regarded even by those who don’t know him personally. His popularity is based on much more than this, but he couldn’t maintain it without colloquially acceptable referential content. By returning over and over to speaking about lineal names, their bearers, and their corresponding matriline, Joseph makes a claim about what’s basic and essential. The rest of the membership displays agreement with him by performing enjoyment and approval of his singing.

Accompanying the use of the lineal name is the verbal root *lab*. Its unmarked meaning, as I discussed above, is “to thank.” It is another repeated element in Joseph’s song (lines 21, 30-2, 40-1, 50-2, 55). As a parallel form, though, it is both problematic and revealing. The morphosyntax and phonology of Medumba produce the output-form, *ndab*, in many contexts, which means that there is only a partial “equivalence in sound” (Jakobson 1987 [1960]:83) at the level of parallel morphemes. In lines 21, 30, 40, and 50, it has the inflectional prefix, *n*, which occurs on the heads of verb-phrases complement-

ing an auxiliary or another verb. In line 32, it has a phonemically identical derivational prefix, which makes it a noun, meaning “(the) thanks,” “(the) thanking,” or – at a higher level of indexicality (see Silverstein 2003 [1996]) – “lineal name.” Joseph was repeating a single lexical root, but equivalence in sound was only in the rhyme of the syllable. This demonstrates the salience of one of Saussure’s formulations (1959): that signifiers do possess a psychological reality for their users, despite variations in their use across instances of talk and text. This is still parallelism because the sounds, in their sensible, concrete, performance, index (1) the cognized, intelligible awareness of the existence of publicly circulating referring forms: and (2) an understanding of how and how not to use and vary them in the service of “doing things with words” (see Silverstein 2005a:8, Urban 1991:9-10).

The repetition of *lab* is another indication that lineal names and their use are among the most important sociopoetic resources in Joseph’s song segment. The present segment is representative of Joseph’s style and the musicking of mixed-sex, Bamiléké banks in Bangangté, more generally. But why are lineal names so important? To answer this with any depth will require exploration of another trope and another analytic term.

“the village,” the urban-rural connection, and place

In chapters two and three, I discussed “traditional” and “modern” as key tropes for my consultants. “Traditional” and “modern” lead into discussion of another equally important trope and another analytic term, “the village” and “the urban-rural connection.” The urban-rural connection is an analytic term which brings our attention to the various ways people maintain kinship networks between urban and rural spaces. These practices and discourses place villages and cities into the “traditional/modern” indexical web so

that they are subject to all the complexity and contradictions of the two tropes. Variants of this affective and cosmological complex are widespread throughout Africa (Baker 1990, Ferguson 1992, Franqueville 1987, Geschiere and Gugler 1998b, Monga 2000).

“The village” is a concept in the domain of “tradition.” It is at least as important to this dissertation as “tradition.” “The village” is the lynchpin of “tradition;” it grounds the “traditional/modern” semiotic complex in something concrete for my consultants. “Village” is the first and last site of the struggle for respect in a world saturated with prejudice and exploitation. For every use of “villager” or “tradition” as insults, members of the musical banks could come back with reasons why the village is great. In a sense, “tradition” lives in “villages.” Power, health, and morality, for them, emerged from “the village,” and whatever returned there was re-energized, healed, and put on the right track. *Actual villages were the leading sites of ancestral lines, history, feeling, power, and positive value.* For example, early in my fieldwork, a taxi-driver I got to know told me that I’d need to spend time in the little villages to really learn about society and culture around here. The villages were authenticity, to him.

The spot at which to begin illuminating the semiotics of “the village” is its most concretely “placed” aspects. These are the fields where most Bamiléké households in Bangangté grow at least some of their food. These fields, themselves, seem to me to be the sources of the *power* which emanates through villages, then out from them to the cities and then out to the region, and further out to the rest of the continent, and even around the world.

People in Bangangté indexed the power associated with these plots of land frequently. Many of them take it to be inherent in the fields. An example of this can be seen in the

discussion of days of the week which proscribe farm-labor (see chapter 2). More obviously, I had two interesting episodes during which locals decided to give me lectures on “Bamiléké culture.” I describe these instances not because I accept them as “*the* ‘beliefs’ of ‘the Bamiléké people,’” but because they resonate metadiscursively with other discourse on the same topics, and because they give some insight into how these two particular men position themselves in relation to something they may call “Bamiléké culture” or “Bamiléké tradition.” One episode was comparatively brief.

For the first third of my field work, I rented out a spare room in a family house. Claudette was the matriarch. One of her brothers paid us a visit one day and he, after hearing what I was doing in Bangangté and wanting to have his say about “culture,” waxed eloquent about why no one would sell their house in “the village.” If you sell the house, he reasoned, you lose access to your fields, which are of value, in themselves. Furthermore, burying relatives next to the fields is a normative practice; to lose access to ancestral burial grounds would be, for him and many others I met, nearly inconceivable because it would become difficult or impossible to honor the deceased properly. This, in turn, could lead to great misfortune and would simply be immoral in its own right. In sum, he strongly emphasized the importance of burial plots and agricultural plots both as moral centers for himself and others, and as ethnic or distinguishing characteristics of “Bamilekeness.”

I received the other “lecture” on this topic from Pierre. It was far lengthier and delved deep into metaphysics and how it relates to semiosis. This one occasion provides insight into how at least Pierre thinks about a range of social phenomena in Bangangté.

As it was impossible to audio-record what he was saying, the following is a reconstruction from field notes written in French:

...In reality, when a Bamiléké is ill, the first thought is always to take her or him to the field [family plot of land]. This place is where your ancestors – your grandparents, in a sense – are securely based. They are sanctuaries because one is in contact with the spirits while on the field. It is the terrain of the “first house” [of your matriline] and someone, in perpetuity, must be there. The family’s gods live there.

[To return to the topic of illness,] diseases do not exist for the Bamileke; you are ill in your head. The ultimate cause is a failure to look after your ancestors’ skulls. The origins of disease are metaphysical. Even AIDS, you got because you didn’t observe customs. Occidental medicine goes after symptoms, not ultimate causes...

The connection between the land and illness is that illness is ultimately caused by displeased ancestors, pleasing the ancestors requires skull-care, and skull-care requires access to family land. Therefore, you run a great risk if you abandon your land for a long time. From there, Pierre continued with the topic of metaphysics and semiotics. I will return to this “lecture,” below.

Pierre explained, in a unique, relatively high-performance style, his take on the phenomena of Bamiléké going to and from their fields for reasons quite separate from farming. I witnessed this numerous times. For example, an urban couple I know had been trying and failing to get pregnant for years. They decided that the wife should go to her village and her family’s fields for ritual healing. A medical doctor, by the time they took this action, had already concluded that the husband was biologically infertile. Their commitment to “village” and “traditional” healing practices was strong enough that the pronouncement from a medical doctor was not enough to end their attempts to conceive.

Food is another one of the avenues through which the semiotics of “the village” has important resonance for kinship: in particular, the intimate solidarity of an ideologized “mother’s hearth.” Perhaps the warmest feelings my consultants expressed in relation to sociality in the village came from the semiotics of the hearth. At least two ethnographic

studies of towns in Ndé describe this (Brain 1972 [Bangwa], Feldman-Savelsberg 1999 [Bangangte]), and I encountered nothing to contradict it, and much to support it.

There is a normative Bamiléké kinship structure of feeling that the strongest and warmest bonds are between ego, full siblings, maternal half-siblings, mother, mother's maternal half-siblings, and maternal grandmother. At least ideally and ideologically, these are the people who would routinely and habitually gather around a single hearth together for at least one generational stage of life; mother, mother's maternal half-siblings, and maternal grandmother are together at one hearth for one stage. Ego, maternal half-siblings, (maybe grandmother,) and mother are together at a later stage. Deep, enduring affection is fostered and managed at this site. When mother's mother or maternal half-siblings are around, ego and maternal siblings find the affection between the older generation unproblematically transferred to them by virtue of mother having been a child at a hearth herself. Bamiléké in the cities away from their family land still have hearth groups and still produce affection through them. However, even with urban Bamiléké I met, discussing affection, mother's care, mother's household and the like almost always brought the conversation around to "the village:" an unmistakably indexical process.

The hearth group, known as *pam nto'* in Mèdâmbà, does not extend this quality of affection to father, paternal grandfather, or paternal half-siblings. They were not at a hearth group together because women with the same husband usually maintain separate kitchens and hearths, and so the feelingful connection cannot be spread by these matrilineal threads. As both gendered practice and gendered ideology, fathers have far less, on average, to do with feeding children than do mothers. Hence: fathers aren't in the hearth group, ideologically.

My observations were consistent with those of Brain and Feldman-Savelsberg. Affection most easily runs through these hearth relationships. Every single person I met was warmly affectionate with members of their hearth group. This continued even through times of disagreement or unrest and extended to recognitions of individual shortcomings. The affection was not shaken. In sharp contrast, when paternal half-siblings were more than casual acquaintances, it was only by chance; if they happened to meet and hit it off, great, but there was no expectation that individuals in that structural relationship would have anything to do with each other.

Creation of fictive sibling relationships in Bangangté is very common, and these are affectionate links. This suggests that the ideal of the maternal – and not *paternal* – half-sibling relationship is the prototypical or unmarked form of “sibling.” Were it the other way around, fictive siblings wouldn’t be affectionate with each other. I also hypothesize that the hearth group is the unmarked prototype of affection, universally. Consider these other common choices for anthropologists who go looking for sources and prototypes of affection: among fathers and children, there *often* is affection in practice, but it is neither normative nor expected. The hearth group with its props and staging did not socialize these relationships. They were in fact complicated by the status, authority, and “law” of fathers and husbands in a patriarchy. What is normative and expected in this relationship is respect and admiration for the father and obeying the father. While affection is not uncommon in practice, a performance or ideological expectation of subtle fear or antagonism, and unsubtle distance on the part of children is typical. Affection between fathers and children emerged opportunistically and idiosyncratically. This is not the case for

mothers and children. To be sure, mothers expect respect and obedience, but affection seems to be much more to the fore than fear, antagonism, or distance.

Formal age-sets are not created in Bangangté. There are no rituals which would create this kind of bond. The closest analogue would be other children from the neighborhood or from school. These relationships are not over-determined in the way maternal half-sibling relationships are. Neighborhood or school acquaintances who happen to get along extremely well or end up sharing a significant experience may become fictive siblings. Otherwise, these relationships are less solidary than the hearth relationships.

As with fathers, the spousal relationship may – and frequently does – bring out considerable affection. The ideology of romantic love has been known in Bangangté since at least the 1930s (Egerton 1939), but it is not the most ideologized aspect of marriage. Jean Hurault (1962:21-30) noted in his monograph of “the Bamiléké” that affection is not typical between spouses, or indeed, patrilineally. Marriages which are not particularly affectionate are not taken by most people in Bangangté to necessarily be dysfunctional, whereas, a long-lasting rift between maternal siblings would be. Furthermore, patriarchy there has made it fairly acceptable for people to think of women, at times, solely as sexual objects or procreative vessels. Wife abuse and other forms of misogyny are also distressingly common. The spousal relationship is not one which, judging by my fieldwork, people in Bangangté consider a model or prototype for affection.

The social anthropologist’s old chum, the mother’s brother, is not the relevant position here either. Mother’s paternal half-brother (being from a different hearth group) is right out. And her *maternal* half-brother is already a member of the hearth group. Therefore, to consider only mother’s maternal half brothers in an attempt to formalize patterns

of affection would be a mistake. The hearth group is a better explanation for this ideology of affect. Hurault also noted that matrilineal groups are “le pôle de la vie affective des Bamiléké”¹¹ (1962:22). It was not until Brain’s research that scholars had access to an analysis of this or an explanation of its significance, however.

To shift the focus from nodes in a genealogy towards the issue of “shared substance” (see Carsten 2004, Schneider 1980), let’s look at food, the shared substance in hearth groups. Élise once told me that, for the Bamiléké, it’s just “common sense” to share food if anyone is with you. A large body of work on the anthropology of food, cooking, and eating has made it clear that feeding someone can be (among many other things) an extremely powerful means of winning that person’s trust and affection across a wide range of chronotopic contexts. Bangangté provides as good a case of this as any (Feldman-Savelsberg 1999).

Being fed by mother and sharing in this with maternal siblings is the crucible of the hearth group relationship. Feeding one’s children comes with certain stresses and pressures, but it can also be joyful. Girls who are grown up somewhat have little choice but to enter the kitchen to cook, taking on the potential burdens of hard work, isolation, and detrimental health affects;¹² however, they also stand to gain by entering the world of women and sharing specialized knowledge and the company of women members of the hearth group. As normatively “women’s work” in Bangangté, food preparation is affectively and politically loaded since it serves both to oppress women (through marginalization and silencing) and empower women (through knowledge production, creating a safe space, and solidarity building).

The food itself becomes affectively and politically loaded because there is a split between “traditional” food and either “modern” or, at least, “non-traditional” meals. “Traditional” food indexes both the hearth and the village. Both village and city residents made comments to me early in my fieldwork about this; leading up to my arrival in the village and continuing for some time afterwards, many people asked me if I liked “traditional” food or indicated that “traditional” food was going to be the norm in Bangangté. The subtext was that I probably was going to find “traditional” food difficult (they were right). These data demonstrate that the indexical connection between food and “traditional/modern” was at the level of awareness for many of my consultants.

