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*Journey of Song: Public Life and Morality in Cameroon.* Clare A. Ignatowski, 2006. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 21 illustrations b&w, maps, bibliography, index, 233 pp.

How is identity performed and shaped in a public setting? In *Journey of Song*, Clare Ignatowski examines the ways in which the Tupuri community in northern Cameroon negotiates morality and politics through song and dance, using coded language to “speak” to one another and form public opinion. Ignatowski’s book primarily focuses on the *gurna*, a Tupuri dance that involves the establishment of temporary communities of performers on the outskirts of town during the nine-month dry season. Though *gurna* celebrations are traditionally held to honour the passing of the dead, Ignatowski came to understand the *gurna*’s active role in facilitating the formation of Tupuri morality and community identity during her time in Cameroon. Her ethnography is based on song collection and interviews in both rural and urban Cameroon, focusing especially on *gurna* bush camp performers and song composers. Ignatowski chooses to analyse the *gurna* in particular not only because it is a clearly identifiable “Tupuri” practice, but also because the Tupuri themselves identify the *gurna* as a tradition that represents ideal Tupuri personhood in which community values are publicly displayed.

In her Introduction, Ignatowski outlines her methodological approach to Tupuri song and dance, drawing on theories by Jürgen Habermas, Peter Geschiere, and Sharon Hutchinson in her examination of the construction of communal moral values in the public sphere. She argues that song serves as a particularly potent method through which moral values are communicated because “voices are given a certain [poetic] license to speak in ways not permitted in everyday society” (8). The poetic license in such songs allows their composers and performers to reveal scandalous information about members of the community in the form of verbal chastisements and insults. Song also emerges as a platform through which *gurna* members debate issues of morality, which is one of the central pillars of Ignatowski’s study. The debates surrounding morality in Tupuri society often have to do with increasing modernisation, raising questions about the future of young Tupuris and Tupuri traditions. The notion of song as a “sanctioned site of social discipline and pedantry” certainly finds relevance in communities outside the Tupuri in Cameroon. The methodological framework constructed by Ignatowski serves as a particularly useful and widely applicable contribution of her study as a whole.

Ignatowski examines the ways in which song and dance operate within Tupuri culture in Chapters Two through Four, expanding her scope beyond the *gurna* celebrations to include other musical genres. The three major song genres collected and studied are divided into the following categories: the *gurna* (songs widely distributed and performed by *gurna* members at death celebrations), the *waywa* (shorter satirical songs composed and performed by young men detailing social transgressions of community members), and the *leele* (bawdy tunes performed by married women at wakes, funerals, and parties). In a particularly compelling case study in Chapter Two, Ignatowski describes how *waywa* songs express male anxieties around courtship and

female independence through the example of Maïtené. Maïtené is a Tupuri woman whose defiant acts against Tupuri traditions (including her refusal to marry and her participation in the opposing political party) led her to become both humiliated and immortalised through song; songs performed so frequently that Maïtené herself sometimes attended. Through song Maïtené became a living emblem of the association between femininity, modernity, and sexual licentiousness.

The origins and significance of the *gurna* society is presented in Chapter Three, in which Ignatowski argues that the *gurna* extends beyond temporary camps in rural villages and has found modern iterations in urban areas. The maintenance and adaptation of the *gurna* is due to its function as a symbol of Tupuri solidarity and identity, formed in large part by the masculine networks of friendship established across clan lines during the yearly celebrations. Ignatowski argues that through these male-dominated *gurna* networks Tupuri men are able to wield their influence over funerary celebrations (the traditional focus of the *gurna*), the socialisation of youth (spending part of their childhood in *gurna* communities), and courtship (since by participating in the *gurna* young women present themselves as eligible for marriage). In Chapter Four, Ignatowski examines modern/traditional and local/national dichotomies. In her analysis of improvisational songs and dances, Ignatowski identifies *gurna* performers' active defiance of modernity through the ritual fattening of their bodies, their valorisation of farming, and their critiques of the modern educational system. Throughout Chapters Two through Four, Ignatowski illustrates how social control and commentary are expressed through song and dance, allowing the reader to understand exactly *why* an analysis of the *gurna* is an effective means of revealing practices of morality within Tupuri society.

