THE SAMBLA XYLOPHONE:
TRADITION AND IDENTITY IN BURKINA FASO

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ABSTRACT

The Sambla are a small ethnic group nestled in a hilly region of western Burkina Faso, West Africa, who play a xylophone called the baan. Played by three musicians simultaneously on a single instrument, the baan accompanies all ritual, work, and recreational activities that require music in Sambla life, and it can be considered the principal Sambla musical instrument. They acquired the instrument from the Tusia, a neighboring ethnic group with whom they have long shared friendly relations as well as kinship and military alliances. In the late 19th century, two Tusia musicians migrated into Sambla country with their xylophone, after which the Sambla adapted the instrument and music to suit their needs and transformed it into a unique tradition.

The Sambla’s acceptance and adaptation of the xylophone can be viewed as the latest step in the formation of their ethnic identity. The Sambla as an ethnic group were formed by a series of processes that began when they separated from another ethnic group, became geographically isolated, and began to absorb various foreign people, practices, and belief systems into their community, unifying themselves by their link to the land under a sacred earth chief. The creation of the baan tradition was another step in their process of identity creation, as it became an essential element to all ritual and social events and the center of Sambla musical life.

Music of the baan is complex and multifaceted, and it employs a speech surrogate system that is capable of extemporaneous speech both within the performance of a song and during interludes between songs in which a spectator
engages in conversation with the soloist, who responds with musical speech on the 

*baan*. The speech surrogate mimics the tonal and rhythmic contour of spoken 

Sambla, and it must also fit within the melodic and modal context of the particular 

song in which the speech is played. The tonal, modal, and multi-dimensional 

rhythmic and metric facets of the music are explored in the musical analysis.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program, administered through the United States Department of Education, for funding my field research in Burkina Faso for this project. I am also grateful for the use of the research facilities while in Burkina Faso at the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique et Technique (C.N.R.S.T.) in Ouagadougou, the resources at the Ouagadougou chapter of the Société International de Linguistique (SIL), and the enormously helpful assistance of Paré Dieudonné, André Prost and the rest of the staff at the bibliothèque in the Centre d’Etudes Economiques et Sociales de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (CESAO) in Bobo-Dioulasso.

During the period of my language study in preparation for my departure for Burkina Faso, I received two summers of financial support from the Title VI Foreign Language Area Studies fellowship (FLAS), also administered by the United States Department of Education, to study Bamana in the Summer Cooperative African Language Institute (SCALI) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2001 and Michigan State University in 2002. This language instruction was invaluable preparation for my field research, and my first Bamana instructor, Karim Traore, eventually became one of my dissertation committee members and most valued mentors throughout my research and writing process.

Thanking every person in Burkina Faso who assisted in some way with this study would be an impossible task. Among the Sambla alone, I can only name a handful of the individuals who I saw on a regular basis. As one can imagine, in a
small community of fourteen villages, everyone knew about the white American woman who came for a year and a half to learn the xylophone, while my ability to remember all of their names and faces is spotty at best.

First and foremost I must thank all of the members of the Diabate family, immediate and extended: my teacher Sadama, his brother Mamdou in Vienna who facilitated the relationship in the first place, and his younger brother Seydou, who assisted in my lessons by filling in the third part, gave me lessons on the Jula balañ, and showed me how a young, intensely talented musician with no formal education is able to find his way in life in urban Africa. All of the musicians in the village also contributed to my education, through both direct conversation and observation of their playing: Sifogobo, Sabwē, and Cemogo Diabate, and all of the wives and children living in baanberenjira, the home base of the Diabate xylophone clan in Torønso. My fondest memories of Burkina Faso are from the times I spent with them in the village.

As for the other Sambla, Samadou Coulibaly, an uncle to the Diabate xylophonists who is not a musician and is admittedly ignorant of the type of musical knowledge I sought, was an indispensable research assistant, interpreter, language instructor, and friend. All of the ka kan clan of Traores contributed greatly to my understanding of Sambla music, especially the late, great Tene. Of course the other great clan of Sambla xylophonists, the Konates of Konkolikan, were my research counterpart to the Diabates. I thank everyone who played in the fêtes I attended and took the time to speak with me, especially the elder musicians Sa-Kɔnɔ and Fie-Siŋi.
Special thanks must go to the village chiefs who took the time to speak with me and answer my questions: Alexis Traore, chief of Karankaso, the administrative center of Sambla country, and the village chief of Bwènde, Sa-Ndoga Traore and his brother Martin. Every individual who took the time to sit and speak with me, showed patience as I struggled to navigate interviews in fragments of Sambla, Jula, and French with Samadou’s aid as interpreter, and most importantly for opening up to me and sharing information about themselves and their families: Fie-Siï Konate, Sa-Kɔnɔn Konate, Si Traore, and Tene Traore (rest in peace, ala ka hine taabaa la).

There are so many other Sambla who contributed to my research and stay in Burkina, who hosted me, fed me, and made me feel welcome. I am truly indebted to all of them for creating the experiences I had there.

I owe an eternal debt of gratitude Andreas Szabo, who initially helped orchestrate my connection with the Sambla in general and the Diabates in particular. He also greatly assisted me as cultural arbiter and sounding board for all of the frustrations I experienced during my stay in Burkina.

My advisor at Welseyan, Eric Charry, has given me unrelenting support and encouragement, helped broaden my perspectives, and as the constructive skeptic, made me work for every last conclusion I made in this process. Mark Slobin, another committee member and valued professor, known for his laconic style and nonchalant insights that somehow end up turning everything I thought I knew upside down. I thank the rest of my professors at Wesleyan and elsewhere who have helped me through this long, involved process. I would like to mention Karim Traore here
again, my first Bamana instructor, who has offered an invaluable perspective as a scholar whose specialty is not music, a Burkinabe who has lived most of his life in the Western academy, and a great friend with whom I have spent many hours talking over drinks, fleshing out my ideas, and working through my experiences in Africa into something concrete and relevant to the rest of my life.

The support of my family must also be mentioned, who may not necessarily understand the demands and time that is required to take on and complete a project such as this, but who have patiently supported me in more ways that I could count. Thanks also to all of my friends at Wesleyan, especially those who participated in regular dissertation-writing meetings, gave me helpful feedback to my work, and saved my sanity on many occasions with much-needed distractions and opportunities to let off steam. Special thanks to the entire staff at Eli Cannon’s.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of my colleagues, especially those who have been there in the latter stages of my writing. Thanks especially to David Locke at Tufts for his feedback, support, and kind encouragement, and Michael Veal at Yale, for his friendship, patience, and invaluable advice, without which I may not have actually finished any of this. Thanks also to all of others who have helped me throughout this process in one way or another: the Inter-Library Loan staff at the Wesleyan library, Alec McLane and everyone at Scores and Recordings and the World Music archives, and all of my colleagues from the Spring 2007 voyage of Semester at Sea. It’s an experience none of us will forget, and the travels, hardships, joys, and constant new discoveries from that short but life-changing
journey will continue to affect the way I approach my work, teaching, research, and relationships for the rest of my life.

I also gratefully acknowledge everyone with whom I have played music throughout my graduate studies: Anthony Braxton, Abraham Adzenyah, Pak Sumarsam and Harjito, Charlie Looker and Lavender, WeSteel and Pandemonium, David Locke, Evan Ziporyn and Gamelan Galak Tika, and the Boston Village Gamelan. I certainly can’t forget the contributions of the Arizona crew, either: Ted Solis and his Mexican marimba ensemble (anticipated bass seems so simple now), Joe Bayana and the South African marimba players in Harare, Mark Sunkett and all of his guidance through my first real steps into the world of ethnomusicology, research in Africa, and always valuing music and performance through it all. Playing music is one of the few things that have maintained my sanity throughout the arduous trials and tribulations of graduate school and the dissertation-writing process. Finally, I’d like to thank Ian Gendreau for always being there and staying with me to the end, putting up with it all, and still remaining someone who can always be counted on.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Track</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>“Baan San So”</td>
<td>07:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recorded: 3/9/03 at a funeral fête in Konkolikan (S: Taako); soloist: Si-Fogobo Diabate; bass: Go Diabate; acc: Siaka Diabate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>“Nogo So” (all)</td>
<td>01:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recorded: 6/12/03; solo: Julie Strand, bass: Seydou Diabate, accompaniment: Sadama Diabate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>“Nogo So” (acc/bass)</td>
<td>00:43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recorded: 6/12/03; bass: Seydou Diabate, acc: Sadama Diabate Deviation from transcription: added LH bass and no RH solo</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>“Koko So” (all)</td>
<td>02:50</td>
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<td>Recorded: 6/13/03; solo: Sadama, bass: Seydou, acc: JS</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>“Mini Soko Ke Soenê” (all)</td>
<td>02:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Recorded: 6/12/03; solo: Sadama, bass: JS, acc: Seydou</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>“Mini Soko Ke Soenê” (solo)</td>
<td>00:41</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solo pattern introduced by solo melodic introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>“Mini Soko Ke Soenê” (acc.)</td>
<td>00:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acc. pattern introduced by solo melodic introduction</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>“Mini Soko Ke Soenê” (bass)</td>
<td>00:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bass pattern introduced by solo melodic introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>“Sikemë Dondo” (all)</td>
<td>01:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recorded 6/13/03; solo: Sadama, bass: Seydou, acc: JS</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>“Sikemë Dondo” (solo)</td>
<td>01:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solo pattern introduced by solo melodic introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>“Sikemë Dondo” (acc.)</td>
<td>00:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acc. pattern introduced by solo melodic introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>“Sikemë Dondo” (bass)</td>
<td>00:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bass pattern introduced by solo melodic introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>“Sikemë Dondo” (acc/bass)</td>
<td>00:22</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deviation from transcription: added LH bass and no RH solo</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>“Koko So” (n junune example)</td>
<td>00:19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recorded 11/29/03; solo: Sadama, acc: Seydou</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>“Bwënde Gwo Sera” (n junune example)</td>
<td>00:51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recorded 11/29/03; solo: Sadama, bass/acc (combined, not complete as notated): Seydou</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>“Ja Don So” (n junune example)</td>
<td>00:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recorded 11/29/03; solo: Sadama, bass/acc (combined, not complete as notated): Seydou</td>
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</table>
GUIDE TO ORTHOGRAPHY AND PRONUNCIATION

The African languages that I used during my fieldwork and that appear in this thesis are Jula and Sambla, both categorized in the Mande family of languages. Because these and other Mande languages are spoken primarily in Francophone African countries, they commonly appear in print, if at all, using French phonetic orthography.¹ Wishing to avoid imposing a decidedly colonial perspective on the representation of indigenous African languages, I have chosen to use an indigenously developed orthography for Bamana, the dominant Mande language spoken primarily in Mali. This is one of the few Mande languages taught in American universities and intensive summer language programs, and a number of instructional books and dictionaries exist in Bamana and English, French, or German (see Bailleul 1977, Bird et al 1977, Kastenholz 1989, Konaré 1998, Maiga 2001, Moralés 1996, Touré and Leucht 1996, Touré and Touré 1993). This orthography uses the international phonetic alphabet, and it has been, for the most part, standardized in Mande-speaking regions of Mali, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso, where it has been introduced to a limited degree into primary and secondary school education.

In this thesis, I have made all attempts to remain true to this Bamana orthography, which is the same that is used in the Bamana-French dictionaries published in Bamako, Mali by Charles Bailleul (1996, 1998). The only exceptions to this practice are certain city and village names, for which I have used the spelling that

¹ One of the most common cases of this phenomenon is the name of the drum jembe, which is frequently spelled in the alternate French phonetic versions of djembe, or less commonly, diembe.
appears on local maps and road signs, and the names of some ethnic groups that are almost exclusively known by their French phonetic spellings. This has been done to avoid confusion and maintain consistency with other print sources with which the reader may be familiar or encounter after reading this thesis. I would like to acknowledge one of my mentors and Bamana instructors, Karim Traore, for instilling in me a dedication to represent African languages in a way that does not depend upon or make reference to dominant colonial language systems.

Written Bamana and other Mande languages utilize four characters that do not exist in the Roman alphabet, two vowels and two consonants. They appear below in the pronunciation guide in their respective categories. The pronunciation for any consonants not listed is identical to the same letter in English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowels</th>
<th>Consonants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>“a” as in “father”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>“a” as in “table”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>“e” as in “get”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>“ee” as in “greet”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>“o” as in “smoke”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>“au” as in “naught”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>“oo” as in “boot”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>“ch” as in “chair”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>“g” as in “gourd”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>“j” as in “jelly”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td>“ng” as in “sing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>“nu” [ny] as in “annual”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>slightly rolled, with a single tap of the tongue to the hard palate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words spelled with double vowels are pronounced with the vowel sound sustained longer than words with single vowels. In general, single vowels are
pronounced very quickly in Sambla, almost as if there is no vowel present between
the consonants.

Sambla is three-tier tonal language, and the while the tonality is very
pronounced in spoken Sambla and essential to proper understanding, I found it nearly
impossible to represent accurately in this writing. For this reason, I decided not to
include any tonal markings here, rather than include some and not others. I decided
that, for this thesis, understanding the tonal contour of the few Sambla words I used
was not essential, except for the one speech surrogate example in Chapter 4, for
which the following tonal markers have been provided:

ò: low tone
o: [no mark] middle tone
ó: high tone

When these tones are combined, the voice creates dramatic upward and
downward inflections, and certain combinations and sequences of tones will
determine the specific inflection. This is not something that I am able to represent
here. The high, medium, and low tones indicated here are sufficient for the musical
analysis in Chapter 4.
In February of 1997 I set off for my first trip to West Africa. Alone, unsponsored, with no contacts or connections in Africa, a novice traveler, monolingual, and with an attitude I would describe now as perhaps a bit too cavalier, I spent three months traveling through Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Mali. I had finished my Bachelor’s degree in clarinet performance two years earlier and had spent the interim saving up to go out and find the music from this region that fascinated me so much and experience it for myself. My interest in West African xylophones began at the University of Michigan, after some classmates in the School of Music had spent a semester at the University of Ghana. During their stay, they learned to play a xylophone played by the Dagari people called gyil, and they put on a small concert after their return to Ann Arbor.

At that period in my life, I was recovering from clarinet-induced tendonitis and fully absorbed in the existential malaise of my disenchantment with classical music. Not knowing if I would ever again be able to play the clarinet, I sought another type of music to sweep me away into that ecstatic state that playing in orchestras had once invoked. I wanted out of the narrow musical track I had found myself in, but I had not yet figured out where I wanted to go.

This short recital of gyil music changed the course of my life. The music was so different from anything I had ever heard before, it captivated me. It was sultry and hypnotic, bursting with emotion and mystery, and it sounded very difficult to play. All of these things attracted me to it very much, and I immediately began buying as
many recordings of West African xylophone music that I could find. I started working at the student radio station where I secured a jazz slot, my second nascent passion, and I covertly slipped African music into my sets as often as I could. I got a job at a local record store to support my habit, and I continued my self-directed music education, taking in as much as I could.

After deciding that ethnomusicology was the path that had laid itself before me, I decided to go to West Africa myself. I finished my degree, saved my money, read up on the region, and set out on my own in February of 1997. I felt prepared, but my only major oversight was a lack of language skills.

As it turned out, issues of language and communication were a major theme throughout all of my travels and research in Africa, which ultimately influenced my choice of dissertation topic. As I struggled through Francophone countries for seven weeks with no French skills beyond je ne comprends pas, one particular incident stands out in my memory that opened my eyes to the special relationship between music and language in Africa. I was vaguely aware of “African talking drums” but did not know exactly how or the extent to which one could communicate linguistically through music until this moment.

It happened during my first stay in Bobo-Dioulasso, in March of 1997. I got to know a group of musicians and some French friends of theirs, and between their collective knowledge of English and my growing French abilities, we managed to communicate. They brought me to a small fête with drums and xylophones, women, children, and lots of beer. At one point, I was sitting on a bench next to my friends,
and an old, wizened man approached me playing an armpit tension drum. He played a few passages on the drum in my direction. Everyone else turned, looked at me, looked at each other, and then burst into laughter. No one was able to tell me exactly what the old man said, nor did I feel they had any intention to. I was a bit embarrassed, but more curious – how was this man able to beat a few tones out on his drum and elicit such laughter at my expense? This question followed me through the rest of my travels and throughout all of my graduate studies.

Thus my interests in West African xylophones and the communicative abilities of music were born. Realizing that this was too great a subject to tackle for a Master’s thesis, I focused on the more manageable Mande balañ for my MA and tabled the music and language cum xylophone topic for a PhD.

It was at Wesleyan that I serendipitously became aware of the Sambla and the captivating music they create with their xylophone. I had directed the preparation of my qualifying exams toward African music, xylophones, and music and language, and I knew that I wanted to study xylophones in Burkina Faso, where I had fallen in love with the mellow easiness and music-everywhere quality of Bobo-Dioulasso. I had not yet, however, nailed down a specific tradition to study, or how exactly I was going to approach the topic.

Enter Andreas Szabo, an Austrian mathematician who is an African music enthusiast, adventure traveler, and amateur ethnomusicologist. He wrote my advisor, Eric Charry, with compliments on his recent book, and also to tell him of a young Burkinabe musician who he had adopted, Mamadou Diabate. He explained a little
about Mamadou’s Sambla heritage and the xylophone music he plays, and the
message was immediately forwarded to me. Through our correspondence, during
which Andreas sent me two of Mamadou’s recordings, I made my connection with
Mamadou and his family, and I subsequently made plans to do my dissertation field
research with them in Burkina Faso.

This thesis represents just a portion of my experiences, revelations,
frustrations, analyses, and conclusions drawn from the eighteen months I spent in
Burkina Faso. I took on some side projects, had many non-research related
adventures, and became so embedded in my life there that at one point I realized I
couldn’t even remember what my life was like before I arrived there. One of the
biggest challenges I faced was due to the fact that I arrived a 30-year old single white
American woman, and all of the gossip, drama and intrigue that resulted from my
presence. This obviously affected my research experiences greatly, though I am
neither able nor willing to address the mountain of issues related to my gender in the
field in this forum. Ultimately, addressing these issues would have only detracted
from the main goals of this thesis, which are to present history and tradition of the
Sambla and my experience of their music. However, I feel that I would be remiss not
to mention how much my age, gender, and marital status affected my interactions
with people in Burkina, and how unprepared I was to deal with it.

This is not to say that my field experience could be characterized negatively,
quite the contrary. The hospitality, openness, and mutual respect I shared with many
of the people I knew and worked with in Burkina Faso was remarkable. The Diabates
welcomed me into their family as one of their own, and I will be grateful to them for that for the rest of my life, not only for benefit of my research, but also for the personal growth I experienced as a result of the relationships I formed with them. I have nothing but the highest respect and admiration for all of my Sambla hosts and friends, and especially for the musicians, who displayed to me a dedication to their art and profoundly masterful level of musicianship that I had rarely if ever encountered before, in any musical tradition, anywhere in the world.
INTRODUCTION

This work represents a nexus of two research interests that I feel are sorely underrepresented in Africanist ethnomusicology: xylophones and Burkina Faso. Granted, the former does have a small base of devoted advocates and researchers, but neither gets the attention merited by the depth and diversity of music traditions that these subjects represent. By depth, I am referring to number, variety, and almost infinite streams of interrelation among different African xylophones. There are many more distinct xylophone traditions in West Africa than most ethnomusicologists and Africanists realize, and though each is unique, they all share certain attributes with one another, depending on geographic proximity and relationships with neighboring groups with xylophone traditions.

The depth I refer to in Burkina Faso parallels that of the xylophones in a way. Within the southwestern region of Burkina Faso, surrounded by borders with Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, and Ghana, a complex web of interrelations exists among a large intermingling of very small ethnic groups. So many unique cultures in close proximity to each other facilitates easy exchange of beliefs, practices, and expressive arts, traveling through lines of migration, intermarriage, and trade, to name a few. The ethnic and linguistic diversity of this region is staggering. It became clear to me after I began my research why so few other ethnomusicologists or anthropologists had chosen this region of Burkina Faso as a research site. It is a tangled web of kinship and military alliances, languages, religious beliefs, music traditions, and other lines of affinity and influence among more than half of the nation’s ethnic groups. Sorting
through the chaos of piecing together genealogies and conduits of cultural diffusion is a daunting task to say the least; one small collection of neighboring groups could be a life’s work, taking the researcher through one family history after another, tracing paths that cultural elements have traveled from community to community.

