

*Journey of Song: Public Life and Morality in Cameroon*. Clare A. Ignatowski. 2006. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. xv. 223 pp., 36 black and white photographs, maps, bibliography, index.

What do we gain from an earnest, highly nuanced, theory-drenched analysis of song that pays scant attention to musical sound? A great deal. What do we miss? Though silence is a notoriously slippery basis from which to argue, I found that Ignatowski's *Journey of Song* left me dissatisfied in some important ways. Clare Ignatowski, an anthropologist at the United States Agency for International Development, first entered the Tupuri region of northern Cameroon in the mid-1980s as a Peace Corps volunteer. When she returned in 1996 and 1997 to perform research for a PhD in anthropology (University of Pennsylvania), she focused her attention on the *gurna* dance society.

Each year at sorghum harvest time, Tupuri village leaders mark out physical camps and convoke groups of men who – during the nine-month dry season that follows – commune and fatten themselves on cow milk. These groups, called *gurna*, align themselves with a composer, and learn the 70 or more verses of the song that he and a coterie of secret agents and couriers have created. The groups normally perform these songs at funeral celebrations that occur during the dry season, months or years after an individual's death.

Ignatowski relies on interviews marked by journalistic tenacity, dialogic review of performance videorecordings, and analysis of *gurna* song texts to explore negotiations of social and conceptual categories through and between individual, ethnic, and national views of Tupuri life. The first chapter theoretically grounds the following nine in this post-structuralist approach. Chapters 2 through 4 contain discussions of *waywa* youth songs, a *gurna* dance movement, and the *gurna* society as a multifaceted institution. Ignatowski then examines *gurna* song in terms of the processes surrounding its composition (Chapter 5), rhetorical conventions of its song lyrics (Chapter 6), the social construction of its composers (Chapter 7), the roles that insult in *gurna* song lyrics play in relation to local and national politics (Chapter 8), and how composers appropriate vocabulary from national Cameroonian political discourse to frame and strengthen political processes unique to Tupuri society (Chapter 9). Chapter 10 contains reflections on why *gurna* continues to flourish, despite the encroachment of national cultural practices. Two brief examples from Ignatowski's narrative illustrate the kinds of insights her approach yields.

In Chapter 4, Ignatowski describes a body movement in which one dancer advances menacingly toward spectators, stops, verbally taunts them, and then rejoins his circling colleagues. Ignatowski's compelling analysis shows how the dancer crafts his physical movements and vocal improvisation into far-reaching, convention-inverting critiques of alcohol, state schooling, and non-farming careers.

In an intriguing chapter entitled, "Telephone of the Dance," Ignatowski describes

the fascinating process through which a composer gathers gossip and stories through a network of village-based secret agents as fodder for his annual *gurna* composition. The composer ultimately decides what stories he wants to include in the song, but he controls neither the motives that his informants might have for providing certain gossip, nor the raconteurs who “leak” information to further their own interests. In the end, he builds his song with the high-minded goal of morally correcting and directing the Tupuri community, but is inevitably ignorant of the background and import of much of what he creates. Like the initiator of a viral bloom on the Internet, someone far from the composer can provide substance to further his or her own agenda, and make it part of the larger discourse provided by the song.

When Ignatowski first boldly approached men in a *gurna* camp with a request – “Teach me the song!” (p. 98) – she began the meticulous, painstaking process of gathering song texts for translation and analysis. However, she didn’t learn to sing the songs or analyse musical features; she devotes only a few lines to the musical form of songs (p. 129). In addition, no audio or video recordings accompany the book. Beginning with Seeger’s warnings about the dancing-about-architecture dangers in writing about music, and Mantle Hood and Alan Merriam’s debates on the benefits of bimusicality, ethnomusicologists have frequently grappled with relationships between music, language, and research. How might involvement in and attention to musical sound have added to Ignatowski’s and our understanding of Tupuri song and dance?

Two observable weaknesses immediately come to mind. First – and rather self-evidently – more musical consideration would have led to more accurate, interesting insights into Tupuri musical practice and forms. Compared to her thick, nuanced descriptions of social phenomena, Ignatowski’s treatment of musical sound and dance sometimes appears superficial and impressionistic (“line dances, similar to the drill teams of African-American girls in the U.S.” (p. 90); “...the competence of the bandleader directing from within the bowels of the dance, the throbbing of the drums...” (p. 119). These characterisations run the risk of evoking clumsy stereotypes of African music. Second, I noticed two errors related to broader discourses of musical performance in Cameroon. For example, Ignatowski mistakenly attributes the popular Cameroonian musical genre, *makossa*, to the Beti ethnic group in central Cameroon; it actually emerged from traditional Duala song forms on the Atlantic coast.

These relatively minor defects led me to speculate on how *Journey of Song* might be improved more substantively by attention to music. The improvements this imagined future brings stem from musicking’s phenomenological richness. For one, it would have resulted in a deeper, broader range of insights into songs as communicational infrastructure. Melody and movement shape lyrics in time and aural space, adding myriad parameters that singers and listeners can draw on to make meaning; the Tupuri language encodes multiple grammatical and lexical distinctions with tone (personal communication with linguist Jim Erickson), creating a rich stew of compositional and interpreta-

tional possibilities. The analysis of texts as timeless words in a notebook alone cannot expose playful tensions between melodic formulae and lexical connotations, ironic musical quotes, or a ripe emotion that a lengthened syllable at the end of a melodic phrase might evoke.

Attention to and including musical sound would also have resulted in more pleasure and connection for readers. I yearn to hear the songs, the sounds that so clearly impress and motivate both the Tupuri people and this American anthropologist. I regret the institutional or logistical factors that muffled the sound in this presentation of Tupuri song, and hope that Ignatowski can augment her excellent work through partnered research with consultants capable of musical analysis in the future.

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*Baakisimba: Gender in the Music and Dance of the Baganda People of Uganda*. Sylvia A. Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2005. 294 pp., 13 figures, 19 plates. New York: Routledge (Current Research in Ethnomusicology Series). Jennifer C. Post, series editor.

*Baakisimba* is a style of choral dance music from Uganda that involves male and female performers. It appears to have originated from communal festivities, and its name derives from a phrase which refers to the cultivation of bananas, a staple food from which beer is also made.

This book describes the interaction between gender, musical culture and various political and social patterns. In particular, the material, musical and behavioural components of *baakisimba* are shown to participate in the shaping of gender relations. Ultimately, they are revealed as affirming as well as contesting patriarchal culture.

A lengthy introduction posits theoretical frameworks that link music and dance, and address issues of gender identity. Methodological concerns also receive attention. The author in particular analyzes her status as cultural insider. Her conclusion is that this status is contradictory. It obviously offers a form of nuanced insider knowledge. Nannyonga-Tamusuza not only is a performer and teacher of *baakisimba*, but, as a Luganda speaker, also has relatively easy access to her informants. These informants are allowed to speak for themselves, and their observations provide valuable insight into the complexities of social behaviour and its ideological foundations. However, the obvious challenge to such insider knowledge is that it does not necessarily ensure insight. The author consequently explains her need to bridge the distinction between knowing and understanding. Interaction with cultural outsiders forced her to acknowledge and then consider the actual sexual significance of *baakisimba* music. Thus, "It was [...] by distancing myself from my culture and using a different lens to understand *baakisimba* that I could think critically about this dance in relation to issues of gender and sexuality" (p. 35). In addition, her status as Christian impacted on her relations with informants as well, especially in the sense that it impeded her in gathering information about older