In Chapters Five through Nine, Ignatowski examines the ways in which *gurna* songs contribute to notions of prestige and dominance between men and villages. Chapter Five examines the flow of information (a "telephone of dance") about village happenings from *gurna* composers to listeners. Through Ignatowski's personal experience in collecting and translating songs, she came to recognise that many *gurna* songs were highly reliant on prior knowledge of village news but that "regardless of the various levels of comprehension of listeners, the song nevertheless operated as a cohesive public sphere, especially when one considers the circulation of gossip and commentary on the song that occurs outside the performance domain" (103). Ignatowski writes that the information transmitted through song serves as both a means of building solidarity among villages and a means of creating rivalry as *gurna* composers compete against one another for recognition. Such rivalries are examined in Chapter Six, in which Ignatowski carefully analyses the lyrics of *gurna* songs and identifies five major rhetorical forms: praise/greeting, dance meta-commentary, insult, humour/ridicule, and social commentary. Ignatowski importantly argues that songs take on different meanings in different contexts: *gurna* songs are not only performed but also passed along as texts among *gurna* members and circulated as gossip among villages. At the centre of all *gurna* songs are their composers, and in Chapter Seven Ignatowski explores

the competition culture among these composers. In competing for legitimacy among other *gurna* composers, each individual utilises the social power of localised “dynasties”, magical herbs during the composition process, and strategic construction and erasure of their persona through lyrics. Ignatowski argues that the poetic license and sanctity of song usually extended to *gurna* composers (a notion presented in her Introduction) has been threatened by the expanded national judicial system and the risk of being brought to court on the charge of libel, again revealing the modern/traditional and local/national tensions present in many aspects of *gurna* culture. Such tensions are laid bare in Chapter Eight in which Ignatowski explores the dampening effect the national judicial system has on verbal abuse and insult in *gurna* songs. Chapter Nine further examines the ways in which *gurna* songs are embedded within the political Tupuri landscape, utilising language surrounding the national conversation about democracy in commenting on local changes in culture, morality, and politics.

Throughout her book, Ignatowski quotes selected song lyrics that cast into high relief the variety of moralities at play within Tupuri society. Case studies such as that of Maïtené are carefully chosen, though one cannot help but wish for an appendix of the songs Ignatowski compiled during her time in Cameroon. Such an appendix could facilitate further studies on the politics and moralities embedded within Tupuri song lyrics, potentially useful for a wide variety of ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and sociologists. Perhaps an appendix to the e-book could also include audio or video recordings of such performances since, as Ignatowski herself writes, the verbal, kinesthetic, and visual components of the *gurna* are integral to its understanding. Ignatowski tantalisingly informs us in the Introduction that she had videotaped performances while in Cameroon, and one can only hope that such resources are made available in the future.

*Journey of Song* serves as a wonderful study of how community identity and systems of morality are formed through public performance. Ignatowski’s methodological framework (balanced by vivid and heartwarming descriptions of her time in Cameroon) is applicable for a wide variety of scholars including ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, sociologists, and historians. The core argument of Ignatowski’s book, that morality and politics are negotiated and played out through public performance, finds resonance throughout time and space and allows the reader to question the performative aspects of religion, ritual, and everyday life. In the Conclusion, Ignatowski leaves the reader with important and thought-provoking questions about the longevity of traditional practices in an increasingly modernised and globalised world. What will happen to the *gurna* as young Tupuris leave their small towns for opportunities in more urban areas? If the *gurna* functions to construct and maintain community identity, how will it respond to changes in the very concept of community brought on by increased globalisation? Will traditions like the *gurna* change, or will they gradually disappear?

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