Ministry of Scientific
and Technical Research

"Musical Invigoration of Cultural Dynamism in a Bamiléké Dance Association"

Brian Schrag

SIL
B.P. 1299, Yaoundé
Cameroon

2004

Musical Invigoration of Cultural Dynamism in a Bamiléké Dance Association

Brian Schrag

He he he sale le!	*He he he* Kanɔɔn!
He kwakeŋe le!	*He* Tree of Peace!
He Fu'mbum!	*He* Gift From Bamoun!
He la' te lye!	*He* Night Without Sleep!
Ô nnɛ yɔɔn mo, ô sale le	*Oh* my body, *oh* Kanɔɔn
Peg wɔ́ lʉa nyiŋ mba á kwé	We mourn someone when he dies
Sale lé, ô yu mpfʉ́ mba á lʉ̌ o	Kanɔɔn, *oh* he who has died has decayed
Sale le, ô Fuɔ Sonkwa pé ya lóo	Kanɔɔn, *oh* King Sonkwa saw
Sale le	Kanɔɔn
Ô peg wɔ lʉa nyiŋ mba á kwé	*Oh*, we only mourn someone when he has died
Ô sale le, ô wɔ gʉa Maya	*Oh* Kanɔɔn, he will leave for Maya
Ntʉ̈i ntʉɔ' ô Fu'mbum	Tell it, *oh* Gift From Bamoun,
Ô Fuɔ Tantaŋ pe ya lo, ô sale le	*Oh* King Tatang saw, *oh* Kanɔɔn
He he he sale le!	*He he he* Kanɔɔn!
He kwakeŋe le!	*He* Tree of Peace!
He Fu'mbum!	*He* Gift From Bamoun!
Aa lílʉ̌ ke a pfʉ pfʉ?	Does it sleep, or does it die?
Aa lílʉ̌ a lílʉ̌ a lílʉ̌	It sleeps, it sleeps, it sleeps

"Sa'a kanɔɔn" (CD Excerpt 1;
vocables in English text italicized)

On January 10, 2004, members of the DAKASBA (Danse Kanɔɔn du Secteur Baléna) dance group traveled all night on a mostly paved road from their homes in Yaoundé, Cameroon to their birth region in the West Province. There, they musically invoked the names of Sonkwa–the current fon[1] of their natal village Batcham, Tatan–Batcham's recently deceased fon, Bamoun–a reference to the centuries' dead leader of a neighboring kingdom, and tens of other personalities mentioned in lyrics of songs like that above (listen to accompanying CD Excerpt 1; Excerpt 4 contains a fuller version of the same song). They prepare for dry season voyages like this throughout the rest of the year, rehearsing and performing the same songs from a continually evolving repertoire, referencing the same personalities, but from sites primarily in Yaoundé. Members all speak the Ngiemboɔn language, and form part of the economically and socially influential Bamiléké cultures, which have spread throughout Cameroon from their geographic base in the West Province. The Ngiemboɔn language is part of the Bamiléké subgroup of the Eastern Grassfields language family, thereby closely related to the well-known Bantu language family (Anderson 2001). In this paper I spell Ngiemboɔn words using the orthography proposed by Stephen Anderson and revised by Moïse Yonta (Yonta 2001).

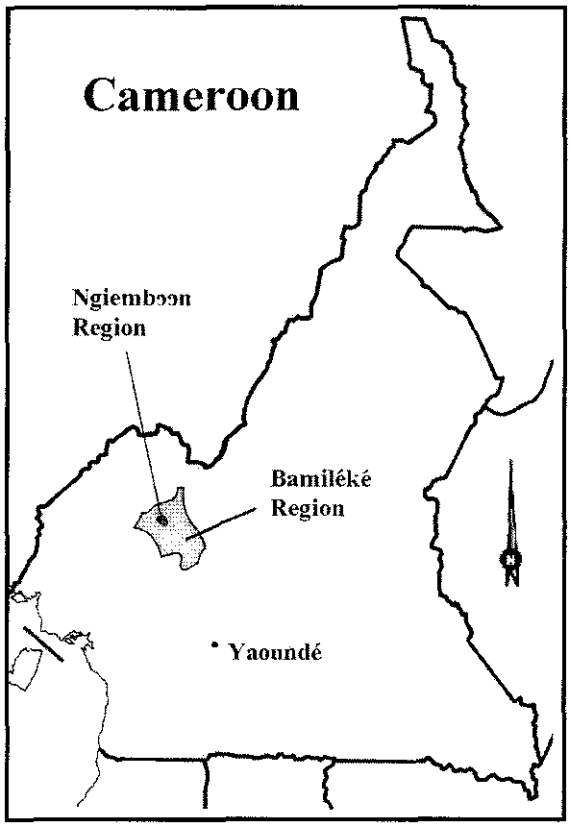
In contrast to multi-site studies of musical cultures in which frequent travel between urban and home regions is difficult–such as Koetting's study of the Kasena of Ghana (1978) and Turino's treatment of the population of an Andean village in Peru (1993)–good roads and

---

[1] I have chosen to refer to traditional chiefs – fuɔ in Ngiemboɔn –and the social units they head with derivatives of the transliteration *fon*, commonly used in the anglophone Northwest Province. Fondoms are *lá'* or *mbʉ̀a* in Ngiemboɔn and referred to as *chefferies* or *groupements* in French.

financial success allow frequent interaction between Ngiemboɔn people living in Yaoundé and those in the villages. This facilitates face-to-face communication between members of these communities who are experiencing different lifeways. Cosmopolitan modes of communication and values interact constantly with traditional ones, creating a rich stew of creativity.

During research that I conducted for this paper between June 2002 and June 2004, two characteristics of Ngiemboɔn culture combined to beg profound reflection. First, Ngiemboɔn people exemplified the common Cameroonian conception of the Bamiléké as highly disciplined, hard-working, and successful in commercial ventures. The influential Cameroonian scholar Jean-Louis Dongmo has written a two-volume book, *Le Dynamisme Bamiléké* (1981), that systematically describes and searches for causes of this dynamism, and the Ngiemboɔn fit nicely in his thorough treatment. Second, traditional musical performance permeates Ngiemboɔn village life, and enjoys a substantial existence even among those who have moved to urban areas. However, nowhere do Dongmo or other scholars who have explored Bamiléké cultures pay much attention to music. Hence my question: What roles does music play in Bamiléké dynamism? I will let DAKASBA give one answer to this question.



Map 1. Bamiléké and Ngiemboɔn Home Regions in Cameroon

Through an exploration of the physical, musical, and social infrastructure undergirding DAKASBA's communication, I will show that musical performance does indeed invigorate Bamiléké culture, not only in affective arenas, but in economic and material areas as well.[2] In particular, I argue that music powerfully mediates and energizes reciprocal communication with givers, enforcers, and protectors of traditional Ngiemboɔn values and social structures, both living and dead. I further suggest that this musically invigorated communication creates physical and symbolic feedback resonance, thereby helping to perpetuate, strengthen, and extend *le dynamisme bamiléké*.

[2] I am grateful to several people who read and commented on earlier versions of this article: Jacqueline C. DjeDje, Michael Jindra, Prosper Djiafeua, and Moïse Yonta. I would also like to thank Libbie Freed for sharing her research on roads, naturalist Paul Noren for helping me identify plants, and Dan Fitzgerald and Roch Ntankeh for their input on my rhythm analyses.

Communicating Through Theoretically Structured Space

I will first construct a theoretical framework drawn from elements of communication theory and the acoustic metaphors of feedback and resonance. Jacques Fame Ndongo, professor, Cameroonian Minister of Communication, and former rector of the Université de Yaoundé I, has extended concepts drawn from the field of semiotics to produce a theory that explains communicational realities of Bantu Africans (1991). The elements of his contribution that concern us here are his expansion of the categories of the transmitter and receiver of a message (*l'Emetteur* and *le Récepteur* of *le Message*), the medium (*le Support*), and the circular nature of African communication. Ndongo draws on concepts connoted by the word *muntu* in many Bantu languages to characterize the émetteur and récepteur of the communication process. Following most closely its usage among Luba speakers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ndongo defines Muntu as an entity that is intelligent, living or dead, spirit, totem, divinity, Supreme God, or procreator (Sa'a 1999:46; see also Boulaga 1977; Motoshi 1995; and Bimwenyi 1968). The Muntu emits a message through a specific medium (support), which reaches the récepteur, who sends a message back to the émetteur.

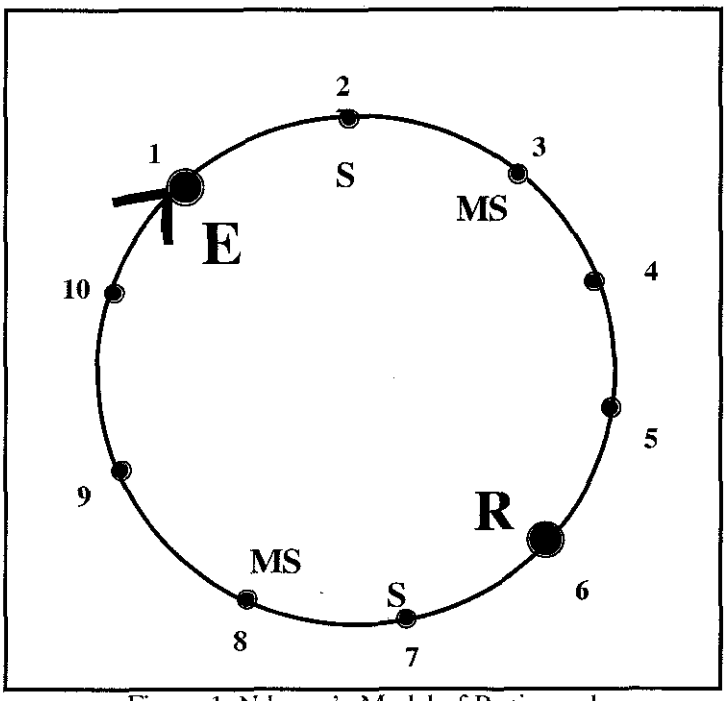


Figure 1. Ndongo's Model of Reciprocal Communication (simplified)

That this broader category for the beings involved in Ngiemboon communication is important rings immediately true. While investigating a Ngiemboon narrative that he had recorded and transcribed, for example, linguist Stephen C. Anderson was unable to pinpoint the referent for a certain pronoun. The narrative related a story about a family controversy that alluded to the skull of a deceased man.[3] At one point in the story, two men dig up a skull, wash, speak to, rebury, and offer a sacrifice to it. The text then says that "he (different subject) immediately got up" (Anderson 1986:23) and threw his enemy into the fire. Anderson confesses, "My cultural 'blind spot' had caused me to see only two possible actors (that is, the two living human beings) present at this point in the story. According to Bamiléké premises, however, there were already three potential agents present and thus it was clear that it was the third participant ([the deceased, represented by] the skull) who had acted in such a powerful and decisive manner. Thus, even a simple linguistic task like referent identification can be easily skewed by the cultural presuppositions of the investigator" (ibid).

Ndongo derives much of his technical vocabulary from Norbert Wiener and Paul Watzlawick's retroactive circular model of communication, which they produced to

[3] Rites involving skulls play a central role in death ceremonies among Bamiléké cultures. The skull serves as the physical and spiritual contact point for communication with its original occupant.

counterbalance popular linear conceptions of communication beginning in the 1940s (Ndongo 1991:13, 16; Watzlawick, et al 1967; Wiener 1948). The model states simply that as one person transmits information to another, the receiver transmits information in turn, which continues in a feedback loop until the actors break the communication event. Information–taken in a broad sense here–can include many phenomena, including, for example, a fact, a sentiment, or a signal (Sa'a 1999:46).