Xylophones have dispersed through this region by the same means as other cultural attributes, each associated with a unique language, repertoire, and tradition, though likely originating from a set of common sources. Tracing the paths that musical instruments have traveled through different communities and examining how they changed along the way can provide a unique view into the movement of people and culture, through the lives and experiences of its musicians. Such a perspective can reflect how, on a small scale, individual families and communities change and adapt to their environments, and on a large scale, how certain elements of culture have spread and interacted with others. In an ethnically diverse region like western Burkina Faso, the xylophone is one of the deepest wells of cultural wealth in understanding a region that has been largely ignored by academia.

But which xylophones have been documented in the immediate region? Western Burkina Faso is particularly rich in diverse ethnic groups and music traditions, and more than 25 other xylophone traditions exist within the region, neighboring the Sambla (see Appendix II for a list of known xylophones played in Burkina Faso). Of this considerable collection, only a few have caught the interest of researchers or other individuals who chose to publish writings or recordings of the instruments. Some of these include the Balanta xylophone from Senegal (Mané 1996,

The Mande balañ (balafon) is surely the most well-known West African gourd-resonated xylophone outside of Africa, thanks to touring national ballet troupes of Guinea, Mali, and Senegal, internationally famous West African pop stars who have incorporated the instrument into their groups, and a handful of touring jeli musicians who have successfully created an international audience for themselves and Mande music in general. The balañ is known in the Sahel region not only as an instrumental genre of music, but also as a fundamental element of the grand tradition of jeliya that has been an intrinsic element of the great Mali Empire since at least the 13th century (see Charry 2000; Knight 1973, 1975, 1984a, 1984b, 1991; Jessup 1983; Rouget 1969; Sidibé 1996; and Strand 2000). Its importance dates back at least that far by its mention in heroic epics that embody Mande history, particularly “Sunjata,” the story of the Emperor of the Kingdom of Mali at that time.

While the balañ may be the most well known West African xylophone outside of Africa, most of its indigenous habitat lies within Francophone African countries.

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2 Jeliya is the name used in the Mande languages Bamana, Maninka, and Jula, for a tradition of music and speech practiced by a class of professional, hereditary musicians and artists of the word who occupy a specific place in Mande social hierarchy. Mande jelis were at one time advisors, praise singers, and counselors to Mande royalty. See Bird 1971; Camara 1976; Charry 2000; Conrad and Frank 1995; Hale 1990 and 1998; Johnson et. al. 1997; Knight 1973, 1975, 1984a, and 1984b; Niane 1975; Schaffer and Cooper 1981; and Tamari 1990 for more on Mande social organization, the arts, and jeliya.

While a small set of Anglophone scholars have focused their studies in French-speaking West African xylophone regions, most English-speaking researchers who are interested African xylophones have focused their interests in Ghana, particularly the various gyils played by the Dagara and Lobi of northwestern Ghana (Aning 1989; Branger 1993; Mensah 1967a, 1967b, 1983; Saighoe 1984; Strumpf 1970, 1976; Wiggins and Kobom 1992), and the related xylophones played by their cousins, the Birifor (Godsey 1980, 1984) and the Sisaala (Seavoy 1982). In addition to published studies, several American and European universities offer instruction in the gyil, and many individuals and groups visit Ghana each year to study the instrument and culture. Education and promotion of the tradition has been furthered by efforts of individual musicians both in Ghana and abroad. Bernard Woma, an internationally known Dagari gyil player, has established a Dagara music center just north of Accra, Ghana, where several colleges and universities regularly bring groups during the summer months for music instruction and cultural exploration of the region.

These ethnic groups straddle the political boundary between Ghana and Burkina Faso, and as in much of Africa, the colonial political division makes little difference in the local articulation of culture. However, despite the keen interest in these instruments and ethnic groups among non-Africans, relatively few people venture into the Burkinabe regions of these ethnic areas, despite the fact that most of the Lobi, Birifor, and Sisaala populations actually reside on the Francophone side of

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4 Eric Charry, Lynn Jessup, and Joe Williams, to name a few; Roderic Knight’s research was conducted mostly in The Gambia, an English-speaking country with a large Mande contingent.

5 The adjective “Burkinabe” is a common modifier used to describe anything or anyone from Burkina Faso.
the border. Burkina Faso is hardly mentioned in English literature as a place where these xylophones exist, a fact that I find ironic, as Burkina has more xylophone traditions within its borders than any other West African country. An example of this kind of omission can be found in Mensah’s article on the Dagara gyil, where he states,

The African xylophone belt stretches from Senegal to northwestern Ghana, through the Republics of Guinea, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast; after a characteristic little pocket in Benin Republic (Dahomey) and a hiatus of some thousand kilometers, the belt resumes in southeastern Nigeria and stretches through Cameroon, Zaire, and Zambia to Mozambique and Madagascar, including areas in what once constituted the East African community. (1982:139)

In this account, which lists twelve African nations as part of the “xylophone belt,” Burkina Faso has been overlooked, though so has Mali. I am not suggesting that this example speaks for all authors who write about African xylophones, but it is representative of how Burkina Faso is a virtual black hole in Africanist research and awareness, in ethnomusicology and other disciplines as well. Within the African music section of the Society for Ethnomusicology, I am regularly met with surprised reactions when other Africanists discover that I conduct research in Burkina Faso.

This is where my research comes in, at the intersection of these two underrepresented subjects, the xylophone and Burkina Faso. This neglected step-child status is not the reason why I chose the Sambla baan [xylophone] as my research subject, at least not directly. People often ask me how I happened upon such an obscure, seemingly random research subject, considering that no prior research

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6 The West African countries that are most commonly cited as having xylophone traditions are Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Senegal, The Gambia, Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia to a certain extent, and even Nigeria and Benin. See Appendix II for a list of xylophone traditions of Burkina Faso.
exists on the Sambla or any music in that region of Burkina Faso. My goal was to find a topic that was not heavily pursued by other ethnomusicologists, but this was not my focus in choosing a research topic. Rather, I knew I was interested in this general region through prior travel in the country, the xylophone, and intersections between music and language. After that, the Sambla actually found me, via my advisor, through the efforts of Andreas Szabo, a well-intentioned enthusiast of African music living in Vienna.

I suppose this confluence of interests came together somewhat serendipitously, though the template had been laid out through my initial interests in the instrument, language, and Burkina Faso that developed in the mid-1990s. Once I heard the music of the Sambla, and more importantly, saw it performed, I realized that I had stumbled upon something truly remarkable, that this music was, in fact, exactly what I was looking for: a xylophone tradition that is extraordinarily complex, displays truly impressive levels of musicianship, and demonstrates a fascinating intersection between music and language, which was the point of interest that had drawn me to this region in the first place.

**Methodology**

Field research for this thesis was conducted over the course of eighteen continuous months in Burkina Faso, from October 2002 to May 2004. Because little to no ethnomusicological research had been conducted in western Burkina Faso at that time, very little had been published on the music of the many groups that reside
there. Realizing I was going to have to rely almost exclusively on original research, I made the decision to use the single year of funding that I received to cover an eighteen-month stay in Burkina, anticipating that the project ahead of me was going to take more than twelve months to complete.

During my first year I occupied myself with the more practical tasks of acclimating myself to Sambla culture, learning to play the instrument, acquiring and improving language skills, and learning to negotiate the inevitable challenges of conducting field research in rural Africa. While conducting an extensive and multifaceted project such as this requires a wide variety of activities and streams of investigation, the one element that maintained continuity throughout the research period was learning, practicing and playing music, and that is what will always remain the strongest in my memories. I would like to recognize the first the profound level of mastery that my teachers and their relatives have on their instruments. As someone who regularly keeps the company of talented musicians, it is rare that I find myself so stunningly impressed by someone’s musical ability as I regularly was when I heard my teacher and his family perform. My teacher, Sadama Diabate, and his brothers, sons, nephews, and other relatives who shared their music with me, showed me a new level of dedication to one’s art, and redefined the meaning of music that has “soul” to my ears.

I would also like to recognize the infinite amount of patience that Sadama showed during the hundreds of hours of lessons that we spent together, while we both struggled through language barriers and the even larger gulf of cultural difference.
Through it all, he remained willing to share his music with me, and was always pleased to observe my progression, which he was very eager to show off to the community every chance he had. Sadama’s younger brother, Seydou Diabate should also be mentioned here, for sitting in on my lessons and filling the essential role of playing the third part so that I could hear the complete piece as I learned the music, something I discovered was essential to my learning the music properly.

![Sadama Diabate playing baan at a New Year’s Eve fête in Bwende, Burkina Faso, with his son Jacka to his left and other Diabate musicians accompanying them. Bwende, 12/31/03. Photo by the author.](image)
Seydou also gave me lessons on what is locally known as the Jula *balañ*, a popular xylophone in western Burkina Faso that is related to the Senufo xylophone and that can be heard at *fêtes*, in *cabarets*, and at other drinking spots across Bobo-Dioulasso. This is the instrument played by the one internationally-known ensemble from Bobo, called Farafina (see Discography). I owe an eternal debt of gratitude to Sadama and Seydou for everything that they taught me, musical and not; this work would be nothing without their all that they shared with me.

I waited more than a year before I began any of my interviews with elders and village chiefs, because I hoped that after seeing me at their *fêtes* for a full agricultural cycle, playing *baan*, forming relationships with the villagers, and hopefully creating a positive image of myself in their eyes, that they would feel more comfortable around me and more likely to open up and talk about the topics I wanted to discuss with them. This strategy paid off, as I gathered the most valuable information and had the most important revelations in my last six months in the region.

Before my departure and even before I applied for funding, my preparations for this research were extensive and lengthy. The most involved preparation I had to make was to acquire the necessary language skills, as my research was conducted in French, Jula, and Sambla. I had picked up French through prior trips to West Africa and two semesters that I took at a community college the year before I began graduate school. English is virtually non-existent in Burkina Faso, and even French did not

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7 A *cabaret* is a small, informal location, often in a private yard, where *dolo* and other alcoholic beverages are sold and consumed. Sometimes live music is also played at *cabarets* in the afternoon and evening. *Dolo* is the traditional millet beer consumed from calabash bowls. It is widely used throughout the Sahel as an essential component to many ritual events, as well as a popular drink for any occasion.
help me once I left urban areas, so Jula, the primary *lingua franca* of western Burkina and neighboring Côte d’Ivoire, was the language upon which I relied the most for my research. To prepare myself, I took two summer intensive language courses in Bamana, the closest language to Jula that is taught in American universities. Upon arrival in Bobo-Dioulasso, I continued my Jula studies through a local language and small business resource organization.

While language was the most important area of preparation I made for this voyage, the importance of which was made acutely aware to me during my first trip to Africa, there were plenty of other necessary preparations I made in the weeks, months, and even years prior to my departure in October of 2002. I made several prior trips to Burkina Faso and other countries in the region, conducted some cursory field research for my Master’s thesis in The Gambia in 1999, and learned everything I could about integrating myself into the culture, how to establish good will in the community, and anything else about conducting effective field research. Nevertheless, once the research began in earnest, I felt utterly unprepared, in the sense that no one could really know what to expect when beginning an extended stay in West Africa.

My initial goals were to learn to play the *baan*, learn what I could about Sambla culture that related to music, learn to speak the Sambla language well enough to understand and play the language on the *baan*, and hopefully learn one or two neighboring xylophone traditions for comparative purposes. It quickly became clear to me that this plan was more than ambitious or unrealistic, it was ridiculous. Once I
realized this, I felt liberated from a restrictive, pre-determined plan and was free to let my research take the paths that laid themselves before me. This was also the most practical approach, as I quickly learned that I had to abandon any notions of being in control of my surroundings, so I sat back, observed, recorded, and took notes as everything unfolded around me. I liken the experience to being caught swimming by a rogue wave. If you try to swim against it, you’ll just tire yourself out and drown. The best thing to do is to let it carry you where it may, and hope that you come out of it unscathed.

Apart from language study, the other major area of concentration during my first year in Burkina was instruction and practice on the *baan*. This presented its own set of unique challenges, which I discuss later in the thesis, but it was the arena in which I thought I would feel the most comfortable. I’ve been learning to play musical instruments since I was five, so I thought the musical instruction would be something I could handle without too much adjustment. Technical issues of the instrument aside, I soon discovered that my teacher’s pedagogical style diverged sharply from that with which I was accustomed, and I had some major difficulties in the early months while I struggled to figure out how my perception of the music differed so greatly from theirs.

On another investigative axis, I found that I rarely received the identical answers to the same question from different people. My friend and mentor Karim Traore once proclaimed this to be one of the biggest problems in African Studies. Which answer has more legitimacy over the others? How do you handle a situation
when the response given to you by an older, respected person conflicts with what you know to be true? Who is the true “expert,” and whom do you believe? What is the actual truth? Is there only one truth? These questions have no single answer, and I found that this was another area in which I benefited from the length of my stay. Getting to know people, their backgrounds, and particular agendas helped me sort through some of the inconsistencies. Understanding the various motivations behind spinning a story (or in some cases completely rewriting it) helped me a lot, as does the realization that many people are going to tell you what they think you want to hear, or what they think you will understand more easily. Then there are the cases where the answer is simply none of your business, but being too polite to say so, some will give you an answer that sounds believable, at least to them. This can also happen if they don’t know the answer, but still decide to offer up some kind of explanation. Of course no small part of the problem is also due to the way that questions are asked. There is an art to asking questions in Africa, an art in which I think I finally became proficient by the end of my stay, after a very steep learning curve.

The final significant hurdle I faced in this project was the issue of language, and indeed, I think this is one of the biggest reasons why so many American ethnomusicologists have focused their studies in Ghana, South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, and other English-speaking countries. The prospect of learning an African language becomes that much more daunting when faced with learning it in the context of another foreign language, in my case French. I had had the advantage of
learning some Bamana in an American university setting before I arrived, but it is difficult to achieve proficiency in a language when not in an environment where one is forced to use it to meet essential needs. Understanding the mechanics of a language and being able to communicate in it are not the same thing. This disparity was compounded by the fact that while Jula and Bamana are considered essentially the same language, the vocabulary and colloquial speech in Jula can differ greatly from Bamana, and I found it necessary to relearn how to say many things in Jula.

Learning Jula was essential for me to conduct this project, because very few Sambla villagers know even a functional amount of French. Many of the older Sambla don’t even speak Jula very well, but once my Jula was solid, I could get around as well as I needed. My teacher Sadama did not speak any French, so all of my lessons and interviews with him were conducted in Jula, with occasional assistance by other brothers who knew enough French to assist in the occasional communication breakdown.

Most importantly, I wanted to learn Jula and Sambla to demonstrate that I was committed to knowing and understanding people and their ways of life. Burkina Faso does not see as many American or European researchers as some of its West African neighbors, but those who do come through normally spend several weeks to a few months, hire interpreters, stay in Western-style accommodations with local women hired to cook, clean, and do their laundry, all of which sends the message that they intend to keep separate from local people and ways of life. In many cases, they are seen simply as another manifestation of a colonial presence. They are there to take
what they want, they use their money to get what they want, and they leave without giving much in return, apart from whatever monetary exchange was arranged for services rendered. The relationship is based upon work done by Africans, paid for by the Europeans or Americans.

While it is important to note that in such an impoverished country, many people rely on income from foreign visitors for their livelihood, I still see it as an unequal exchange. While I did pay for my lessons and contributed to the families with whom I lived and worked through small gifts of children’s clothing, medical care, and food, I wanted a better parity in my exchanges with them. Because most Africans are by necessity multi-lingual themselves, I felt that they appreciated the effort that I made to learn their language, and that this was something they valued that I could give back to them.

The final language barrier that faced me was the Sambla language itself. I had no opportunities to study it until I arrived, so after I felt confident enough with Jula, I began some lessons with Samadou Coulibaly, an uncle of the Diabates who lives in Bobo-Dioulasso, speaks English quite well, and holds an Master’s degree in linguistics from the Univeristy of Ouagadougou. He is the only Sambla I met who spoke English, who had a graduate degree and was therefore familiar with academic investigation, and who understood the goals of my research better than any other Burkinabe I knew. Samadou spent a considerable amount of time writing up some of the more relevant rules of Sambla grammar for me, and we met in the afternoons for regular language lessons about five months into my stay.
I discovered that Sambla is considerably more difficult than Jula and has a profoundly more complex tonal system, one benefit of which is the translation on the *baan* in the speech surrogate system, creating beautiful melodic speech patterns. I learned as much Sambla as I could with the time and resources available to me, and that was practically possible while also actively working to improve my Jula at the same time. At the peak of my abilities, I could carry on short conversations with villagers and other family living in the city, but my Sambla never reached the level I needed to conduct interviews or have in-depth conversations with people about their lives and their music. Part of the problem was that by then, everyone knew I could speak Jula, and my attempts to practice speaking Sambla were thwarted by people who, impatient with continually repeating themselves to me, quickly changed to Jula if I did not understand them the first time.

Because of this, Samadou helped me greatly in the later stages of my research as an interpreter during interviews with elders who did not speak Jula and preferred to speak with me in Sambla. We discussed my questions and their answers in French, Jula, and English, until I had the most complete understanding of the interviews that I could, from multiple linguistic angles. Occasionally, Samadou and other friends also helped out with translations of conversations taken from recordings of lessons and *fêtes*, but the majority of the translations from Jula and French that are used in this thesis are my own.

Apart from language, though, the majority of my efforts were devoted to learning to play the instrument, which was both the most frustrating and satisfying
experience of my research. To learn the *baan* I took two-hour lessons five days a week for more than a year; some days in the village, with nothing better to do, I had two daily lessons. My lessons were also times for me to talk with Sadama and ask him questions about the *baan*, the Sambla people and language, culture and traditions relating to the *baan*, and his family. We always played during my lessons, but some of them ran more like interviews, as I pulled out my recorder and field notebook in order to take down all of the information he gave me. The recordings were especially helpful, because if there was a passage of explanation I did not fully understand the first time, I could play it back to other family members and friends with better French skills who could help translate Sadama’s words in French, which I then translated into English. My playing and language skills developed along a similar axis, and as I grew to understand the music more deeply and develop better technical facility on the instrument, I became better at knowing what questions to ask, how to ask them, and when to stop asking and simply sit back and listen.

By the second half of my first year in Burkina, I had learned enough about the music, language, and tradition to launch into my investigations of the speech aspect of the music. After one year, I began my interviews with chiefs and elders in the villages, with the assistance of Samadou. This period of time was necessary to get to know people in the villages that I frequented: Torønso, Bwënde, Konkolikan, Tiara, Bana, and occasionally Surukudingan and Karankaso. Once they had seen me at an entire year’s cycle of fêtes and other occasions, they had seen that I was learning the
instrument and had heard me play, I hoped that I had gained enough of their trust to open up to me.

In my last six months, I busily gathered as much information that I could on topics related to the _baan_. I visited a Tusia village and interviewed musicians there, visited several libraries and research centers in Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou, and I began to focus more seriously on learning to play the instrument that resident Bobolais refer to as the _jula balañ_, a popular xylophone throughout the Bobo-Dioulasso region that is modeled after the Senufo xylophone from southern Mali and northern Côte d’Ivoire. The more time I spent in western Burkina, the more I came to realize the profoundly complex web of relationships and influence that simultaneously flow among all of the groups in the region, and the unique and integral role the xylophone plays in these cultures. I hope to return and continue this research on xylophones throughout western Burkina and in neighboring regions of Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, and Ghana. The general knowledge of this instrument in this region is grossly underrepresented in ethnomusicological literature, and I believe this to be a hugely significant cluster of music, instruments, and traditions that the rest of the world has yet to discover.