Indexing the hearth, however, was less accessible to awareness, but eating practices in Bangangté demonstrate that the connection was there. In the center of town, the variety of meals for sale is wide. Restaurants, stalls, and ambulatory vendors, collectively, offer more and less upscale and formal eating spaces, “traditional” and “modern” means of eating (i.e., hands or utensils), and dishes from both within and without the “traditional.” Home cooking, though, is much less variable, in general. The vast majority of the many meals I had in Bangangté houses were “traditional” dishes and while cutlery was often available, few if any people used it. On a few occasions, a dining-room table was set with a cloth, cutlery and chairs to honor me or other guests; these artifacts and practices noticeably index “whiteness.” The safety and intimacy of eating around “the hearth” means eating “traditional” food with one hand, while holding the bowl it is in with the other. What all this adds up to is a pattern of indexical relationships between what and how people eat around the hearth, and “traditional” foods and ways of eating. The association between the hearth and affection is so strong as to be over-determined, and therefore is

powerful enough to bring “traditional” food and eating into this semiotic network of positive affect.

It is crucial to many Bamiléké that they and their relatives be buried in “the village.” At the time of Egerton’s fieldwork, this might not have seemed interesting; where else would they have been buried? However, during my fieldwork, the extensive migration of Bamiléké to Cameroonian metropolises and to other countries and continents had been underway for a long time. The pull of the village is now clear because of the effort and money invested by emigrants to ensure burial in the homeland. Only with a village burial can the deceased be properly honored. This honoring goes well beyond the large and exuberant public rituals of display of the corpse, burial, and remembrance. First of all, the power and beauty associated with the village is pleasing to the dead. Second, about two years after burial, it is common to exhume a corpse and remove its head, which is then buried elsewhere along with other heads of ancestors to be honored specially. The removal of the head in particular seems to depend on the power of the village for its effectiveness in pleasing the dead. The initial burial and later transference of the head resonate loudly with the power of the land itself.

The hearth, the land, and the ancestors are the basis for how “the village” becomes a powerful trope in an authoritative discourse on morality which profoundly affects many Bamiléké in Bangangté. The logic of its effectiveness can be summarized this way: (1) the land, as a source of power and health, compels protection by people. (2) The hearth teaches how and when to be affectionate and compassionate. (3) The ancestors ensure conduct which pleases them through their ability to effect fortune or misfortune for the

living. Appreciating and accounting for the authority of this morality of villages means understanding its connection with chiefs and nobility.

To begin with, “village” has two definitions because villages exist differently in two authoritative systems of legitimacy. One is that of the state, in which a village is the smallest class of municipality; the other is the cosmology of sovereign chiefs and their chiefdoms. A cosmological village and a municipality of the same name are not necessarily the same spatial unit. The municipalities of Bangangté and Bangoulap, for instance, each have their own mayors and geographical boundaries. Within these spaces, however – and only very tenuously relevant to the state’s play for authority over place through organization and administration of space – there is a high chief and a number of sub-chiefdoms, each with its own (sub-)chief.¹³ In other words, some of the neighborhoods (or *quartiers*) of these larger “villages” are secondary or tertiary chiefdoms. Those *quartiers*, then, can be called villages in the cosmological sense.

The places of the state and the places of nobility and kinship share names in many instances, but this in no way interferes with the fact that they index distinct sets of power relations, values, obligations, and practices. On the one hand, supporters of the state are easy to find in Bangangté. On the other hand, Cameroon’s Grassfields in general – and the Western, Anglophone Grassfields in particular – have long been home to the fiercest resisters of the Cameroonian state (DeLancey and Mokeba 1990:199-200, Eyongetah and Brain 1974, Mbembe 1996, Noubissie Tchouake 2006). The state does provide a nationalist semiotics of positive identity when it comes to international affairs and dealings with people from other countries. At home, though, the state limits, denigrates, and exploits poor rural people (Mbembe 2001), labeling them “traditional,” disposable,” or “ig-

norant” within the logic of the neoliberal “modern” (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Ferguson 2006, Klein 2007). It is *not* the state that provides my consultants with a semiotics of their own worth as people or as members of a respectable social group. Chiefdoms, by virtue of being cosmologically ordained, do provide it. Therefore, the “villages” which are the sources of power, beauty, and morality are not the divisions of the state, not municipalities. Rather, the villages of the sovereign, and positively “traditional” chiefdoms are the sources of power, beauty, and morality.

The politics and actions of chiefs in contemporary Africa vary greatly. The people I worked with held a high opinion of the man who was chief of Bangangté during my field work and believed that he was competently, and in good faith, representing the interests of his subjects who struggle for subsistence and respect. However, discourses about chiefs are always value-laden. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish between ideologies of nobility, and biographies of particular nobles because it is impossible to transparently read ideology and biography one off the other.¹⁴ Ideologically, a Bamiléké chief has the power both to create safety for his subjects (Argenti 2007), and to threaten the “homeostasis” of his polity through a loss of his own health, strength, or virility (Feldman-Savelsberg 1999:61-3). In other words, if the chief is strong, the people will be protected from certain dangers; if he is not, everyone’s security is compromised – so this discourse goes.

What dangers are Grassfields chiefs suited to protect against? Primarily, their supernatural power is as a mediator between the people in the village and the dangers of the bush (Argenti 2007, Fardon 1990, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999). The bush is a domain external to the polity – wild, over-powering, threatening – and, therefore, outside of intelli-

gibility (see Urban 1991, 1996). The chief, ideologically, comes from the bush, but is able to control it, to an extent. His associations with the bush mean that, while he is a protector, he is also dangerous. Such power and unpredictability are a large part of why Bamiléké commoners accept nobility; ideology puts a chief's essence beyond mundane dealings and ascribes to it something of the ineffability of wildness, sorcery, and death. The supernatural holds great authority among many Bamiléké people. That power, seemingly inaccessible to most of the population, is fearsome, which makes the chief himself fearsome.

Pierre provides an eloquent example of this. In the previous excerpt from his "lecture," he had been telling me how being on the ancestral fields of one's family means being in a sanctuary where one is in contact with spirits, who are the family's gods. He then explained how the supernatural, which he also referred to as "sorcery" and "metaphysics," provides the ultimate explanation for disease. Here are his remarks – in striking concert with Evans-Pritchard (1937) – on the matter:

Metaphysics is the "why." Why did this happen now? Why did this happen in this way? Why did this happen to this person?

Everyone has a physical and a metaphysical identity. Vampirism and astral projection are truly possible. All that's required is the performance of the correct rituals.

I must emphasize the *riches of ritual*.¹⁵ Take the important relationship between ancestors and funerals; ancestors speak in dreams to the living. Funerals free the spirits; they free the ancestors. The ancestors get angry if you don't mourn them enough or well, and *they* are in contact with the supreme god.

White folks don't or can't understand this stuff. But getting into metaphysics is necessary for an anthropologist of the Bamiléké. The essence of "Bamiléké" is the metaphysical domain.¹⁶ If you don't know metaphysics, you don't know the Bamiléké.

A few minutes later, we were still discussing sorcery and metaphysics, and he started to chuckle. This was, by now, a familiar reaction on the part of my consultants after talking

about these themes. Pierre said, “all of this is amusing, but it’s reality. This is our cultural identity.”

While Pierre is unusual in his eagerness to give a long monologue, he is not unusual in his ascription of significance and power to sorcery and the supernatural. Recall, for example, the conversations I had about the eight-day week and days prescribed for working in the fields (chapter two). This same power is ideologized as being part of what a chief is. A chief has supernatural abilities which command something of the same awe which sorcerers, ancestors, and metaphysics command.

A positive spin can be put on this easily, and it often is. Indeed, the bulk of scholarly writing on nobility in the Grassfields primarily portrays its offices, officers, and institutions positively. They regulate society; they maintain stability; they are the health of the polity; they inspire commoners’ “unity” and their collaboration in reproducing the social order peacefully, and the like (e.g., Egerton 1939, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999, Hamani 2005, Hurault 1962, Maillard 1984, Nkwi 1976, Tardits 1960, 1980, Wansi Eyoubi [no date]). Such discourse does not go unchallenged, though. For example, I asked Joseph about his names and titles. When I mentioned titles, he said, “I don’t like titles.”

“Why not?” said I.

“What’s a title?”¹⁷ he replied. Pragmatically, this was a rejection of nobility itself; it was a small act of resistance to the system. His relationship to the hegemony of nobility (like that of almost everyone) is highly conflicted, though. His songs are replete with approving, validating references to the chief of Bangangté.

Fear of chiefs’ sorcery and wildness is part of how nobility exacts acquiescence from the masses. Another part is the fear of chiefs’ military power. One thing that all the

above-mentioned scholarly publications have in common is that they could be used to help justify and rationalize the power structure of nobility, thereby helping to maintain it. Nicolas Argenti's historical and ethnographic account of chiefs in the Grassfields (2007) directly challenges such a "power positive" portrayal of nobility and chiefs. He argues that, while there was a period when commoners in some parts of the Grassfields were protected from the real threat of slave raids from the North by chiefs, this period ended during the 19th century and was replaced by a situation in which they were rightly in terror of being sold into slavery *by their own chief*. He attributes much of the migration within the Grassfields to commoners' attempts to escape their own chiefs. Such movement was limited, Argenti argues, by chiefs' ability to use or threaten violence against people who attempted to flee out of the chiefdom. His conclusion is that benign descriptions of the roles of chiefs and nobility in Grassfields history have left out the most relevant data on chiefs, promoting a thoroughly inaccurate and inadequate picture of life in these "top-down" polities.

From the perspective of Argenti's work, Joseph's critique is suggestive of a long history of exploitation by chiefs. This history, Argenti argues, is crucial to understanding contemporary life in the Grassfields. Commoners' dissatisfaction with the operations of this power structure is reflected in the use of masks in dance at his field site in the Anglophone Grassfields of Cameroon's Northwest Province.

The power and hegemony of nobility and chiefs, though, is far from toppling. Its discourses remain authoritative in many contexts. Part of such discourse is that this or that chief is the chief of this or that "village." The "villages," then, become *sovereign villages* by virtue of their implication in discourses of nobility. Furthermore, they become authen-

ticating – which is to say that they take on the appearance of incontrovertible, absolute knowledge (Irvine 1989:257-8) – insofar as nobility and chiefs are already authenticating by virtue of being supernaturally powerful. Nobility thereby carves up the world up into categories and concepts – making the sensible intelligible (see Urban 1991, 1996). Embedding the categories and concepts in the authority and hegemony of social structure makes them appear necessary and self-evident. The ideology of nobility connects concrete villages to the intelligibility of the conceptual distinction between domains such as “natural” and “supernatural.” Ideologies of nobility play a basic, engendering, creative role in this moral system about villages. So, *villages*, in this sense, *come into being through the existence of chiefs* because it is exactly through having a chief that a place becomes cosmologically important.

What does this have to do with people’s names, then? Two things: first, normatively, every Bamiléké person has a name which indexes both a particular village and a particular matriline: i.e., both place and kinship. They, the lineal names, authenticate villages and kinship in a circular semiosis similar to that which obtains among chiefs and villages. The boundaries between lineal names are made to seem self-evident by these places. The places, in turn, are made to seem self-evident by naming and the names’ distinctiveness as tactile speech in a phonopoetic system (see Benveniste 1939, 1971 [1958], Urban 1991, 1996). This is despite the fact that there are no physical boundaries between village-chiefdoms, and no structural practice keeping anyone residing in the village of her or his *ndab*. While I observed a loosely virilocal pattern, migration within and without Bamiléké territory has been extensive since at least the beginning of urbanization in Cameroon.

Second, naming reveals that Bamiléké kinship is inseparable from place in a way that may be unique. Bamiléké matriline and matrilineality don't completely resonate for my consultants when removed from the context of their places. Brain (1972) appreciated something of the significance of place to Bamiléké kinship by arguing that the term "lineage" did not apply to the Bamiléké. The reason for this is that there is no matriline without a place – a village-chiefdom – as its "home." One shouldn't attempt to reduce matrilineality to place, but since there are no matrilineages with names of their own or totems, the matriline is very much "of the land." Belonging with kin means belonging on this land. The only way to have that kind of belonging on that land is to be of the correct matriline; it's an ascribed status, the feeling for which is both rich and structured.

Returning to Joseph's song segment, it is not surprising that he usually chooses *ndab* when naming someone, given their deep semiotics of "tradition," power, beauty, and relatedness. In addition to referring to individuals, lineal names' capacity to refer to matriline foregrounds kinship as a practice of affection and responsibility. Lineal names are important because they are nodal points in these people's song. Their song is nodal in the local semiotics of emplaced, historicized belonging.

death and place in marc's narrative song

How do the dynamics of naming, place, and kinship play out in song which also includes narrative? The next segment is taken from singing by Marc, also at an AM rehearsal. Marc loved to tell stories with song, but he also performed a fair amount of calling out. This segment contains some of both. Marc gave a spoken introduction to his song at this rehearsal, saying that he was going to tell the story of the death of Ncamba, a musician. To introduce a song was quite rare. In fact, Marc was the only one of the singers I

got to know who ever did this, and it wasn't typical for him. He did it whenever he'd planned something in advance, but he didn't need to have planned in order to sing a narrative.