But Ndongo takes these ideas much further, tying them to his conception of primordial African characteristics and patterns of communication. He believes that African communication is "based on the paradigm of circular geometry inherent in African cosmogony. The vision of the world of Africans, their *Weltanschauung*, is governed by circular geometry" (Sa'a 1999:48). Or more precisely, "[t]he diverse origin myths of African peoples hearken back to images (circle, curved lines, cylinder, spiral, snail figures, elliptical or sinusoidal shapes) for whom circularity is at the epicenter" (Ndongo 1996: 67).

To understand the communication patterns of DAKASBA performance, I elaborate the importance of feedback in Ndongo's conception of reciprocal communication. In an audio amplification system, feedback refers to the increase in amplitude of frequencies that results from the sound emanating from a speaker returning to the amplifier through a microphone. At a certain threshold, the sounds form a continuous loop that results in certain frequencies being amplified again and again. Collins (1987) has applied this concept to the influence of Black American musics on the creation and development of popular African musics. Common musical traits resulting in large part from previous musical interactions with enslaved Africans allow ease of assimilation. Feedback resonance caused by the interactions between musicians traveling back and forth between Africa and the Caribbean, for example, provides an explanation for Cuban and Congolese musical similarities. In such contexts, musical energy flows with little resistance, and when feedback occurs, musics acquire energy, and build on themselves.

Jihad Racy applies the concept of feedback resonance to the performance of Arabic music that "emphasizes live musical performances, gives prominence to instantaneous modal creations, and treats music as an ecstatic experience" (1999: 9). From this perspective, the creative process requires not only the skill and artistry of the classically trained composer/performer, but also a communicative audience that shares an understanding of the basic musical materials (e.g., *maqamat*) with the performers. Intelligent, emotional feedback from the listeners affects how the performers spontaneously compose. This emotional exchange helps create in the performer the ecstatic state of *saltana*.

In contrast to Collins' discussion of resonance resulting from the interactions between music-makers of different but historically related cultures, and Racy's application of the concept to performer-audience interaction in individual performance, I here explore the effects of repeated musical reference to current and historical figures on cultural values and activities. In particular, while describing the participants in DAKASBA acts of musical communication, and the physical, social, and musical infrastructure through which they communicate, I will delve into questions such as the following: When the leader of a kanɔɔn song calls on Fuɔ Sonkwa or Málem Ndíkún, what does he allow him to say, and to whom? Does he create a feedback loop that reinforces the cultural characteristics of Bamiléké peoples that have made them so powerful? Does the musical form of the call make it stronger?

Ngiembɔɔn Communicators

To understand Ngiembɔɔn song texts, and the social processes in which music plays significant roles, a familiarity with Ngiembɔɔn history is essential. Song texts, for example, are replete with references to historical personalities and places, and a sense of continuity flows through music-making in all of its rural and urban contexts.

First Roads Home

Speakers of the Ngiembɔɔn language are part of the larger Bamiléké cultural group geographically located in the highlands of West Cameroon. Examination of leaders', elders', and intelligentsia's oral accounts of the histories of various Bamiléké kingdoms reveals a fairly clear, though complicated, series of migrations leading to the current location of the five Ngiembɔɔn fondoms.[4] I refer to this area as the Ngiembɔɔn people's 'home,' a word that connotes both the physical substance of the place, and the people–living and dead–that inhabit it. It also carries a sense of sacredness and obligation. If a Ngiembɔɔn or other Bamiléké person dies somewhere outside of the region, for example–even in Europe or North America– his or her family will do everything in their power to return the body or a surrogate to the region for burial (Djiafeua 2002b; Poumbo 1999). Furthermore, songs make explicit reference to the soil of home (as in "Laayé" CDNG02-1:09). And as we shall see, even though large communities of Ngiembɔɔn people live in urban areas, few of the most important funerary rites are performed there.[5]

Like the majority of Bamiléké peoples, the Ngiembɔɔn cite the Ndobo as their forebears. With roots in the Sudan, by the 18th century the Ndobo had migrated to the Haut Mbam region, occupied currently by the Tikar people in Cameroon (Mohammadou 1986:22; Dongmo 1981:58). By the time that the Fulbe began to force the Bamoun people southward in the mid 19th century, Ndobo groups had already begun to shift south themselves (Dongmo 1981:65). Their movement was "simply an episode of a vast migratory flow that, in the pre-colonial period, drew numerous people from the North to the South of Cameroon" (Dongmo 1981:65; translation mine).

Under pressure from the Bamoun king Mboué-Mboué (Dongmo 1981:64), the Ndobo moved into the Bamiléké plateau between the middle of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th (Delarozière 1950:9). Mboué-Mboué was able to subdue 48 Ndobo kings, but many others were able to resist his rule, including the forebears of the Ngiembɔɔn. After additional coercion from the Bandjoun, and extended periods of wandering, these proto-Ngiembɔɔn groups eventually ended up in a place called Nzié, in the current village of Bangang, which Ngiembɔɔn people cite as the point from which all Ngiembɔɔn people spread (Ngouane 35-36; see Map 2 below). It was in Nzié that the general Fuɔ Patwa was chosen the first leader of the Ngiembɔɔn people. Soon deposed by another king, he left Nzié and founded the Batcham dynasty. Oral history traces a succession of sixteen fons of Batcham, beginning with Fuɔ Patwa and culminating in Fuɔ Soŋkwĕ, the current fon (Ngouane 49-50).

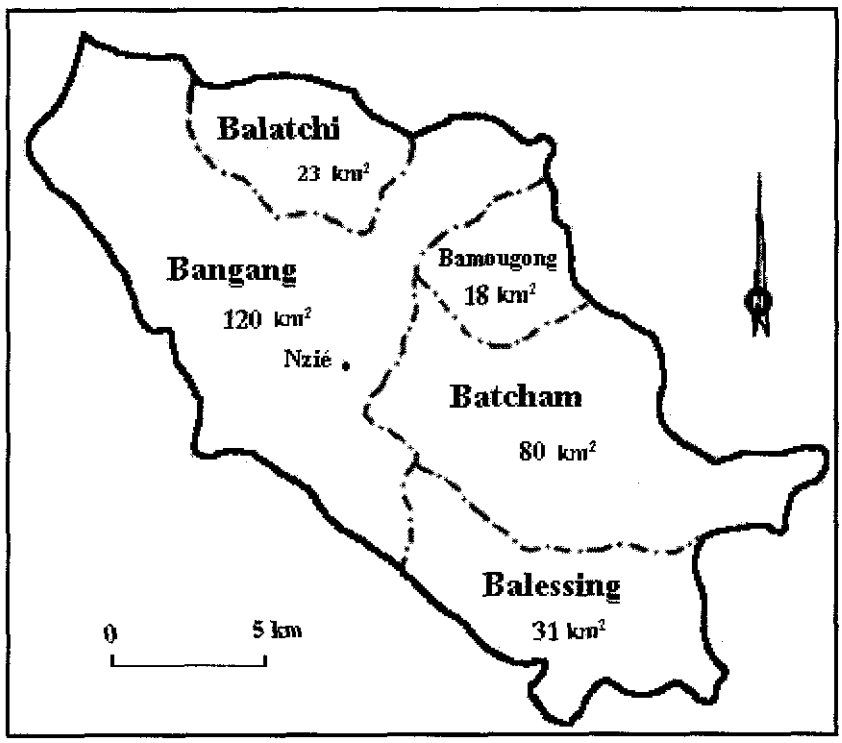
---

[4] I consulted the following sources to create this historical representation: Delarozière 1950; Dongmo 1981a; Doumtsop 2002a; Ketchoua n.d.; Ngouane 1983; Mohammadou 1986; Mbuagbaw, Brain, and Palmer 1987.

[5] An exception is the *enlever le noir* ceremony, in which a widow changes from her black mourning clothes to everyday attire, one year after her husband's death. Some say that this ceremony began to appear within the last fifteen years, and is only performed by Ngiembɔɔn women living in large, urban areas (Tiozang 2002-2003); others dispute this (e.g., Djiafeua 2003c).

Emigration

Bamiléké regions soon became overpopulated. High birth and fertility rates, low sterility, and a relatively long life expectancy combined with strong cultural motivations for pro-creation to create highly dense populations (Dongmo 1981:71-88). By the beginning of the 20th century, Bamiléké peoples had begun to move both to other Bamiléké regions, as well as to other parts of Cameroon. By 1976, approximately 15% of people born in the two divisions inhabited by the Ngiemboɔn (Bamboutos and Ménoua) lived outside of their home region (Dongmo 1981a:195). Reasons for this emigration include overpopulation, the loss of arable land due to colonial appropriation, lack of land to grow food due to the increase in the number and size of coffee plantations, civil unrest when Cameroon gained its independence in the period of 1960-61, as well as the psychological attraction of new experiences and knowledge afforded by interaction with the wider world (ibid:199-209). 1997 figures reveal a continued elevated population density in Ngiemboɔn areas, and mounting urbanization (Annuaire Statistique du Cameroun 1998:25, 22). I would suggest that continued population growth offers yet another sign of Bamiléké dynamism.



Map 2. Fondoms in the Ngiemboɔn Home Region

Home in 2002 and 2003

There are approximately 250,000 speakers of the Ngiemboɔn language in Cameroon (Anderson and Yonta 2003), the majority concentrated in five fondoms: Balessing, Batcham, Bangang, Bamougon, and Balatchi (see Map 2; Grimes 2003). These fondoms are found in the Bamboutos and Menoua divisions of West Province.

Some Social and Religious Characteristics of Home.

Each of the five fondoms is governed by a fuɔ - chef in French, and king or fon for English speakers. The fon exercises a high level of social, judicial, and spiritual authority; he and his advisors hear, decide on, and mete out judgment for virtually all criminal and civil complaints in their purview. These fondoms are in turn composed of sub-fondoms led by lesser fons, which are made up of neighborhoods (lepfó la' in Ngiemboɔn, quartiers in French) governed by their own fons (tá lepfó). Finally, each neighborhood comprises family compounds where a man, his wife or wives and children live. The man is the fon of his compound (Ngaŋ mbùa). People accord great respect to each of these authorities and are generally very cognizant of relative rankings.

The fon and the complex system of administrative and spiritual bodies who surround him (see Ngouane 1983:101-112), interact with a second interrelated but separate hierarchy. In contrast to the hereditary basis of the fon's system, this second system favors individual material success, and is manifest symbolically in clothing and features of a person's habitat (Dongmo 1981a:52).

The high level of social stratification both influences and is moderated by an equally strong network of solidarity-based associations. People may belong to multiple associations–*mànzòŋ* (age sets) and *luŋ* (social groupings)–at either the level of the neighborhood or the fondom. The luŋ may be a secret society with spiritual functions, or a voluntary organization with goals that include mutual aid (Dongmo 1981a:50-51). DAKASBA is part of the latter category.

Ngiemboɔn traditional religion includes belief in a single, supreme god, *sse*, referred to by many names highlighting various attributes, including creator, all powerful, savior, merciful, and omniscient (Ngouane 1983:113-114; dictionary 2003; Signing 2002; Doumtsop 2002b). Adherents also believe in lesser gods, most of whom reside in trees or specially constructed houses near an important geological phenomenon like a water source, or a sacred place such as the fon's compound. Priests offer sacrifices of salt, meat, palm wine, or oil to these gods to ask for help when a child is born, someone is sick, a woman has trouble becoming pregnant, or simply when a traditional seer receives a message that a propitious moment has arrived.