**Overview**

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides a brief political and ethnic history of the nation-state of Burkina Faso, situating the Sambla as a social and political unit in the context of Burkana Faso’s cultural and ethnic
makeup. Information on Sambla social organization in particular will be relevant to the discussion of different types of Sambla musicians in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the complexities of defining ethnic identity in Africa, and then provides a chronology of the emergence and development of the Sambla as a distinct ethnic group. This discussion considers the contemporary historical context and the social and political events of the time that shaped this process, drawing upon historical sources. The second half of this chapter explains the introduction of the xylophone to the Sambla by musicians from a neighboring ethnic group, also situating this migration within the current social and political environment of the time, considering how the political climate may have shaped or even caused these events to take place. The discussion then turns to the expansion of the two families of xylophonists who settled, expanded, and became part of the Sambla community, where they remain today as the only two families of xylophonists in all of Sambla country. These events and genealogies were put together though oral histories that I collected during my field research.

Chapter 3 provides a complete description of the Sambla baan tradition as it is practiced today, beginning with the xylophonist, or baan-beren-ka, and how this new type of musician initiated a change in the Sambla social class system to distinguish between the xylophonists and Sambla musicians who predated the arrival of the xylophone and participated in older music traditions. The cultural role and importance of the instrument in Sambla culture is discussed, and the baan is also
placed within a regional context, considering the myriad xylophone traditions practiced elsewhere in close vicinity to Sambla country in western Burkina Faso.

Chapter 4 discusses the actual music of the *baan*, beginning with the tuning, intervals, and modes, and then an interlude that discusses my perceptions of the music during the early period of instruction. Mechanics of the music and how the various parts interact are achieved through careful analysis and transcription. Included in this analysis is the speech surrogate that is employed in the music, whereby spoken Sambla is communicated extemporaneously on the *baan* by the soloist. A single phrase is analyzed in the context of seven different songs in order to see how the phrase transforms in the context of different modes and when substituting for different melodic lines. By seeing what changes and what stays the same, the “identity” of the phrase, that which communicates the meaning, is preserved.

The analysis of the music played on the *baan* explores various realms of perception, including variability in the perception of the time, meter, and beat placement, perception of the music in its constituent parts versus the whole, and perception of the music by individual players within the ensemble. Perception of the speech surrogate itself may also be variable within the Sambla community, a pattern that cannot be characterized or quantified. The improvisatory nature of the music is also explored, with discussions of where patterns may be varied, where they must stay the same, and where a soloist may completely improvise a melodic line that does not signify speech. Finally, some provocative questions for further investigation are considered. My hope is that this study can be seen as the first step in what will
hopefully result in future work on the Sambla and the other fascinating yet virtually unknown xylophone traditions practiced by the collection of small ethnic groups scattered throughout the region of western Burkina Faso known locally as *pays balafon*, or “xylophone country.”
CHAPTER I: The Sambla in the Modern Nation-State of Burkina Faso

Brief Colonial and Political History of Burkina Faso

The nation-state of Burkina Faso, previously Upper Volta or Haute-Volta, initially began as a French military region in the late 19th century, somewhat later than many of its West African neighbors. In 1902 it was combined with the military region of Sénégal-Ouagadougou, becoming the colony of Haut-Sénégal-Niger in October 1904 (see Maps 1 and 2). After the anti-colonial war of 1915-1916 in parts of present-day Burkina Faso and Mali, the French broke the larger region of Haut-Sénégal-Niger into separate colonies in an effort to tighten their control. The colony of Haute Volta was created in May 1919, partitioned into a number of administrative cercles.


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8 Much of the information on the political history of Burkina Faso was obtained from Englebert (1996).
9 All maps in this thesis were created by the author, based on existing maps from various sources.
Due to a catastrophic combination of a worldwide economic depression that affected the prices of local exports, heavy taxes imposed by the French in the form of grain and other staple foods, massive migration out of the colony to escape oppression from the French, and untimely seasons of poor rainfall and locusts, a famine began in the region in 1931. The French proclaimed Upper Volta an economic failure and dismantled the colony in 1932, partitioning sections of it out to be included in the French Soudan (present-day Mali), Côte d’Ivoire, and Niger. The colonial practice of forced labor intensified in this region during the following period, shifting to a concentration of forced military inscription into the French army at the outbreak of World War II. Upper Volta was reinstated as a colony in September 1947, as the French increased political organization in West Africa by integrating representatives from their colonies into their metropolitan parliament.
Upper Volta gained its independence on August 5, 1960, within weeks of several other French colonies. The ensuing indigenous government underwent numerous, troubled transformations in the following decades, marked by a staggering number of political parties that formed, dissolved, and reformed under different names and missions. The government eventually succumbed to corruption and fell into a military regime.

In 1983, military captains Thomas Sankara and Blaise Campaoré executed a coup d’état, beginning a populist revolution led by Thomas Sankara as president. He instituted a number of sweeping political reforms, attempting to flush corruption out of the government and establish citizens as the main priority. Sankara made great improvements to the crippled economy and living conditions of the poor, becoming one of the most popular and revered leaders in African history. In 1984 he officially changed the country’s name to Burkina Faso, “homeland of the honest,” as an act to represent the country by an indigenous name that contains words from its two major lingua francas: Mooré, spoken by the Mossi and millions of others in the vicinity of the nation’s capital, Ouagadougou, and Jula, a Mande language associated with Muslim traders that is spoken in the west of the country (see Map 3).

After a period of political disorder and a subsequent marginalization of his power, Thomas Sankara was assassinated on October 15, 1987 by soldiers serving his long-time friend and military companion, Blaise Campaoré. Following this violent coup, Campaoré took over the position as president of Burkina Faso, which he continues to hold at this writing.
Population Dynamics and Ethnic Composition of Burkina Faso

Like many of its neighbors, Burkina Faso is comprised of a large variety of ethnic groups, languages, and religious and cultural practices, considering its relatively small size. At 108,869 square miles, roughly the same area as the state of Colorado, Burkina is home to some 60 different ethnic groups and languages. The last official census published in 2006 reported Burkina’s population was 13,558,000 with a population growth rate of 3.1%; the July 2008 population estimate is 15,264,735. The largest ethnic group is the Mossi, speaking a language called Mooré, who comprise roughly 53% of the population and occupy a large plateau in the center of the country. The capital city of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, is situated in the center of this plateau, and the majority of politicians and ministry employees in Ouagadougou today are Mossi.

The second largest ethnic group in Burkina Faso is the Fula, who speak a language called Fulfulde and are part of a complex of semi-nomadic cattle herders dispersed throughout the Sahel, including groups known as Peul and Tukulor (also Toucouleur). The Fula comprise 6.7% of the country’s population and live mainly in northern Burkina (see Map 3). This leaves about 40% of the country’s population that is divided among the 60 or so remaining ethnic groups and languages, more than 10 Different sources cite numbers that range from 60 to 66.

Geographical and population statistics were obtained from the official websites of the Embassy of Burkina Faso in the United States, the Developing National Information and Communications Infrastructure (NICI) in Africa, and the CIA World Factbook.

12 Different accepted orthographies exist for the Mossi. The term itself is believed to be a French perversion of Mossé, the plural of Moaga, or inhabitant of moghho, the land of the Mossi (Delobson 1932). While an official decree in December 1975 set the orthography as Mooga (singular) and Moose (plural), most authors continue to use the spelling “Mossi,” as it more closely indicates the correct pronunciation of the word (Englebert 1996:36).
half of which reside in the western region of the country. Despite its fragmented ethnic composition, Burkina Faso has had very little inter-ethnic conflict in relation to other African countries and has had no civil or religious wars, boasting many years of peaceful coexistence within its diverse population.

Map 3. Lingua Francas spoken in Burkina Faso.

However, this state of peace may change soon due to two major causes: destabilization of the Bobo-Dioulasso region as a result of the war in Côte d'Ivoire, and the influx of Mossi into the western region of the country. The armed uprising in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002, characterized as an attempted coup by the media, resulted in a war that raged for over a year after its initial attempt, jeopardizing the
continuity of that state and introducing a culture of violence into the society.\textsuperscript{13} At that time, an estimated three to five million people of Burkinabé origin lived in Côte d’Ivoire.\textsuperscript{14} While the action was politically motivated, the ensuing war brought other conflicts to the surface, such as religious tensions between northern Muslims and southern Christians, as well as Ivorian animosity toward foreign workers, most of whom are Burkinabé. Because of this sudden aggression toward them, a massive state-funded repatriation brought thousands of Burkinabes, many of whom had not been in Burkina for decades, back to their country in the subsequent months of the war.\textsuperscript{15}

This was compounded by the sale of arms to the youth of Bobo-Dioulasso by Ivorian rebels, who made regular retreats to the city during this violent period.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, a mercenary industry developed in the area, as rebels enticed poor, unemployed Burkinabes to fight their cause for a small wage. This caused further tensions in Burkina, as nearly everyone in Bobo-Dioulasso has relatives living in the threat of rebel violence.

Complicating matters, overpopulation of the Mossi plateau has caused migration of the Mossi into the western, Jula-speaking region of the country over the

\textsuperscript{13} For an in-depth analysis of the causes of the Ivorian political crisis, see Akindès (2005).
\textsuperscript{15} This repatriation caused a refugee crisis, as the state-funded transport to Burkina ended at the bus stations in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. Refugee camps suddenly sprung up around Burkina’s big cities, while many women and children simply remained at the bus stations where they arrived, begging for food and money from passing travelers.
\textsuperscript{16} Bobo has long had a close alliance with Abidjan, as one of the first train lines in the region was constructed between the two cities in 1934 that carried the majority of Burkina’s imports and exports to and from the port in Abidjan. Many Bobolais also travel seasonally to work in cocoa and coffee plantations just outside Abidjan.
past two decades (Englebert 1996:120). These migrants have created independent settlements adjacent to villages, making no efforts to integrate with native residents of the region. Their numbers have also increased in Bobo-Dioulasso, the country’s second largest city, where they now dominate many local businesses. This situation has caused tension between the Jula- and Mossi-speaking populations, and some fear that a civil war may be in the future as a result of this.

This situation exists in Sambla country as much as it does elsewhere in rural, western Burkina Faso. Particularly in the northern Sambla villages, the Mossi presence has become a serious political problem and puts an added strain on already scant resources of arable land, safe water, and wild game. This Mossi presence is significant because it goes against the dominant migration paradigm of the region, where immigrants integrate themselves into village kinship networks through intermarriage and eventually “become” Sambla. Such examples include migrants from neighboring Tusia, Bobo, and Tiefo communities who have been instrumental in the composition of Sambla society from the very foundation of the oldest Sambla villages.

These populations were enculturated to their new communities, learning the language and adapting to local religious practices and customs, but they also had significant effects on changes and developments in Sambla culture. In addition to introducing new cultural practices from their home communities, these liaisons established important kinship networks between the Sambla and neighboring villages. These networks strengthened relationships between communities that share close
geographical proximity but diverse origins, acting as conduits for the exchange of material, religious, and expressive culture. This means of cultural diffusion is common in many African communities, creating a dynamic model of local ethnicity that is continually redefined by its ever-changing syncretic cultural practices.\footnote{See Royer (1996) for exchange of religious practices between the Sambla and their neighbors; also LeMoal (1999) and Roy (1985, 1987a, 1987b) for similarities in mask traditions among the Bobo and Bwa in Burkina Faso.}

The Sambla have benefited from these relationships through military alliances and protection, and by a vigorous exchange in religious cults with neighboring groups (see Royer 1996). Their demonstrated openness to embracing others’ spiritual beliefs was later extended to the expressive realm by the adoption of a xylophone tradition that was brought to them by two Tusia musicians who migrated into Sambla country with their instrument the last quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. This arrival was a landmark occasion that can be seen as another stage in the continuum of processes that gradually constructed Sambla identity over the centuries. Just as migration in and out of Sambla country has changed the ethnic, ritual, and demographic landscape of Sambla country, this critical Tusia migration has made an indelible imprint on all aspects of Sambla life, permanently changing and augmenting the definition of Sambla identity.
The Sambla Today

Geography and Population Dynamics

The ethnic group known today as the Sambla resides in a distinct region consisting of fourteen villages and six hamlets, situated about 50 kilometers west of Bobo-Dioulasso in a region known as the *Haute-Bassins* (Upper Basins) of the Mouhoun river (Map 4).\(^{18}\) They are bordered by the Bobo to the east, the Tusia to the west, and the Tiefo to the Southeast.\(^{19}\) The villages are divided into two regions, North and South, for which there are two distinct, though mutually intelligible dialects.\(^{20}\) The southern region is nestled in a series of rolling hills, making those villages extremely difficult to access before better roads and the advent of the motorbike (*mobylette*) have facilitated travel to and from the region, albeit marginally. Politically, the fourteen villages are known collectively as the Prefecture of Karankaso-Sambla, the village of Karankaso being the administrative capital.

\(^{18}\) This region originally consisted of twelve villages (see Chapter 2); population growth and expansion has resulted in the addition of the hamlets and two villages.\(^{19}\) With the exception of the Bobo, most of the ethnic groups in the immediate region of the Sambla are some of the smallest ethnic groups in the country. Being rather small communities, the villages in the areas described here tend to be more or less monoethnic. However, in villages that lie on the borders between two regions are often multi-ethnic, represented by the overlapping sections in Map 4. Bana, which lies on the edge of Bobo and Sambla country, is a mixed Bobo and Sambla village. Some villages display an even more diverse amalgam. In Moami, a village on the road between Bobo-Dioulasso and Orodara (see Map 4), one can find families of Bobo, Tiefo, Tusia, and Sambla descent, among others.\(^{20}\) Some consider there to be a third dialect in one of the northern villages, Surukudingan (Sambla name: Kuruweëko). Others simply consider it to be a variant of the southern dialect, as that village was settled by people from the southern village of Bwende.
Sambla villages and most Sambla hamlets are known under two names: one in Sambla used only by Sambla speakers, and another in Jula, which appears on maps and road signs and is used in all non-Sambla communications (see Figure 2). The sources of these Jula names are largely unknown, though some names translate to meanings associated with the region, such as Surukudingan, which means “hyena-cave” in Jula (suruku-dingen). For purposes of clarity and to agree with the names that appear on maps and other documentation referenced in this study, I will refer to Sambla villages by their Jula name.
### Jula name | Sambla name
---|---
Northern villages: Banakɔrɔso | Nyantɛgәmә
Jofulema | Jofule
Karankaso | Timi
Kumbadugu | Joonә
Maganfәso | Kwәebәn
Southern villages: Bwәnde | Gbәngәn
Gonion** | Donɔnje
Konkolikan | Taako
Samatukɔrә** | Sanblegәn
Semblene | Sombele
Surukudingan* | Kuruwәko
Tiara | Tiaa
Torәnso | Tue
Tukәrә | Sonkәnә
Hamlets: Badara | Joengәn
Bana | Fiyajogәnә
Buta | Butәәnә
Kurukan | Junkә
-none- | Sankumә
-none- | Santиnә

**Figure 2. Sambla and Jula names of all Sambla villages and hamlets.**

* While geographically in the northern region, Surukudingan is included in the southern category because the southern Sambla dialect is spoken there.

** These two villages were not included in the original twelve-village prefecture that was established by the French; they were added some time in the decade between 1992 and 2002.

The Sambla are one of the smallest ethnic groups in Burkina Faso. The most recent detailed population data available was from the 1996 census, which counted 20,667 residents of the Sambla prefecture, or 0.2% of the country’s total population at that time (Institut National de la Statistique et de la Demographie 1996). However, we can assume that the actual number of Sambla is greater than this, as the census

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21 According to the national census from 1996, the population of Burkina was 10,332,798 (CIA World Factbook); by the 2006 census it was 13,902,972 (PopulationData.net), and the estimated population in July 2008 was 15,264,735 (CIA World Factbook).
count only represents the inhabitants in the prefecture villages, and not the Sambla
living in the six hamlets adjacent to the region, nor those living in other cities.  

Village demographics have fluctuated widely over the centuries due to factors
that vary with the times. Village populations have diminished over the past couple of
centuries due to casualties of wars, forced military inscription, and massive migration
movements that occurred as a means of passive resistance to externally imposed taxes
and forced labor.  Because of these periodic emigrations, significant Sambla
communities exist in some of the larger cities of the region, including Bobo-
Dioulasso, the smaller cities of Banfora and Orodara to the south and west
respectively, and even as far as the capital cities of Ouagadougou, Bamako and
Abidjan. Today many Sambla leave their villages for these cities in search of work, a
prospect made easier by established Sambla communities already present in these
urban areas.

The Sambla hamlets, which are normally mixtures of Sambla and other
neighboring groups, have grown rapidly in the past decade, according to current
residents. Some of these hamlets are even bigger than some Sambla villages, though
as hamlets, they have no independent governance structure or other political
organization. They generally fall under the governance of the nearest village with
which they have the closest kinship or other alliance.

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22 The census numbers are organized by the political division of the land, and the ethnicity of the
residents is not generally taken into consideration. Any Sambla living in a city or village of another
ethnic group would be included in the number for that geographical region. One significant example is
the village of Bama, a village that is administratively listed as Bobo, located adjacent to southern
Sambla country and has large wards of Sambla residents, including one faction of the Diabate
xylophone clan.

23 See Chapter 2 for descriptions of the historical events that precipitated these events.
The appellation “Sambla” is actually a Jula word and is only used by non-Sambla speaking people. The Sambla perceive this name as derogatory (Coulibaly 1989:3, Royer 1996:14), as it was a name given to them by invaders and colonizers, though the exact source of the word is not certain. Royer (1996:14) proposes that Jula conquerors from the Kong region of northern Côte d’Ivoire gave them the name “Sambella,” which was probably a deformation of “Semblene” (Sombele in Sambla), the name of the oldest Sambla village. This term was then adopted by the first European explorers who traveled through Sambla country in the 1890’s, Parfait-Louis Monteil and Doctor Crozat (see Monteil 1894).

Another explanation that is popular with the Sambla was offered by Samadou Coulibaly, an uncle to the Diabate musicians with whom I worked, a linguist, and an invaluable research assistant during my stay in Burkina. According to Coulibaly, Sambla oral history claims that the name was given to them by the French around the period of the anti-colonial war of 1915-1916. During this war, French soldiers were sent into the area now known as Sambla country to “restore peace,” a euphemism often used in reference to violent, suppressive attacks from colonial forces. The French soldiers found the inhabitants’ resistance to be so strong that they were repeatedly heard saying the French phrase sans blague (“no joke”), in reference to Sambla resilience and determination. The pronunciation of the phrase “sans blague” was then distorted when repeated by indigenous soldiers of the colonial army, and the resulting name “Sambla” was subsequently adopted to refer to this community

24 See Saul and Royer (2001) for an in-depth study of this important war.
(Coulibaly 1989:3). While this story is very colorful and flattering to the Sambla people, different versions of the name “Sambla” appear in written records dating as early as 1891, 25 years before this war (see Crozat 1891: 8).

In the Sambla language, the prefix seeñ is used in any indigenous appellation concerning local ethnicity. A Sambla person is therefore called seeñ-møgø (Sambla-person), the language is called seeñ-ku (Sambla-language), and Sambla country is called seeñ-gwan (Sambla-bush/country). In casual conversation, people regularly refer to each other as seeñ-mini (Sambla-woman) or seeñ-kure (Sambla-man). In this thesis I use the name Sambla for simplicity and to maintain continuity with common name used by non-Sambla and other published studies on this region.

The Sambla Language in Context

The Sambla language is classified as a Northwest Mande language, part of the Samogo sub-category that includes various dialects of Samogo that are spoken in Burkina Faso and in Mali (Ethnologue.com; Kastenholz 1996; Williamson and Blench 2000). This classification was not always clear, however, as it underwent several stages of transformation over the years due to imprecise categorization by some of the earliest scholars, religious workers, and colonial administrators working in the region. One of the main sources of confusion in the categorization of Sambla has been their association with the Samogo, due largely to the sonic resemblance of the spoken words Samogo and seeñmøgø, the word that the Sambla use to refer to themselves. This and other phonemic similarities between the two languages led
many outsiders to assume that the two languages were the same. Complicating matters further, the people who speak what is today called Samogo commonly abbreviate their language as “Samo,” confusing them with another language of the same name spoken to the north of their region. These similarities and incomplete early linguistic evidence have resulted in inaccurate and inconsistent categorizations of the Sambla language over the past fifty years by some linguists of African languages.