Marc's narrative was remarkably non-linear, and we see that, too, in this example. He switched between scenes without making explicit how they're interconnected. The "wholeness" of his narratives was emergent from the totality of the scenes. This fragment contains two scenes and some metacommentary. My analysis of this fragment relies much less on linguistic form than my analysis of Joseph's segment. Furthermore, what reference to form I will make confines itself to what I explained already. Therefore, I have omitted the interlineal translation entirely.

fragment two

1. bin lən ncambà gə di
do you know Ncamba?
2. ncambà' nà' bə ŋga bu' sa
Ncamba played music
3. mbə ŋga yub sa
and sang the traditional repertoire
4. tam ncambà' ke ndjub kwi la
when Ncamba sang!
5. tamandju kə ndjub kwi la
when Tamandju sang!
6. bumə djə mə gə bə binə
when this took place, I wasn't with you [here]
7. mən bo ngə yubə ɔ
people with their country
8. ɔ yubə à yu
yours is you(rs)
9. ɔ yubə à yu mvən mèn ncobə
yours is yours. The chief says this
10. saŋ lo baa ba bə à nyoŋ i
if two birds aren't flying, the rest can't get going

11. a bə à yi la
that's right
12. təcwit kə kə
Tachwit, pay attention
13. ɔ la mba dyc
what I'm saying
14. mən na len tawa la la mba dyc
the one who knows Tawa, is what I'm saying
15. papa zitə ɔ la mba dyc
Papa Zitu oh, what I'm saying
16. ɔ la mba dyc
oh, what I'm saying
17. ɔ la mba dyc
oh, what I'm saying
18. ɔ mə sɔŋ zin cɔ shundim di ɔ
Have I told you the news of Shundim?
19. ɔ bag nən və shundzim ɔ
oh, we went to a funeral in Shundim, oh
20. bag kom shundim mba nyɔŋ bəg bə ke
when we got to Shundim, we weren't as we are now [there was more of us]
21. mə lan bwɔ̀ bə o lan yu wət o
I cry [mourn] well and you mourn [cry] your own body, too
22. ɔ yən ba wə dyc
oh, see who's here
23. ndoŋ kə mə cobə ndzə bən ntən mən gə mbu'u
the kalimba does not "speak" me – people do not play it
24. ka bin lo ndə
don't go fast and heedlessly
25. maŋgambə ba lan mən zi binə i ya dyc
mangambeu one mourns [through the night] until morning
26. ɔ bin num ju'u dyc
are you hearing/understanding?
27. ɔ bin num ju'u dyc
are you hearing/understanding?
28. ɔ bag wə bə di
who am I with?
29. ɔ mə lab tə zinə ɔ ka binə cob tə
I thank you no more chatter

30. mbə dzu ka mən nə cob tə
I'm saying, nobody chatter

Line 1 is the beginning of the story, although Marc had sung a few lines of warm-up before this point. From here to line 6 is the first scene of the narrative. Lines 7-10 are commentary which makes Marc's moral standpoint explicit; he occupies the animator, author, and principal roles (see Goffman 1981). Another scene runs from line 18 to only line 20. Lines 21 to 25 are also commentary.

This is a story about death and mourning. Across my corpus of recorded song, death and mourning are so common that it is tempting to say that they are *obligatory* in "traditional" song. Some of Marc's elaboration on this theme underscores the importance I've given it for Bamiléké ethnography. In line 21 he prescriptively explains that he mourns people very well, by which he means creating a grand and festive occasion at which many eat, drink, and dance. Furthermore, he says, to mourn well is also to mourn and celebrate one's own passage through life, not just that of the deceased. Line 23 seems to leap to a totally different topic, but musicking is closely connected to mourning, and so I read this reference to musical instruments as a metaphor for mourning. People have agency, but the totality of ritual is beyond what people intend. The message of line 24 is that, in musicking and in ritual, doing well also means being careful and skillful, not just ostentatious or flashy. In line 25, he prescriptively states that a *mangambeu* ensemble hired for a funeral should dance, sing, and play all night long. In other words, Marc is saying that it is important to get mourning right even though, in some respects, it is hard work.

This segment of Marc's song contains two kinds of poetic figure. The first is the juxtaposition of references to mourning, place, and "tradition," which are the same major themes I discussed in chapter four and earlier in the present chapter. Between lines 5 and

6, Marc changes his topic from “traditional” music to place and nation. Their arrangement like this is an icon of the many ways in which “tradition” and place index each other. Concern with place flowed from concern with “tradition” as though *causally*. Narrative temporality is tied up with causation in many cases cross-culturally (Ochs 2004:270-1). This juxtaposition is a figure of meaning which uses narrative structure to iconize the important role of place in the indexical complex of mourning, ancestors, “tradition,” kinship, and solidarity. This constructed causality is a dicent-index of how “tradition” is placed for the musical bankers. A dicent sign is taken by someone to be a sign of an actual aspect of reality, not just something that could be (rheme), or something deduced or inferred (argument) (Mertz 1985, Peirce 1955). This sign-type is crucial for explaining the fervency – emotional and otherwise – of people’s involvement in, and commitment to, musicking, and the power performance often has to shape ideology and structures of feeling (Turino 1999:238). My consultants, in general, took the connections between musicking, “tradition,” place, moral values, and kinship to be incontrovertible. Moments in song such as this one reproduce the placed structures of feeling which I have discussed throughout this dissertation.

The indexing accomplished, he asserts the dependence of identity on place by saying that one’s land is oneself (lines 7 and 8). The authority of this he bolsters in two ways. First (line 9), he appeals to chiefly authority. Then, he uses a proverb in line 10. This proverb is saying that when people leave Bamiléké territory for a long time, it’s bad for everyone: the implied reason being that it threatens the continuation of “tradition.”

Marc’s other figure in this segment is his use of familiar, stock phrases to mark the passage between different sections of his narrative. Lines 11 through 17 comprise one of

these section breaks that occur throughout the entire song. It includes “calling out” very similar to Joseph’s. One of the stock phrases is the same *la mba* (lines 15-7) I analyzed above. Lineal names appear in lines 12 and 14 as part of Marc’s calling out actions. He also refers to Ncamba, the protagonist, by a lineal name in line 5.

Another stock phrase is “*a be a yi la*” (line 11). This phrase, appearing frequently throughout my corpus, is an example of what the musical bankers call *animation*. *Animation* is singing intended to (1) encourage the participants to keep going and (2) signal the singer’s approval of what they’re doing. The singer has the right to instruct the instrumentalists because her or his contentment is necessary for a successful performance. The repetition of any or all of these phrases runs throughout the song, each time serving to guide listeners through the narrative Marc slowly unfolds; this is typical of Bamiléké song in Bangangté. The parallelism between each of these breaks makes it possible for participants to recognize them as a token of a type so that they successfully index the sectioning of a narrative, despite bearing no iconic relationship to structure or sectioning.

The present narrative is but one in a vast cultural repertoire of stories with death as a central theme. Musical bankers sing about death over and over again. The “seductive” potential of narrative (see McHugh 1995) means that each skillful performance of a death narrative in the context of the whole corpus is incredibly influential over Bamiléké death-practice – and over the domains of kinship, musicking, and place by virtue of death’s implication therein. Performances are nodal points in death-discourse. This one small discursive event contributes to the reproduction and history of an entire semiotic complex of death-practice which includes all the other narrative performances and all the other discursive moments with some relevance to understandings of and reactions to death and

deaths among Bamiléké people. Marc's performance finds its place in this large complex through the process Bruner calls "narrative accrual," the cultural collection of publically known narratives which necessarily bear culturally specific formal and thematic marks of their histories. "Once shared culturally...narrative accruals achieve...the power of constraint" (Bruner 1991:19): i.e., the kinds of constraint inherent in habitus, hegemony, and ideology.

Narrative is an important site for students of sociality. It is a means "not only of representing but of constituting reality" (Bruner 1991:5), because "we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative" (Bruner 1991:4). Bruner, Capps, and Ochs agree that narrative is an important means of both constructing reality and shaping subjectivities. However, they diverge somewhat in how they position normativity in their theories of narrative as social action. Bruner makes the statement that "narrative is necessarily normative" (1991:15). Ochs' and Capps' statement that "the conventionality of narrative structure itself normalizes life's unsettling events" (1996:27) assigns normativity a precise and more limited role. What they are referring to is making life's unsettling events bearable, manageable, or reconcilable; narratives "evoke shifting and enduring perspectives on experience" (Ochs and Capps 1996:20), which is to say that they provide an opportunity to develop the kind of non-denotatively explicit knowledge that performance in general can. The kind of normativity Bruner is referring to is the justification of possibly oppressive power structures, conventions, and moral orders (Bruner 1991:11-2, 19). Ochs and Capps deal with this, too; for them narrative organization of events is moral in and of itself (22), which can have dramatic consequences for power structures (33).

In a more recent publication, Ochs (2004) characterizes moral stance as one of five *basic dimensions* of narrative. However, she argues that moral stances in narrative aren't necessarily monolithic, oppressive, or dominating; "some tellers may use narrative to affirm a moral perspective...alternatively, tellers may launch a narrative precisely because they are unsure of how to morally evaluate a life event...Narrating allows tellers to bring experiences into moral focus" (284). Herein lies a major difference between Bruner on the one hand and Ochs and Capps on the other. The latter place much more emphasis on the power of narrative to critically examine life's challenges and even disturb the possibility of arriving at a singular, stable causal or moral explanation of events; this they call narrative's *relativistic* tendency (1996:32). By no means, though, do they underemphasize what they call its *fundamentalistic* (32) tendency, that of authenticating a single moral or causal order above any potential alternatives. Ochs (2004) elaborates on the tendencies, referring to them, instead, as Narrative *Practices* 2 and 1, respectively.

Marc does not consistently adhere to either the relativistic or fundamentalistic tendency in this story. He states quite clearly that it is good to stay close to one's territory in a way that brooks no contradiction. However, he comes to no conclusion as to the point of death or whether it is good or bad, if either; rather, Marc "explores alternative understandings of experience, including the possibility that some life problems...may be ultimately unresolvable" (Ochs 2004:278). Emblematic of narrative moral relativism, this story leaves death a great Mystery, never to be completely grasped.

In other ways, this narrative more clearly exemplifies the extremes of Ochs' basic dimensions of narrative. Most relevant to the moral dimension is the fact that the links between scenes and events in the narrative are quite loose, and therefore open to interpre-

tation. In other words, the non-linearity I mentioned above is a kind of incoherence. However, let this not be mistaken for a value judgment (see Ochs 2004:279-81). Marc is a skilled narrator in a non-linear style. This kind of competence lends itself precisely to using narrative as a stimulus for probing and exploring narrated events, and dissuades hearers from committing themselves to rigid moral or causal frameworks. This is how Marc's story partakes in Narrative Practice 2.

With respect to the other three of Ochs' dimensions, Marc's narrative performance is like the Narrative Practice 1, or fundamentalistic prototype (see Ochs 2004:286, Ochs and Capps 1996:32). Marc is the sole active teller of this narrative; there is no opportunity for anyone else to say anything until after the telling is finished. Second, the narrative is relatively detached from the place and time of its telling; it is highly entextualizable (see, e.g., Bauman and Briggs 1990, Briggs and Bauman 1992). Finally, it is a very "tellable" incident – the death of a revered musician – i.e., it's a tale worth telling. Bruner says that tellability is a function of a "breach" in a "canon" (1991:11-3). Death seems to be inherently tellable because death is awe-inspiring and, usually, a tragedy for someone. What's breached, in this case, is the continuity of a living being. Canonicity and breach is at the heart of the kind of narrative normativity Bruner focuses on because, for him, "the perpetual construction and reconstruction of the past [which narrative entails] provide precisely the forms of canonicity that permit us to recognize when a breach has occurred and how it might be interpreted" (20). In other words, narrative plays a large role in creating one's sense of what is "canonical" in the first place.

Ochs, being a student of language, points to another dimension of narrative – the poetics of narrative performance. She puts this in terms of how "compelling" the "man-

ner” of telling is (2004:282), but this is no different from saying that high stylization and high poetic structuring in performance both reflect and create authority. Song is, in a sense, the apex of such poetic “heightening,” which makes Marc’s narrative all the more affecting.

conclusion

This chapter has culminated in formal analysis of two song segments which are ethnographically significant in a number of ways. First, they focus on the aspects of life most important to Bangangté’s musical bankers: death, “tradition,” kinship, respect, and solidarity. Song reflects and constructs their importance in various ways. With respect to topic-choice, death and moral values are far and away the most popular. Liberal use of lineal names in song resonates with all these concerns by indexing influential, local theories of history, poetic structuration, and cosmology. Second, there are structuring elements in these examples which are common to nearly all the songs I recorded. Third, singers construct authority by aligning themselves with different kinds of power and value. Chiefly authority is very common. The authority of the state is less common, but hardly unusual. Appeal to the basic value, power, and beauty of “tradition” itself is the most common of all.

The poetics of song both reflect and help constitute musical bankers’ understandings of how kinship, place, mourning, and “tradition” are interconnected. Throughout my field work, thinking and talking about key emotional and intersubjective constructs (Biehl et al. 2007a:10) kept bringing me back to “traditional/modern,” and “tradition” kept coming down to “the village” – in other words, to place. Kinship can’t be separated from place. Place organizes people’s categories of matrilineal relatedness. It goes beyond that,

though, because the land is the source of a power and value that runs through “traditional” practices and processes.