Ancestors also play a fundamental role in the lives of traditional Ngiemboɔn. Most compounds in the home region have a small house in which skulls of the family's progenitors reside.[6] The heads of household perform sacrifices to the ancestors on a rock or pot sitting on top of the buried skulls, for occasions that include, among others, thanking them, and asking for a favor (Ngouane 1983:123; Ndongo 1981a:50). The most important event concerning an ancestor's skull is when it is unburied and placed in the small house, several years after a person's death. I will discuss this more below.

A number of elements–a healthful physical environment, overpopulation, strong hierarchical social structure combined with a fervent sense of solidarity–contribute to Bamiléké dynamism. Other specific social practices also play significant roles. Inheritance customs, for example, require the head of a family to choose the most capable of his sons to be named his successor, and the chosen son receives all of his father's wealth. Because the father confides his choice to a close friend, who only makes the selection public after the father's death, potential inheritors often compete to become the most capable. In addition, the son(s) who is not chosen must then start from scratch, and is expected to found his own dynasty. "The principle of the indivisibility of inheritance, putting the non-inheriting sons in the absolute obligation to make their own way, and to consider them as founders of their own lineages is a powerful goad to action. Hard on the incapable and lazy, the Bamiléké custom gives to the most gifted the possibility of a rapid social climb" (Hurault 1962:36, my translation). Dongmo considers competition, struggle, pronounced taste for independence, a spirit of initiative and innovation, and a traditional education oriented toward production as the essential social reasons for the Bamilékés' disproportionate commercial and financial success. In a nutshell, Bamiléké dynamism results from competition in solidarity (Ndongo 1981a:53-56)

---

[6] The transition to independence in 1956-1961 resulted in violence that caused the destruction of whole villages, including the sacred houses and skulls within. When the Ngiemboɔn rebuilt, they replaced the skulls with small stones representing individual ancestors (Tiozang 2002-2003).

DAKASBA

DAKASBA exemplifies this vitality through its structure, activities, and musical performance. Members meet every other Saturday, from 6pm until 8 or 9pm, at the home of Moïse Tchinda, in the Cité Verte neighborhood of Yaoundé. The group consists of approximately thirty-five adults, less than five of who are women. It was founded in 1992 as the cultural arm of SYSCADESBAL–*Section de Yaoundé du **S**ous-Comité **d'Action** de **D**eveloppement du Secteur **Ba**léna.* The name Baléna refers both to a neighborhood in the village of Batcham, and a larger sector that includes Baléna and eight other neighborhoods. To resolve resultant confusion with the name, in 2002 the fon of Batcham renamed the sector to *Ntumlepfé.* Though the group's name has thus officially changed to DAKASTUM (***Danse Kana du Secteur Tum**lefe'et*), most members still refer to it as DAKASBA.

DAKASBA After a Performance in Yaoundé

Leaders of DAKASBA state two primary purposes for its existence. First, they want to promote Ngiembɔɔn culture. They are proud to be Ngiembɔɔn and perform the dances with gusto, partly in order to convince others of the value of Ngiembɔɔn cultural practices. On a studio recording I helped them with, they included a spoken description of the history of the kanɔɔn dance, in order to educate their compatriots as well as outsiders about who they are (the Appendix contains the complete text).

Second, they exist in order to help each other. In addition to its identity as a luŋ, a term that foregrounds the cultural and musical identity of a voluntary association, DAKASBA is also a *ntsẅa'a*, the Ngiembɔɔn term for a highly structured savings, cultural, and dance association, which includes mandatory participation and attendance for members; *ntsẅa'a* highlights the financial aspects. Virtually all of the dance associations in Yaoundé and the Ngiembɔɔn village region serve as this type of social institution, which form part of a larger phenomenon researchers have called *tontines*, or ROSCAS–Rotating Savings and Credit Associations. Ubiquitous in Cameroon–perhaps as many as 80 percent of adults belong to at least one (Guérin 2003)–they fill both social and financial functions. Though scholars drew the tag 'tontine' from the Italian banker De Lorenzo Tonti, who created a collective savings association in the 17th century, similar associations probably existed much earlier in Africa (Furer 2003; Laburthe-Tolra & Warnier 1997). Tontines often function like the *Samali* dance association (*Mali Ngiŋɛ Ledɔɔn*) in the Bametac II neighborhood of the Ngiembɔɔn village of Balessing. There, each member contributes 300 FCFA[7] at each

[7] 1000 FCFA (Francs Communauté Financière Africaine) equal approximately 1.5 euros.

weekly meeting. The money is gathered and immediately disbursed to one of the members, each in turn. The association also has a voluntary bank where people can deposit additional funds to a separate pot, and the group can choose to lend it out at interest to members who have special needs; at the end of the year, depositors receive their contributions back with interest.

Thus, members of associations–who often don't have enough monetary or social capital to access government-supported banks–benefit from this alternative savings system. But even more fundamental than the economic benefits is the solidarity that associations engender. Associations bring much pressure to bear on their membership to attend meetings, visit other members in times of death or sickness, and to keep current on their financial obligations to the group. In return, the group is always there to proffer emotional and financial aid.

DAKASBA emphasizes the solidarity aspects of their association over the financial. They contribute 500 FCFA at each meeting (every other week), but the treasurer holds that money to pay for travel to ceremonies where the group will perform, usually in Ngiemboɔn villages; no regular distribution or investment function exists[8]. Special circumstances may require additional contributions. For example, one of the members lost his spouse in April 2003, and each of the other members gave 1000 FCFA to help with his expenses. The group is also in the process of replacing its performance clothes, and will require a one-time contribution for this from members.

Organization. Men who fill nearly a dozen positions direct the association (DAKASTUM 2003). These include the organizational and financial posts of President, Vice President, General Secretary, Treasurer, President of Honor, and Account Commissioner; the artistic positions of Choral Master, Drum Master, and Choreography Master; and the secondary roles of Chargé of Materials and Master Servant (dispensing for example, food and drinks at events). Prosper Djiafeua–my closest research associate in the group–serves as Special Counsel by virtue of his extensive knowledge of Ngiemboɔn history and culture.

In theory, all DAKASBA members constitute the General Assembly, and vote people into these positions in bi-annual elections; terms for each position last two years, and are renewable. In actuality, the last elections took place in 2000, and because no major issues weighed heavily at the time, the 2002 elections never happened. In addition, there is not much turnover in many of the positions. For example, President Melataya began as Vice President before becoming president, and has been in power for almost ten years. The next elections were planned for sometime in the second half of 2004.

Performance contexts. DAKASBA performs for two broad categories of events: those that are somehow related to death, and those arranged for state or popular celebrations. Examples of the latter include performances at the Cameroonian Cultural Center, Cameroonian Independence Day celebrations, the enthroning of a fon, and at a Yaoundé hospital. The former category includes wakes that take place one or two nights after a death (*deuil* in French, *legwé* in Ngiemboɔn), condolence observances for the aggrieved family a month or two after a death (*visite de condoléances* in French, *shÿó legwé* in Ngiemboɔn), ceremonies where a widow changes from the black clothes she's worn for the year since her husband's death (*enlever le noir* or *enlèvement du noir* in French, no word in Ngiemboɔn), and ceremonies to commemorate the death of a family member several years after his or her demise (*funérailles* in French, *nkem legwe* or *nziŋte ziŋtĕ* in Ngiemboɔn).

---

[8] Most members also belong to other tontines that may serve their financial ends more directly. Interestingly, DAKASBA leaders are considering instituting a rotating savings contribution for members in order to exert pressure to ameliorate their sometimes erratic attendance (Djiafeua 2003a).

The most frequent performance context, and that cited as the most important element of mutual aid for DAKASBA members, is the nkem legwe. Nkem legwe translates literally as "the unveiling of death" (Yonta 2002). Though people come to cry and show sympathy for the family immediately after someone dies, they will assert that he is not dead, merely sick. It is only after the son of a person who has died gathers enough goods and money for a big celebration–which may take years–that nkem legwe is performed in the deceased person's village. Moïse Yonta, a Ngiemboon linguist and Bible translator, here describes how a man might describe his own arrival in a village to hold a nkem legwe for his father:

> I come now to tell you that [my father] is dead. And by saying that he is dead, that I want to mourn him. He already died, but we waited. We held back from mourning him. So we held it, waiting for a moment when I have friends, a moment when I'm strong, a moment when I have money. And now, I come. I act. I show to everyone that I'm a big translator of the Bible [laugh]. A worthy child. I show that I am a son who wants to give honor to his father. But it's not honor to his father, but it's a worship of his father. (Yonta 2002; my translation)

In addition to the status-seeking motivation Yonta describes, spiritual incentives are also at work. Before the celebratory portion of the nkem legwe–possibly years before the event–the family of the person who has died performs a ritual to remove the curse, or *ndòon*, that the deceased may be holding against the family. Yonta here explains how this works:

> It's as if the father is saying, "If you don't take my head seriously, you might die." After two or three years or so, you take out his head, and leave all of the other parts of the body. You dig up the grave, take out the head, with a certain kind of leaves, certain objects, and you take out the head and put it aside. Often there is still hair, which you scrape off. And you dig a hole in the ground and put the skull in it. And you put a clay pot on top. At this time, they use an expression that says, 'Now, we'll mourn him' [*Me ge lʉ ye*]. That's our funeral expression. (ibid)

Kanɔɔn dancers and others come to celebrate the removal of the curse. Because the family did what was required, others come "to celebrate the victory. . . . That's why there's so much joy, splendid clothes, dignified processions, excellent food, people traveling in groups. They are all proud, drink a lot of wine, and are very content" (ibid).[9]

Though the nkem legwe constitutes the socially and spiritually central event of Ngiemboon life, it provokes controversy of two basic sorts. First, many Christians interpret the concomitant skull ceremonies as worship of the dead instead of God (see "Le Chrétien face aux funérailles" n.d.); Moïse Yonta (2002) takes this position. Second, the enormous expense of providing food, drink, and other provisions for the dignitaries and other attendees has led to a public debate about the wastefulness of the practice. One newspaper article begins, "The quality of a funeral is henceforth measured by the conveniences placed at the disposition of participants. Waste and excess have taken the place of tears and sorrow" (Cameroon Tribune 2002; my translation).

---

[9] Interestingly, a singer from northwest Cameroon, Benson Loh (2003), likens these death celebrations to tontines. Your attendance at someone else's celebration serves as an invitation to others to attend yours. As in a tontine, everyone benefits on a rotating basis (see Poubom 1999).

Traditional Ngiembɔɔn life patterns virtually require the performance of the kanɔɔn dance at the ceremony (Yemmene 2003). When a member of DAKASBA arranges a nkem legwe, all members are expected to attend. Because virtually all such ceremonies take place in the deceased's village of origin, the group hires one or two buses and travels there, usually on a weekend. These ceremonies are usually planned for sometime between November and the end of March, when dry season allows for easy travel and less likelihood of rain interruptions during the celebration. The fons of Batcham and Balessing have ordained that all nkem legwes must be completed by March 31st to allow people to devote more time to work in their fields.

Kanɔɔn. The kanɔɔn dance originates not among the Ngiembɔɔn, but among the Bamoun, a non-Bamiléké language group found in the extreme southeast of the Bamboutos Division, West Province. Several warriors from the fondom Lá'átsɔ́ɔn (referred to by non-Ngiembɔɔns as Batcham), spent a period of time within the Sultanate of Bamoun in order to develop friendship and political relations. They learned and brought back the kanɔɔn dance, which they integrated into their celebrations of military victories, and which exists now in all of the Ngiembɔɔn villages (Djiafeua 2003c). Associations that perform the kanɔɔn dance–as well as those who perform other warrior dances, such as *pwɔ manzoŋ*–are the descendants of warrior societies that originally protected fondoms from attack, found throughout the Grassfields region (Jindra 1997).