The three language names, Sambla, Samogo, and Samo, underwent numerous categorical transformations. In 1952, the German linguist Diedrich Westermann proclaimed that the Sambla “appear to be a section of the Samo” (41), an assumption that was followed by many subsequent Africanist linguists, including Welmers (1958), Greenberg (1963) and Voegelin (1964). De Tressan (1953) separated this category into two distinct groups: San or “Samogo-Tougan,” which is spoken around the northern region of Tougan, and another that he called Samogo-Gouan, spoken in the region of Bobo-Dioulasso.

The three languages were finally fleshed out from this grouping through a statistical lexical comparison of geographically separated groups by Morse (1967). She concluded that the Tougan Samogo was the least similar to the other two, and instead bore a 50% correspondence to Bisa, an Eastern Mande language spoken in southeastern Burkina Faso. Sambla and Samogo shared a 50% similarity with each other, and both share a 23% correspondence to Bamana, a major Western Mande language spoken throughout much of neighboring Mali (Morse 1967:65).
This similarity would actually put the Sambla and Samogo linguistically closer to the core Mande groups than the Samo, and by extension, to the Empire of Mali that flourished under Sunjata Keita in the 13th century. An association with such a historically significant dynasty is always favorable, particularly among minority communities such as these; this correlation is actively remembered and cultivated with pride today by the Sambla.

Today, Sambla is classified in the Samogo subcategory of the Northwest Mande languages (Gordon 2005; Kastenholz, 1996; Williamson and Blench, 2000). This subgroup also includes the language known today as Samogo (dzùìngoo), which is based around the village of Samogogwan, roughly 40 kilometers west and north of Sambla country (see Map 4). The other three languages in this group are commonly referred to as Samogo by local residents, but they are recognized as three separate languages, duungooma, jowulu, and bankagooma, all situated in the region of Sikasso, Mali (Gordon 2005; Carlson 1993; Solomiac et. al 1998; Traore et. al 1998; Hoschstetler 1999) (see Map 6 in Chapter 2). Tougan Samogo is known in Burkina Faso today as Samo (san/sane), which is classified in the same subgroup of the Eastern Mande languages as the Bisa (bissa), in south-central Burkina, and the Busa of Nigeria and Benin.

**Sambla Village Life**

Sambla country bears typical characteristics of Sahelian regions with a hot, arid climate and low, scrubby vegetation in the dry season (October to May). The
climate becomes humid and cooler during the rainy season (June to September), when significant rainfall makes the countryside burst with striking green foliage that vibrates against the reddish tones of the earth in the surrounding countryside (see Figures 3 and 15 for comparison). The French military officer Parfait-Louis Monteil, who traveled from the west coast of Senegal to Tripoli, was one of the first European explorers to enter the Sambla region and wrote that it was “one of the most beautiful countries in the world” (Monteil 1894: 78).

Figure 3. The hilly landscape of southern Sambla country in the rainy season. Torónso 7/20/03.
The residences in most Sambla villages are not contained within a single, defined area that is distinct from the wilderness, or “bush,” with the exception of Karankaso, which at one time was encircled by a wall for military protection. Most villages, especially those in the southern region, consist of small groups of dwellings scattered throughout the village territory, dispersed among the hills and valleys. They are separated by farmland and open, unclaimed land, connected by an intricate network of footpaths (see Figure 4). These compounds are usually far enough away from each other that one is rarely able to see more than one or two of them at a time. The chief’s residence is usually centrally located, with neighboring residences in closer proximity to each other than in the rest of the village.

The compounds are organized in a layout that is typical in the West African savannah and Sahel regions, with several small houses for sleeping quarters arranged around a central courtyard, an area designated for preparing food either inside or outside, and other structures used for storage of grain and ritual objects. One compound, called a *campement* in French, generally houses an extended family unit, consisting of the family elders, adult sons with their families, and unmarried daughters. The houses themselves are built with the colonially-imposed rectangular architecture made of mud bricks and a corrugated tin roof. Remains of older houses made in the original round architecture with thatched roofs are still present in some places.

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25 The name Karankaso is derived from the Mande word *kankan*, which refers to the woven straw “walls” that are often constructed around a residence or compound for privacy and shade (Royer 1996: 34).
The Sambla are subsistence farmers, as are most rural-dwelling Africans, growing primarily staple crops of millet, corn, and peanuts for personal consumption, and cotton that is sold in the marketplace for export. Other crops that are grown in the region include sesame, which is also sold as a commodity, and fonio, a small, couscous-like grain that is common throughout the Sahel. Village life follows an annual cycle that is tied to the agricultural calendar, beginning with the period just before the rains start when all villagers are busy planting and tending their fields, and ending with a harvest that lasts from September to November.
During the growing season from June to September, there is very little ritual or social activity, as most people are too busy working in their fields to participate in leisure activities. This period can also be a time of hardship, as the previous year’s reserves of grain are dwindling, and the new grain from current crops will not be ready to eat until after the harvest. Compounding the problem, the money raised from selling last year’s crops is generally used up by this time. Therefore, the shortage of time, money, and food during the growing season necessarily prevents rural communities from organizing and hosting ritual or social celebrations, commonly referred to by the French word fête, which is the primary locus of Sambla music activity.

The period of fêtes generally begins with a few during the first harvest in September and October, as people celebrate success of their crops and first agricultural income of the season, though they are still busy harvesting up until the December holiday season when la saison de fête commences in full force.²⁶ These social and ritual celebrations then continue through the dry season with other celebratory events, such as weddings, baptisms, and other social gatherings, leading up to the “funeral season” that begins in March, when the deaths of the previous year are commemorated and celebrated once again.

The majority of ritual activity takes place during the hot, dry months of March and April, at the end of the dry season. This also holds true for other ethnic groups,

²⁶ Following the common practice displayed in most parts of Burkina Faso, everyone in the community celebrates both Christian and Muslim holidays together, regardless of their own religious affiliation or beliefs.
such as the neighboring Bobo, who begin their funeral season with mask celebrations at the same time. Musicians are busiest and make the majority of their annual income during this period. It is not uncommon for xylophonists to play for several funerals on the same day during these months, and those attending can often see two or three other funerals taking place in the same vicinity.

**Sambla Political and Ritual Organization – Village Chief vs. Mangan**

Within the greater ethnic context of West Africa, Sambla political structure incorporates forms of governance that are shared by other groups in the region, but they are articulated in a way that specifically defines local Sambla ethnicity in relation to surrounding communities. Rather than a single, omnipotent ruling figure, Sambla political governance is distributed among different members of the community, reflecting the diversity of influences that have taken part in the construction of local political and social organization.

On the outermost level is the village chief, a figure that is almost ubiquitous in rural Africa. The Sambla chief represents his village in the context of the political unit of the Sambla prefecture, and communicates with other village chiefs on matters that affect residents of the region in question. The chief also takes care of certain local matters, such as keeping track of land use in the village domain. However, in the wider scope of social wellbeing, the position of chief is largely that of a figurehead, essentially overseeing ritual activities but holding little responsibility in their performance, as other essential roles are filled by different members of society.
Conflict resolution and spiritual protection, for example, are responsibilities held by certain members of the artisan class called *ka*, discussed below. The real power functioning at the core of Sambla governance on a regional and spiritual level, however, is held by the *mangan*, a sacred ritual leader whose powers transcend those of any human governing agency.

Understanding the institution of the *mangan* is essential to understanding the central notion of Sambla identity. The *mangan* is a religious figure who represents the ultimate authority over his particular domain of Sambla country, defining the territory and establishing local propriety over it. He is selected from a particular lineage taken from the clan of the village founder known as *mangandon* (“mangan-child”), and his authority is derived from being a descendant of the “first-comer” to the region. His power, on the other hand, is based on his control of all local religious cults. He is not considered man or god, but represents qualities of both.27

While the *mangan* is technically a human being when appointed to the role, the process of induction ceremoniously “kills” the human man, requiring him to relinquish his human life as a farmer and leave the physical world to become a semideific figure.28 In reality, he shuts himself off from the community by secluding

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27 The information in the first three paragraphs of this section about the *mangan* was drawn primarily from Royer (1996:81) and personal communication with Alexis Traore, village chief of Karnkasos (4/18/04).

28 One of the most remarkable features of the *mangan* is the fact that after his human body dies, the community is not informed right away – the period could be as long as ten or more years before the official funeral and a search begins for his replacement. It may seem strange that a community continues to function for a decade or more without their most powerful and influential ruler, but this is only testament to the fact that the *mangan* is not actually viewed as a human being, though not as a god nor within the realm of the dead. The *mangan* instead occupies a special, otherworldly space that is unique to him, and the demise of his physical body is not as significant as the community’s sustained belief in him and his existence, no matter what state that is.
himself in his house. He exerts the entirety of his rule from his seclusion through contact with intermediaries called *mangan-ke-sera* (“mangan-message-master”), who are selected from a different *mangandon* lineage called Sura. These individuals are the only ones allowed access to the *mangan* and who have intimate knowledge of his activities.

Royer described the *mangan* as “the ritual manifestation of the right of villagers to exploit the land surrounding the villages,” (1996:67). Through such activities as ensuring agricultural fecundity, controlling rainfall, and acting as a peacemaker between villages and arbitrator between the human and spiritual realm, the *mangan* forms the critical link between people and territory that comprises the roots of Sambla identity. Royer also stated that:

> The interaction between the *mangan*, the people, and a territory has led to the construction of local political and cultural arrangements which evolved into an ethnic identity in the context of changes brought about by Jula conquerors and then by French colonizers (1996:68).

The institution of the *mangan* is the most fundamental mechanism in the construction of Sambla identity, both on a local and regional level. Locally, it is the means by which people from different origins have been brought together under a new, common identity that is modern Sambla society, constructing a new manifestation of ethnicity distinct from its surroundings. Regionally, the *mangan* bears striking similarities to other figureheads in Mande West Africa, maintaining continuity between the Sambla, the Mande, and their greater environment (see Chapter 2).
**Sambla Social Organization – sa, ka, and jɔn**

Like many other Mande ethnic groups, Sambla society is stratified according to family lineage, status and occupation. The Sambla model both mirrors and diverges from dominant Mande society, which are those populations across the Sahel whose mother tongues are Bamana, Maninka and Jula, and who trace their roots to the locus of the Malian Empire, the region surrounding the border between present day Mali and Guinea. This society will henceforth be referred to simply as Mande.

Mande society is stratified into three different levels, beginning with the hořn, or freeborn class, consisting mainly of landowners, political leaders, and royal lineages. The next category is the nyamakala, or artisan class, consisting of leather workers (garanke), blacksmiths (numu), and a class of professional musicians, praise singers, genealogists, and historians (jeli). The final group, jɔn, or the slave class, is generally not recognized today, as an association with a slave lineage is not desirable in modern society. In the past, a slave designation was often attained during one’s lifetime and was not always an inherited status.

The Sambla have a similar tripartite categorization. Sambla social classes were at one time endogamous like the Mande, though significant intermarriage happens today, both among the Sambla social classes and with neighboring ethnic groups. These rules are still acknowledged symbolically as one of the defining elements of the Sambla class system, even if they are no longer followed. However, certain rules of marriage do still exist that are relevant to Sambla musicians in
particular, illustrating fundamental differences between the origins of their various lineages.

The Sambla freeborn class is called saa, consisting mainly of landowners and farmers. The saa lineages date back to the first settlers in the area, and are thus granted propriety of the region as the masters of the land. The saa control rituals of productivity, and they consider themselves to be the only “true” Sambla (Royer 1996:21). The saa category originally included blacksmiths, called tiye in Sambla, which implies that they were also among the earliest settled groups in the region. However, blacksmiths are associated today with the artisan class, ka, which is discussed below. According to Go-Tasiu Coulibaly, an elder from the village of Bwende, many ka have become blacksmiths over the years, and the profession eventually became associated with that group, reflecting the Mande model, with blacksmiths (numu) included in the nyamakala artisan class (pers. com. 12/22/03).

The class called jón in Sambla, as it is in greater Mande culture, similarly consists of what is commonly referred to as slaves. Since the name for this category is the same in both Sambla and the major Mande dialects, it is also likely that Mande nomenclature influenced this appellation. As in other parts of Africa, people often attain slave status as a result of a personal debt or having been captured as a prisoner of war. The Sambla also use slavery as a means of controlling antisocial behavior. An individual who habitually commits crimes or other malevolent acts would

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29 Originally, the saa were the only farmers in Sambla country, as the other groups earned their living through their associated trade or worked for another land-owner as a slave. As subsistence farmers, all Sambla must farm in order to survive today, so the distinction between those who farm and those who do not is only symbolic and drawn from early Sambla society.
sometimes be captured, often by a member of the individual’s own family, and sold as a slave as a means of controlling his behavior (Coulibaly 12/22/03).

The phenomenon of slavery probably existed in Sambla country at the time of the earliest settlers of the region, as it did elsewhere in the Sahel at this time, and is not as significant in modern history. This was confirmed by people in the Sambla community who, like those in the greater Mande society, consider the slave designation as a thing of the past that is no longer relevant to present day. It is possible that the Sambla once had their own name for the slave class, and the adoption of the Mande name may be a result of the significant influence that Jula has had on the smaller minority languages of the region.\textsuperscript{30}

The final group, which is situated between the saa and jœn in social status, is the artisan class known as ka. The Sambla ka bear close similarities to the Mande nyamakala, with some important differences that speak to the singularity of Sambla culture in relation to its larger Mande counterparts. Similar to greater Mande culture, the Sambla ka are divided into separate categories: xylophonists, called baan-beren-ka (xylophone-play-ka), leather workers, called tsun-dege-ka (leather-make-ka), and keepers of mystic powers known as dio-ka. The cult of dio is one of the most important Sambla religious cults. It is found in every Sambla village and was acquired from the neighboring Tusia (Royer 1996:24). The cult of dio may also be

\textsuperscript{30} Showalter has found evidence that the trade language Jula is spreading in this region, claiming that researchers have discovered a trend that “small ethnic groups in southwest Burkina Faso are abandoning their mother tongue in favor of Jula” (2001:12-13). Samadou Coulibaly also confirmed that Jula is slowly infiltrating the Sambla language, and that many Sambla words have been permanently replaced by their Jula counterparts. In many cases, they no longer know the original Sambla for some of these words, as they have long-since fallen out of use.
related to the cult of dò, a spirit-possession cult practiced by the Bobo in the region of Bobo-Dioulasso and practiced among other neighboring ethnic groups in the region.\textsuperscript{31} The dio-\textit{ka} protect the community from sickness and other malevolent forces through sacrifices and other ritual activities. In addition to their specific trades, certain \textit{ka} are assigned other functions within their group, such as social arbitrators, grave-diggers (S: \textit{konsoka}), and individuals who perform the sacrifices in ritual contexts (S: \textit{pwe-sera} “knife holder”).

While this may seem like a tidy organization of a society’s artisan class, the \textit{ka} category is much more fluid and complex than this cursory description. The category’s flexibility was demonstrated above by the shift in blacksmith classification from \textit{saa} to \textit{ka}. Since the initial settlers to the region are by definition within the \textit{saa} category and the slave designation is something assigned to someone secondarily, the \textit{ka} would necessarily absorb any migrants to the region who arrived after the initial settlers and established themselves within an artisanal occupation. The definition and sub-categorization of the \textit{ka} class must therefore be able to adapt to the changing social landscape that results from continual arrival and incorporation of foreign influences. The migration of Tusia xylophonists into Sambla country effected one such change, the creation of a unique sub-category that incorporates xylophonists into Sambla social structure. As will be explained in Chapter 2, this arrival and categorical modification caused much deeper changes in the organization and politics

\textsuperscript{31} See Le Moal (1980) for more on the cult of dò among the Bobo and its related mask traditions.
of the Sambla artisan class, as differences between previously existing Sambla music traditions and practitioners had to be negotiated with the Tusia arrival.

Similar to the Mande *jeli*, the *baan-beren-ka* comprise hereditary, occupational lineages of xylophone players. Boys learn to play the instrument at a young age from their father, uncles, and older brothers. While it is not necessarily an obligation for boys born into xylophone families to become professional musicians, every male born to a *baan-beren-ka* father will at least learn how to play the instrument and interpret the speech that is articulated through its surrogate language system.  

In general, girls and women do not play the xylophone in any public context. Some may learn to play for amusement, but in the village, girls rarely have the free time required to practice the instrument, and they would be forbidden from performing for any ritual function, even if they did learn to play well. During celebrations where the *baan* is played, the girls and women dominate the majority of the dancing, singing along with the popular, secular songs. The songs with more serious ritual significance are rarely sung vocally; the lyrics are expressed only by the soloist through the surrogate language of the *baan*.

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32 Traditionally, children of *baan-beren-ka* did not go to school, leaving time to learn and perfect the craft of music-making. In modern society, however, some of these children are being sent to school in hopes of later finding work in the cities to help financially support their families, who categorically exist in a perpetual state of abject poverty. Those boys who attend school do not have enough time to learn the *baan* adequately for public performance and ritual purposes, another avenue by which the traditional structure has transformed in adaptation to modern needs.

33 I encountered only one female Sambla xylophonist during my time in Burkina, Sali Diabate, a young woman in the family with whom I worked in Toronso. Sali lives in Bobo-Dioulasso and is also an accomplished player of the popular Jula balafon and the jembe. Her group, Lonkoba, won first prize in the category of traditional music at the 2004 Semaine National de la Culture, a biannual cultural festival that takes place in Bobo-Dioulasso. Judging by the reaction of audience members during their performance, it is quite rare to see a woman perform the xylophone in public.
The baan-beren-ka are descendants of the original Tusia musicians who immigrated into Sambla country with their xylophones in the late 19th century. Through intermarriage with local women, these musicians’ families were absorbed into the Sambla community and integrated into the complex of matrilineal ties that exists between villages and urban populations. This process did not happen immediately, but eventually kinship ties were created between the new musicians and the existing Sambla, fully integrating them into the community.

Mosaic

The social, political, and linguistic construction of the society we know today as the Sambla has resulted from a long series of processes involving a diverse collection of influences that combined to create this unique, syncretic culture. The arrival and subsequent development of the xylophone marked a new progression in this series. Upon arrival, this instrument was transformed from a foreign instrument played for dances in neighboring communities to a uniquely Sambla tradition, adding a highly developed and dynamically expressive system of music, dance, and communication specifically tailored to the Sambla people and finely tuned to their needs.

This community was formed by means of external social and political forces acting upon a migrating population with roots to ancient Manden. One of the most marginalized communities in a sea of ethnic and linguistic diversity, the Sambla fashioned their own identity through passive absorption of external influences, as
small contingents of migrants flowed into Sambla country and brought elements of their own cultures with them. The Sambla have also actively sought out foreign influences, seeking new religious cults to help rid themselves of witchcraft and other social ills, for example. Through this gradual accumulation of foreign cultural practices, both by voluntary and involuntary selection, a new culture has emerged with its own unique identity.
CHAPTER II: The Creation of a People: Sambla History from Past to Present

The Problem of Identity in Africa

The Sambla are situated in the midst of a region populated by a dense network of small ethno-linguistic groups that spans from Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso to Sikasso, Mali. The historian Yves Person described the populace of this region as a “dust cloud” of ethnic groups, which can be considered as small yet distinct minority populations defined primarily by language and cultural practices, who cohabitate in close proximity and actively exchange cultural traits (1968:1876). This ethnic and linguistic diversity is immediately evident when traveling even short distances in this region. In the 75-kilometer stretch of road from Bobo-Dioulasso to Orodara, one passes through regions where at least eight different languages are spoken as mother tongues.34

The geographic limits for these groups are generally defined by village boundaries established in the pre-colonial and colonial eras, or other natural phenomena such as rivers or escarpments (see Map 5). Although implied by the map, these borders do not manifest distinct divisions of the languages or cultural practices associated with each group. Among this high concentration of ethnic variation, different linguistic and ethnic characteristics manifest on a continuum, as it does throughout much of Africa. Diverse populations coexist at the peripheries of these ethnic centers, where they combine elements of their various ethnic backgrounds,

34 The ethno-linguistic groups residing along this route are Bobo, Sambla, Tiefo, Tusia, Turka, Siamou, Samogo, and Gouin.
languages, and religious and other cultural practices as they negotiate their multicultural landscape. In some cases, new, hybrid languages develop that are only spoken in these communities, and certain cultural practices and beliefs are similarly integrated and practiced by the community at large.\textsuperscript{35} These composite, peripheral communities act as conduits for cultural diffusion among different ethnic groups by their frequent association with different people, regions, and villages. These conditions lead to a certain cultural heterogeneity that is somewhat typical of many African communities.\textsuperscript{36} As Terence Ranger stated,

Far from there being a single tribal identity, most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as subjects to this chief, at another moment as a member of that cult, at another moment as part of this clan, and yet at another moment as an initiate in that professional guild. These overlapping networks of association and exchange extended over wide areas (1983:248).