This chapter was concerned with performance’s disproportionate influence on structures of feeling and moral values. The seeming necessity of relatively non-arbitrary signs – usually icons or dicent-indexes – is what gives performance the kinds of power which linguistic anthropologists and their collaborators have recognized and attempted to understand and explain for some decades (see introduction for citations). Musicking partakes of this power because it “is the most highly stylized of social forms, iconically linked to the broader cultural production of local identity and indexically linked to contexts and occasions of community participation” (Feld 1994:269). Indexes and icons are precisely the sign-types which elicit emotional and bodily response. Unlike for symbolic signs, which can assert propositionally, you can’t rationally respond to a feeling with “no, that’s not true.” To do so would be to miss the point. Musicking is a way of creating “experiences of being *of* a group through the ‘naturalness’ of iconic signs and the direct experience of dicent-indices. Propositions...about identity may even become emotionally heated, but...they do not provide the feeling or direct experience *of* belonging” (Turino 1999:241).

Musical bankers’ song in Bangangté provides direct experience of belonging by evoking death, kinship, and solidarity thematically, and by constructing their links and importance poetically through the use of lineal names and narrative structure. These particulars are what the musical bankers “belong *to*,” therefore the multiple semiotic layers resonate for them as dicents and both authenticate and shape their values and goals.

notes

¹ Focusing on Bamiléké lineal names brings one's attention to matrilineality and how important it is in the Grassfields. Ethnographers working in Bamiléké territory during colonialism and early independence (e.g. Egerton 1939, Hurault 1962, Tardits 1960), however, did not come to a consensus on how or how much matrilineality was relevant at their field sites. Before the postmodern turn in anthropology and the influence of Schneider on kinship studies, inheritance of property was a mainstream concern for scholars and men hold more property than women, generally speaking. The major over-balance is the ownership of land. While the ultimate owner of all the land is the chiefly office, men – and, generally, not women – receive rights to land. At death, these rights usually transfer patrilineally to a male heir (Brain 1972, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999, Hurault 1962, Tardits 1960).

While scholars have been aware for a long time that the Bamiléké and other “semi-Bantu” agricultural societies practice bilineality, matrilineality and matrilineality were under-studied for some time. Scholars paid little or no attention to lineal names until Brain's 1972 monograph, despite their centrality to the subjective and discursive functions and practices of kinship. Recently, the imbalance has been corrected and contemporary anthropologists of the Grassfields put equal weight on patrilineality and matrilineality. The discipline elided lineal names partly because it is a sociolinguistic issue, and linguistic anthropology before the 1970s was in a very different state than it currently is, and has never been very popular among ethnographers trained in Europe. Only a small number of anthropologists trained in the “New World” have worked with the Bamiléké and I believe I am the first *linguistic* anthropologist to do so.

² My debt to Voorhoeve is great because his systematicity covers some of the gaps in my interview surveys. Unlike him, I did not come away with an undisputed picture of why *ndab* are the way they are. This may be because Voorhoeve relied heavily on a single informant, but it's also possible that things have changed since the early 1960s and the system is being contested or reworked. It certainly isn't falling out of practice, though, even among urban Bamiléké.

³ Teknonyms are names given based on birth order: i.e., the first born in always named x, the second born, y, etc.

⁴ In this, the *ndab* is unlike T/V alternation in European languages, the pragmatics of which make it difficult to mark both solidarity and respect with the same morpheme (Brown and Gilman 1960, Friedrich 1979 [1966]).

⁵ My translation of: “Lorsque le père ou la mère adresse à son enfant la salutation-devise du lignage, ce dernier est content et flatté, il se sent solidaire de toute sa parenté, avec des droits et des obligations en commun.”

⁶ My translation of: “A travers son l’individu se sent solidaire de tous les membres de son lignage, morts ou vivants, voire ceux à venir. Ce sont des noms et des salutations qui constituent le patrimoine commun de tous les gens de son lignage et qui les lient les uns aux autres en faisant sentir la qualité de personne sociale.”

⁷ Inflected, /ne labte /is usually monosyllabic: /lab/. “Thank-you” in English means “me lab te” in Mèdâmbà. Nasal prefixation is common in this language and applies to numerous syntactic processes. Nissim’s work on Bamiléké morphosyntax (1980a, 1980b) showed that among the means to nominalize verbs is the nominalizing prefix, /N-/. An uncomplicated phonological process turns [l] into [d] after a nasal. *Ndab* is the result of a nominalization of /ne labte/.

⁸ Other ideological uptake in Bangangté defuses the potential negatives of distancing, principally that concerning ethnic identification and Christian fraternity. I have marginalized the latter in this dissertation, but it is a factor. Furthermore, the given names of the musical bankers and other Bamiléké in Bangangté are more individualizing and, therefore, do not “play a part in subordinating expression of exclusive selfhood.”

⁹ His examples indicate that he interprets “clause” loosely and broadly.

¹⁰ My use of “bearable” in conjunction with kinship and belonging is not cynical in Sartre’s (1958) “hell is other people” sense. What I mean to suggest is that, pleasant or unpleasant, intensity of emotion – which is often attendant on acknowledging, denying, or negotiating relatedness and its obligations – can be a source of stress requiring “management.” Musicking provided such management for my consultants.

¹¹ “the core of the affective life of the Bamiléké”

¹² Being in a smoky room for long periods almost every day can damage the eyes and lungs, eventually.

¹³ Sometimes the chief of Bangangté is considered the high chief of the Southeastern Bamiléké, also known as the “Médâmbà” people. These lands are almost contiguous with the state’s *Nde Division*, but extend a little bit further. Egerton (1939) contends that the chief of Bangangté conquered other nearby chiefs in the early 20th century and assumed dominance over them.

¹⁴ This does not imply, though, that ideology and event are utterly separate and have nothing to do with each other; on the contrary, ideology gives meaning and structured feeling to the sense-data of pre-conceptual events, or “secondness” (see Daniel 1996:104-53, Peirce 1955, Turino 1999). Secondness, in turn, exerts pressure “back” onto ideology and either is subsumed and accounted for within the perspective of power, or weakens the ideological authority. The relationship is circular, in other words.

¹⁵ “Les riches des rites.”

¹⁶ “L’essence du Bamiléké est le domain metaphysique.”

¹⁷ “Je n’aime pas les titres.”

“Pourquoi pas?”

“Un titre c’est quoi?”

chapter six

a coffee shop in Bangangté

In this chapter, I return to considering the ways life in Bangangté inserts people into macro-social processes with national or international significance. While the musical bankers will not be the primary focus here, this chapter is intended to indirectly illuminate them from a different angle by focusing on some people in Bangangté with whom some musical bankers interact now and again. All of this goes to the important tensions of positioning oneself in relation to “traditional” and “modern.” The members of musical banks are familiar with the “modern” domains of formal education, international affairs, imported products, and fashion magazines, even though this was not prominent in the preceding chapters. In some instances, members were denied access to them due to lack of privilege. In others, they eschewed something despite its high “modern” status.

As a means of enriching this context, I will describe the staff and regular clientele at a coffee shop not far from the main marketplace, which I call *L'intime*. This place and set of consultants were positioned between the positives of “tradition” and the positives of “modernity” quite differently from how participation in musical banks was positioned. While the staff at *L'intime*, like most musical bankers I worked with, are trying to hang on to a source of income in a difficult cash economy, some of the regulars have more fi-

nancial security and exemplify what cosmopolitanism in Bangangté can be like. The juxtaposition in *L'intime* of people distinguished by such markedly unequal status – all the staff are women, take note – is emblematic of relations of power musical bankers (especially women) must contend with in aspects of their lives. Nevertheless, even the financially secure, educated men drinking coffee are far from rich and are at pains to maintain some status in a world in which the word “African” is often subtly or not so subtly pejorative because it can easily index “traditional.” Ferguson (2006) suggests, without obscuring important uniqueness, that the traditional/modern binary acts very much like a post-independence face-lift of the savage/civilized binary which flourished during colonialism.

Initially, I felt that I was “off duty” during much of the time that I spent drinking coffee in Bangangté. After a while, I realized that what was going on was merely that I was acting in ways that made it easier for me to get some critical distance from my own habits, styles, and prejudices. They, of course, were with me all the time, and I was glad to have had them revealed to me to the limited extent that they were.

L'intime also provided me with a setting to hear talk about music which the musical banks could not have provided. Staff and regulars confirmed what the vocational musicians were telling me about what genres were popular, for example. They too would be eager to dance to *benskin* or *mangambeu* at a moment’s notice. There were times when I was able to see them dancing and smiling their approval, not just telling me about it.

I will then proceed to a discussion of language shift. Language shift is a worrying possibility threatening much of what champions of “tradition” hold dear. A linguistically attuned listener cannot fail to notice that it is frequently discussed in Bangangté’s bars, cafés, and sitting rooms. Many musical bankers are concerned and trying to prevent or

halt it. This section will mostly raise some questions for further research, outlining the pragmatics, axes of authority, and ideologies which an initial glance at this important tangent from my central research project could reveal.

L'intime is located on the edge of Bangangté's central marketplace near a taxi-stop. It is maintained by a large Cameroonian firm based in Bafoussam, which exports cocoa and coffee. The physical plant is a small octagonal building with a counter, a broom closet and a few stools. Behind the counter, there's enough space for the staff to prepare the coffee and some food, if they've brought the latter themselves from home.

Two full-time staff would split the hours of operation between them. When I first arrived in Bangangté, the employees were Elise, whose comments on the eight-day week I quoted in chapter two, and Brenda. Brenda also sold credits for the pay-per-use cell phones that were widely used in Bangangté. Elise later left, for reasons I was never able to discover, and was replaced by Raisa. All three women were literate, but only Raisa had a husband or children. She sometimes brought her baby daughter to work with her. Locals drink coffee sweetened, but otherwise black, so I kept a can of powdered milk behind the counter with the intention of it being for my private use. Certainly, no one ever wanted to put any in their coffee except me and the few white friends and family I brought with me, occasionally. Raisa gave some of this powdered milk to her child, from time to time.

Elise was a nationally ranked amateur track-and-field competitor. Throughout my fieldwork, she went running on the track surrounding Bangangté's soccer pitch regularly. I knew her better than Brenda and Raisa partly because she lived near where I first

boarded with a family in Bangangté. When she later found work tending bar at a nightclub, I visited her, there, too, occasionally.

L'intime does not attract a cross-section of Bangangté-life, but rather a disproportionate number of well-educated men who work in civil service or commerce, and of taxi-drivers, who have variable levels of education.¹ For some, it's a place to stop in for a coffee, perhaps enjoy some company, and press on to one's tasks when the cup is empty. For others, the "regulars," it was a place to pass several hours each day. I went almost every day – sometimes just for a few minutes, other times to join the regulars for a couple of hours.

Like a bar, *L'intime* provided opportunities to pass the time with people in a casual environment. Bangangté was big enough that you might not know anyone else upon entering a bar, café, or restaurant, but small enough that you wouldn't be surprised if you did. Chatting with whoever happened to be around was something many Cameroonians I met liked to do. Much was unique about *L'intime*, though. One of them was that nowhere else in town served brewed coffee. It was instant everywhere else. *L'intime* was also very light and bright relative to most other establishments; it was a pleasant place to be if you were in the mood for some natural light with your beverage.

L'intime indexed "the modern" in various ways. The light and bright coloring of the place was one of them. Darkness when indoors is dispelled by electric lighting, a decidedly "modern" accoutrement. The vast majority of houses in the residential areas of *Ndé departement* were made of bricks made from the local, iron-rich soil. A few of them were painted bright colors, but over-all, the visual impression created by the white, yellow, and green of *L'intime*'s clean walls and roof presented a sharp contrast to the visual impres-

sion created by typical houses. The esteemed “traditional” architecture of chief’s compounds was also dark because it, too, used unstained organic materials. In architectural style, *L’intime* was reminiscent of a hotel or mansion built by affluent citizens or a state-sponsored development initiative: all indexing “modern.”

Its location played a role in its “modern” semiotics. Bangangté’s central marketplace is where you went to buy a CD-player, a European newspaper, or a t-shirt with a picture of 50-cent (an American rapper popular at the time) on it. There was a gas-station, three hotels struggling to stay in business, and a bakery there. Visible from *L’intime*’s entrance were the radio station, the mayor’s offices, the hospital, the post office, and the prefect’s offices

Furthermore, there was nothing else like *L’intime* in the *departement* of *Ndé*. There was nothing like it *anywhere* in neighboring *departement* to the West, which contained the much larger town of Bafang. The provincial capital, Bafoussam, did have a coffee shop with a nearly identical physical plant. The major cities also had them downtown. In the poor, outlying *quartiers* of the metropolises, and in small villages, coffee shops were totally absent. In those places – places where most equatorial Cameroonians² spent most of their non-work time – when people went to an establishment to drink and talk, they drank alcohol or soda. The ubiquitous small, inexpensive eateries served instant coffee, but customers at these establishments would consume what they’d bought and leave shortly thereafter.

Partly through a semiotics of place and space, use of coffee as a “social lubricant” indexed both “the modern” and class privilege. Such use of alcohol was, I would say, unmarked because it was common in every setting I observed throughout equatorial Ca-

meroon. The dark aesthetic of bars and restaurants in villages and urban margins, however, were not signs of privilege at all.