Dancers and instrumentalists exhibit strong emotional involvement during performances. The dance retains the intensity and bravado of its warrior roots, with dancers engaging in stylized mock battle encounters, emitting whoops of exultation, climbing on top of the lighted fire during night performances, and improvising vigorous dance steps. One member said that when he is dancing, he loses track of who and where he is (Djiafeua 2003). I never witnessed members entering trances or extreme alternate states of consciousness, though people told me that it still occurs where magic is still practiced in villages. This is one of many changes resulting from the cosmopolitan[10] values informing this urban manifestation of a village dance. Others include the interpretation of physically demanding feats as resulting from physical courage rather than magical prowess, the regularization of dance steps, and fixing the order of songs in a performance.

Communication through musically structured space

Members of DAKASBA contribute to an already rich Cameroonian musical soundscape. Widely popular musics such as the Douala-originating Makossa, Bikutsi from the Central Province (including Yaoundé), and Bend Skin from the anglophone Northwest vie for attention in the West Province with Bamiléké artists such as Saint Bruno and Talandré. Churches–most of the DAKASBA members have some affiliation with Catholicism–incorporate European hymns in French, English, or sometimes local languages, and occasionally include songs composed using traditional styles and instruments.

When members of DAKASBA perform, they create a unique musical infrastructure through which they instigate reciprocal communication with Ngiembɔɔn muntu. I describe below several elements of this infrastructure.

---

[10] I follow Turino's definition of the term *cosmopolitan* as those "objects, ideas, and cultural positions that are widely diffused throughout the world and yet are specific only to certain portions of the populations within given countries" (2000:7). Associated values include standardization of cultural artifacts for wider consumption, and secularization.

Some Musical Characteristics of a Performance

The Event. DAKASBA offered to put on a special performance for me with the understanding that I would videotape it, an occasion similar to others where the target audience is not Ngiemboɔn. They expressed their goal of presenting a complete, animated version of the dance, and made sure that as many members as possible would attend. This consisted of two parts–*la phase du jour* and *la phase de la nuit*–wherein they performed their current active repertoire of sixteen songs, and wore their gandouras (flowing robes) and multi-colored woven hats. Performances for other occasions would not often include their complete repertoire.

Movement through the performance is controlled at three levels. At the level of the total event, two particular songs always mark the beginning and the end, "Sa'a kanɔɔn" and "Pɔ́ɔn lé giŋa lóŋ," respectively. The song leader, who communicates change to new songs by several sharp whistle blows, verbal calls, or rapid shakes of the shaker (*tsétsá'*), marks internal progression from one song to another. Finally, the song leader or master choreographer calls for changes of dance steps and sections within songs through gestures and vocal instructions.

Rhythm. DAKASBA members state that the sound that defines the kanɔɔn dance is the rhythm created by the instruments (DAKASBA 2003). In order to approach an understanding of how they conceive of and generate these complex rhythms, I relied on insights gained from my participation in performances, existing analyses of rhythmic patterns of percussion ensembles, studies on the perception of rhythm, interviews with performers, and multi-media supported analyses.

Throughout these investigations, my own participation in musical events proved an invaluable heuristic tool and touchstone. My primary involvement as a musical contributor was as a dancer and tsétsá' player at DAKASBA rehearsals. Members view this as the most basic level of participation, and they are all expected to be able to perform adequately without individualized instruction; dancers normally play the same six-pulse pattern on the tsétsá' throughout an entire performance. However, as I elaborate below, even this basic series of strokes requires command of intricate hand, arm, and wrist movements, and not all members have mastered it. Rehearsals in which I followed a simple dance step while playing the tsétsá' allowed me to periodically concentrate on different elements of the performance, usually for uninterrupted periods of half an hour or more. When Nota began giving me lessons on the drums, however, I knew that I would not reach a level of mastery that would allow a performer's intuition of rhythmic organization.

Thus, though my participation was necessary, it was not sufficient to arrive at fundamental explanations; I turned to other researcher's insights to understand and portray DAKASBA's rhythmic production. Koetting (1986), for example, proposed a "fastest pulse" model for the analysis of African rhythm. His approach suggests that African musicians conceptualize the underlying pulse of their music according to the shortest interval in a time cycle, and construct patterns by additive processes. Research into rhythm perception (see, for example, Povel and Essens 1985; Fraisse 1978, 1982; Eisler 1976) have shown, however, that that people possess an underlying pulse clock that best fits rhythmic patterns of medium duration that are then either subdivided or concatenated. According to these studies, then, performers of African percussion generate rhythmic patterns derived from not the shortest divisions of time, but from divisions of medium duration, like those associated with dance steps.

Kofi Agawu, in a lecture at UCLA (1999), supported the importance of attending to dance movement. He exhorted his listeners to avoid complicated concepts such as additivity, cross-rhythm, and polymeter to describe African rhythms. Instead, Agawu encouraged the

researcher to look first at the dancers' feet; therein lies the most salient and useful cue for extracting the underlying pulse of the time span. Parncutt (1994) and Todd and Lee (1994) have incorporated this kind of motoric component into their research on rhythm perception.

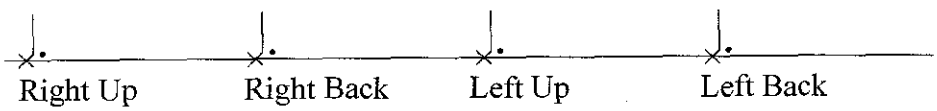
Listeners also use other cues to make sense of rhythm. Simha Arom (1991; 1993; see also Rivière's 1993 extension of Arom's work) posits the existence of three basic kinds of phenomena that mark rhythmic structure in African music: alteration of timbre, alteration of intensity, and alteration of pitch. Other researchers have shown that subjects–including infants–use these and other cues to structure their conceptions of rhythmic grouping and phrase structure in music (see, e.g., Deliège 1987; Jusczyk and Krumhansl 1993).

Building on these insights, I took the following steps. In July 2002, I videotaped the performance that DAKASBA arranged for my benefit, which I describe above (DVNG02-01). I then watched this videotape with three of the group's leaders–Prosper Djiafeua (*conseiller spécial*), Bernard Melataya (*président*), and Jean-Pierre Tametsa (*maître choriste*). Whenever the videotaped performance moved to a new song, I recorded these three men singing that song. To initiate the rhythm analysis, I chose one song, "Gwɔ́ goon mba ɔ́ jú'" ("Don't speak unless you understand") to serve as a referent for the percussion parts. I then videotaped Étienne Nota, the group's *maître batteur*, playing each instrument while listening to this recording. In this way, I was able to listen to each instrument in relationship to the same points in the same song.

I initially wanted to distill basic, prototypical rhythmic patterns for each instrument, following Arom's treatment of Banda horn ensembles (1991). However, I found that players may produce a number of valid patterns during a performance, governed by their abilities and the aesthetic requirements of responding to other players' patterns. In fact, Nota has developed hierarchies of patterns that he uses in teaching novice drummers, ordered by degree of difficulty. For this analytical exercise, I asked Nota to play one or two patterns consistently throughout the song, not the simplest, and not the most complex. He was able to do this with every instrument except the mâ nkà (large drum), on which he felt compelled to elaborate (this confirmed my understandings of this drum as requiring a greater level of improvisation than other instruments). Thus, when taken together, the patterns shown below represent one possible rhythmic configuration at a given point during a performance, but reveal nothing about flow and variability throughout the development of a song.

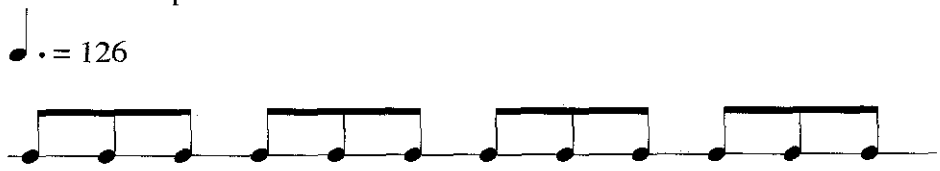
For each instrument, I will describe the materials of its construction, playing techniques, a representative rhythmic pattern, and any special roles it plays in the ensemble. Where relevant in presentations of the rhythm patterns, I describe the point of articulation (where on the drum contact is made), the manner of articulation (which part of the body is used, and what the player does with it), dynamics, timbre, and pitch.

Underlying pulse. Because of the complexities involved in perceiving rhythm discussed above, deriving the underlying structure required continual switches of perspective between instrument patterns, song structure, and dance steps. I began with the predominant dance step as my primary time division. The following figure depicts the solid, regular placement of the right and left feet, forward and back.



I then listened to the various instruments and vocal melody to determine the smallest time units into which these steps could be divided; the time taken for each step corresponded to at most three pulse realizations by another instrument or voice. I then looked for patterns of repetition in the instruments, and found that the longest consisted of twelve pulses. Thus,

the foundation upon which all of my analyses of rhythm, melody, and form rest is a time span divided into twelve equal pulses, as represented in the figure below. Nketia (1974) and others present such spans as fundamental organizing chunks, and my research confirms this in the case of DAKASBA performance.



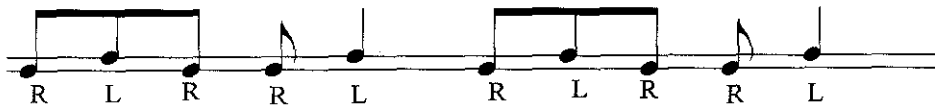
The three DAKASBA members who I recorded in a removed context sang at this slower tempo; CD Excerpt 3–the same song performed with all group members–reveals a faster speed, ♩. = 152.

Samuel FOTIO playing the tsétsá

Prosper TANE playing the ndʉ'

muɔ nkà and mâ nkà

Ndʉ'. The ndʉ' is a wooden slit drum played with two wooden beaters. The ndʉ' player sits on a low stool, holding the drum between his knees or steadied on the ground between his feet, striking its two lips with beaters; he plays the closest, highest pitched lip with his left hand, and the farther, lower pitched lip with his right; I have documented instruments whose two pitches differ by a major second and another by a major third. Nota enumerates a base number of eight rhythmic patterns realizable by a ndʉ' player, with more possible, depending on his skill. The patterns cover a range of between six and twelve underlying pulses. The figure below shows his third pattern:

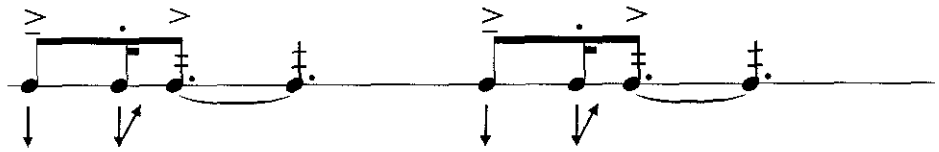


Legend

R = Right hand
L = Left Hand

My non-systematic listening to ndʉ' playing during a performance suggests that there is normally little variation or development of the patterns. In other words, when a player begins playing a certain rhythm, he is likely to continue it throughout that song.

Tsétsá'. The tsétsá' is a metal or raffia shaken idiophone, played either in pairs or singly. This is the only kanɔɔn instrument that I've seen played by women. I here describe DAKASBA's predominant shaker pattern.



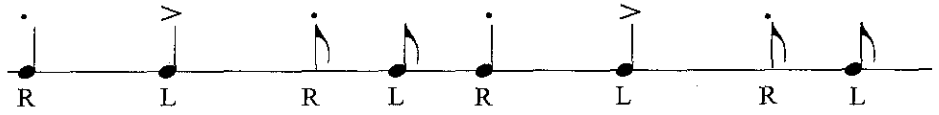
Legend

marcato accent — dry, staccato — roll

down movement — down then up movement

This notation describes a downward movement of the hand with an abrupt stop, resulting in a marcato accent. The hand then pushes quickly down and up and slightly around, producing a quick, dry, staccato stroke. The sequence concludes with a roll. The player bends his or her wrist very little.