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\textsuperscript{35} The best example of this phenomenon in this area can be found in the village of Moami, situated on the Bobo-Dioulasso to Orodara route, approximately halfway between Bobo and Sambla countries (see Map 4). The language spoken in this village is called \textit{moamikan} in Jula, meaning simply “Moami language,” which is actually a combination of Sambla, Tusia, and Tiefo (Coulibaly, pers. comm.). According to my informants, residents of Moami can understand these three languages when spoken by others, but these outsiders cannot understand \textit{moamikan}. This language is only spoken in the village of Moami and an adjacent hamlet, by a population of slightly more than 500 people who actively maintain kinship relations with many neighboring villages. At a funeral that I attended in Moami, Sambla xylophonists from Toronso came to play for the fête because the family of the deceased had strong ties to the Sambla community, but all the residents of Moami participated in the event.

\textsuperscript{36} This view of African societies is somewhat antithetical to much of 19\textsuperscript{th} and early-20\textsuperscript{th} century Africanist anthropology, when ethnic groups were often examined as isolated, individual entities without taking into account the considerable influence of other neighboring communities.
Ethnic identity in Africa, reflecting a multiplicity of influences, is therefore not defined by any single attribute, such as language, regional distribution, or religious practices and beliefs. Within every community, a sense of unity and multiplicity are present, which is the case in this smattering of minority populations found in western Burkina Faso. They can be considered to have distinct, unified traditions and languages, but each of these groups also shares something with their neighbors, from religious practices to economic systems, to common ancestry, creating a collective diversity within each community. The French geographer Thierry Hertog remarked on the symbiotic relationship between unity and diversity in the populations of this region in his study of agriculture and land use among the Sambla:

Each [community] reveals a certain unity: ethnic group, cultural stock, landscape, and other such elements that imprint a fundamental cultural identity. But beyond this unity, each [individual] corresponds to a particular agricultural, social, and economic situation. The internal diversity of a population responds thus to the unity of [its] environment. Unity and diversity are not, however, opposite terms, but rather complementary; they follow, across time and within the same limits of definition, a common evolution. (1980:92, my translation)

This idea of unity within diversity exists in this region on both a large scale, characterizing relationships between ethnic groups as described above, and also on the smaller scale of individual communities, many of which include descendants of neighboring ethnic groups who have migrated into their region over the years. Despite the diversity of ethnic backgrounds found within these populations and the inevitable influence that has on their societies at large, the people within each of these communities share a sense of a common ethnic identity. The vital question is,
therefore, what defines a unified identity in the face of such multiplicity? The answer must depend on the specifics of the circumstance in question, and in order to find the answer for the Sambla, it is necessary to examine the history of the formation of the ethnic group and the forces at work in forging this identity.

Sambla society includes members that represent lineages of the original settlers of the region as well as descendants of past migrants from most of their neighboring ethnic groups, especially Bobo, Tusia, and Tiefo. Despite their different cultural origins, which inevitably manifest in each individual’s religious and/or personal life, the Sambla have a sense of their own identity, of what is Sambla and what is not. This is largely determined by a combination of language, cultural and religious practices and beliefs, economic systems, and political and religious governance structures. Many of these cultural elements are drawn from the original home communities of their members and are subsequently combined into a new, singular tradition. This is the case for many of the other ethnic groups in the region as well. Jean Hébert described this hybridization of cultural practices among the Tusia:

Thus the Southern Tusia, generally classified with the Senufo, would be in reality an amalgamation of several ethnic groups; the combining of economic, matrimonial, political and religious practices have effected enough cohesion to give the appearance of an original ethnic group (Hébert 1976:3).

This diversity within unity that permeates cultures of this region is a result of the same forces that established political boundaries, as well as the ethnic alliances

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37 Sambla social classes are based on family origin: the saa, descendants of the region’s original settlers who are considered the “true Sambla,” and the ka, an artisan class that subsumes later arrivals to the region (see Chapter 1).
and hostilities that influenced later interactions among populations. Unlike some other parts of Africa, where ethnic groups were formed artificially by colonial forces as a strategy for pacification and control, ethnic division in this region occurred before French rule, during the Jula invasions of the 19th century. Warfare, migration, and unequal relations of power between indigenous populations and Jula conquerors shaped the ethnic landscape in the region as we know it today (Royer 1996:26). One important migration, that of two Tusia musicians who left their villages to settle in Sambla country, accounts for the initial introduction of the xylophone to the Sambla, who, according to their oral traditions, had no dance music tradition before this event. These musicians physically brought the instrument to the Sambla, and then proceeded to adapt it to their particular cultural needs, culminating in the highly developed, decidedly Sambla instrumental tradition that is the subject of this thesis.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to outline the historical events that contributed to the construction of Sambla society, culture, and identity, and to place the invention of the baan tradition in this continuum of processes. This diachronic view of the Sambla illustrates how and why they developed into a distinct ethnic group, as well as the social, political, and religious factors that shaped this development. The succession of processes presented here forged a unique cultural identity out of an ethnic amalgamation, culminating in the introduction of the xylophone to the Sambla. This major cultural event forever changed Sambla ritual and social life, and became one of the most prominent features of their identity as it is known within Sambla country and elsewhere in the region.
Initial Settlement – The Samogo Populations

The history of the Sambla begins with the eastward migrations of Mande-speaking peoples from the Fouta-Jallon mountains on the border of present-day Guinea and Mali, beginning as early as 1500 C.E. (Person 1961:47-59, Royer 1996:33). One segment of this migration, known today as the Samogo populations (Morse 1967), eventually settled in the region between Sikasso, Mali and Bobo-Dioulasso. The first documentation of these communities was made by one of the earliest European explorer in the region, Captain Louis-Gustave Binger, who cited a Samogo community of 40 villages south of Sikasso (1892:227-8). Person also placed a Samogo population just south of Kenedugu, the Jula stronghold based in Sikasso, in maps depicting the region in the 1880s (1990: maps 18, 33), though he implies that they were present in the region much earlier than that. In his extensive history of Samori Toure, Person called this area “the cradle of a Mande ethnic group who speak a particular language called Samogo, [and] who … therefore represent the oldest population tier [in this area]” (1968:749-750).

Of course this region was not uninhabited when the Samogo populations arrived, though Person has determined that it was very sparsely populated during the Middle Ages (ibid.). When the Samogo arrived in this region, they found other people there who spoke languages from the Gur or Voltaic family. One such group is the Tusia, who are widely considered the oldest residents of this region (see Hébert 1976).
After settling in this area, these early Samogo were divided and fragmented by successive waves of Senufo migrations, dispersing them southward in smaller groups that eventually developed into distinct ethno-linguistic groups (Person ibid., Rondeau 1980:66). These communities were linked by common origins and language, but as they separated and were isolated from one another, their languages and cultural practices diverged and developed into separate, unique entities under the influence of neighboring peoples (see Map 6).

Today the Samogo populations are recognized as the five groups who speak languages under the Samogo category of the Northwest Mande languages: Sambla (seeňku) and Samogo (dzùʊngoo) in Burkina Faso, and jowulu (jɔ), duungooma, and bankagooma, in Mali, which were discussed in Chapter 1. The Samogo have also spread further south from this region into Côte d’Ivoire toward Bunjali and Mankono (Person 1968:783).

The Sambla and Samogo, considered two distinct ethnic groups today, retain active kinship and other alliances, as well as many cultural similarities. The village of Karankaso, the political and geographic center of Sambla country, was founded by a family from Samogogwan, the central village of Samogo country (see Map 6). The descendants of this family regularly visit relatives in Samogogwan today, referring to these trips as “going home” (S. Coulibaly, pers. com. 10/19/03). The Sambla and Samogo also share commonly acknowledged linguistic similarities (see Chapter 1), but the most important cultural attribute that the two groups share is the presence of an “earth chief” or guardian of the earth as a ritual leader, which has played a crucial role in unifying a multi-ethnic population into a single, Sambla identity.

**The Earth Chief in the Larger Mande Context**

The institution of the mangan, or Sambla earth chief, is one of the most important ritual elements that the Sambla share with the Samogo. Like the Samogo earth chiefs, the mangan reigns over a small group of adjacent Sambla villages (Person 1968:749-50, Rondeau 1980:66). Communities with earth chiefs are
sometimes considered to be “custodians of the earth,” a responsibility assigned to the first settlers of a region (Person 1968:749-50, Royer 1996:18), as Person has established with the Samogo.38 The mangan is also sometimes known as son-sera (“sky-master”), such as in the baan song titled “Son Sera So” (“sky master song”), referring to his ability to control rainfall. The sky god figure is also common elsewhere in Burkina Faso and West Africa (see Zwernemann 1961).

Ironically, the most pronounced cultural trait that links the Sambla with the Samogo is also the mechanism by which the Sambla distinguished themselves from the Samogo and other neighboring groups. In the creation of Sambla society, the mangan acted as an agent of social cohesion by unifying an ethnically diverse group of people with the land on which they live, creating the foundation of Sambla identity (see Chapter 1). By defining a sense of unity within the community, the Sambla were set apart from other neighboring peoples, as definitions of what exactly is and is not Sambla were further defined with the aid of the mangan.

The mangan also maintains a tangible tie between the Sambla and their larger Mande context by its similarity with the mansa or “sacred king” of the Mande world (Royer 1996:68). The tradition of mansaya (kingship) is one of the oldest in the history of Mande West Africa, dating to at least the ancient Ghana Empire of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Like the mansa, the Sambla mangan traces his lineage to the original settler of the village/region, and his rule is based in a philosophy of non-violence, acting as a regional peacemaker. They both undergo a

38 This status is recognized in Sambla social structure, which considers the saa, descendants of the first settlers of the region, as landowners, custodians of the earth, and the only true Sambla (see Chapter 1).
transformation from man to divine being through symbolic death and withdrawal from social life, signifying a departure from the human realm. The authority of the mansa and the mangan, derived through corporate kinship groups, covers a regional network constituted of one central village and a number of satellites. This power is primarily involved with the welfare of the land and the people it supports.

Royer further illustrated the similarities between the mansa and mangan through their relationship with other earth chiefs:

Although some mansaw of the Mande world ruled empires, the religious role of the mangan and of most mansaw was not substantially different from that of the well-known earth chief of West African villages. In this continuum between the village chief and the mansa the same symbolic structure and the same symbols of power are often used (for example, the ritual killing of the new chief, or more simply the use of a cow hide as a symbol of power). Over a long period of time, the office of earth-chief could be promoted to that of mansa and conversely that of mansa could be reduced to that of earth chief (1996:69).

The ritual organization and governance structure of the institution of the mangan, probably influenced by the mansa, greatly influenced the early stages in the development of Sambla society. The social conditions created by the mangan led to certain means of political and cultural organization that eventually evolved into an ethnic identity. The processes constructing this sense of identity continued and evolved under different political and social contexts of the last century, including the Jula invasions and French colonization. It was within this context, during the turbulent period before and during colonization, that the Sambla baan tradition was invented, further building a sense of Sambla identity through expressive culture.
The Creation of Borders – External Forces

In the two centuries preceding French colonization, warring lineages from the Jula of Kong, the Wattara and the Traore, invaded and took control of the region between Sikasso and Bobo-Dioulasso in an attempt to expand their control of trade routes in this critical region that links the southern forest region with the trans-Saharan trade routes from North Africa. The formation of ethnic identity in this region took place largely during this period, influenced by population movements and warfare that were precipitated by unequal power relations between local communities and the Jula. Peoples residing in the region between Bobo-Dioulasso and Sikasso were effectively used as pawns in a power struggle between the Wattara, who settled in the Bobo-Dioulasso region, and the Traore, based in the area of Sikasso. The conquest and subjugation of peoples by the Jula during this period had the greatest influence on ethnic division and the creation of boundaries that are recognized today. When the French took control in the late 19th century, they found the region already in a fragmented, easily manageable state, and they maintained the boundaries set by the Jula and used them to create official administrative borders.

Regional social relations were also established during this period. As independent communities formed, alliances were made, both among the subjugated populations to create a stronger defense against invaders, and between certain groups and different sides of the Jula conflict. The political and kinship relations established among the small ethnic groups caught in the middle of this conflict directed the

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39 My interpretation and analysis of these historical events and their ramifications on social processes are drawn largely from Royer (1996).
subsequent flow of cultural exchange that took place in the formation of these groups’ identities.

Furthermore, the subjugation of these populations precipitated massive migrations, first to flee villages and regions that had been conquered and destroyed by the Jula, and later as a form of passive resistance to tax collection, forced labor, and military inscription by colonial forces. Many of these migrations were over relatively short distances, either to neighboring regions where the migrants had established alliances, or other areas where they found friendly communities who welcomed and accepted them, as the Sambla were known to do. These migratory paths outlined additional avenues upon which cultural diffusion flowed from one ethnic group to the next. This movement of peoples and their accompanying cultural traditions is largely responsible for the ethnic pastiche that characterizes this entire region today. The assortment of ethnic groups that became absorbed by each community was unified by various local political and religious institutions, such as the Sambla mangan.

The events of this period and their consequences are significant to the history of the Sambla baan for two major reasons. First, military and kinship alliances were established at this time between the Sambla and Tusia as a means of defense against Jula invaders. This relationship led to the later migration of Tusia musicians into Sambla country, when the xylophone was first introduced to the community. Second, the development of the Sambla baan tradition is part of this system of processes that forged Sambla identity from the mixture of ethnic backgrounds that characterize Sambla country and surrounding territories. The introduction of the baan occurred
later in the continuum, but the development and presence of this new tradition acted in many ways like the institution of the *mangan* and other local systems to unify the Sambla people and further define their unique ethnic identity.

**Jula Invasion and Conflict – Gwiriko and Kenedugu**

The era of Jula invasion and conquest began in the early 1700s when Seku Wattara overthrew the non-Muslim leader of Kong, situated in the north of present-day Côte d’Ivoire, with the help of Muslim clerics. The Jula were a warrior class whose name translates to “itinerant trader” in Bamana, and today many scholars of African history associate them with the spread of Islam as a by-product of their mobile commercial activities. By overtaking the region of Kong, the Jula were then able to expand their economic and military power by linking the two crucial trade regions of the southern forest and the northern savannah. The most critical region to conquer was the important commercial center of Bobo-Dioulasso, which had long served as a commercial hub and crossroads of trade routes from the Sahara to the southern forest regions.

However, the conquest of this region was complicated by a split in the Jula community caused by a conflict between Seku and his younger brother, Famagan. Tradition dictated that his brother was positioned next in line for power and control of the Jula Empire, but Seku favored his sons more than his brother and promised the position to them. This conflict split the empire into two sides: the Wattara, supporters

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40 The Jula invasions of this period are discussed in many scholarly works. Person (1968) provides one of the most celebrated and detailed accounts.
of Seku, who successfully conquered the region of Bobo-Dioulasso and created a political state known as Gwiriko, and the Traore, the legacy of Famagan, who settled in the region of Sikasso, Mali, and created the Kingdom of Kenedugu.

The Wattara lineages spread their military power over the western region of present-day Burkina Faso, using the small populations located to the southeast and west of Bobo-Dioulasso as pools of warriors in their continuing battle against the Traore of Sikasso. They also used these groups as slave lineages, and these smaller communities either formed alliances with or resisted the Wattara, which consolidated population groups and demarcated ethnic boundaries. This was the first step in the division of these populations by external forces, separating people into smaller clusters that are known today as ethnic groups. During this era, processes of social differentiation had less to do with kinship, language, traditions, or other cultural traits; the division was used more as a means to “maintain or erase a particular identity according to particular political and economic conditions” (Royer 1996:33). The Wattara military conquests were therefore akin to war as “social practice,” producing or reproducing social and political networks but not a political structure (ibid: 39).41

Present-day Sambla country was located in the heart of the fluctuating border between the Wattara and Traore, and their patterns of alliance and resistance marked the first separation of the northern and southern Sambla regions. The Sambla were already known as warriors in this area, and they frequently raided neighboring Bobo

41 See Bazin and Terray (1982) for more on this topic.
and other villages.\textsuperscript{42} Those living in Karankaso at that time joined warring expeditions with the Wattara, who had a major lord settled in the neighboring Bobo village of Makuma (J: Sungalodaga) (see Map 4).\textsuperscript{43} The southern villages, located in a hilly region that was very difficult to access, openly resisted Jula rule, setting them apart from the northern collaborators. This refusal to align themselves with the Wattara helped establish the southern region’s reputation for continual resistance, both active and passive, to any external rule.\textsuperscript{44} This dissonance between the two Sambla populations also led to later internal conflicts between the two regions, resulting in a latent animosity that exists to some extent today, though Sambla country today could only be described as unified and peaceful.

In July 1898, the French gained control of Sambla country (Person 1968:1993), and with the help of the Wattara, they repressed the local revolts that continued in the southern villages. The French followed the ethnic boundaries that had been established during the initial Jula invasions and created states (états) broken into cantons, which were placed under the rule of cooperative Wattara. The canton Sambla was then created as part of the état of Moro-Fin Wattara. This canton was eventually placed under the control of the notorious chef de canton and tyrant, Si-

\textsuperscript{42} According to Samadou Coulibaly, at one time, a particular song played on the xylophone was traditionally danced with the ear of a conquered Bobo pierced on the end of a long stick. Relations between the Sambla and Bobo have long been reconciled since then, and they now share many kinship relations and religious practices.

\textsuperscript{43} The Karankaso-Wattara alliance led to the Jula appellation of the village by the wall that was constructed around the perimeter of the village as a military defense. The Jula word “kankan,” which refers to the woven straw walls often constructed for privacy around dwellings or compounds, was then transformed into “Karankaso” (Royer 1992: 34). Remnants of this wall still exist to this day.

\textsuperscript{44} The southern villages at this time were Semblene, Torønso, Bwende, Konkolikan, Tiara, and Tukørø; the hamlets of Gonion and Samatukørø later grew and became established as villages and are currently considered part of the southern Sambla region.
Boro Traore, an orphaned child of Sambla and Fula parents, who was a typical example of a marginalized individual who sought validation by joining forces with an external, oppressive force (Royer 1996:55-56).

Si-Boro was a famous collaborator with the French, and terrorized the region with his often brutal manner of levying taxes and recruiting young men for forced military inscription into the colonial army. He was known for having throngs of wives, most of whom were stolen from villages where they were already married and had families. He also began to change Sambla family names to his name, Traore, because according to villagers today, he considered all of the Sambla as his children. A disproportionate percentage of the Sambla still bear the family name Traore today, though some families have recently looked up old records and changed their names back.