Semiotically “modern” things in Bangangté were concentrated near *L’intime*. Semiotically “traditional” things like hearths, raffia wine, farm land, and ancestors’ skulls were concentrated away from marketplaces. While downtown, one might find it easy to forget that Bangangté’s *quartiers* were “*mon village*” to many people, that it had “village” powers. Bangangté may have been the economic center of the *departement* – and therefore something of a hub – but it straddled the grey areas between “tradition/rural” and “modern/urban,” making it a semiotically complex place.

For all these reasons, to enter the place was to enter something “modern.” For a farmer to come downtown was routine, but it was also to self-consciously juxtapose the slippery signs of “modern” and “traditional.” *L’intime* would have been an unattractive choice for someone in the mood to put those tensions and complexities out of her or his mind. Going there was necessarily an ambivalent experience for people committed to musical banking because membership implied support for “the traditional” in a world in which the authority of “the modern” is glaring, and in which many influential people considered the values of one to be antithetical to the other. So, going to *L’intime* gave the musical bankers an opportunity to engage with indices of “the modern,” during which the stakes were relatively low. This had some appeal for many of Bangangté’s laborers and farmers, but some were more comfortable there than others, because of who dominated *L’intime*: the “regulars.”

I was closest with two regulars in particular: Pierre, who has already appeared in the dissertation, and Rigobert. They had a lot in common. Both had university degrees and

made their livelihoods from business ventures, allowing them to spend several hours almost every day at the café. People who came often for a coffee, but didn't linger for conversation, I don't include in the "regulars" category.

While Pierre and Rigobert did have fields and they did work them, farming was not how they survived; for them, it was part-time. In comparison to most of the people in the musical banks, their hands were clean and soft, their clothing fine and pressed. Pierre and Rigobert usually wore dress shoes and pants with a button-up shirt open at the neck. Most of *L'intime's* regular customers fit this profile. Priests, businessmen, civil servants, college and university teachers, and the upwardly mobile were typical. Due to these traits, I consider them people with considerable orientation towards "the modern." Importantly, it was rare to see a woman there, other than the ones working behind the counter. There were various explicit and implicit pressures on women to stay home unless their work took them out. Women working outside the home was not unusual, however.

Pierre and Rigobert were also typical regulars in that they spoke very positively about "tradition" and "Bamiléké culture." The last thing they wanted was a radical overthrow of ethnic specificity in favor of rationalized, antihistorical, late capitalist subjectivity. I took notes on great long speeches by Pierre on a number of "traditional Bamiléké" issues in addition to the ones quoted in this dissertation. Both of them were in informal banks, but no musical ones. They did not know how to play instruments very well, but Pierre, true to form, excitedly described numerous "traditional" genres and what he knew of their uses or origins. He and Rigobert were very positive about what they called "tradition" and were quite eager for me to understand it, both as an end and as a means of making *me* positive about "tradition." In at least the second goal, they had many suc-

cesses. Similarly, a professor living in Dschang (farther West in francophone Bamiléké Territory) who occasionally visited Bangangté and patronized *L'intime*, described himself as a cultural curator. He recommended readings for me.

Positioning oneself in debates about the meanings and values “traditional” and “modern” does not require choosing one “side” or the other of a war (see Argenti 2002). This goes equally for musical bankers who live off farming. Indeed, these people criticized George W. Bush, owned cellular phones, followed the World Cup, and saved money for concrete floors in their houses despite the fact that many people would label them “very villagey,”³ which is to say “very traditional.” Each lifeway – relatively privileged élite and marginalized poor – avoided stark characterizations of either “traditional” or “modern” as simply good or bad.

Something that made Pierre and Rigobert atypical around the café – indeed, around my entire network in Cameroon – was their dedication to East and South Asian mystical and contemplative religion and spirituality. Pierre and Rigobert said that they found in Buddhism and yoga something meaningfully compatible with the “traditional” religion indigenous to Bamiléké territory. Pierre even described himself as a Buddhist. Both men commented on how Bamiléké religion was very focused on the world of the dead and on understanding the workings of nature and supernature (physics and metaphysics). This resonated, to them, with what they found in Buddhist and yogic discourses. They specifically mentioned the special powers associated with tantric yoga, and the theory of reincarnation. This is in contrast to Christianity, which they associate with colonialism and whiteness, both of which are highly equivocal. They (and many other Cameroonians I met) said that much of what white folks do and say is selfishly individualistic, destruc-

tively dour, and reveals naïvety about supernatural. Importantly, though, neither Pierre nor Rigobert were hostile to Christianity and had no hesitation about attending Christian rites or showing respect to priests.

Another of my significant fieldwork relationships at *L'intime* was with Thomas. I think he and I disliked each other right from the start. My sense, now, is that Thomas was very unhappy. He was cash poor to the level of under-nourishment, even though you wouldn't guess it from his clothing and university education. The potential for shame, already high, was intensified by the fact that he was an unmarried father of three school-aged children. He had a sharp understanding of how European and North American governments and corporations have been exploiting Africa and Africans since the time of the Atlantic slave trade. Understandably, he was incensed by this. He bore a searing anger toward white people and their governments, which is also totally understandable.

But, pouring salt on his wounds, Thomas also revealed vitriol towards Africans. To what I suspect was his great sadness, Thomas had internalized some of the white-supremacism which had so hurt him and others in the global South. For example, he was a member of no informal banks, which was a bit of a surprise for a man of his age, forty-two. The reason he gave was that they're stupid; participants in them may be keeping a tradition going, but they think slowly and have no ideas, according to him. I suspect that he resented much of his situation in life and much of what was going on in the world around him.

Other Bamiléké people I worked with in Bangangté turned white-supremacism on themselves, from time to time. During one of the language courses I took in the field, I had the opportunity to tell some of the children in the class what I was doing in Ban-

gangté. One of them, upon hearing that I had chosen to come out of interest, asked me why I had want to do research in such a lousy place as Cameroon. Marc once said to me, “we Africans don’t know how to live. People who are sick don’t get the care they need, but it’s largely due to negligence, not poverty. The large sums of money spend on funerals would be better put towards healing the living.” Marc was directly involved with this issue because he had another “hat” as a Red Cross volunteer and trainee. It is not necessarily racist to criticize how funds are allocated, but he began by making a pejorative generalization about a whole continent of people.

These vignettes depict the semiotic struggle everyone in Bangangté must engage in if they are to compel (self-)respect. Being “modern” can be given positive value practically anywhere around the world. However, the regulars, the musical bankers, and countless others are dedicated to practices which strongly index “tradition,” thereby opening themselves up to criticism. They can and do, however, manage to talk back to the neocolonial authority of the “modern.”

I was and am entirely sympathetic with Thomas, but (without wishing to justify this) I was emotionally put off by the contempt he appeared to harbor so often. Despite my best efforts, it was difficult for me to like him until late in my fieldwork. I felt as though he was picking fights with me – not surprising given what I take to be his anger directed at white people. During FESTAC,⁴ he and numerous others saw me performing with AM and CB on the main stage. I got a lot of positive feedback for this from most people who spoke to me about it. Thomas was the only one who said anything negative; according to him, I was a clown. He also once accused me of being a bad anthropologist. On this occasion, I lost my temper and yelled at him. After he left that day, the other regulars sup-

ported me, as usual, saying that Thomas was out of line and didn't know what he was talking about. That was a comfort, but still, I can't blame Thomas for being angry about a white researcher coming into his community with little to offer as reparation.

My feelings that he was a threat to me got the better of me, sometimes. Once, Thomas spoke to me in English, but I couldn't understand him partly because his English was very poor and partly because Cameroonian English wasn't transparent to me, given my native dialect. Struggling with a momentary clash between my commitment to kindness and social justice, and an urge to lash out at him, I clued-in to what was going on, but didn't just say I missed what he was saying. Instead, I asked him, insultingly, if he was speaking Pidgin, and said (truthfully), "I don't know Pidgin." I regret this because it was both a personal attack on his English skills and an instance of language-based discrimination, which I was able to enact because of my privileged position in that interaction.

I got a totally different look at Thomas in the last few months of my fieldwork when I asked him to answer my brief survey about musicking, language, and names. First of all, he was more than willing to do it and I thought he might even have been happy that I'd asked. Several of his responses and his thoughtfulness and openness touched me. To begin with, despite the difficulty of finding money for tuition, supplies, and uniforms, his children are all in school. He said that he places a lot of importance on school. His bachelor's degree is in civil rights – either or both of cause and effect of his passion about global justice.

Most engaging for me was his explanation of why jazz was on his list of favorite kinds of music (along with mangambeu and ndanji). During university in the city, he met some jazz men and it was an inspirational experience for him. They weren't revolutiona-

ries or geniuses, nevertheless they were liberators. It meant a lot to Thomas that the liberation of black people was so central to jazz history. This reminded me that small comments he made from time to time while discussing other things indicated that he was interested in pan-Africanism and “black” identity. Nothing was unusual about that because many Bangangté residents regularly read or listen to national and international news.

My conversations with café cosmopolitans were familiar to me – in the beginning, surprisingly so – at least with respect to topics. They were like my conversations with middle-class, educated, urbanites at bars and cafés in North America and Europe. Regulars at the café in Bangangté were eager to speak abstractly with me about social science (including anthropology), culture, ideology, international affairs, and political structures, making specific references to the writings of well-known intellectuals and scholars. Compared to most of my consultants, it was easy to “learn how to ask” café regulars (Briggs 1984, 1986, 2007). While Pierre and Rigobert were the only two who knew much about Buddhism and yoga, other regulars were active when the conversation took different turns. For example, their responses to meeting my parents: Pierre, to Rigobert’s enthusiastic support, said that my mother was an embodiment of “the ideal feminine.” The time that someone told me that Bangangté music is “the universal music”⁵ also illustrates this pragmatics of erudition and abstraction.

On one memorable occasion at the café, Rigobert, Thomas (before I had spent much time with him), and I began talking about international development, shifted to philosophy of science, and finally got around to existentialism. Thomas took the position that development is bad because he felt that Africans are losing their “essence” and becoming little American copycats. “It’s too much, too fast,” he decried. Rigobert, on the other

hand, thought that there's nothing inherently wrong with technological or economic shift: that it's okay to find new things and carry them forward with you. I put forward the complicated perspective that the destruction, confusion, and loss which have too often accompanied development projects are important issues. Nevertheless, there are multiple ways to interpret and use the practices and technologies that developers encourage, which makes them neither inherently bad nor inherently good. Rigobert backchanneled approvingly.

He and I took the position that science and technology are neutral, insofar as they can be used well or poorly. Philosophy or morals should guide their use. Thomas held to his position that they are bad. "They're unAfrican," he said.

Later, on existentialism, Thomas supported Sartre's statement, "existence precedes essence" (2007). I said that I preferred the very different conclusions Lévi-Strauss reached on similar questions (see Lévi-Strauss 1966, 1969), unsure if they would have heard of him. They had, but didn't know too much. What I found particularly engaging was Rigobert's response: "Both Lévi-Strauss and Sartre are hopeless because they are atheists." Non-atheist existentialism is where it's at, for him. He agreed with the idea, ascribed by him to Heidegger, that "the 'I' comes from God."⁶ Pierre, who had been present, but silent, this whole time agreed with Rigobert.

Rigobert felt he had really carried the day at this point and made two concluding statements with which all three of us agreed. (1) Humanity's future is in a spiritual revolution, not a technological or scientific one. (2) Spiritual happiness is greater than material happiness.

A handful of topics engaged both cosmopolitans and others. One of them was racism. Racism is a household word in Bangangté, and discussions of it usually begin with colonialism, immigration, or international development, especially structural adjustment. Such institutionally regimented, legally protected, geopolitical “macro-racism” seems to be quite well understood by most people living in Bangangté, including members of ethnic groups other than Bamiléké. In contrast, my sense from informal and formal discussions of racism among middle-class North Americans is that face-to-face, “micro-racism” receives more attention and is better understood than macro-racism. This is not surprising given the influence of liberal and neoliberal ideologies in the latter group.

Such processes of oppression loom large in my consultants’ experiences of “the modern.” They know they are virtually one hundred percent at the mercy of states and multinational corporations when it comes to some things they want and need. They are at the mercy of their own state and its potential for violence when they wish to avoid crooked *gendarmes*, a wide gap between rich and poor, and elections which appear to many to be rigged. Their wish for reliable utilities for equipped buildings is subject to the private decisions of the foreign-owned companies providing those services. Many Cameroonians asked me for help with securing a tourist visa to Canada. The few who can raise the money stand every chance of being denied entry for reasons totally obscure to them. This, too, is beyond their control. The tantalizing international debates about debt-relief for the poorest countries hasn’t yet lead to any help for “on the ground” problems in Cameroon. Talk of reparations for colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade are usually just dismissed by powerful whites.

Gender, particularly women's rights, was another topic about which almost everyone had something to say. International Women's Day is taken quite seriously in Cameroon. In the morning of the year I was there, hundreds of women marched in a parade – most of them wearing dresses of matching fabric. For the rest of the day, women celebrated in bars and living rooms. For some women, this would have been the only beer of the year. All of this excluded men, the significance of which is two-fold. That these events were women-only emphasized the solidarity-building potential of the day. Second, men's absence is emblematic of the relative lack of support I saw men in Cameroon giving this issue.