Muɔ nkà. This cow-skin covered wooden drum–along with its larger partner, the mâ nkà–occupies a physically and symbolically central place during a performance. Together they create the rhythmic pattern that defines the kanɔɔn sound to Ngiembɔɔn listeners; the *muɔ nkà* is referred to as the accompanist to the soloist mâ nkà.



Legend

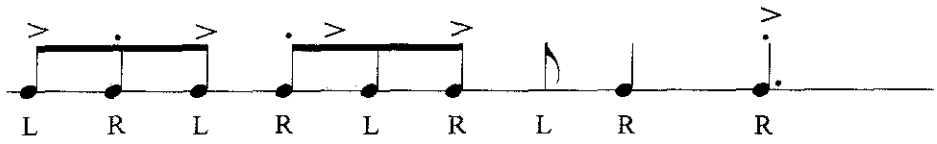
slap — ghosted

open (tone) — accented open

The muɔ nkà player begins the pattern by hitting the drum head about an inch from the center with the fleshy part of the top two sections of his fingers on his right hand. The fingers rest on the head for a brief moment, letting high frequencies sound, but suppressing the fundamental. Percussionists commonly call this a *slap* (see, for example, Kofi and Neely 1997:7). The second stroke consists of the left hand hitting the head about an inch from the center with the fleshy part of all of his fingers, with increased force, and immediately removing it. This allows all frequencies to vibrate, and following convention, I refer to as an *open*, or *tone* articulation. After this open stroke, the drummer touches the head of the drum lightly with the tips of the fingers of his right hand, producing a muted, or *ghosted*, sound; this stroke is also referred to as *floating hand*. The smallest sequence concludes with a non-accented open stroke by the left hand.


Bernard TEZEM playing *kẅi' fùɔ*

Mâ nkà. Members refer to this large drum as the soloist, and its player enjoys the greatest degree of freedom in improvisation of movement, playing technique, and rhythmic sequences. During a performance, the player may leave the instrument for periods of time to dance or interact with other participants, and sometimes uses flamboyant movements or sudden volleys of fast strokes that draw attention to his virtuosity. To the fairly limited strokes of the smaller drum, the mâ nkà player may add elbow strokes and subtle modifications through finger damping, including those that allow various clearly-pitched formants to emerge. Nota enumerated nine patterns for this instrument, but said there could be many, many more, depending on the drummer's competence. I've here noted the fourth pattern in his hierarchy. Notation conventions are the same as those for the muɔ nkà.



Kẅi' fùɔ or nzeme mmó. The kẅi' fùɔ is a metallic idiophone with two bells, struck by a wooden beater. The pitches of the two bells are typically an interval close to a major second apart (e.g., B and Db). Though its name as an isolated object is nzeme ('behind') mmó ('thing'), people more often refer to the instrument as kẅi' fùɔ, a reference to its sacred use in royal dance ensembles (fùɔ = king). When the fon wishes to announce his arrival for a traditional ceremony, for example, one of his counselors will play a kẅi' fùɔ. Nota lists only one rhythmic pattern as part of his instructional repertoire, though acknowledges that performers at less advanced levels of competence produce others.

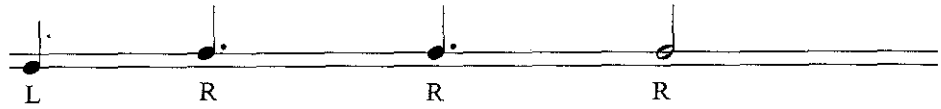


Figure 2 presents a composite view of the various rhythms produced by percussion instruments in a DAKASBA performance.

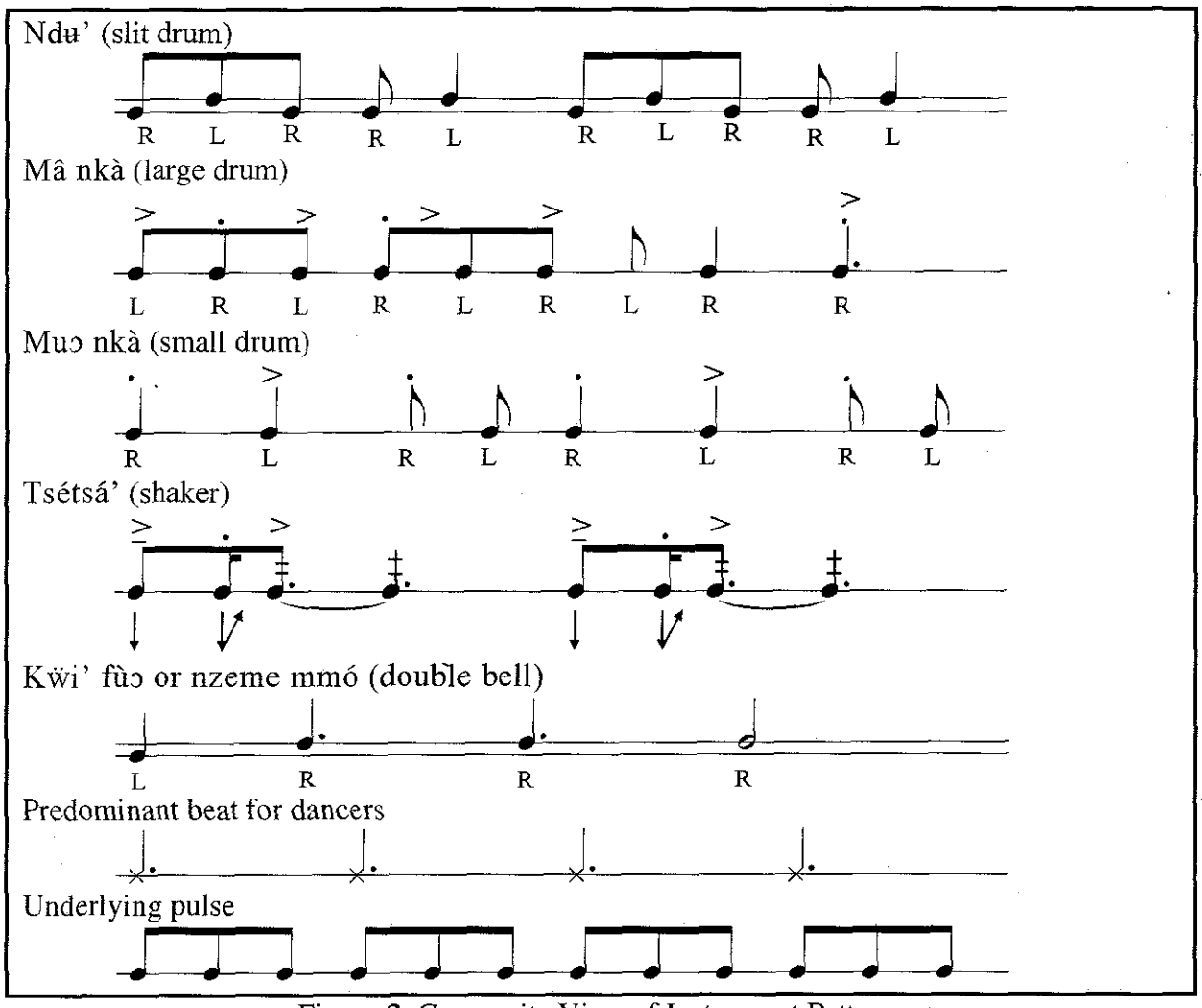


Figure 2. Composite View of Instrument Patterns

Non-metric Instruments. In addition to the percussion instruments described above, three other sound producing objects play important roles in the performance of a kanɔɔn dance: the wooden méshʉa vertical whistle, the metal whistle (*sifflet*, referred to in French), and pairs of machetes (*nnĕ*). The méshʉa can produce two pitches, normally a minor third apart (F# and A, G# and B, F and G# – from instruments on three DAKASBA recordings), controlled by covering or uncovering two small holes on the side of the instrument. It is used as a signal for dancers to congregate and begin dancing, and sounds throughout the performance as a symbolic call to arms; proficient performers can produce a piercing timbre. The metal whistle, manufactured for use in refereeing sporting events, produces one pitch, and is used in part to signal the beginning of a new song or dance step.

In addition to their clear historical signification of the kanɔɔn dance's warrior roots, dancers also exploit machetes to produce sonic and visual signs of power.

Robert TIDO playing méshʉa

Throughout a performance, dancers will occasionally meet in a mock, stylized battle interaction. In this simulated skirmish, two dancers approach each other with machetes raised in their right hands, and then hit them together to make a clang. One of the dancers then moves his machete between the arm and head of the other, into his left hand. The two perform this process twice more. After the third hit, they release each other from their crossed arms by each taking their machete in their left hand and parting. Prosper Djiafeua describes the effect this way:

Stylized Battle Interaction

"Generally, when we cross iron on iron, sparks fly. That shows the power of the group, the warriors. Because if we continue to place ourselves in the logic of the warrior dance, when we have power, the enemy is scared! Sparks fly up! Because today there is no longer war in that sense, this gives a coloration, gestures permit the dance to have a certain *hauteur*, nobility. It accentuates the dance, and differentiates it from a smooth dance like women's dances. This is a virile masculine dance!" (2002 27 July 2002, video dialog; translation mine).

Thus, the non-metric sound producers in the ensemble play functional roles–such as marking movement between sections or calling dancers together–and in evoking associations with warrior themes.

General comments on rhythm. As in many West African percussion ensembles, attending to an individual instrument foregrounds its duple or triple feel, a phenomenon common in the resulting multiple rhythmic gestalt (see Kofi and Neeley 1997:15). Musical roles of individual instruments in this kanɔɔn ensemble, however, contrast markedly from those of other "hot" ensembles in West Africa (Merriam 1958). For example, instead of playing an invariant pattern that serves as a constant reference throughout a song (Kubik 1998:310), the kanɔɔn double bell plays only an accompanying role. Consistent, organized, accurate performance depends, rather, on the chronometric consistency of the muɔ nkà player (Nota and Keula 2003).