While the chef de canton was only a pawn used by the French and had no real power of his own, Si-Boro missed no opportunity to make ostentatious displays of his authority. This included adopting a practice used by Kele-Mori, the first Wattara ruler of this region, by sending musicians ahead to herald his arrival when he visited villages (Kodjo 1986:465, Royer 1996:60). According to Sa-Kɔnɔn Konate, an elder of the Konkolikan-based clan of xylophonists, Si-Boro chose Go-Fëfëfo Konate, the best xylophonist in the region at the time, to be his personal musician for such purposes (pers. com. 3/21/04). At the time of Si-Boro’s reign as canton chief, from

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45 The song from the baan repertoire called “Mini Soko Ke Soenõe” (“Beautiful Women Are Plenty”) was written during this period. Some of the women from the Konate xylophone family said that the song was played while Si-Boro lined up the women from a village to make his choices. The song proclaims that there are many beautiful women, implying that he could leave the women here alone and find another suitable one elsewhere (Coulibaly and Traore, pers. com. 12/22/03).
1915-1919 (Royer 196:56-60), the baan tradition was still quite new, as Go-Fëëfo was the younger brother of one of the original Tusia xylophonists who migrated to Sambla country in the late 19th century (see below). The Sambla baan tradition was therefore developed enough, even at this nascent stage, to be appropriated by Si-Boro to signify his authority and to facilitate domination and social control.

The political organization instated by the French during this period created the boundaries that continue to define Sambla country as a regional political unit today. While Sambla identity is not so one-dimensional as to be defined solely by artificial, externally-imposed boundaries, the division and isolation of ethnic groups during these warring periods before and during colonization helped intensify a sense of ethnic solidarity and cohesion based on common goals. This phenomenon also affected the division of the Sambla between northern and southern regions, which are signified today by differences in dialect and accent in the spoken language, and as we will later see, a slight difference in northern and southern tuning systems.

Meanwhile, the Traore, called the “Jula of Sikasso” by the Sambla, waged continuous battles with the Wattara for control of the region until the time of colonization. This violence reached a peak in the late 19th century, in the period directly preceding French rule. This was the period of reign of the infamous Tieba Traore, one of the most ruthless and oppressive Jula overlords of this period. In the 1880s, Tieba expanded his realm to the area just west of Sambla country, overtaking the village of Samogogwan and regularly raiding neighboring Tusia and Turka

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46 The advent of French colonization effectively ended the Traore-Wattara dispute, and “froze” the fluctuating state of ethnic and political boundaries that had been established as a result of this conflict.
villages. In 1892 he attacked Banfulagwe, the largest Tusia village, and despite aid from the Sambla, he succeeded in decimating the village population (Hébert 1970:38; Saul and Royer 2001:342). Tieba subsequently raided the Sambla, but he was unable to penetrate the hilly southern region and was eventually killed the following year in the famous battle of Bama, a Bobo village on the outskirts of Sambla country (Hébert 1970).

The Jula conflicts and later French colonization had significant consequences on the relations among the mosaic of small ethnic groups residing in this battleground for external subjugation. Each of the individual groups in this region was too small to stand a chance defending themselves against the aggressive Jula and French invasions alone, so it was necessary to band together under military alliances to help defend each other against these invaders. Just as the Sambla came to the aid of the Tusia when Tieba attacked Banfulagwe in 1892, the Tusia joined the Sambla when the southern villages rose up to revolt against French colonizers in 1916 as a part of the massive anti-colonial war that shook the entire region from Bamako to Ouagadougou from 1915-1916.47 While these collaborations did not always result in victory, the alliances formed during this period created enduring reciprocal relationships that formed social contracts that are maintained to this day.

47 See Saul and Royer (2001) for an in-depth examination of this important war.
The Tusia – The Influence of Precedence

In general, the Sambla maintain close relations with other neighboring peoples, but the most important relationship to the development of Sambla culture and identity has been with the Tusia, who reside west of Sambla country (see Maps 4-6). The Tusia are part of the Gur language family, formerly known as the Voltaic languages, as are most of the other ethno-linguistic groups in the region, such as the Mossi, Senufo, Bwa, Lobi, and many others (see Map 6). The Tusia are commonly regarded as the first historical settlers of this immediate region (Hébert 1976, Royer 1996:74). Like the Sambla, Tusia country is divided into two groups, indicated by geographical difference as Northern and Southern Tusia, but the difference between the two is also manifest in language, customs, and cultural origin. The Northern Tusia are considered the oldest community, and they are the ones with whom the Sambla have the closest relations, due mainly to close geographic proximity. The Southern Tusia consist primarily of people who arrived later to the community by migration and were absorbed into Tusia society. The culture of the Southern Tusia reflects some of the foreign influences brought in by migrants over the ages, which accounts for the cultural differences between the two regions.

Due to their close geographic proximity, the Sambla and Tusia developed religious and kinship alliances that later led to the military alliances described above (Saul and Royer 2001:224). The close relationship between the two groups and the

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48 Some rock carvings have been found in various parts of contemporary Tusia country that date to the Paleolithic era. Some of these drawings depict scenes that resemble some of the initiation rites of the Tusia cult of Do, though it is impossible to know if they were in fact drawn by ancestors of the Tusia (Hébert 1976:1-2).
Tusia’s precedence in the region resulted in the exchange of many cultural and religious practices from the Tusia to the Sambla. An important example of this is the cult of Dio, one of the most pervasive and enduring religious cults that exists in every Sambla village today.49 This cult originated as the cult of Do, the central cult of initiation ceremonies of all northern Tusia villages (Royer 1996:75). The Sambla similarly incorporated Dio to their cult of Nogo, the Sambla men’s initiation ritual, paying homage to the Tusia’s regional seniority.50

Another important similarity between the Sambla and Tusia is the manner in which they name their children, a practice that must have been adopted by the Sambla early in their relationship with the Tusia. Both communities name their children according to birth order. These chronologies are divided by the sex of the child, and are determined by the order of children from each mother rather than the father, as this is a polygamous community. Therefore, the status of “first born” for the purposes of naming could be held by several different children from the same father, because the first son and first daughter of each mother would be bear the first-born name for that sex. The Sambla names and their associated birth orders are listed in Figure 5, with a selection of Tusia equivalents for comparison. These names are attached as prefixes to another name that is chosen specifically for that child, usually

49 The cult of Do spread to other late-coming ethnic groups in the region besides the Sambla, including the Siamou, Turka, Bobo (Dwo) and Bwa (Bognolo 2000, Hanna-Vergara 1996, Le Moal 1999, Roy 1987a, Royer 1996).
50 Dio is in fact so central to Nogo that part of the initiation process involves learning a “secret language” called dioku (“dio-language”). While the cult of Nogo has been discontinued in all but one Sambla village, dioku is still taught and spoken by the few who still participate in the initiation. I never had an opportunity myself to hear this language spoken; other, non-initiated Sambla who have heard it characterize the language as “completely different” from Sambla, and is not recognized as bearing resemblance to any of the neighboring languages with which they would be familiar, such as Samogo, Tusia, Tiefo, or Bobo.
determined by an event associated with their birth or similarity with another relative.

For example, the name by which I was known in Burkina Faso was Asetu, a common Muslim name found throughout the Sahel, which was easier for people to remember and pronounce than my real name. Because I was the first girl born to my mother, my Sambla name would therefore be “Jië-Asetu,” which is elided and pronounced like “Jiësetu.”

### Male Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sambla</th>
<th>Tusia (north/south)</th>
<th>Siamou</th>
<th>Lobi and Gan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Si</td>
<td>Sie</td>
<td>Sie</td>
<td>Sie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sa</td>
<td>San</td>
<td>Sone</td>
<td>Sansan/Sane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go</td>
<td>Wula</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Olo/Ole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fie</td>
<td>Pie</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>Togo/Toa</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Sërë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penege</td>
<td>Kupenege/Pon</td>
<td>--</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kue</td>
<td>Keba</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Female Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sambla</th>
<th>Tusia (north/south)</th>
<th>Siamou</th>
<th>Lobi and Gan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jië</td>
<td>Yabile/Siapri</td>
<td>Ye</td>
<td>Yeri/Yeli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ga</td>
<td>Wo</td>
<td>Wëë</td>
<td>Oho/Ohbi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyi</td>
<td>Nyine/Nyin</td>
<td>Nyin</td>
<td>Ini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fen</td>
<td>Pane</td>
<td>Fon</td>
<td>Mini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sere</td>
<td>Sela</td>
<td>See</td>
<td>Sesere/Sere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyëma</td>
<td>Ëmon/Ëma</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pa</td>
<td>Pra</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

After the seventh child, the Sambla names repeat with the suffix –Maa added (S: “again”), i.e. Si-Maa, Jië-Maa, etc.

**Figure 5.** Sambla names according to birth order with select equivalents from other neighboring ethnic groups (Coulibaly, pers. com. 7/21/06). [-- signifies missing data].

In addition to military alliances, a deeply embedded network of kinship ties also link the Sambla with the Tusia, as demonstrated by the establishment of the
matriclan from which the *mangan* is chosen in Semblene, the first Sambla village. This matriclan was begun by a Tusia woman named Semme, who fled her home village of Subakanyedugu (T: Benion) after accusations of witchcraft and settled in Semblene.\(^{51}\) Going back even further, one of the two original settlers of Semblene was a Tusia man named San-Cë, placing the very foundation of Sambla country partially in the hands of the Tusia (Royer 1996:82).

The many different facets and levels of the alliances between the Tusia and Sambla are crucial to the nature of the intimate relationship between the two groups.\(^{52}\) Despite their different origins, both societies share many cultural traits and experiences. They both underwent parallel processes of territorial expansion, and banded together during the turbulent eras of Jula and French invasion and control. The history and depth of this relationship helps us to see how and why two Tusia xylophonists chose to migrate to Sambla country after deciding to relocate from their home villages, and why the Sambla were obliged to welcome them into their community and eagerly adopted the Tusia xylophone tradition as their own.

**Introduction of the Xylophone by the Tusia**

Despite its position as the cornerstone of Sambla music and vital role in virtually all Sambla ritual and social activities, the *baan* is a relatively new music tradition. Most Sambla living today are not able to estimate how long the xylophone tradition has been.

\(^{51}\) Subakanyedugu, the Jula name that appears on maps and road signs, is called Benion in Tusia and is also known exclusively under that name by the Sambla. Because I only heard the village referred to as Benion in the course of my research, I will henceforth use that name in this thesis.

\(^{52}\) The Sambla often describe themselves and the Tusia as one people, demonstrated by intertwining their fingers (Royer 1996:74).
has existed among them. However, by speaking with elders from the two Sambla xylophone clans and village chiefs who are descendants of individuals who helped establish the xylophone in Sambla country, I have been able to put together a genealogy of xylophonists that leads back to the individuals who first brought the instrument to the Sambla.

Accuracy of oral histories is always a concern in collecting ethnographic data such as this, so I developed my own ad hoc system of fact checking and determining which sources were more reliable than others. In general, I asked the same questions to as many people as possible to verify answers given in other interviews. When discrepancies arose in family lineages, I valued the answers given by direct descendants of the ancestors in question, though answers confirmed by more than one source were always given highest priority. The people I interviewed were mainly members of the Diabate and Konate xylophone clans, as well as village chiefs from Bwènde and Karankaso. Because one of the social responsibilities held by Sambla xylophonists is to learn local genealogies, as it is for other Mande professional musicians of inherited status, one could assume that the genealogy they know best would be their own. Similarly, memories of significant historical events that have taken place in the area that involved former chiefs would likely be preserved by descendents of that chief. Other interview subjects were some of the more senior elders in the village who had been closely associated with the xylophone or ka kan

53 Most of my informants were hesitant to say that anything from their culture or villages is somehow new or originated elsewhere. Because the xylophone fills such a central role in nearly every facet of daily life, many Sambla spoke of the baan to me as if it existed in their culture many generations before the colonial era, despite the fact that local oral history places its introduction in the period directly preceding French rule (see below).
families. Nevertheless, my conclusions from these oral histories and the timeline that I have constructed from them must be considered estimations, as I have no written record to confirm the birth order, names or existence of the individuals named in the genealogical sketch that I have cobbled together from this collection of oral histories.

The biggest difficulty in reconstructing such a genealogy and estimating the amount of time that each generation represents is the unusually long span of time that can be represented by a single generation in polygamous communities. Because a man can continue to marry wives of child-bearing age well into his senior years, the amount of time between his first and last child could easily span three or four decades. Because of this, it is not unusual for people to have children who are older than their own youngest siblings, resulting in aunts and uncles who are younger than their nieces and nephews, and sometimes even extended grandparents who are younger than one’s own parents. Add in the fact that the terms “mother,” “father,” “grandmother,” and “grandfather” are often used in reference to people who are not a person’s biological parent or grandparent, and the business of estimating the birth dates of prior generations becomes nearly impossible. Fortunately, one of the first generation of xylophonists who migrated into Sambla country was linked to a documented historical reference, so I was able to place this individual within a specific time frame, making it easier to estimate the time of the original arrival of the xylophone in Sambla country.

Nearly everyone I asked Si-Këënsa Konate, a Tusia from the village of Banfulagwe (T: Këën), as the first musician who migrated into Sambla country,
bringing the xylophone with him (pers. com. Go-Tasiu Coulibaly, Fie-Siți Konate 12/22/03; Sadama Diabate 1/5/04; Sa-Kɔnɔ Konate 3/21/04; Sa-Ndoga and Martin Traore 4/18/04). He came together with his younger brother, Go-Fɛɛfo, but because Si-Kɛɛnsa was the elder brother, he is the one credited for this migration (see Map 7).54

Map 7. The migration of the Konate and Diabate xylophonists from the Tusia villages of Banfulagwe and Benion to Sambla country, late 19th century.

54 The issue of seniority is very important here as it is elsewhere in Africa; a younger sibling is rarely if ever given recognition or priority over an older sibling.
According to local oral accounts, Go-Fëëfo Konate was hired by the canton chief Si-Boro Traore as his personal musician (see above), and he was widely considered the finest xylophonist in Sambla country in his lifetime (Sa-Kønøn Konate, pers. com. 3/21/04). If Go-Fëëfo was actively playing and possibly at the height of his career during the period of Si-Boro’s reign as canton chief from 1915 to 1919 (Royer 1996:56-60), it is likely that he was at least 35 to 40 years old while in Si-Boro’s service, considering his master status at the time. It is possible that he may have been older than his 40s, though probably not significantly so, considering the low life expectancy rates in Burkina Faso, particularly among rural musicians. By estimating Go-Fëëfo’s age between 40 and 50 years between 1915 and 1920, and assuming that he was between 15 and 25 years old at the time of migration, Go-Fëëfo and his older brother Si-Këënsa Konate would have migrated from Banfulagwe to Konkolikan between 1885 and 1905. This estimation is consistent with the account given by Fie-Siõi Konate, a xylophonist from Konkolikan, who said that Si-Këënsa migrated to Sambla country around the time of French colonization.

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55 Based upon the ages of the Sambla xylophonists who were active during the period of my research, I estimate 40 as the approximate age when a xylophonist has adequately mastered the technical virtuosity of the solo baan part, including the astoundingly challenging demands of the surrogate speech element of performance (see Chapter 4).

56 The life expectancy at birth for Burkinabe males in 2006 is 47.33 years old (CIA World Factbook, internet). During the period of my research, the oldest Diabate xylophonist was in his late-40s, and the Konate xylophonists were slightly older. The xylophonists do not lead particularly healthy lifestyles; most of them are heavy drinkers and smokers, and they tend to die at a relatively young age.

57 These figures are only estimations, and it is possible that he was older than 50 when in the service of Si-Boro and younger than 15 when he migrated, moving the year of migration back in time in either case, though ages outside of my proposed ranges are less likely. Since he was the younger of the two brothers, it is unlikely that he was much older than 25 years old when he migrated.

58 In the late 1890s, the French systematically took control over different regions of Burkina Faso. They occupied Bobo-Dioulasso in September 1897, took control of Sambla country in July 1898, and
This time frame is narrowed by another historical event, however, because it has been documented that Tieba Traore attacked Banfulagwe in 1892. All of the residents of this village either fled or were killed by Tieba and his soldiers, and the village was left completely destroyed (Hébert 1970:38). Therefore, the migration must have occurred before 1892, and it may have taken place as a direct result of the attack, or in anticipation of it. Konkolikan is the closest Sambla village to Banfulagwe, just a few hours’ walking distance, but it is also safely nestled in the hilly southern region of Sambla country, where Tieba had been unable to penetrate (Royer 1996:45). Another possible reason could be that Si-Këënsa and his family moved to Sambla country to find a new region with fewer musicians and therefore less competition for work. The elder Konate xylophonists suggested this as a possible reason.

Whatever the exact reasons for this migration, the Sambla openly welcomed the Tusia Konates, consistent with the reciprocal aid that had been demonstrated between the two groups for decades. This single action was responsible for the first introduction of the xylophone to Sambla country. The instrument was likely familiar to most Sambla, as the two groups were friends, but this was the first time that someone had established residency with the instrument in a Sambla village.

However, the initial Konate migration did not lead the family exclusively to Konkolikan. According to brothers of the chief of Bwënde (Traores, pers. com. 4/18/04), the next village to the east of Konkolikan, the Konates first passed through

finally established a military post in Bobo-Dioulasso in October 1899 (McFarland 1978:15,18; Person 1968:1993).
Konkolikan but then continued on to Bwènde as they continued to investigate the region and make efforts to meet the inhabitants. As protocol dictates when one is in a foreign village, the Konates sought the chief of Bwènde to introduce themselves and explain the intention of their presence. The Konates told the Traores that they would like to settle in the area and that they sought the Traores’ protection. When recounting the story to me, the Traores used that very word, “protection,” which also supports the theory that the Konates may have fled Tusia country in search of safety.

Even if this was not the case, a family that is displaced from their home village can be vulnerable, so it is wise to establish a relationship with a powerful family in the region to build trust, friendly relations, and to seek protection in case such a need would arise. This process forms a type of kinship relation between the protectors and protected, described to me as being similar to an older brother-younger brother relationship.

The chief of Bwènde agreed, and dictated the conditions to this protective arrangement. The Bwènde Traores would “buy” the Konate’s xylophone; that is, some type of compensation was exchanged from the Traores to the Konates, establishing a patronage with the Konates. The Traores told me that their ancestors were interested in the xylophone because the spirits they worshipped liked to dance, so with this arrangement, they could call on the Konates to play music any time they wanted to worship. They could dictate where and when the xylophone was played elsewhere as well. With this arrangement, the xylophone became a physical bond between the two families that symbolized their mutually-beneficial relationship, but it
also created an actual kinship relation between the two families. The Traores were then considered to be the older brothers of the Konates, which extended to all of their relatives as well. For example, the Konate children would become the Traores’ nieces and nephews, they all shared common cousins, and so forth.

While the Traores were the Konate’s patrons and technically owned their xylophone, they were not obliged to stay in Bwënde, and they were told they could settle anywhere in the region they wished. No matter where they lived, the Traores guaranteed their protection. The Konates decided to establish their new home in Konkolikan, where they had visited earlier, as they had enjoyed the area and the people they met there had already invited them to stay. This was how the Konates came to live in Sambla country, and became the first family of xylophonists in the region. Any subsequent family of musicians from Tusia country who would come to settle in the area were then required to visit the Konates first, who would help introduce them to the area and its inhabitants, and help them establish their new home.

Once the Konates had successfully relocated and settled in Konkolikan, another family of Tusia xylophonists, the Diabates, migrated from the village of Benion to Sambla country (Fie-Siñi Konate, pers. com. 12/22/03). I was not able to collect as much information on the Diabate family lineage as I did on the Konates, nor was I able to reconcile some of the discrepancies I encountered in my interviews. Furthermore, the elder Diabate xylophonists are overall younger than the Konates and not as knowledgeable about their family histories as the elder Konates. Since the
majority of my work was done with Sadama Diabate, it was difficult for me to speak with any other Diabates about these matters, because they always wanted to defer to Sadama’s word out of respect for our working arrangement.

According to Sadama, the first Diabate to migrate to Sambla country was named Si-Gombita, who settled in Semblene, the first Sambla village (pers. com. 1/5/04). Other informants gave me names of several other xylophonists from this era of the Diabates, including Sa-Ce, Togo-Bwen, Go-Mèen, Sa-Non, and Si-Pèe (F. Konate 12/22/03; G. Coulibaly 12/22/03; Traores 4/18/04). The latter four were probably either sons or younger siblings of Si-Gombita, and Sa-Ce may have been an older relative, such as an uncle or significantly older brother or cousin. All of these names were usually mentioned together as the first Diabate xylophonists, so they may have all migrated together. The reasons for their migration are also unknown, though it is possible that their reasons were similar to those that motivated the Konate migration.