The café was open, despite the unofficial holiday, and Raisa was behind the counter as usual. Rigobert and Pierre made it clear that they were skeptical of feminism. They argued forcefully that a gendered division of labor was essential for social reproduction and for avoiding a complete collapse of stability and prosperity. From this followed their disapproval of women in law, commerce, or politics, despite allowing that many women were quite good in these positions. My interlocutors claimed that they didn't see women as inferior to men, but that each sex should stay out of the other's domains. I argued against them, attempting to explain essentialism and show its flaws, and to explain the ethical problems of rigid sexual division of labor. Other men present were less talkative, but agreed with Rigobert and Pierre.

Throughout this conversation, no one except me seemed to be looking over to Raisa at all, and she seemed to make no attempt to join the conversation. She, the only woman present, said precisely nothing when the conversation turned to women's issues. This, regrettably, was only the most ironic example of business as usual around the café. While

men were listened to and brought themselves into any conversation they wanted, the few women around stayed out or were kept out, much of the time. Such male-dominance of airtime was also common at meetings of the musical banks. My basic research question did not take me to a deep engagement with gender, and so I do not have the empirical data to argue the pragmatics of silence among the Bamiléké in Bangangté. Numerous detailed case studies show that silence can index high or low status, or something else entirely. The situation is usually quite a bit more complicated than a bivalent low-status/high-status switch (for example, Basso 1972, Gal 1995, Irvine 1989, Tannen and Saville-Troike 1985). My initial sense of Bangangté's pragmatics of gender suggests that it is possible to use "refusal to speak" as a powerful gesture. However, I strongly suspect that this episode on International Women's Day was a case of keeping women out and silencing them.

I regret that my research was not more insightful and sensitive about gender and sexuality. I was fully occupied by my primary problematics, the result being chapters three and four. Nevertheless, gendering of some signs and actions was unmistakable and I've tried to remind readers of this dimension of social life, when I could. The fieldwork I did with women was, in general, distinct from that I did with men. Interactions with the café staff, women I got to know through kin networks, and women in musical banks had, in general, a particular quality that felt as though I was just there in their lives with them. It was as though (1) most women were doing things which were normal for them – although, to be sure, holding back what they were uncomfortable doing in front of me – and (2) if they felt they were teaching, explaining, or showing something, I was going to

have to be observant; they didn't say, "now, hear this," or "you need to do that," as often as many men.

A large part of the reason for this difference was that, much more than men, women worked during the time we spent together. Sometimes I worked with them, and sometimes I didn't, but it was far more normal for men to just pass the time with me without busying their hands. They were exceptions – women who were available to simply sit in the living room, men who kept shelling beans or sharpening tools when I arrived – but exceptions they remained. The café is the most obvious site of contrast; Brenda, Raisa, and Elise were at their place of employment serving people (mostly men) who were taking leisure time. I think, however, that work would be a fruitful place to begin detailed research on gender in Bangangté, especially as it intersects notions about who works "at home," and what kinds of work are done at home.

While she still worked at the café, Elise invited me to visit her and her family at home. I did so fairly often, as it was near where I was living, at the time. Elise lived with her parents and some younger siblings and cousins. Sometimes, she would be doing something leisurely, like looking at her photo album. In fact, this became familiar to me as an intimacy-building routine among my consultants in Bangangté, and I made a photo album of my friends and family to show consultants, which everyone seemed to enjoy greatly. However, more often, I would find Elise out behind the house doing something related to food preparation, such as pounding corn or greens with a mortar and pestle – sometimes alone, sometimes not. And this was how I spent a large percentage of my time when I wanted to work with women. I would go into the kitchen or yard and either participate in or watch food being prepared or clothing and dishes being washed. My participa-

tion in chores of most kinds made many people, regardless of their sex, uncomfortable, even when I didn't mess it up, so it didn't always happen. Usually we would watch each other, sometimes with some conversation. These conversations included a lot of questioning about my interests and about life in North America. Élise once asked me if North Americans have customs.

Misogyny and homophobia made their presence notable, from time to time, in Bangangté. The topic came up once with Nico, one of the young men in the family I boarded with, and he lost his temper, which he normally only did when children were involved. One café regular said that he would refuse to eat in the presence of a homosexual. While no one except me ever said anything queer-positive, flaring tempers and active-aggressive statements such as this were rare when homosexuality was the topic. Many people asserted that homosexuality emerged in Africa only due to contact with Europeans, an ideology Africanists encounter fairly frequently in both “data” and “theory” (Epprecht 2008, Murray and Roscoe 1998b).

I witnessed and heard reports of domestic violence not infrequently, for example. Marc, despite my respect for him and enjoyment of his company at many levels, was outspokenly misogynistic. His words: “for the Bamiléké, it's men who give the orders. Women don't have the right to speak against or above men. *She* gives respect [to him].” One of his songs included the line “men are better than women.” This sort of thing resonated with the occasional statements from both men and women that ultimate authority in a marriage rested with the husband. A wife should do what he says when conflict arises.

Feminist movement⁷ is usually conceptualized as a “modern” phenomenon – either good or bad, depending on the conversational moment – in Bangangté. One way of dispa-

raging feminist movement is to make it index fears of linguistic shift or the “loss” of (“traditional”) “Bamiléké culture,” language(s), and customs. This is a real and present anxiety for many people in Bangangté; some are convinced it’s already underway, inexorably or not, and musicking is fully incorporated into these discourses. Preservation of something motivates many musical bankers to defend their participation and promote it with more gusto than they otherwise might.

Is Mèdâmbà, also known as “Bamiléké-Bangangté,” an endangered language? Are related anxieties about “culture loss” warranted? If so, what precisely is changing? As I described in chapter two, older people like Marc assert that young people don’t learn Mèdâmbà or traditional music, at least not very thoroughly. In the words of a neighbor of Marc’s who sometimes participated in my music lessons, “Mèdâmbà is not a living language.”⁸ The lack of consensus on where to find musicians (also in chapter two) raises the issue of languacultural shift since some people believe that villages are being drained of ambitious, young musicians who seek affluence and fame through a recording contract and national or international distribution. On the other hand, there is no shortage of urban Bamiléké firmly maintaining that “the village” is central to their well-being and visiting it for major transitions and rituals. Most crucially, I have seen many pre-adolescents displaying virtuosity, enjoyment, and ease in “traditional” musicking and conversational Mèdâmbà.

There are complicated questions to be asked, though, about language standardization, moral values, and endangerment and about the relationships between the Bamiléké-language talk in Ndé Division today and that of one or two generations ago. According to most people, something has changed, although, I don’t know what or in what ways. Since

before fieldwork, getting to know ex-patriots of Ndé Division (roughly, the Mèdâmbà zone) living in Toronto, Canada, I had noticed discourse on something called “real” Mèdâmbà,⁹ or the “real” language of such-and-such village. This came up repeatedly throughout my time in Bangangté.

My first exposure to this discourse was with the Cameroonian-Canadian Henri. I had many conversations with him before my fieldwork about his village in Ndé Division, Bazou.¹⁰ He helped me with language training, but told me that the language of Bazou is all but lost – spoken only by the elderly. He didn’t really have a name for what most residents of Bazou speak today, but he didn’t consider it the real language of Bazou. This sort of thing continued when I got to Bangangté.

For example, Luc, the aspiring pop-star said, “mostly, we don’t speak Mèdâmbà [in Bangangté]. You wouldn’t be understood if you spoke real Mèdâmbà.” When this came up in the café, I heard the same story, that few in Bangangté speak it. Roger, my visitor from Douala, had the most detailed commentary regarding “the real language.” For him, real Mèdâmbà emanates from the village of Bangoulap, but the differences between it and what is heard in Bangangté are slight – pronunciation of a few words. Bangangté’s language he called “heavy.” But he was glad that I was learning real Mèdâmbà from my language tutor, at the time, Hector.

Roger’s statement goes to standardization and the differential status of styles.¹¹ What does “heavy” mean? What exactly are these socially significant pronunciation differences? What makes Bangoulap the source, according to Roger? He also points to the insecurity about their speech that at least some residents of Bangangté have – residents who natively speak (“fake”?) Mèdâmbà, or Bangangté-language. One conversation with Élise

while she still worked at the café forcefully illuminated her discontent with her linguistic repertoire. She had been telling me that what I was learning with Hector was wonderful – correct, valuable language. She earnestly told me that she wanted to learn Mèdûmbà: this from someone I counted among its native speakers.

How important is it that she didn't say, "I want to learn *to read and write* Mèdûmbà?" What was she speaking, in her estimation? Or was there a level at which she felt that one doesn't fully or actually know a language unless one is literate in it? What was behind the sense I got that she *revered* Hector, what he did, and his authority? Hector is among the founding members of the NGO I mentioned in chapter two, CEPOM. Its purpose is to preserve Mèdûmbà language and culture, and to promote reading, writing, and publication in the language. This has included an explicit standardization project.

CEPOM wouldn't have been formed had Hector and his confederates not believed that there was need of preservation efforts. Today, though, they say that CEPOM has done well and continues to have a positive impact. In a CEPOM course I took, the teacher's introductory remarks included reference to "authentic Mèdûmbà," but not "real Mèdûmbà." He also explained that they had decided to designate the Bahouac (also spelled "Bawock") dialect standard. Their writing system reflects this decision. For example, I noticed variation in whether or not the high central vowel was round or not. It's round in the standard, and "ɥ" represents it.

I do not have detailed knowledge of the effects CEPOM's attempts to standardize have had on ideologies and moral values shaping Mèdûmbà pragmatics as they are played out moment to moment. The organization seems to create authority from the amount of education its founders have, from the accoutrements of formal schooling sur-

rounding it, and from writing, itself. It is conceivable that insecurity about speaking “well” and insecurity about literacy in African languages have increased among residents of Ndé Division. Has standardization had any unique impact on Bahouac’s residents or for those with Bahouac lineal names? Who are or were the native speakers of the now standard dialect?

Poetry and song are complexly tied up with the form, grammar, and pragmatics of language in my field site, as I showed in chapters four and five by illuminating some dimensions of the connection. There’s more to it, though. Martin and Jean expressed concern over my potential as a lead benskin drummer because I didn’t understand Mèdêmbà well enough; according to them, the soloist knows what to play by echoing the singer. How this plays out formally, I plan to discover in a subsequent article, but they clearly viewed benskin as we currently know it to be dependent on this linguistic code. Therefore, a significant shift at any point in the musicolinguistic continuum is bound to influence the whole. Scholars have claimed or implied similar things about other cases (Agawu 1984, 1988, Coplan 1988, Diehl 2002, Feld 1994 [1988], 1996, Fox 2004, Mannheim 1986, Samuels 2004, Sherzer and Wicks 1982, Urban 1994, Woodbury 1993).

There are clearly changes underway in Bamiléké sociomusicology, what Feld (1984) termed the “performance” and “value and equality” areas of inquiry. It seems that few young urban people, relative to their age cohort in “Bamiléké territory” and to middle-aged urbanites, are able to play an instrument in any “traditional” genre. Appreciation of “modern” music and professional musicians, and aspirations of stardom are very high everywhere, though. Perhaps the view of musicking as a specialization or profession is becoming normative among the urban Bamiléké, as it has among the middle classes of

Europe and North America (Attali 1985, Small 1996 [1977]). For the vast majority of my consultants who've noticed, and some scholars (for example, Campbell 1998, Keil 2002, Small 1996 [1977]), this is bad news. Since musical banks primarily build solidarity among their members, and since musicking is a major component of their success in this capacity, it's unclear what would result if the percentage of members who can't play the instruments were to increase substantially.

Enthusiasm for “traditional” genres, though, was high among younger Cameroonians I met, regardless of where they lived or if they could handle a pair of shakers. In Bamiléké territory, which is more rural, it seemed nearly universal. Young and old quickly get out of their seats to dance, in other words. In Douala and Bangangté I saw a vigorous minority of children and adolescents seeking instruction in the “traditional” repertoire – putting their contemporary spin on it, to be sure, but stretching out their hands to receive a good many of the torches passed from their elders.

Benskin, for one, is booming, but, some genres tended not to be favored by younger people. I only saw one *lali* ensemble with any young people in it. They would not have been praiseworthy according to the men I worked with who were respected for their mastery of *lali*, such as Marc and Jules.

Therefore, a simple picture of young people ignoring or disparaging *en masse* a(n already or nearly moribund) musicolinguistic way of being in the world is distorted, it seems to me. If there is a language shift underway, I believe it is taking the following form:

- full integration of French into the sociopoetic field of Bangangté, creating balanced bilinguals in the youngest age-sets

- most middle aged people in rural *and* urban settings seem to me to be balanced bilinguals
- an actual reduction in use of African languages *in cities*, resulting in many young urbanites being native Francophones, and semi-speakers of Mèdêmbà

The semiotics of modern/traditional and urban/rural might be making it difficult to give subtle answers to questions about what is and is not changing. As I described in chapter two, “tradition” tends to index “elderly,” concepts in opposition to “modern” and “young,” respectively. When these binaries are iconized, in Irvine and Gal’s sense (2000), they become a distorting ideology since those influenced by it have difficulty recognizing the nuances and inconsistencies which are always present in social categories such as “urban,” “rural,” “young,” “old,” “new,” and “traditional.”

In addition, young rural people may not share a pragmatics of codeswitching with their elders: i.e., when to use which language, what can be indexed, how and whether to distinguish between the supposedly discrete codes (see Woolard 2004 for a recent review). This can create interactional discord even though Mèdêmbà-monolingual grandparents “share a code” with their very young descendants. It could easily seem as though young people aren’t learning the language because pragmatic clashes are quite difficult to understand and explain.

notes

¹ I saw no female taxi-drivers in Cameroon.