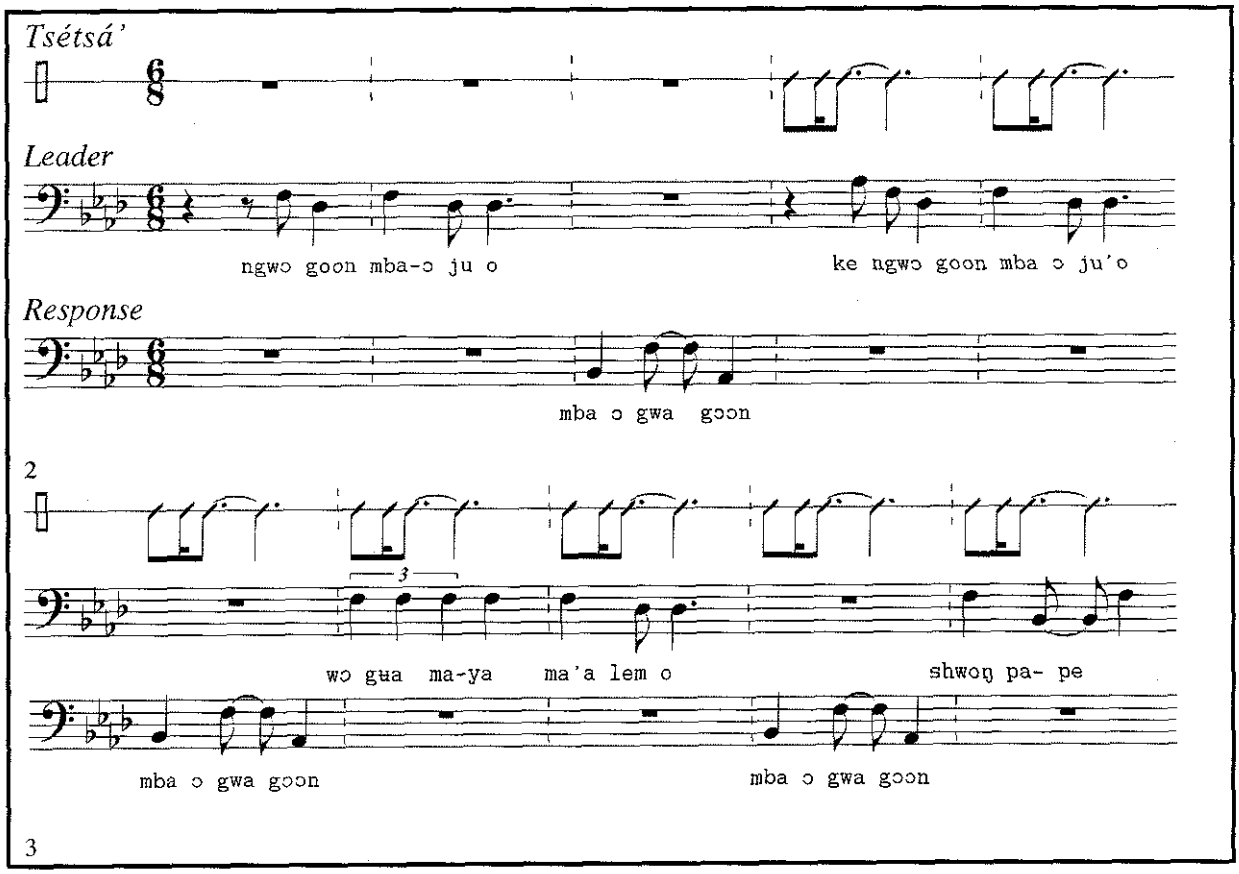
Another observation related to rhythmic production relates to a second bell pattern, audible in CD Excerpt 3:

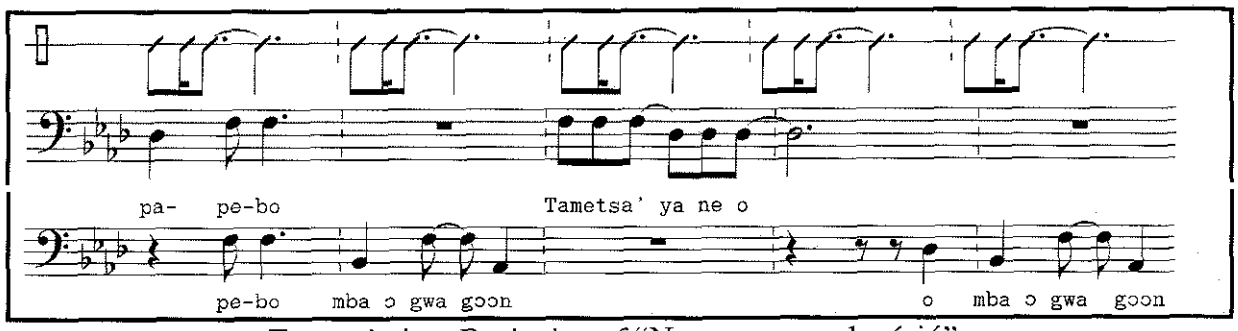
It may well be that this sequence does indeed require less cognitive mastery of the rhythmic organization of the kanɔɔn percussion: it consists only of a three-stroke repetition over six pulses, at the beginning of the time span. As evident in the figure above, this results in soundings concurrent with the beginnings of each of the other rhythmic elements; Nota's first bell pattern covers twelve pulses, and depending on the point in the cycle he beginnings this pattern, it may seldom line up with the other sequences.

Song structure. Each song that DAKASBA members perform consists of an individual call marked by various degrees of improvisation, and an essentially uniform

response by the rest of the members. This improvisatory freedom allows him to show his capabilities, to vaunt himself. Thus, for example, he may sing words or phrases in several languages, to demonstrate his mastery of poetic language. Structurally, the leader's improvised texts in this corpus last longer than the response in four of the sixteen songs in this corpus, shorter in nine, and take up the same amount of time in three. Overlap between calls and their responses may take several forms. First, the caller may anticipate his entry point, intoning a vocable a few pulses before the response is completed (as in song 10). Second, the responders may anticipate their entry point by joining the caller at the end of his section (song 12, shown in system three of the transcription below; CD Excerpt 2). Finally, some songs include structural overlap, wherein the call section continues into the response (songs 2 and 5).

In the transcription below, I present a short excerpt from the DAKASBA song on which I based the rhythm discussion above. I've used a modified form of Western European notation, which requires only a few explanatory comments. First, the key signature does not imply a diatonic or other scale with concomitant roles (e.g., dominant, sub-dominant); the flats simply describe the notes' positions in relation to each other in aural space. Second, the time signature does not imply that notes falling on specific beats will be expected to express certain accents, as they would in some music with roots in European art music. Third, the dotted lines demarcate the time span, and should not be read as measures. Finally, my purpose in including this transcript is to give a glimpse of the structure and time organization of a song. I have thus not notated slight variations in pitch or vocal timbre. CD Excerpt 2 is the out-of-context recording of the three DAKASBA members from which I produced this transcription. CD Excerpt 3 is another recording of the same song, with the entire group performing.





Transcription. Beginning of "Ngwɔ goon mba ɔ́ jú"
(CD Excerpts 2 and 3)

A translation of a portion of the lyrics follows:

Ngwɔ goon mba ɔ́ jú' oo	Don't speak unless you've understood
mba ɔ gwǎ gɔɔn	Why have you spoken?
Ké ngwɔ goon mba ɔ́ jú' oo	Don't speak unless you've understood
mba ɔ gwǎ gɔɔn	Why have you spoken?
Wɔ̌ gua maya ma'a lem oo	Who will announce our news to Maya?
mba ɔ gwǎ gɔɔn	Why have you spoken?
Shwoŋ pape papéb oo	Tell our companions
mba ɔ gwǎ gɔɔn	Why have you spoken?
Tametsa' ya né oo	Tametsa saw
mba ɔ gwǎ gɔɔn	Why have you spoken?
Wɔ̌ lɔg pan ngÿe ma'a lem oo	Who will raise the torch of ??
mba ɔ gwǎ gɔɔn	Why have you spoken?
Njÿo mejwŏŋ nê ju' oo	Chomejoung is listening.

Excerpt from "Ngwɔ goon mba ɔ́ jú"
(choral response indented)

Movement and Space

Performers and instruments interact in regular patterns in a kanɔɔn day phase performance. Area One, the most central in Figure 3 below, is occupied by the mâ nkà, muɔ nkà, ndu', méshua, and their players. All performers except that of the mâ nkà remain at their instruments during a presentation; the improvising mâ nkà player has freedom to roam periodically in close proximity to his drum. In Area Two, the song leader, kẅi' fùɔ player, and méshua players stand or move in approximate coordination with the dancers in Area Three; the song leader and the kẅi' fùɔ player may be one and the same. Area Two also seems to be a space where individual dancers may improvise. As in many Ngiemboɔn dances, kanɔɔn dancers rotate slowly around the two inner spaces–in what I here describe as Area Three–while performing various ancillary movements with their feet; most dancers simultaneously play a tsétsá'. Some steps are associated with particular songs and help to mark transitions between the songs.

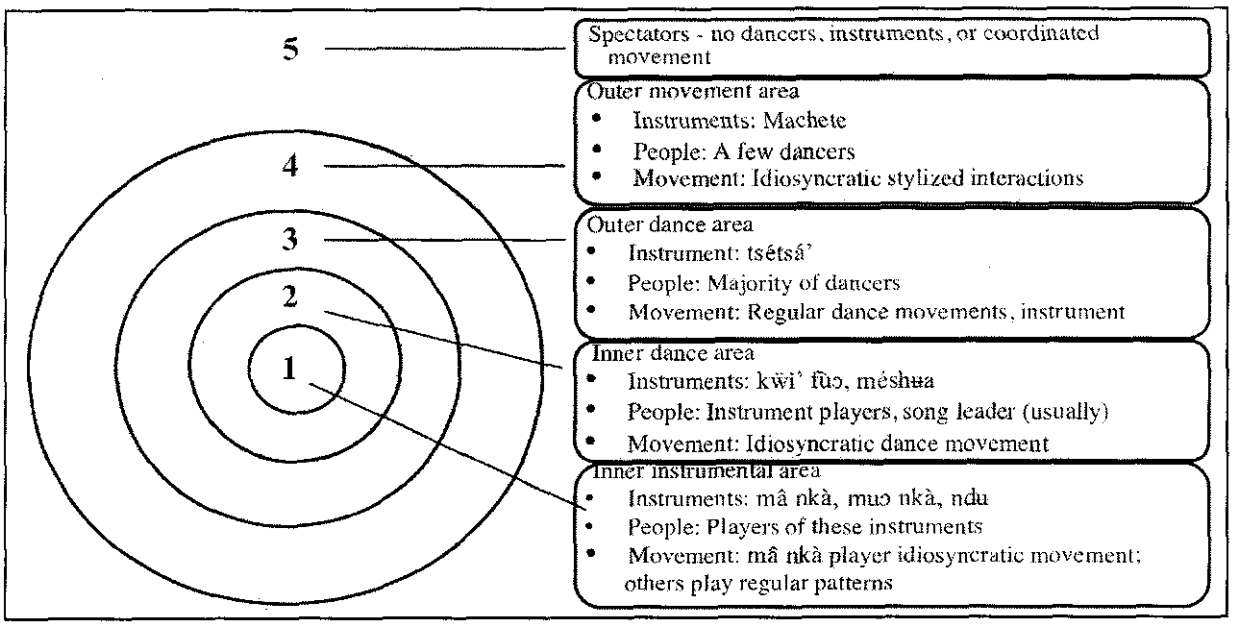


Figure 3. Division of Space at a Kanɔɔn Performance

In Area Four, outside the regular circular movement of the majority of dancers, single and paired dancers periodically remove themselves to engage in stylized interactions. An individual may exit the dance circle to hit his machete on a wall or other solid object, in order to make a loud sound. This is also the space in which dancers meet in the mock battles I describe above. Though all of the areas are permeable–and there is frequent movement between spaces–spectators (Area Five) seldom enter into the dancing areas.

In a night performance, association members build a fire next to the inner percussion ensemble. The fire becomes the site of several activities not performed during the day, including acts of courage–climbing on top of the flaming brands, for example–and the cooking of a chicken, symbolic reference to historical spoils of war.

Song Texts

In order to hear lyrics and melodies clearly, I here rely on the out-of-context recordings of the sixteen-song corpus produced by Bernard Melataya, Prosper Djiafeua, and Jean Pierre Tametsa (2002). Ferdinand Doumtsop transcribed the song texts, translated them into French, and provided some commentary.

Muntu References. Lyrics of the sixteen songs that comprise DAKASBA's current repertoire refer by name to numerous people, both living and dead. The improvising caller in one song, for example, invokes names eleven times (some are repeated), constituting over half of his singing time (CDNG02-01:07). Among those mentioned in the songs are living members of DAKASBA, living and dead fons of Batcham, fons important in the distant history of the Ngiemboɔn people, and figures related to the development of the kanɔɔn dance.