The Diabates settled first in the village of Semblene, the oldest Sambla village, where they sought protection under the chief’s family there, just as the Konates did in Bwende (see Map 7). It is easy to see why the Diabates chose to settle in Semblene over the other Sambla villages, since the Semblene mangan is chosen from a Tusia matriclan from Benion, and one of the co-founders of the village is also said to be Tusia (see above).

59 After telling me that he could not know the identity of Si-Gombita’s father, Sadama described Sa-Ce as his “father,” a label often applied to elder individuals with whom they had a paternal-like relationship, regardless of any actual blood relation.
After some time in Semblene, the Diabates relocated to Torønso, the village to the east of Bwende in southern Sambla country and largest in the region. The reason for the move is probably because Torønso’s size. Semblene was the closest village to Benion geographically and a natural choice for an initial destination, but if

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All photos in this thesis were taken by the author.

Semblene is currently the smallest of the Sambla villages and continues to shrink in size as its inhabitants move out to stay in one of the bigger villages, or to search for a new home in a city. Many fear that the village will soon become extinct.

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Figure 6. Cemogo Diabate in baanberenjira, the Diabate family compound, with the next generation of Diabate xylophonists. Clockwise from top center (infant): Sibiri, Moussa, Sidiki, Sali, Fie-Sien, Togo, Ladjí, Si-Kambil, and Fie. Torønso, 11/17/02.

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the Tusia migration was indeed motivated by a search for more work opportunities, the largest village in the immediate vicinity would be a much more practical choice for these purposes, though in Torɔnso they remained under the protection and patronage of the chief of Semblene. Once in Torɔnso, Si-Gombita established the Diabate family compound, called baanberenjira, or “home of the xylophone players,” in the district of Toble. This compound still exists today as the central home of the Diabate xylophonists. Every Diabate xylophonist in Sambla country today traces his roots to this original compound, and most were born there (see Figure 11 in Chapter 3). This particular compound is where I stayed during the majority of my village excursions from my home base in Bobo-Dioulasso. Other Diabates currently reside in Semblene, Bana (a Bobo/Sambla village), and the hamlet Badara, where they actively play for ritual and social occasions (see Map 4).

Expansion of the Konate and Diabate families

The migration of these two Tusia families has resulted in the propagation of the two clans of xylophonists that exist in contemporary Sambla country. With the exception of a small family of xylophonists in Karankaso who may be of Bobo origin, all of the xylophonists in Sambla country bear the name Konate or Diabate, and they can trace their origins to one of the two men mentioned above.62

Si-Kɛɛnsa Konate had a son named Sa-Diri, who also became known as one of the greatest xylophonists in the region. He was taught by his uncle Go-Feɛfo, as is

62 In many cases, they can trace connections back to both, as a significant amount of intermarriage has occurred between the two families.
often the custom in musician families. Go-Feëfo’s children then moved on to Surukudingan, in northern Sambla country, to establish a family of xylophonists there, and others moved to the hamlets of Badara and Tukoro in the South, establishing further extensions of the Konate clan of xylophonists (see Map 4) (F. Konate, pers.com. 12/22/03). This link between the Surukudingan xylophonists and Go-Feëfo Konate established a strong connection between this particular northern village and the characteristics of the southern region. While Surukudingan is geographically in the north, they manifest aesthetic traits of the southern villages in their spoken language and music, because this village was originally settled by people from the southern village of Bwënde (see Chapter 4 for musical differences between northern and southern regions). For this reason, Surukudingan holds a dual status of both a northern and southern village, though administratively it is categorized as a northern village (G. Coulibaly, pers. com. 12/22/03).

In Karankaso, the administrative capital of the Sambla villages and part of the northern region, there are two distinct families of xylophonists (Alexis Traore, pers. com. 4/18/2004). The first one is an extension of the Konate clan who migrated from Konkolikan years ago. They still maintain familial relations with the Konates and Diabates in the southern region, as the families often participate in celebrations from the other’s village. However, this family is no longer known under the name Konate; they are now Traores. This change of surname is actually quite common among the Sambla, and can be traced back to the Sambla canton chief, Si-Boro Traore (see above).
The other family, also called Traore today, is of Bobo origin, according to the chief of Karankaso (Traore, ibid). The Sambla and the Bobo share a close alliance, as they are neighbors and cohabitate in many of the villages situated along the border between Sambla country and Bobo country. This second xylophonist family of Traores migrated to Karankaso from the village of Sungalodaga (B: Makuma), a mixed Sambla and Bobo village that is situated on the border between the two ethnic regions. The relationship between the Sambla and the Bobo of Sungalodaga was established during the period of Jula invasion, when a faction of the Wattara of Gwiriko established residency in this village and convinced the northern Sambla to collaborate with them. Once intertwined into the network of Sambla kinship relations, this Traore family must have been linked with a faction of the xylophonist clans, though it is not clear whether this family of Bobo origins is linked to the Diabates or Konates.

The Creation of a People, the Creation of Tradition

Once the Tusia musicians were established and integrated into Sambla society, the process of creating the Sambla baan tradition began. The Sambla baan retains certain characteristics of the original Tusia model, but important changes were made to the tuning, repertoire, and performance style to adapt to an evolving sense of Sambla culture and tradition. This process was familiar to the Sambla by this time, as

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There is an expression among the Sambla that supports this relationship, that “if a (Sambla) man doesn’t marry another Sambla woman, at least he can marry a Bobo woman” (Samadou Coulibaly, pers. com. 10/19/03). In fact, there is much intermarriage between the Sambla and the Bobo, reinforcing their close alliance.
they had long been accustomed to integrating foreign elements into their culture and making them their own, ultimately becoming major cultural indicators of Sambla identity. After being separated and isolated from the other Samogo populations, this evolution began, influenced by migration, warfare, and subsequent alliances made with neighboring peoples.

These processes that have occurred throughout the history of Sambla society can be found throughout Africa, as a way of negotiating a multicultural environment in the quest to find a unique identity. The institution of the *mangan*, related to the Mande tradition of *mansaya* and the Samogo earth chiefs, became one of the primary instruments of unification in a community comprised of so many different ethnic origins. External forces during the period of Jula and French conquest formed and institutionalized ethnic boundaries that also promoted differentiation among the mosaic of communities that cohabitate in this region. Both of these forces helped define the Sambla as a community, with their own ritual and political governance and geographical borders, all the while maintaining kinship, military and other alliances with their neighbors, providing conduits for cultural diffusion and borrowing that accounts for the many different levels of similarity and difference that exist between the Sambla and their neighbors.

In the arena of expressive culture, however, the Sambla did not have a particularly rich musical tradition to accompany their ritual and entertainment activities. I was told by the relatives of the chief of Bwënde that the spirits they worshipped liked to dance, but they had no dance music tradition before the advent of
the *baan* (Traores, pers. com. 4/18/04). Once the Tusia brought the xylophone to the Sambla, this cultural need took over, and the *baan* tradition quickly emerged and was inserted into virtually all realms of Sambla ritual and social life. What is so remarkable is the speed in which this tradition was created and rose to such prominence. In only two or three decades after the instrument was first introduced into Sambla society, the *baan* held enough prominence to be appropriated by the local canton chief to signify his authority in this region, and his authority as a Sambla.

The Sambla are not the only ones in the region who regard the xylophone as a major indicator of cultural identity. Considering all of the minority ethnic groups that have their own xylophone traditions in southwestern Burkina Faso (see Appendix II), it may seem that the xylophone would be viewed as a common trait linking these groups together. Instead, the wide diversity of manifestations of the instrument among these neighboring groups, varying in tuning, language, and repertoire, acts to define the differences between them rather than highlighting their similarities. In a discussion of the *gyil*, the xylophone played by the Dagara in northwestern Ghana and southwestern Burkina Faso, J. R. Goody stated that, “the type of xylophone played is seen by the people of the area as one of the most important indices of cultural affiliation” (1962:103). The instrument is a vital element to most ritual activity, the songs played on the instrument embody local histories, shared beliefs, and common values, and the tuning is linked to the spoken language of the people. These facts alone demonstrate how a xylophone tradition can reflect and embody so many attributes of cultural identity and differentiate one group from another.
The following chapters outline specific details of the baan tradition physically, aesthetically, and musically, and also the depth to which the tradition has permeated virtually all facets of Sambla life. They will illustrate the transformation that the tradition underwent in the creation of a Sambla musical practice, reflecting the unique aspects of Sambla identity in the realms of language, religion, social life, and history. This process has ultimately helped to further define and establish a strong sense of Sambla-ness as a set of characteristics that are unmistakably representative of their culture to not only them, but also to all other communities in the region.
CHAPTER III: The Sambla Baan Today: Tradition and Practice in Context

Sambla Baan in a Regional Context

The xylophone represents one of the oldest and most diverse instrumental traditions in West Africa. According to oral traditions since at least the time of Sunjata in the 13th century CE, the xylophone has been played for kings, chiefs, villages, elders, families, and wealthy patrons. The xylophone helps mark major life events, retain and perpetuate history, and provide a vehicle for bards and praise singers to recount tales, genealogies, and praises. The xylophone is used for communication between individuals, communities, and between the living and the dead. The xylophone may reproduce literal speech, like the Sambla baan, or it may communicate more abstract principles, such as aesthetics, streams of foreign influence, and the feeling of community. The xylophone is played for dancing, in village celebrations and increasingly on the stage in big cities. Xylophone music employs concepts of rhythm and physical coordination inherent to percussion instruments, as well as melody, harmony, in the sense of pitches sounding together, and modality. The xylophone can accompany or take the lead, soloing to dancers, or leading an instrumental ensemble through a piece of music.

The xylophone is one of the most multi-faceted, versatile instruments on the African continent, exhibiting differences in tuning, physical construction, size, and manner of playing. Within the boundaries of one West African nation, the prevalence and diversity of the xylophone is most pronounced in the western region of Burkina...
Faso. At least sixteen different ethno-linguistic groups play a version of the gourd-resonated xylophone in Burkina Faso, each with unique tunings, names, functions, and repertoire. Unfortunately, most of these traditions are largely unknown outside of Burkina, due to scant ethnomusicological research that has been conducted in the region to date, the minority status of most communities with xylophone traditions in relation to larger neighbors, and the lack of commercially-available recordings of the music.

A few scholars and African music enthusiasts from within Africa and other non-African countries have contributed to the body of recorded music from Burkina Faso through their personal efforts and research. Patrick Kersalé, a French world-traveler and world music enthusiast, has probably produced the most recordings of Burkinabé music, mainly on French labels Arion, Buda, and Playasound, including a DVD entitled *Tambours et Djembe du Burkina Faso*, highlighting musicians living in Bobo-Dioulasso. Charles Duvelle, another French adventurer who kept extensive musical documentation of his travels, has also released many of his field recordings from travels in West Africa and elsewhere in the world. He contributed several volumes to the Prophet series of world music on Philips, including a set devoted to various music traditions of Burkina Faso. Among these recordings, only ten xylophone traditions that are indigenous to Burkina Faso are featured. This may sound like a good number, but most of these obscure traditions appear on only one or

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64 See the discography at the end of this thesis for individual titles.
two tracks on these recordings, the CDs are poorly distributed, and many of them are out of print.

A nascent association and website is making efforts to disseminate information on all African xylophones, called Marimbalafon (www.marimbalafon.com). Both the site and association were created by Mamadou Koladé, a Senegalese businessman from Casamance who has played the Balanta xylophone (*kadif*) since he was a child. He conducts research on African xylophones in conjunction with his business travels across Africa, seeking new information on instruments and potential members and collaborators for the association. Konomba Traore, a musician and teacher in Ouagadougou, contributed two articles to the site that offer a slightly closer look at the landscape of xylophones played in the region of western Burkina known commonly by residents of the region as *pays balafon* (Traore 2006, internet). Based on seventeen varieties of xylophones practiced in the region, Traore organized them into the following groups:

1. Senufo, Bobo and Samogo
2. Sambla, Siamou and Tusia
3. Gouin, Turka, and Karaboro
4. Bwaba and Puguli
5. Lobi, Dagari, Birifor, Gan, and Dian
6. Malinké (Maninka, or simply Mande)

The exact criteria that define each category are imprecise, but certain features of similarity can be inferred from this grouping, providing a broad structure of categorization that implies closer inter-ethnic relationships and networks of cultural sharing. Traore used the Senufo xylophone as a point of comparison for each of the
categories, which appears to have had significant influence on these other regional xylophones. The Senufo instrument is cited as the prototype for the Bobo, Samogo, Gouin, Turka, and Karaboro xylophones, as well as the Bwaba and Puguli, with the exception of some of the bass keys. The similarity between these instruments lies within the resemblance of their size, physical construction, and most importantly, the type of pentatonic scale to which they are tuned, which he described as “inequipentatonic.” The xylophones in the second and fifth group are tuned to inequipentatonic scales, and the Mande balafon, whose historical home is further west in Guinea and Mali, is the only heptatonic xylophone found in this region.

In his descriptions, Traore attributes an equi-pentatonic scale to several instruments that I know to be inequipentatonic, based on my experiences in Burkina Faso. These discrepancies aside, the instruments in question do bear a significant resemblance to one another. Taking pre-colonial settlement patterns of the region into consideration, it is possible that the Senufo may have been the first group to play a pentatonic xylophone in the region, which was then diffused to neighboring groups and changed according to their needs.

This xylophone-dominated region of Burkina Faso is comprised of a mosaic of small communities that speak either Mande or Gur languages (see Map 5).65 Once the Samogo populations settled in the region after migrating from present-day

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65 The only exception is the Siamou, located in the region of Orodara, who speak a language belonging to the Kru family. Other ethnic groups that speak Kru languages are located on the southern and western coast of West Africa, in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d’Ivoire. It is unknown when the Siamou settled in Burkina Faso or the circumstances surrounding their split from the other Kru groups and migration to the region.
Guinea, they were divided into isolated communities by waves of Senufo migrations moving south toward Côte d’Ivoire (see Map 6 and Chapter 2).

It is possible that the Senufo had a pentatonic xylophone tradition during period, and that the instrument was first introduced and diffused to some of these smaller communities during these migrations. This would explain the similarities that many of these instruments bear to the Senufo version, and it could also suggest a possible root to the surrogate language systems practiced on instruments in the region. Recent scholarship by Hugo Zemp (2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2005 video; 2004) investigates the capacity for speech in the Senufo xylophone tradition. While no specific evidence suggests that the origin of this practice lies in the Senufo tradition, the idea supports the theory that the Senufo xylophone was the seed for other pentatonic xylophone traditions practiced in the region.

Returning to Traore’s grouping listed above, the second category places the Sambla together with the Tusia and Siamou xylophone traditions. Mamadou Diabate, a Sambla xylophonist currently living in Vienna, also considers these three traditions as having similar speech surrogate practices. The relationship between the Sambla and Tusia is evident, but the relationship of either tradition with the Siamou is not as easily explained. During my interviews with Sambla village elders, numerous kinship alliances between the Sambla and Tusia were cited, but none were known to exist between the Sambla and Siamou. Furthermore, the elder Sambla xylophonists claimed that the Siamou do not speak on their xylophone like the Sambla and Tusia do. However, I once heard a recording of Siamou xylophone music that immediately
struck me as resembling the conversational interludes between the Sambla xylophone and various spectators that occurs between songs during a Sambla fête. When I questioned the owner of the cassette, he told me that it was a recording of a Siamou xylophone made in his home village. Having never heard a Siamou xylophone before, I had no point of reference for comparison, but the resemblance to the Sambla tradition was undeniable in both the playing style, and the manner of interaction between musician and spectator.

One possible explanation for this was suggested by the Tusia xylophonist Si Traoré. He said that because the Siamou lived in such close proximity to the Tusia, that they developed a style of playing that imitates the Tusia style, which would have included the surrogate speech practice. I later discovered that the Siamou have another xylophone tradition that they acknowledge as an imitation of a neighboring tradition, one that they identify as “Bambara.” This instrument is actually the Senufo xylophone, a variation of which is also the most popular xylophone played in Bobo-Dioulasso, called the “Jula balafon” there. It is possible, therefore, that the Siamou may have also developed a style of playing that imitates another neighboring tradition, that of the Tusia. Whether or not the passages that resemble speech in the Siamou music actually represent a surrogate language system that corresponds to the Siamou language is unclear. The Sambla claim that it does not, that it only “sounds like” xylophone speech (F. Konate, pers.com. 12/22/03), but they may have said this

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66 It is common for some ethnic groups in the region, including the Sambla, to refer to the Senufo as “Bambara.” For the Sambla, this appellation carries pejorative overtones, though I do not know the specific reason for this. The variable nature of the term “Bambara” is discussed at length by Bazin (1985).
to foster a sense of exclusivity around the Sambla and Tusia traditions, which are as intertwined as the web of kinship relations that connects the two communities.

Within the Sambla, the uniqueness of the xylophonists in relation to other Sambla musicians quickly established as the Tusia xylophonists created their own, separate social class within the local social structure once they were incorporated into Sambla society. This caused a shift in the existing social categorization as the Sambla made room for the new musicians in their community.

**The Sambla Musician as Griot – baan-beren-ka and the Creation of ka kan**

The word “griot,” much like the word “balafon,” is one of an assortment of terms that has developed from French distortions of words in West African languages, eventually becoming canonical terms used outside of their original contexts. The word appears in French travel accounts dating back to the 17th century and appears to have developed from names in other Sahelian languages that also refer to griot figures: gewel in Wolof, gawlo in Fula, and iggio in Hassaniya or Moor (Charry 2000:105-107; Tang 2007). In each of their respective languages, these terms refer to the social equivalent of the Mande jeli, a musician and oral historian by inherited status who learns genealogies, local history, and praise singing styles, and who earns his or her living by providing music for social and ritual occasions. The French word “griot” has been used in reference to similar figures from non-Mande groups, such as the Wolof and Fula examples mentioned above (see Tang 2007),
much as the word “balafon” is used as a generic term for gourd-resonated frame xylophones in West Africa, regardless of ethnic origin.

I mention this here because during my conversations with various Sambla musicians, chiefs, and others knowledgeable about Sambla music traditions, the word griot was periodically used in reference to musicians. On certain occasions, such as my conversations with Alexis Traore, the chief of Karankaso, I had the impression that he used the term because he wanted to use vocabulary that he assumed I knew, counting on my knowledge of the generic definition of the word griot to imply his meaning. On other occasions, the Jula term jeli was used in reference to Sambla xylophonists, and then restated as griot in an attempt to use an equivalent term in French. Since griot is not an indigenous term, its definition can be fluid for many West Africans, able to refer to a variety of related yet distinct individuals. Its use is not entirely inaccurate for Sambla musicians, but specific distinctions must be made between Sambla professional musicians and the classic griot understood as jeli.

The Sambla xylophonist (baa-beren-ka) belongs to this larger tradition by his close resemblance to the Mande jeli. Both perform similar social functions as professional musicians and guardians of genealogies and oral histories, and both are part of a larger artisan class, the Sambla ka and the Mande nyamakala (see Chapter 1). The Sambla xylophonist is also considered an artisan of the word, one of the most characteristic features of Mande jeliya (the art of the jeli). However, while Mande jelis spend years of their lives refining their oration skills as an intrinsic part of their training, their Sambla counterparts devote similar efforts toward their mastery of
baan speech, the musical speech surrogate that delivers history, praise, and requests for remuneration in the Sambla context (see Chapter 4 for further explanation of the baan speech surrogate).

However, two curious factors indirectly link the Sambla xylophonists with Mande culture, and particularly the baan-beren-ka with the Mande jeli: the family names of the two Sambla xylophone clans, Konate and Diabate, which are common Mande names. Furthermore, because of the traditional practice of endogamy and inherited status in Mande culture, certain names are often associated with particular social categories; Diabate is a common jeli jamu (last name) in greater Mande culture. This could suggest a connection between the baan-beren-ka with the Mande jeli, but the Sambla Diabates and Konates are of Tusia origin, from the Gur ethno-linguistic family, and therefore ethnically and linguistically distinct from the Mande. These two families actively maintain ancestral and kinship relations with their counterparts remaining in the two Tusia villages, Banfulagwe and Benion. The origin of the Tusia Konate and Diabate clans is unknown, but their names suggest that they may have migrated into Tusia country long before moving on to the Sambla. Whether or not they brought the xylophone to the Tusia from elsewhere is equally a mystery, but the Diabate link to Mande jeliya opens the possibility.