² I did not go to Northern, Sub-Saharan Cameroon. Islam is dominant there, which has profound repercussions for the consumption and semiotics of alcoholic beverages.

³ “très villageois”

⁴ The cultural festival held in Bangangté every two years.

⁵ This was quite explicitly in contrast to other “traditional” musics in Cameroon, and definitely not a “unifying” statement about Cameroon or Africa. He mentioned, for example, the Duala. He took rhythm to be the key to this universality.

⁶ I do not have a citation for this, and make no claims regarding the accuracy of the attribution.

⁷ I follow bell hooks (1994, 2003) in adopting this usage.

⁸ “...n’est pas une langue vivant.”

⁹ “vrai Mèdâmbâ”

¹⁰ At the time, I was planning to make Bazou my field site.

¹¹ I use Irvine’s conceptualization of “style,” here. “Whatever ‘styles’ are, in language or elsewhere, they are part of a *system of distinction*, in which a style contrasts with other possible styles, and the social meaning signified by the style contrasts with other social meanings” (2001:22).

chapter seven

conclusions and discussion

In this dissertation, I showed that, among musical bankers in Bangangté, musicking was crucial for building solidarity and negotiating “the traditional”; and that the semiotics of “traditional” and “modern” shapes a lot of what musical bankers do. I did this through formal analysis of performances and through metadiscursive analysis of actions at a range of events from my field work. “Tradition” involves ways of talking and musicking, foods, clothing, means of livelihood, gendered division of labor, lineal names, the power in places, and honoring the deceased. Solidarity involves affection and care, emotional and financial support, and collaboration in the project of a musical bank.

In the introduction, I synthesized the participation approach in ethnomusicology and the anthropology of music with language ideologies in linguistic anthropology. I bridged this gap with reference to literatures on poetics, semiotics, phenomenology, performance, emotion, and subjectivity. To clarify some issues in the anthropology of music and performance, I coined the term “emergent participation.”

After orienting readers to the field site, Bangangté, in chapter two, I began a discussion of “traditional” and “modern” as power-laden tropes, not analytic terms. Then, in chapter three, I explored what “traditional” musicking meant for my consultants and ar-

gued that “doing tradition” is a fundamental orientation for musical banks, differentiating them from musical ensembles bearing a higher concentration of “modern” indexes and icons. Such differentiation entailed performance practice, instrumentation, code choice, and genre. In this chapter, I developed the concepts music ideologies (or ideologies of music) and sonic ideologies (or ideologies of sound) to understand ways in which performance practice, talk, song, musical instruments, and amplification technology mediate each other and moral values. Sonic and music ideologies are useful for bringing anthropological concerns with sound form, ideology, healing, moral values, and participation together in a newly productive fashion.

Chapter four illuminated the close connection between death and the musical banks’ financial and musical operations. The noticeable focus on death in Grassfields daily life has led, in the case of some ethnic groups including the Bamiléké, to intensity and grandiosity in mourning ritual. Families are under considerable financial pressure to stage burial and memorial events which will please the deceased. Informal banks provide credit and donations among non-kin for this reason. Musical banks do most of their public performance at mourning rituals and make money from these opportunities. Members use much of this capital, too, for funereal expenses. Therefore, death is a large part of the purpose of getting together with non-kin in musical banks. Members find, however, that they also can rely on each other for care and comfort in times of anxiety or grief. One of the social effects of musicking, in this context, is to create positive feelings. Getting together in time, using song, dance, and instruments increases members’ solidarity and is therapeutic for releasing or lifting the stresses of loss and scarcity.

This chapter bridges gaps between musicking, emotion, and money which have rarely been more than mentioned in passing in anthropological writings. Money influences performance practice more fundamentally than in the simple act of charging and paying musicians' fees. Musicking has significant impact on how money circulates and on the moral semiotics of its circulation. This chapter also synthesizes recent statements on subjectivity, the body, and emotion in musicking from semiotic, participation, and phenomenological theoretical groundings.

Chapters two, three, and four were stages of preparation for the poetic analysis in chapter five. This chapter revealed that understanding why the musical bankers felt strongly about what they did requires appreciating the importance of place in their sociopoetic field. Time spent in Bangangté lead me to notice another important trope intimately embroiled in "tradition" discourse, "the village." The positive values many musical bankers associated with "tradition" were, in fact, rooted in the power and beauty of certain sites in Bamiléké territory, the cosmological villages under the purview of a (sub)chief. It is specifically *the land* which my Bamiléké consultants understood to be essential for the continuation of these moral values. Village beauty and village power, in turn, lead to the emergence of "traditional" positives such as the code Mèdûmbà and the genre *ndanji*. Furthermore, matrilineality is so closely tied up with "villages" that one cannot ultimately separate Bamiléké kinship from place.

Attention to the use of lineal names revealed that matrilineal lines are "village" lines. Bamiléké people remembered their matrilineal lines and returned to the associated village – sometimes from another continent – to informally renew themselves or to increase the efficacy of a mourning or healing ritual. The near unthinkability of Bamiléké matrilineality sepa-

rate from place and land has implications for kinship studies. Land and place as constitutive elements in kinship have been little discussed. When kinship and place are brought together, it is usually in order to explain land tenure (Shipton 1994). I hope to begin filling this important gap in the ethnographic record.

If we follow Marshall Sahlins (2010) in understanding kinship as co-participation in each other's lives and mutuality of being, then we would expect it to be constituted, in part, by classically material domains such as making a living and land use. Kinship, being a classically moral domain shapes the feelingful semiotics of place, land use, and survival. My findings suggest that the well-known approach to kinship as "shared substance" (see, e.g., Carsten 2004, Peletz 1995), while tremendously productive, does not have the universal, totalizing explanatory power – even for a "symbolic" anthropology – which some initially hoped. For the people I worked with in Bangangté, villages, plots of land, and sacred burial sites were not shared substances, but they did provide for mutuality of being and for means of co-participating in each other's lives.

In order to analyze song-texts, I developed two new technical terms for poetic analysis, "predicate centrality" and "performative or pragmatic figuration." I wondered if Urban's (1991) concepts, agent and patient –centricity, applied to "traditional" Bamiléké song. They did not, but another kind of grammatical parallelism did, predicate centrality. This analysis brought to light another way in which grammatical parallelism can manifest, which in turn can be used by an ethnographer to elucidate sociolinguistic/sociopoetic relations.

Second, figures of sound (phonological or phonetic parallelism) and figures of "meaning" (semantic parallelism) have been well-known in poetics for a long time. My

analysis found something different, which I called figures of performativity or of pragmatics. This figuration patterns and ideologizes actions, rather than oral articulations or semantico-reference. Demonstrating that such processes exist is important for developing a participation-centered approach to language.

Matters of place, history, and kinship are concentrated in the semiosis of inherited personal names which index the matriline/village pairing of their bearers. Naming, in turn, is an indispensable poetic resource in musical bankers' song. Highly stylized moving and sounding together in time was crucial to the affective, moral, and financial operation of musical banks; musicking was necessary for ritual efficacy and generates income; through the combination of performance practice, sound, and grammar, musicking ideologized – i.e., mediated, shaped, constructed – practices of kinship, “tradition,” death, and place. Participation in musical banks played a major role in affectively and financially enabling the members to accomplish necessary kinship work surrounding death and mourning. Therefore, the musicking of musical banks aids the reproduction and commemoration of kin relations at numerous levels.

Chapters three through five dealt with the unusual ethnographic site of rehearsals. Few ethnographers have paid full attention to rehearsals (but see Fabian 1990). When they are not ignored, rehearsals are usually only mentioned in passing, described cursorily in a way which makes little connection to the primary contributions of a scholarly work, or they are used to illustrate an ethnographer's process of gaining competence or acceptance in the field. This latter sort of account rarely problematizes rehearsals themselves; the importance of them for locals is assumed to be simple and transparent. I analyzed rehearsal performances as a primary research site and showed that they are more

than preparation for events yet to come or responses to events already in the past. They have their own semiotics and patterns which index future and past events, but are not identical to them. Furthermore, emergent participation which occurs at performances can be just as significant or impressive to participants as that which occurs while playing out.

Finally, in chapter six, I moved away from the musical banks and towards a coffee-shop located in the middle of Bangangté, *L'intime*. Comparing and contrasting conversations with, on the one hand, people who frequented *L'intime* and, on the other, musical bankers gave me a more accurate, but more complicated picture of the semiotics of “traditional” and “modern.” This chapter brings home the fact that, while many people do tend to “lean” to one side or the other of this binary, it is not a case of fixed exclusivity. Everyone I met in Bangangté was interested in some of what they considered “modern,” even if they staunchly defended “tradition” against its detractors. Furthermore, in every moment, one’s position with respect to this binary had to be negotiated strategically (see Kroskrity 2001); no one was simply a “modern person” or a “traditional person.” Discourse in Bangangté explodes any equation of “tradition” with stasis or irrationality – and likewise any equation of “modern” with rationality and social justice (also see Askew 2003, Sahlins 1999).

In every chapter, I dealt with temporalization in one form or another. All invocation of “tradition” indexes some ideologized past. It may be a past which is taken to be the source of the “traditional,” or a past which invigorates the present. “Tradition” discourse can also be a discourse of present and future since, in some instances, Bamiléké people in Bangangté are concerned with choosing what is good from “tradition” and practicing it in the present or intentionally maintaining it in the future. All of this discourse creates and

recreates “tradition” and the past. This includes “tradition” discourse in non-denotational aspects of linguistic and musical semiosis.

The issue of musicolinguistic shift which I addressed in chapter six is also an opportunity to imagine or construct a past and then compare it to an ideologized present in fear of a dystopic future. “Cultural preservation” projects, be they focused on language, music, or something else, seek to prevent a possible negative future by taking present action in the belief that it will have certain effects on future possibilities.

Rehearsals are structured around the recollection of past events and judgments about what was good or bad about them. However, they are oriented towards preparation for future events which are relatively predictable based on extrapolations from past events.

Funereal rituals commemorate a life which is now in the past, and make intelligible a past event, a death. In addition, these rites attempt to please deceased people either because of misfortune in the past or fear of it in the future: a double temporalization which constructs and attributes causal relations between deceased people, past events, present actions, and imagined future events.

In chapter five I dealt with the historiographic nature of Mèdâmbà matriline-names and stereotypes about matriline and villages. These names select from ideologized, imagined pasts, thereby shaping what continues to be emphasized in memory and discourse.

Finally, there is the special present of highly stylized moving and sounding together in time, which I have called emergent participation. While experiencing emergent participation, the musical bankers achieved non-denotatively explicit, mediated, ideologized understandings of the processes and practices of “traditional/modern,” death, solidarity, place, and kinship. Each of these feelingful domains temporalizes sociality. Therefore,

ideologized pasts and futures and collapse into the expansive present of emergent participation.

Subjectivity, too, has been a theme throughout the dissertation equal to the themes of music and language. Subjectivity is a master-concept at the foundation of all my anthropological interests and quite a few of my interests which have little connection to my scholarly efforts. Musicking and speaking are merely the topics from which I began my anthropological explorations into my broader interest in the experiences of being in a context and the conditions for those experiences – conditions which are equally social, biographical, and biological.

Music and language are extremely productive sites for beginning a comprehensive inquiry into subjectivity. Sounding and moving together in time involve people in all our human capacities. In participating, we use our bodies, implying vast evolutionary, physiological, and neurological complexities; we exercise our full range of semiotic potentials which includes Peircean diagramming of objects outside the participative moment, which are necessarily ideological; we negotiate relationships with others; we engage intellectually and affectively with abstract and material objects; musicking, talk, and dancing are common therapeutic tools around the world; during emergent participation we can experience that which has been called supermundane, transcendent, mystical, and spiritual. All these components of subjectivity are concentrated in emergent participation (understood semiotically, historically, and phenomenologically), whether it be called music, language, dance, or some combination. Therefore, the study of sounding and moving together in time is very likely to deepen one's grasp of the profound, basic anthropological

finding that subjectivity, concepts, practice, and knowledge are contingent, relative, and interdependent.

potential follow-up research: Bangangté subjectivities in practice

This dissertation opens many possibilities for further research. Five, in particular, are compelling for me. To begin with, in chapter two I explained how the Bamiléké ethnicity is normative in this area, hence it being known to so many as “Bamiléké territory.” I also mentioned that Bangangté is replete with members of the Fulani ethnic group. For feasibility reasons, these people disappeared from my dissertation, even though I knew many of them. Balancing this look at Bamiléké people in Bangangté with a look at Fulani people in Bangangté would be equitable and interesting. In particular, I am interested in senses of place among the latter. In what ways do they feelingfully connect with this part of the Grassfields, given how many people consider it to be the rightful property of the Bamiléké? There have been Fulani people in the area for a long time; how, through history, has the normativity of Bamilékéness been produced and reproduced? What are the implications of being an ethnic minority in the Grassfields? What stereotypes or assumptions about Fulani and Bamiléké circulate in Bangangté discourse? What are the markers of the two ethnic groups beyond the obvious phenotypic and linguistic ones and how are they made to seem essential or unproblematic?