The muntu chosen by the kanɔɔn song leaders reflect and reinforce two of the foundational characteristics of Bamiléké cultures. First, they call on authority figures–royalty and gods, both living and dead; these focus on hierarchical relationships. Second, the list contains people related to kanɔɔn. This does not refer exclusively–or even primarily–to the dance itself, but to the lùŋ, the group that performs the dance and helps each other; here, the focus is on solidarity relationships. People whose social roles contain major elements of both hierarchy and solidarity bring the imprimatur of an authority figure to bear on DAKASBA. The group must pay homage to the current authorities, but can gain even higher authority by

appealing to respected chiefs who originally brought kanɔɔn to Batcham. Figure 4 presents this analysis.

Name	Description	Living/ dead	Hierarchy Focus	Solidarity Focus
Fuɔ Soŋkwě	Current Fon of Batcham	Alive	√	
Tataŋ	Former chief of Batcham, who died in 2002 after 36 years in power	Dead	√	
Fou Bamoun	An unnamed leader of the Bamoun people	Dead	√	√
Fuɔ Sà'a	Chief of the Batcham community in Yaoundé	Alive	√	
Kěmdoŋ	Renowned dancer in Batcham (Bazinmbab neighborhood)	Dead	√	
Pankẅi nkem ndá'a	Neighborhood chief in Batcham	Alive?	√	
Málem Ndíkún	Warrior who brought kanɔɔn to the Ngiembɔɔn	Dead	√	√
Málem Nkazílí	Warrior who brought kanɔɔn to the Ngiembɔɔn	Dead	√	√
Fÿa Ntèmpfú	Elite from Batcham	Dead 2002	√	
Ti' ngem fuɔ	Tiguemfouo. Tametsa's (singer) mother	Dead	√	
Fùɔ Maya	Name of god at a sacred water flow	Alive	√	
Prosper Nju'áfùa	Special counsel, DAKASBA	Alive		√
Melá'ta'ngyá Bernard	President, Master Choreographer of DAKASBA	Alive		√
Tsinda Moïse	President of honor, DAKASBA	Alive		√
Yimetɯɔ' also known as njÿo mejwóŋ	An influential member of DAKASBA	Alive, living in Douala		√
Tametsa' Jean Pierre	Treasurer, choral master, DAKASBA	Alive		√
Manpla ntɯ'loŋ	A renowned kanɔɔn dancer	Alive, living in Batcham		√
Mɔɔnfuɔ Ti'ndɔ'	A renowned kanɔɔn dancer	Dead		√
Tênjya mbéŋ	Bernard Melataya's father in Batcham	Alive	√	√
Dÿe fùɔ nduaŋa nju'	Famous man in Batcham	Dead	√	
Sakalîɛ Yemnzẅě (Yemze Isaac)	A renowned kanɔɔn dancer in Batcham	Alive	√	
Yesyéb Tangetchɯ	An important merchant	Alive, living in Bafoussam	√	

Figure 4. Muntu Addressed in DAKASBA Songs

The manner in which the singers reference these personalities highlights the fact that regardless of their status as alive or dead, or where they are geographically, they are part of a

process of communication: "Fon Sonkwa is listening," "Tchinda Moïse is listening" (CDNG02-01:02). The exact nature of this communication remains unclear. When I asked two DAKASBA members whether, for example, a dead fon was actually present and listening when they sang his name, they responded negatively (Nota and Keula 2003). For them, he was only present in the sense that his memory remains in their minds. However, traditional beliefs include the continued existence of ancestors and spirits, and their occasional interaction with the living (Ngouana 1983). Furthermore, many people in the closely related cultures of the Northwest Province attest to the presence of ancestors at their death celebrations (Jindra 1997). Thus, I expect that further investigation would reveal a wide range of individual conceptualizations regarding the exact nature of the ancestors' involvement in performance, based on parameters of cosmopolitan and traditional values.

My explicit questions regarding why certain people are called resulted primarily in assertions that those people deserve honor. Djiafeua (2003b) offered a comment that partially unpacks what it means to honor someone: "L'évocation n'est pas gratuite!" ("Calling someone's name isn't a free gift!") In other words, the song leader doesn't have to take anyone else into account when he calls someone's name. He takes stock of where he is and who is there, and invokes the names of the people he feels are most important to the occasion. So in fact, being named in a song attests to the two Bamiléké strains of competition and solidarity, the core tension engendering Bamiléké dynamism. A muntu must *earn* the right to be invoked, but within a highly cohesive social context.

Values Communicated. In addition to transcribing song texts, Ferdinand Doumtsop isolated both direct references to proverbs and other value-rich language, and statements that refer obliquely to Ngiemboon ideals. Many of the songs make explicit reference to the fact that they are communicating advice and warnings to their listeners: "Love each other. Who will take this message to Batcham? Who will take this message to Balena?" (CDNG02-1:02). A brief survey of these themes, most of which I list in Figure 5, reveals an overwhelming emphasis on promulgating attitudes and actions that lead to social harmony:

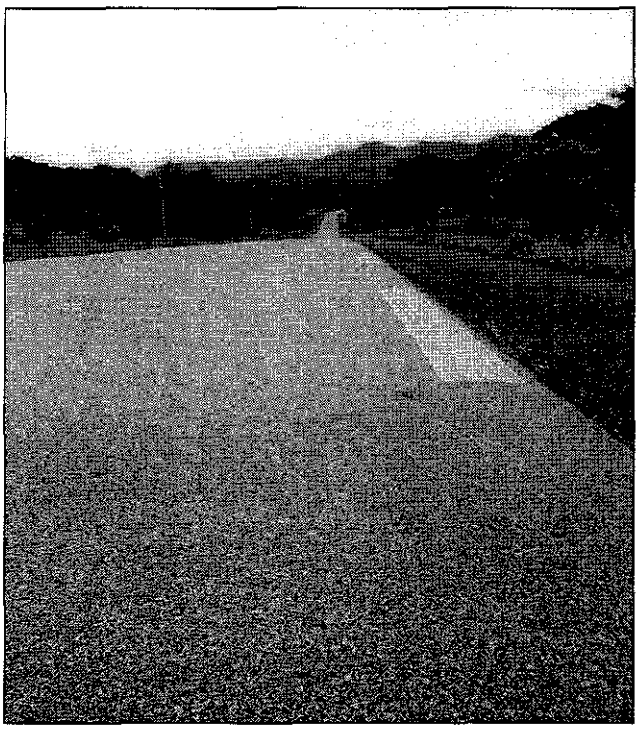
He who detests another's children is bound to suffer.
Everyone is destined to die, so there is no use hating someone else's children.
A friend can be more than a brother. However, friendship can be ephemeral, whereas brotherhood is eternal.
Understanding between people liberates the world.
May the dead have a good voyage to heaven.
Man destroys man.
At least build a house, otherwise you'll be buried in the field.
Share happiness with your brothers, because life has many obstacles.
He who dies leaves orphans.
Human beings are good, and we have many good examples to follow.
If you hate other people's children, you will have a bad end, as will your children.
Everything on earth is destined to die. You can't avoid death.
A person's death should be marked by music and dancing.
There is joy for those born Ngiemboon.
When someone dies, the whole community must take care of those who are left.
What curse caused this death?
Whoever you are, death has no favorites and takes the good as well as the bad.
A person loves his village.
Only the jujube [an *afromomum*, in the family *zingibarcea*], called *ndendum* is the mystical force of the Ngiemboon. It symbolizes peace and simplicity.

Don't do sorcery.
Money brings a curse and misfortune.
Be just and honest, avoid treachery. Give witness only to what you have seen.
Avoid everything that undermines the value of human life.
Avoid AIDS.
Control what you say and you'll live a long time.
Be tolerant.
Don't die angry, or you'll cause curses for your family.

Figure 5. Themes and Proverbs in DAKASBA Songs

Conclusion: Tune and Tarmac as Communicational Infrastructure

In 1926, the French colonial government finished transforming a path between Yaoundé and a point near the Ngiemboɔn region navigable only by foot and mule into a road that motorized vehicles could travel in any season (Dongmo 1981b: 69; Archives Coloniales 2961926). The road from Yaoundé to Bafoussam–about 32 kilometers from the Ngiemboɔn village of Balessing–was paved by1986 (Jindra 2003), and the road from Bafoussam to Balessing by 1988 (Doumtsop 2003). With tarmac roads available up to the southern-most Ngiemboɔn area, DAKASBA members can now complete a trip from Yaoundé to Batcham in less than six hours, for a cost of less than 5000 FCFA.



The Smooth, Solid Road to the Ngiemboɔn Homeland

Like the paths that allowed Ngiemboɔn ancestors to travel to their current home in Cameroon's West Province, and the economically-motivated improvement of roads that now permits frequent movement between urban and rural areas, Ngiemboɔn musical culture provides a symbolic infrastructure that facilitates socially invigorating communication. Kanɔɔn rhythmic patterns provide a consistent aural background upon which song leaders can call out the names of figures germane to the song's message and performance context, in an improvised call-and-response melodic structure. When members of DAKASBA sing exhortations to live in harmony, they open conversational doors to Fon Sonkwa, Fon Bamoun, and other members of their space-time community that provide structural and historical footing.

The New Harvard Dictionary of Music defines resonance as "the large oscillatory response of a system to a weak driving force whose frequency matches precisely one of the natural frequencies of the driven system" (Randall 1986:8). In their improvised calls, DAKASBA singers perform small acts of communication to named symbols of hierarchy and solidarity, within an undercurrent of competition. These symbolically potent personages

respond figuratively or actually in a manner that buttresses the "large oscillatory response" of traditional values and attitudes– the "natural frequencies" vibrating throughout Bamiléké cultural systems. This kind of reciprocal musical communication occurs regularly, in the context of hundreds of Bamiléké dance associations active throughout Cameroon, each of which looks to the soil, structures, and muntu of their home in the West Province as a sacred touchstone. This cannot help but strengthen these cultures' abilities to negotiate the rapid cosmopolitan and modernist changes in the world in which they live. Though certainly not the only medium facilitating communication among Bamiléké communities writ large, musical performance plays a vital role in expanding *le dynamisme bamiléké*.

Appendix: History of Kanɔɔn Dance

Written transcript of audio recording made by Prosper Djiafeua, 9 December 2002.

Ladies and gentlemen, following the songs that you have just listened to, I would like to give you a history of the kanɔɔn dance, as it emerges from Ngiembɔɔn oral tradition.

We can place the birth of the kanɔɔn dance in the Ngiembɔɔn region near the middle of the 19th century. Batcham, Lá'átsɔ́ɔn, is the village where the kanɔɔn dance originated in the Ngiembɔɔn region. This was during the period when the reigning king was Fuɔ Fomekwoŋ Maloŋnzwe, from the dynasty of Fuɔ Patwa, who had founded Lá'átsɔ́ɔn –Batcham– around the middle of the 18th century. Oral tradition reveals that Fuɔ Fomekwoŋ Maloŋnzwe, was a conquering king, expansionistic. His ambition was to extend Lá'átsɔ́ɔn all the way to the Noun River, reputed to separate the Bamiléké people from the Bamoun kingdom. Fuɔ Fomekwoŋ, had cordial, respectful relations with the Sultan of Bamoun, who was also expansionistic.

King Fuɔ Fomekwoŋ wanted to extend his territory all the way to Baleŋ, from Fŭaleŋ in the Menoua, and to the Noun River. It is said that there was a tacit understanding between Fomekwoŋ, Shufwămom, and the Sultan of Bamoun. In order to assuage his thirst for territorial expansion, Fuɔ Fomekwoŋ created an intrepid army. Certain of these warrior leaders, such as Malem Ndikun, Malem Kazili, and Mbĕ Tantɔ' spent a period of time in the Bamoun region, perhaps under agreements between this kingdom and that of Lá'átsɔ́ɔn. The terms "malem" and "mbę" are borrowed from the Bamoun language.