A drawback of taking this route is that it would require “starting over” with members of a separate ethnic group, and I think my doctoral research would be better enhanced by depth than breadth. The best way to improve what I have already done would be to record and analyze the musical bankers’ talk in non-performance frames. I would emphasize talk in Mèdâmbà, but a grasp of codeswitching – mostly with French – would be indispensa-

ble. Presumably, I missed a lot by restricting my formal analysis to song, but I limited myself for, again, feasibility reasons. The meetings of the musical banks would be the place to start.

These chapters virtually cry out for a comprehensive look at gender in Bangangté's musicking. Gender essentialism is evident there. "Women's music" is vibrant and well-known. Much could be revealed by recordings of performances and of non-performance talk. There is some obvious formal distinctiveness in "women's music," but what distinctions are less obvious? Is there "men's music?" Are there gendered styles or forms in talk? What else do they index? How are patriarchy and misogyny manifest in other ways? How is "tradition" used to bolster or undermine patriarchy? What kinds of participation in feminist movement are to be found in Bangangté?

I also barely scratched the surface of analyzing the comments numerous people made to me about the purposes of musicking. The idea that musicking heals grief and otherwise chases away woe was extremely popular. It constitutes a local music therapy. I am interested in putting together a detailed picture of how various local people conceive of that. I would like to follow up on the claim that vocational musicians tend to be happier than average. All of this would get me into a new field: medical anthropology/ethnomusicology, the anthropology of healing, or music therapy, depending on how one formulates it (Gouk 2000, Koen et al. 2008, Laderman and Roseman 1996). Such partnerships between anthropologists and clinical psychologists or social workers have already been fruitful for a range of anthropological concerns. Not a lot of musicological work in this vein has been done until very recently, but there are indications that it would continue to be fruitful.

Another way of going deeper into the musicolinguistic findings of this dissertation would be to look at drumming styles in either or both of two ways. The first is a follow-up on something Jean and Martin emphasized during their attempts to teach me the lead drum in *benskin*. They shared some concern that my potential might be severely limited by the fact that I was not a fluent Mèdâmbà-speaker. They said that, during the singing, a good lead drummer would copy the singing in realtime. Studying this would lead to immediate confrontation with a number of questions at the nexus of ideology and form. What does it mean to “copy” song using an array of drums that has far less flexibility in pitch and timbre than the human voice? What distinctions can be omitted by the drummer, and have the result still count as a good copy? What do drums add which is absent from human voices? If this copying requires comprehension of the semantico-referential content of the song’s text, what does that mean about the musical bankers’ ideologies about the relationship(s) between form and “meaning”? Would semantico-referentially ignorant copying of form alone be possible in principle? If a comparison were done between accompaniment in *benskin* with that of another genre featuring drums, such as *lali*, what similarities and differences would be found? Do *lali* drummers copy singers? If not, what do they consider themselves to be doing? Why does the difference exist? If they do, does the same system of copying apply, or is the acceptability of omission genre-dependent?

Comparing genres raises another set of sociopoetic questions about Bamiléké drumming. Consultants’ comments and my own observations agreed that *benskin* is very popular among people under around age forty and much less popular among older people. The opposite is true for *lali*, another genre featuring drums as a lead instrument. Judging by

the ensembles I observed, *lali* was very popular among older people, and seemed to lack a steady influx of junior members being groomed to take over in the future; *lali* ensembles had junior members, but not nearly as many. Correlating with this, I observed a consistent pattern of difference between *lali* and *benskin* drumming at the level of processual participatory discrepancies. Watching the drummers in these two genres, I also believe I noticed distinct ways of positioning and moving the hands before and at the strike. Furthermore, Marc (in his sixties) initially expressed interest in teaching me to play the lead drum in *benskin*, but after trying, proclaimed himself unable and we talked to Jean and Martin (both in their thirties) about receiving instruction from them. That enabled me to compare and contrast the three men's playing on the same set of drums. The timbre Marc got from the drums was distinct from the timbre the two younger men got, but was very close to the timbre I had heard him and other men in his age set get from drums in *lali* ensembles.

I have focused on *lali* in this passage because it features a lead drummer. However, both *ndanji* and *mangambeu* ensembles can include an accompanying drum and I suspect these issues of drumming technique, genre, and age would apply even for accompanying drumming, not just lead drumming. The popularity of *ndanji* is also lower among younger people, just like *lali*. *Mangambeu* is intermediate; it is more popular than *lali* and *ndanji* among younger people, but less so than *benskin*. Not coincidentally, *benskin* is widely considered to be a new “traditional” genre (see chapter three), and both it and *mangambeu* have “modern” variants which can be heard on the radio. As far as I know, there is no “modern” *ndanji* or *lali*. What accounts for these popularity patterns? What are age and drumming styles indexing for Bamiléké people in Bangangté? What different

social effects do separate genres have? Is there competition between “traditional” genres that I missed? What is at stake in stating genre preferences?

theory, ethnography, and activism

The musical bankers in Bangangté provide but one example of a community of practice which created frequent opportunities for everyone to experience emergent participation. Discourses which either suppressed specialization in musicking or denied the dignity of non-specialist participation were far from hegemonic and seemed to have little clout. This characterization is not a purist’s, blinkered, utopic fantasy. Many of the musical bankers revered celebrities or yearned for stardom themselves, and there were times outside a mourning context when virtuosic vocational musicians wanted an audience whose members would appreciate their performance without participating significantly in it. Throughout, though, they displayed a commitment to retaining some performance situations characterized by equitable inclusion of all in attendance without pretending that social distinctions were non-existent.

Bangangté’s explicit and non-explicit discourse in and about musicking directed me to a “traditional” theory of musicking which emphasized a local *music therapy*. While it did not become part of my argument in this dissertation, the time I spent on these data and ideas, and relevant secondary research (e.g., Becker 2004, Biehl et al. 2007b, Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2003, Friedson 2009, Gouk 2000, Koen et al. 2008, Laderman and Roseman 1996, McNeill 1995, Roseman 1991, Turner 1997) opened me to the idea that moving and sounding together in time might be powerfully healthful. This applies in a similar fashion to the moving and sounding together in time we typically group under the category “language.” Therefore, the documentation of varieties of musicolinguistic par-

icipation becomes a social justice issue. Promotion of social justice is one way I hope this dissertation can be valuable beyond its scholarly contributions.

Music and language, though, are somewhat hidden as areas for social justice action. Prejudice and discrimination concerning ways of sounding and moving together in time are widespread, but without large-scale challenge. Romantic and (neo)liberal discourse prescribing respect for “traditional” or “indigenous” “cultures,” “languages,” and “arts” is abundant, but it often comes to nothing in practice and policy. Even in left or progressive circles, it is easy to get away with claiming that a preference or value about language or music has nothing to do with authority or privilege and is innocently a matter of unproblematic “accuracy” or autonomous “opinion.” However, much of what is called opinion is based on power-laden ideology; much of what is called accuracy is based on the justification or rationalization of institutional structures which are utterly political.

One’s preference or dispreference for this or that way of musicking or speaking is very largely a matter of culturally specific and historically contingent ideologies of the relationships between signs, social groups, sounds, bodies in motion, and moral values (see, e.g., Meintjes 1990). This social context influences one’s understandings and actions, imbuing them with power relations, nurturing some potentials and limiting others (e.g., Becker 2004, Becker and Becker 1981, Campbell 1998, Eckert 2000, Erlmann 1999, Feld 1994 [1988], Keil 1994 [1985], Milroy and Milroy 1999, Rickford and Rickford 2000, Samuels 2004, Schieffelin et al. 1998, Small 1996 [1977], 1998, Turino 2008, Urciuoli 1996, Walser 1993). That these are matters of predominantly indexical and iconic signs can make the relationships seem incontrovertible or necessary even as

they also are important ways of learning (see chapter one). I have attempted to bring out the situatedness of “traditional” Bamiléke musicking in order to make this point.

Understanding this sort of process provides a way for people to begin reflecting on the ethical and political implications of their likes and dislikes, and then stop taking them for granted. Such self-knowledge is not all social justice activism needs in order to be effective, but it is part of what it needs (hooks 2003, Macy 2007 [1991], Mertes 2004, Rothberg 2006), because it can lead to a critique of power which is connected to lived experience.

Music and language both, from a participation perspective, engage people in all of our human capacities – all the senses, intellect, living bodies, emotions, neurologies, phenomenologies, cognitions, mysticisms. This suggests to some students of musicking that we have a human right or human need for highly participatory musicking, negotiated in the local scenarios most comfortable for us. It suggests to some students of language that we have a human right or human need to inhabit local, stylized practices of talking, gesturing, writing, or signing which are habitual, hegemonic, or feelingful for us without imposing them on others. Recourse to this medical anthropological (or medical ethnomusicological) argument should not be used as a “trump” to get out of power and politics, but rather to integrate the fields of power, politics, subjectivity, and the body that they may always be viewed as co-constitutive.

To suppress alternative musical or linguistic styles is to hamstring people’s abilities to develop their interconnections in the particular ways which are locally considered beautiful and “good.” Linguistic standardization is the clearest example of this. In extreme cases, regimentation associated with standardization – whether taking the form of

“correcting” talk to suppress styles or dialects, or of prohibiting use of a language in some situation – can have the result of suppressing and denigrating some ways of talking, writing, or signing, and by extension, some groups of people. This is unethical – read, “racist, sexist, or classist” – because these ways are necessarily stylized (see Feld 1994, 1994 [1988]), which implies that they are repositories for consciousness and moral values.

Similarly, some examples of denigration of genres or musicians is motivated by classism, sexism, or racism. What is a bit more obscure is the way interests of class, (neo)colonialism, and capital have combined to reduce the percentage of people worldwide who fully participate in musicking (Attali 1985, Ehrenreich 2006, Feld and Keil 1994, Keil 1994, 2002).¹ There is a very common hegemony in Europe and North America that musicking is only for a select few, and that most of us have a responsibility to keep silent and still, because we would do more harm than good if we sang, danced, or played an instrument. This “musical class system” can be oppressive in the same ways language standardization can be. The music industry contributes to the suppression of most people through affirming and reaffirming the super-stardom of a chosen few and legitimizing and re-legitimizing their work, explicitly or implicitly denigrating the musicking of the people excluded from “the industry,” which is almost everybody (see, e.g., Feld 1999, Feld 2000a, Harker 1997, Meintjes 1990, Mitchell 1993, Stokes 2004). The social justice-based promotion of participatory musicking does not require a social structure which maximizes the number of people whose only work is musicking. Furthermore, the current system favors the financial interests of large corporations and puts significant amounts of money in the pockets of only very few musickers. Helping people overcome

the most destructive forms of musicolinguistic oppression by encouraging people to sound and move together in time on their own terms would require one to take a critical stance towards this power structure. This points one towards what David Graeber (2004) calls “New Anarchism,” or in more mainstream parlance, resisting neoliberalism.

note

¹ This part of my discussion indexes a large and important critique of capitalism which I cannot review, here (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Heller 2010, Klein 2001 [1999], Marx 1978 [1867], Pfeifer and Chapman 2010, Roseberry 1997, Sahlins 1994, Sider 2004, Thompson 1964, Weber 2002 [1920]).

appendix

REGLEMENT INTERIEUR

N°	Motifs	Amendes	N°	Motifs	Amendes
1	Retard (après 10 mn)	25 F	27	Saletés	300 F
2	Absence entraînement	200 F	28	Tenue non conforme	500 F
3	Absence réunion (3 ^e absence)	100 F	29	Gourmandise	1.000 F
4	Absence à une veillée	350 F	30	Refus de manger et de boire	1.000 F
5	Absence à une neuvaine ou funérailles	1.000 F	31	Manque d'eau lors des sorties	1.000 F
6	Absence à un enterrement	1.000 F	32	Abandon des membres pour des fins inutiles par le concerné	1.000 F
7	Sortie non autorisée	200 F	33	Utilisation de l'uniforme à des fins personnelles	1.000 F
8	Fumée dans la salle	1 paquet	34	Vol et détournement au sein de l'Association	Remboursement + 1.000 F
9	Boisson en salle	1 casier de 12	35	Vol en dehors de l'association	Exclusion définitive
10	Troubles	500 F	36	Retard tontine	50 F
11	Bavardages	50 F	37	Echec tontine non bénéficiée	100 F
12	Coupe parole	200 F	38	Echec tontine bénéficiée	200 F
13	Abandon de séance	100 F	39	Non respect des adhérents envers les membres	1.000 F
14	Injures en séance	500 F	40	Non respect des membres envers les adhérents	2.000 F
15	Lutte en dehors ou en salle	1.000 F	41	Irrégularité d'un membre du bureau à son poste de responsabilité pendant 2 semaines <i>sans excuse</i>	1.000 F
16	Ivresse et manifeste	1 casier de 12	42	Irrégularité d'un adhérent en salle pendant 4 semaines	Est convoqué au Comité pour blâme
17	Commérages	Congé de 2 mois			Congé d'un mois si récidive
18	Faux témoignages	400 F			
19	Piaffer pendant une intervention	200 F			
20	Retour sur un point débattu et amendé	100 F			
21	Refus de commission ou d'obtempérer	500 F			
22	Sommeil	100 F			
23	Rires intempestifs	100 F			
24	Refus de chanter ou de danser	500 F			
25	Lunettes non médicales en salle	200 F			
26	Jambes croisées et déplacement inopportun	500 F			

N.B. Toute sanction doit être payée avant deux semaines au plus tard.

Le Président

Figure 8.1 the rules of one musical bank: distinguishing marks have been removed

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