During their stay in the Bamoun country, these leaders adopted the models of life of their hosts, including folk dances and marriage unions. It is even said that these leaders married daughters of Bamoun. Moreover, they learned to enjoy and dance the kanɔɔn, a warrior dance of the Bamoun people.

At the point when they returned to Batcham village, they gave gifts to their hosts so that they would authorize them to export and import the kanɔɔn dance in the Ngiembɔɔn region. People say it might have been balls of couscous, a kind of food highly valued by the Bamoun.

When they arrived back in Lá'átsɔ́ɔn, that is, Batcham, they were welcomed and installed in a camp next to a water course named Zẅiag Zẅiàg below the current Batcham Fon's concession, on the road to Batsẅĕtʉɔ'. It is possible that the camp was a military camp, from whence Fuɔ Fomekwoŋ waged his expansionist battles.

The kanɔɔn dance, as a warrior dance, was the means through which he celebrated his successes. Thus, people recount that after a victory, the warriors returned from the conquest, gathered again around the fire with the spoils of war: goats, pigs, etc., even human heads– they wanted to celebrate all aspects of their victory. They drank and sang, and danced to the rhythm of the kanɔɔn.

Since the time of German colonization, expansionist wars have diminished in intensity. The local army was reduced to silence, and the warriors dispersed in the village. From that instant, kanɔɔn left its essentially warrior nature and acquired a civil status. The former leaders, returned to civil life, created kanɔɔn dance groups, while retaining the archetypical

elements, by which the kanɔɔn still resembles a scene of war. These signs include machetes, the chicken, the mask, the rhythm, the rites that bring together, I would say, this dance from a scene of war.

From a global view, a dance scene begins with a cry to call people together. The same is true at the end. The mask and the chicken, present during the day (the chicken, at night), bring to mind the spoils of war. The fire around which they dance during the night brings to mind the return of the combatants, brought together to celebrate their victory. Thus, we burn the chicken on the braziers or in a basin full of red oil, palm oil. All the dancers, and even some spectators, share the chicken that plays the role of the spoils of war.

Some dancers, up until a recent period, practiced magic during the dance scenes at night, to send away the non-initiated from the area. That is where this expression comes from: "ndendem n náa ngúŋ," "That the neophytes should depart from the circle." Not just anybody can approach the warrior scene.

In our days, the kanɔɔn has become an expression of the Ngiembɔɔn region. At joyful as well as sad ceremonies, at the occasion of wakes, mourning watches, and funerals, the kanɔɔn is present. At celebrations, happy ceremonies, like national holidays, at the return of prodigal sons to their home territories, the kanɔɔn is present. It is danced everywhere in the Ngiembɔɔn region. In Balessing, in Bamougong, in Bangang, in Balatchi. Nevertheless, when you ask for the original kanɔɔn, people will direct you quickly to Lá'átsɔ́ɔn, its birthplace in the Ngiembɔɔn region.

References

Anderson, Stephen C. 1983. "Tone and morpheme rules in Ngyemboon-Bamileke." Ph.D. thesis. University of Southern California.

_____. 1986. "Skulls, gods and revenge in Bamileke." Notes on Anthropology and Intercultural Community Work 5: 24-40.

_____. 2001. "Phonological Characteristics of Eastern Grassfields Languages." In Research Mate in African Linguistics: Focus on Cameroon, edited by Ngessimo M. Mutaka and Sammy B. Chumbow. Köln, Germany: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 33-54.

Anderson, Stephen C. and Moïse Yonta. 2003. Personal communication with author.

Annuaire Statistique du Cameroun 1997. 1998. Yaoundé: Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances.

Archives Colonial 296. 1926. "Rapport Annuel: Chapitre X, Outillage Economique."

Arom, Simha. 1991. African Polyphony and Polyrhythm. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Avorgbedor, Daniel. 1998. "Rural-Urban Interchange: The Anlo-Ewe." In The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Volume 1: Africa, edited by Ruth Stone, 389-399. New York; London: Garland Publishing.

Clarke, Eric F. 1999. "Rhythm and Timing in Music." In The Psychology of Music, 2nd Edition, edited by Diana Deutsch, 473-500. San Diego, London: Academic Press.

Collins, John. 1987. "Jazz Feedback to Africa." American Music 5(2):176-194.

DAKASBA. 2003. Videocassettes DVNG03-07, DVNG03-08. Recorded in Yaoundé, Cameroon, 15 June 2003.

DAKASTUM. 2003. "Règlement intérieur de la DAKASTUM." Unpublished manuscript.

Delarozière, R. 1950. Les Institutions Politiques et Sociales des populations dites Bamiléké. Institut Français d'Afrique Noire.

Deliège, I. 1987. Grouping Conditions in Listening to Music: An Approach to Lerdahl & Jackendoff's Grouping Preference Rules." *Music Perception* 4:325-360.

Desain, P. 1992. "A (De)composable Theory of Rhythm Perception." Music Perception 9:439-454.

Djiafeua, Prosper. 2003a. Interview with author, 7 October 2003, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

_____. 2003b. Interview with author, 23 May 2003, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

_____. 2003c. "Kanɔɔn Historique". On La Danse Kanɔɔn. CD.

_____. 2002a. Interview with author, 28 June 2002, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

_____. 2002b. Interview with author, 2 October 2002, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Dongmo, Jean-Louis. 1981a. Le Dynamisme Bamiléké (Cameroun), vol. 1. La maîtrise de l'espace agraire. Yaoundé, Cameroon: Imprimérie St-Paul.

Dongmo, Jean-Louis. 1981b. Le Dynamisme Bamiléké (Cameroun), vol. 2. La maîtrise de l'espace urbain. Yaoundé, Cameroon: Imprimérie St-Paul.

Doumtsop, Ferdinand. 2002a. "Les Ngiemboon: Introduction et Mode de Vie." Unpublished manuscript.

_____. 2002b. Filmed interview with author, 7 September 2002, Balessing, Cameroon.

Eisler, H. 1976. "Experiments on Subjective Duration 1868-1975: A Collection of Power Punction Exponents." Psychological Bulletin 83:1154-1171.

Fraisse, P. 1982. "Rhythm and Tempo." In The Psychology of Music, edited by Diana Deutsch, 149-180. New York: Academic Press.

_____. 1978. "Time and Rhythm Perception." In Handbook of Perception: Vol. 8, edited by E.C. Carterette and M. P. Friedman., 203-254. New York: Academic Press.

Grimes, Barbara, editor. 2000. Ethnologue:Languages of the World, 14th Edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL.

Hurault, J. 1962. La structure sociale des Bamiléké. Paris, France: PUF.

Jindra, Michael. 2003. Personal communication with the author.

_____. 1997. "The Proliferation of Ancestors: Death Celebrations in the Cameroon Grassfields." Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Jusczyk, P. and Krumhansl, C.L. 1993. "Pitch and Rhythmic Patterns Affecting Infants' Sensitivity to Musical Phrase Structure." Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance 19:627-640.

Ketchoua, Thomas. n.d. Les Peuples de l'Ouest Cameroun en Diaspora Depuis 3000 Ans. Yaoundé, Cameroon: Presses de l'Imprimerie National.

Koetting, James. 1970. "Analysis and Notation of West African Drum Ensemble Music." Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology 1(3). Los Angeles: University of California.

Kofi, Francis and Paul Neeley. 1997. Traditional Dance Rhythms of Ghana. Volume I. Everett, PA: HoneyRock.

Krumhansl, Carol L. 2000. "Rhythm and Pitch in Music Cognition." Psychological Bulletin 126(1):159-179.

Kubik, Gerhard. 1998. "Intra-African Streams of Influence." In The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Volume 1: Africa, edited by Ruth Stone, 293-326. New York; London: Garland Publishing.

Le Chrétien Face aux Funérailles et au Culte d'Actions de Grâces. n.d. Bafoussam, Cameroon: JCV.

Lee, C.S. 1991. "The Perception of Metrical Structure: Experimental Evidence and a Model." In Representing Musical Structure, edited by P. Howell, R. West, and I. Cross, pp. 59-127. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Les Funérailles et le Chrétien. n.d. Bafoussam, Cameroon: Vie Nouvelle Pour Tous.

Loh, Benson. 2003. "Cry Die Songs." Audio Cassette.

Mbuagbaw, Tambi Eyongetah, Robert Brain, and Robin Palmer. 1987. A History of the Cameroon, New Edition. Essex, England: Longman Group.

Melataya, Bernard, Prosper Djiafeua, and Jean Pierre Tametsa. 2002. "Kanɔɔn Songs." Compact Disk (CDNG02-01). Recorded on 27 July 2002, Yaounde, Cameroon.

Merriam, Alan P. 1958. "African Music." In Continuity and Change in African Cultures, edited by William R.l Bascom and Melville Herskovits, 49-86. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mohammadou, Eldridge. 1986. Traditions d'origine des peuples du centre et de l'ouest du Cameroun. Tokyo, Japan: Institute for the study of languages and cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA).

Ndongo, Jacques Fame. 1996. Un regard africain sur la communication : A la découverte de la géométrie circulaire. Yaoundé, Cameroon: Editions St. Paul.

Ngouane, Abbé Michel T. 1983. L'Aperçu Historique du Peuple Ngyemba. Catholic Mission, Small Mankon: Jimmy's Charity Press.

Nketia, Kwabena. 1974. The Music of Africa. New York: Norton.

Nota, Étienne, and Jean Claude Keula. 2003. Interview with author, 30 October.

Parncutt, R. 1994. "A Perceptual Model of Pulse Salience and Metrical Accent in Musical Rhythms." Music Perception 11:409-464.

Petit Dictionnaire- Mûɔmé Ngɔɔn ssé, Ngiemboɔn -Français, Français-Ngiemboɔn. Batcham, Cameroon: Comité de Langue Ngiemboɔn.

Poubom Lamy Ney. 1999. "Les funérailles chez les Bamiléké-Medumba" Echos du Ndé. N° 41 March. Accessed at www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Shores/ 4051/edn/Y99/41_document.htm 11 June 2003.

Povel, Dirk-Jan and Peter Essens. 1985. "Perception of Temporal Patterns." Music Perception 2:411-440.

Racy, Ali Jihad. 1991. "Creativity and Ambience: An Ecstatic Feedback Model from Arab Music." The World of Music 33(3):7-28.

Randel, Don Michael. 1986. The New harvard Dictionary of Music. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Sa'a, Elvis Tangwa. 1999. "'Je Parle, Donc, Je Suis.' Décodage des Signes Profanes et Ésotériques de la Communication dans la Tradition Africaine." Bulletin Arbres, Forêts et Communautés Rurales no. 17: 46-50.

Signing, Father Martinon, S.A.. 2002. Interview with author, July 21, 2002.

Tiozang, David. 2002-2003. Interviews with author.

Turino, Thomas. 2000. Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

_____. 1993. Moving Away From Silence: Music of the Peruvian Altiplano and the Experiment of Urban Migration. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

"Obsèques: Un commerce qui rapporte 'à mort'." 11 January 2002. Cameroon Tribune.

Watzlawick, Paul, Janet Bevin-Bavelas, and Don D. Jackson. 1967. Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes. New York: Norton.

Wiener, Norbert. 1948. Cybernetics . New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Yemmene, Patrice. 2002. Personal communication with author.

Yonta, Moïse. 2002. Interview with author, 9 July 2002, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

_____, editor. 2001. Manuel pour lire et écrire la langue ngiemboon, 4th edition, by Stephen C. Anderson and Juliette Anderson. Yaoundé, Cameroon: CABTAL.