Sambla ka and baan-beren-ka therefore exhibit undeniable parallels with Mande nyamakala and jeliya, respectively. However, regardless of their similarities with the larger paradigmatic tradition, ka has proven to be an adaptable social grouping, able to reorganize and accommodate new categories as the necessity arises.
This happened with the creation of the *baan-beren-ka* social group, as it became clear that the xylophone was not a passing trend but a new tradition that was to become an enduring element of Sambla culture. This acceptance of the Tusia xylophonists into the social structure is not the only significant aspect of this event, however; this change caused lasting repercussions in the status and categorization of previously existing Sambla musicians, revealing a dynamic aspect of this social class as well as certain attitudes among *ka* subgroups.

In most discussions with my Sambla friends, the *ka* category was always described as including only the three types discussed briefly in Chapter 1: *tsun-dege-ka* (leather smith), *dio-ka* (arbitrators of *dio*), and *baan-beren-ka* (xylophonists). However, another category of *ka* musicians is recognized, the *ka kan*, another type of griot who practices Sambla music traditions that were present before the arrival of the xylophone, which consisted of some drumming, flute, and vocal traditions. It was only after learning a song on the *baan* called “Ka Kan Doen” (ka kan-children) that I became aware of their existence, and I began to understand how the Tusia xylophonists cleaved their way into Sambla society, making room for themselves while driving the preexisting musicians to the margins of their social category.

Among the Sambla today, virtually all local music is associated with the xylophone, which is the core of their musical tradition and pervasive to both sacred and secular social activities. Other percussion instruments are considered either subservient to the xylophone, such as the variety of small drums that accompany the *baan*, or they are part of archaic practices that no longer carry their original
significance. These older instruments are the last remnants of Sambla music before the advent of the xylophone, which swept through the region and gained fast popularity over the past century. The social designation of these two types of musicians therefore reflects a fundamental difference between the *ka kan*, Sambla musicians associated with ancient traditions, and the *baan-beren-ka*, the newer members of Sambla music culture.

Largely descriptive and functional, the *ka* and *ka kan* names clearly illustrate one of the most significant characteristics that differentiates the newer xylophonists from the musicians that preceded them. The *ka* xylophonists are hereditary musicians, and their reproductive activities are theoretically restricted to one of the Diabate and Konate bloodlines, similar to the Mande *jeli*, a musician of inherited status through endogamous bloodlines. For the *ka kan*, or “free ka,” music-making is not a hereditary activity, though it is not uncommon to find several *ka* in the same family. Before the advent of the *baan*, those known today as *ka kan* belonged to one of the other two *ka* occupational classes, *tsun-dege-ka* or *dio-ka*, and they chose to become musicians as an additional occupation. Some of these early *ka* musicians did fulfill certain social functions assigned to specific clans, such as the players of the *dan-dunnun* royal drum (see below), but most of the musicians known today as *ka kan* became involved in music by choice, not by family tradition.

A *ka kan* generally concentrates on one of two musical activities, instrumental or vocal. The *ka kan* singing traditions also fall into two categories: those who sing

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67 I qualify this restriction as theoretical because while this has been the commonly recognized practice, today these social rules are not as strictly followed or enforced as they once were.
for entertainment, and praise singers. The praise singers are called tumaa ka (“praise-ka,” tumaa so = “praise song”), and they follow a tradition that is similar to jeli praise singers, which is practiced by both men and women in Mande culture. Like the jeli praise singers, the tumaa ka create praise songs specific to individuals present at an event, often a wedding, funeral, or other life-cycle occasion, drawing upon their specialized knowledge of genealogies and local history, and they do not play instruments. Both ka singing traditions require a sustained apprenticeship with an elder, normally a close relative in the case of jeli, but this could be any mentor for the tumaa ka. During their apprenticeship, the tumaa ka learn the genealogies of all families in the immediate region, significant historical events and the histories of the individuals involved in them, and the established repertoire of tumaa so. Most of these songs were composed and sung to important historical figures, usually former chiefs, and they were remembered and sustained as a process of historical preservation.

The ka kan who sing for pleasure do so mostly in local contexts, but some have become well-known outside of Sambla country as well. While there is no established name for the ka who sing for pleasure, the renowned Tene Traore, the last of the great ka kan singers in southern Sambla country, described it as “simple singing,” referring to a lack of particular function or context. I had only a few

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68 Baan-beren-ka also incorporate praise singing into the speech they play on the xylophone.

69 One of the oldest members of the Diabate’s extended family, Tene Traore, was known throughout the region as a superior singer, and a film of her singing with a group of Diabate musicians accompanying her on baan was broadcast on Burkina’s national television station in 1982. The Diabate family in Bobo-Dioulasso owns a videotape of this broadcast that we watched many times during my stay in Burkina Faso.
opportunities to speak with Tene about singing traditions and the ka kan, and I was not able to follow up with her due to her sudden passing in early 2004. Her death marked a great loss in this “simple” singing tradition, as very few young people have interest in learning and carrying on this older tradition.

Ka kan instrumentalists may play two of the drums that accompany the baan: the dunun, an armpit-tension drum known regionally as lunka in Jula, and the dennin, a small, barrel-shaped drum played with a curved stick. According to local oral history, these drums both existed in Sambla country before the xylophone, but they were relegated to accompanying instruments in the baan ensemble once the xylophone established itself as the dominant vehicle of Sambla music. Some ka kan also play one of the extant yet marginalized flute traditions, discussed below, but these instruments are not generally performed in public anymore. It was stressed to me on several occasions that ka kan do not play the xylophone, a distinction for which the importance became increasingly clear to me as I began to understand the major differences between these two types of musicians.

I experienced different perspectives of the ka kan designation depending on who gave the description. In discussions with Sadama and Seydou Diabate (both baan-beren-ka), the ka kan were first described to me as “griots who don’t play the xylophone,” who are instead artists of the word. They were also described as “correct,” that they “do no wrong,” and they have “pure hearts,” which is also

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70 The lunka resembles the luna of the Dagbani and other similar instruments of nearby Gur groups of northern Ghana and southwest Burkina Faso (see Locke 1990). It is possible that both the instrument and the Jula appellation were borrowed from one of these ethnic groups.

71 U ye kuma-mog ye (“they are speech people”) (Sadama Diabate, pers. com. 10/19/03).
interpreted as having a “clean heart,” “pure blood,” and not being jealous of others. The Diabates consider the *ka kan* to be the “true (Sambla) griots,” and they speak of them as if they are socially superior to xylophonists, a suggestion that is understandable when one realizes the social stigma surrounding xylophonists in the initial years after their migration into Sambla country.

These descriptions reveal two important attitudes the Sambla have regarding musicians. First, that xylophonists are not considered “true griots,” perhaps in reference to their relatively recent arrival in Sambla country. This resonates with the designation that the *saa*, descendants of the first settlers and “masters” of the land, are also considered the only “true Sambla,” reinforcing the significance of seniority in establishing social hierarchy.

Second, The concepts of purity and cleanliness that are associated with the *ka kan* draw a sharp contrast to the xylophonists, who were often considered dirty and repugnant in the early years after the initial Tusia migration. Sadama told me that at one time, if a xylophonist paid a visit to a *saa* household, the hosts would immediately wash the stool where the xylophonist sat after his departure, before anyone else would sit on it again (pers. com. 11/4/03). According to Samadou Coulibaly, the early generations of xylophonists had to seek wives in neighboring Tusia villages, because none of the Sambla women would marry them, and they would not have been considered in any arranged marriages, which are often decided

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72 *U koné ka gwelen* (“their bellies are pure [clean, light]”) (Sadama Diabate, pers. com. 11/14/03).
the day a girl is born. Eventually, some of the Sambla women rebelled against their families and eloped with xylophonists, incorporating them into the intricate network of kinship alliances that tie the Sambla together (Sadama Coulibaly, pers com. 12/22/03).

Rules of marriage are also telling in the differences between the two types of Sambla musicians. The **ka kan** may only marry within the **ka** category, though they are forbidden from marrying the xylophonists, but **baan-beren-ka** can and do regularly intermarry with the **saa** as well as other **ka**. This endogamous restriction that applies only to **ka kan** and not xylophonists suggest that the **ka kan** represent an older social category and are bound by traditional, perhaps archaic rules that do not apply to the **baan-beren-ka**. This may be what the Diabates meant when they said that the **ka kan** do everything “correctly” (i.e. according to tradition). The taboo that forbids **ka kan** from marrying **baan-beren-ka** suggests that some hostility probably existed between the two groups. The **ka kan** may have felt threatened by the arrival of new musicians playing flashy, complex dance rhythms that took attention away from their music practices, compounded by the general social stigma against the early Tusia xylophonists in Sambla country.

The arrival of the xylophone in Sambla country did more than provide a community with its own dance music tradition, it also cleaved its own place into the

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73 Not all Sambla marriages are arranged. If the girl had not been promised to a boy in another family through a *mini tsin bwo* (“woman-engagement-do”), she is free to choose her own mate and marry by a process called *mini faga* (“woman-steal”), marriage by “kidnapping” or elopement. The name is misleading, as it is the girl who chooses from a group of suitors. When she finally leaves to marry him, he comes to take her and her belongings late at night, and the family discovers her missing the next day, hence the idea of being “stolen” or “kidnapped.”
existing social structure, pushing older music traditions aside. Not only were the traditions marginalized, but the original class of musicians found it necessary to distinguish themselves from the newcomers as decidedly different, not to be confused with the loud, boisterous dance music played by coarse-talking, hard-drinking musicians. What is more significant than social attitudes toward the xylophonists, however, is the way in which Sambla social structure was bent out of its normal configuration to create a space for these newcomers, evidence that the xylophone was not a short-lived distraction, but a new music tradition on its way to becoming firmly entrenched in Sambla practices and belief systems.

**Physical Attributes of the Baan and Connection to Tradition**

The *baan* is part of a complex of gourd-resonated, frame-xylophones found throughout West Africa, often referred to generically as “balafon.” These instruments all roughly conform to the same general construction style, corresponding to the eighth type of multiple calabash-resonated xylophones outlined by Lois Anderson (1984: 873-875), based on observations made by Olga Boone (1936:89-107). The open frame is made of four short, thick vertical poles and eight horizontal strips of lightweight, flexible wood lashed together with strips of softened goat skin, to which the keys are affixed with either strips of animal skin or synthetic cord. Another leather strip is wrapped around the portions of the frame upon which the keys rest, acting as insulation material at the nodes of vibration for each key, which are the points of contact between the keys and the frame.
An empty gourd hangs below each key to resonate and amplify the sound, cut to resonate at the same pitch as its corresponding key. Enhancing the instrument’s timbral aesthetic, one or two small holes are cut out of the gourds and covered by a thin, vibrating membrane to create a buzzing sound that is characteristic of these instruments. Tough, spider egg sacs were originally used for this purpose, but today xylophonists use either very thin paper, such as cigarette paper, or small bits of thin plastic bags. The mallets are made of wood, with strips of dried rubber wrapped around the tip of each stick. The xylophonists prepare the tip material by spreading raw liquid rubber onto a wooden plank, which is cut into strips after it dries and hardens (see Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7. Jacka Diabate spreading liquid rubber on a wooden plank to dry, to be used for baan mallets. Torønso, 10/15/03.
The keys are made from species of very hard woods, which vary by geographic region. These keys are cut to rough rectangular slabs, the extra wood to be trimmed to shape during the tuning process, and then they are “smoked,” or dried over a fire to cure the wood. The smoking time varies by region and ethnic group, though most wooden xylophone keys in West Africa are smoked for a period of only one to several weeks (see Figure 9). However, the Sambla say that they smoke their keys for up to a year, claiming that this extra time is needed to get the dry, hard, and dense quality to the wood that is necessary for the key to resonate properly. I’m not certain why the Sambla smoke their keys so much longer than others in the region,
especially considering that the Tusia only leave their keys on the fire for a week to ten
days (Si Traore, pers. com. 3/25/04). It is possible that the especially loud, resonant
quality of the Sambla *baan* is a result of this extra smoking, or possibly that the
reported smoking time was simply overstated.\(^74\) I have seen no evidence that either
proves or disproves this claim; since my visits to villages were sporadic and confined
to one to two weeks, I wasn’t able to observe regular activities with any consistency.

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\(^74\) In several other instances, I have discovered that certain details given to me by the Diabates were
enhanced in a way that displayed the Sambla as superior over other groups or otherwise unique.
The resonating gourds used on the *baan*, which are the same as those used on the Tusia *pan*, also differ greatly from other xylophones of the region. Other instruments typically use a common variety of a pale, round calabash gourd that is easily found throughout the Savannah and Sahel, the same variety used for other stringed and percussion instruments as well as the ubiquitous bowl used to serve beverages and porridge throughout the region. These gourds are easy to find and relatively inexpensive, making them easy to replace when they inevitably break.

The Sambla and Tusia use a different species of gourd that they cultivate specifically for use with their xylophones. The primary difference between these gourds and the more common variety is their oblong shape and earthy, reddish color (see Figure 10). This color is not natural; the variety of gourd that the Sambla use dries to the same pale yellow color as the more common variety found on other xylophones. Sambla xylophonists apply this color to the gourds in a secretive procedure done late at night, wearing special, ritual clothes, in order to give the gourds the proper resonance. Sadama told me that he and his older brother Si-Fogobo are the only two Diabates who currently know this procedure. This knowledge is passed down to select males in the family by the eldest xylophonists, but only if the younger musician is deemed mature enough to know (pers. com. 7/26/03).
The Sambla and Tusia are the only two xylophone traditions in this region of Burkina Faso that I know that use this unique gourd and treat it in this way, though the procedure is not considered a secret among the Tusia. In conversations with Si Traore, a Tusia xylophonist from the village of Kurinion, I learned that they achieve this reddish color with a soft, chalky red rock that is ground, mixed with water, and
spread on the gourds. In contrast to the Sambla, the Tusia perform this act in the heat of the noonday sun (pers. com. 3/25/04).

The most significant feature of the gourds used on the baan is the one placed under the largest bass key (see Figure 11). This gourd is officially called nemøgøfirin (no known translation), but only xylophonists may refer to it by this name because it is the most sacred element of the xylophone. Others refer to it by its nickname, bienkote (“swollen-testicles-gourd”), a term originally used to describe male symptoms of elephantiasis and presumably used to describe the gourd due to its physical appearance.

Figure 11. Bienkote (nemøgøfirin), on the left side of the baan. Bwende, 4/18/04.
The bienkote is made by affixing a small, round calabash to the end of a long, thin gourd, which is cut and tuned to the pitch of its corresponding key. Because the gourd is so sacred, the secrets to its construction are protected and known only by two of the eldest xylophonists in the Diabate clan, similar to the gourd treatment process. If the bienkote breaks, a complex series of sacrifices must be made to appease the ancestors, and a new one must be made to replace it within a certain span of time to avoid spiritual retribution from the ancestors.

Xylophonists continually described the bienkote as a “gris-gris” or fetish of the instrument, indicating its role as a power object in ritual context.75 It is regarded as a kind of spiritual guardian of the instrument and portal to the ancestors of Sambla xylophonists, and it acts as the locus or altar upon which regular sacrifices are made to the baan as a part of the annual village ritual cycle. These sacrifices are made to herald the beginning and end of the rain season, and to express gratitude to the instrument and all prior xylophonists for creating and sustaining the tradition that provides a livelihood to present musicians and allows them to perform a vital social function as musicians. The Sambla believe that the baan embodies the spirits of all deceased xylophonists, there to be called upon for assistance by xylophonists living in the present. In exchange, these spirits must be appeased through regular sacrifices through the bienkote, which involves applying blood and feathers of sacrificed chickens directly to the gourd.

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75 I use the term “fetish” here because of the frequent use of the French term fetiche by Burkinabes. This word is popularly considered a translation of “gris-gris,” another term used in many parts of West Africa in reference to physical objects associated with supernatural powers.
Sacrifices are also made to the bienkote for individual requests, such as protection from malevolent forces, cures for illnesses, professional success and prosperity, or other personal needs. For these requests, one or more chickens are sacrificed, and the response is expressed by the position of the chicken’s body when it dies. If the bird dies on its belly, the protection or request is granted; if it dies on its back or side, the sacrifice is not accepted by the ancestors (Sa-Kɔnɔn Konate, int. 4/5/04). When given a favorable response from the ancestors, the beneficiary is then required to return each year with subsequent sacrifices for the baan in remuneration for the favor granted. If these subsequent sacrifices are not made, the spirits become angry and will create misfortune and discord in the person’s life.

The sacrifices made to the bienkote and the rules and activities associated with them are related to the Sambla bwen cults, a category of important religious cults that are found in every Sambla village. Bwen cults are associated with powers coming from the bush that are often used for protection and to detect witchcraft (Royer 1996:207). One form of bwen is owned by certain lineages and represents jinns (spirits) from the bush called bwendon (“wen-child”). Specific bwendon are represented through shrines consisting of two closed ceramic pots containing various plants and roots soaking in water, placed on the top of three-pronged wooden posts. The pots are distinguished by sex and are called “mother” and “father” of the particular cult. The bienkote, while the “father” of the baan, is the son of these two

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76 Much of Sambla religious belief and practice is predicated on a fundamental distinction between the bush (jun) and the village (gwo) and the forces inherent to each domain, and a primary function of many Sambla religious cults is to detect witchcraft. See Royer (1996) for more on Sambla religious practice and change.

77 This model of shrine is common to many ethnic groups in the region of the Mouhoun river.
parent elements of the lineage shrine. Therefore, the *bienkote* acts not only as a link to the ancestors of the *baan*, but it also connects the *baan* with the family’s cult of *bwen* and the forces of the bush controlled by that cult.

The *baan* is therefore woven into the intrinsic relationship between the Sambla and their territory as defined by the *mangan* (see Chapter 2), via the *bienkote*. This fundamental aspect of Sambla identity is the very concept upon which the *mangan* institution is based: an “earth-chief” who is guardian of the land. Land propriety was initially the most important criteria in determining social categorization, *saa* versus *ka*, and ultimately determines who are considered the only “true” Sambla (see discussion of *saa* in Chapter 1). Because of this link between the *baan* and the land created by the *bienkote*, it is forbidden for instruments with this gourd to leave Sambla country, so some instruments are made with a standard gourd in its place to be used for fêtes in other villages or cities.

Despite the depth of significance that the *bienkote* holds in Sambla culture, its origin lies with the Tusia, having come to the Sambla with the xylophone itself. Interestingly, this odd-shaped gourd, which the Tusia call *tɔŋ*, is not standard to the Tusia xylophone as the *bienkote* is to the *baan*. The *tɔŋ* is only included on a special Tusia xylophone that is played only for a mask called the *dutɔn*, which comes out once every 25 years and dances for a special initiation rite. This rite is distinct from the standard male initiation that occurs in several stages, beginning with circumcision for young boys and ending with a final ceremony at approximately 20 years old.

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78 I am indebted to Si Traore of Kurinion for all of the information I gathered on the Tusia xylophone tradition.
when the boys become men and are ready to marry. For the dutɔn, the initiates spend three months in the bush in order to learn a secret mask language, expressed graphically on the masks themselves.79

The xylophone that accompanies the dutɔn mask bears three important similarities to the Sambla baan. The standard Tusia jon has only 18 keys and is played by two people, while the special xylophone played for the dutɔn mask has 23 keys and is played by three people, exactly like the baan. The number of players and presence of the sacred gourd on both instruments implies that the Tusia dutɔn xylophone, which they only play four times in a century, could have been the prototype for the Sambla baan.

One can only speculate why the Sambla baan may have been modeled after the most rare and sacred Tusia xylophone. For the Tusia to choose to bring the dutɔn xylophone with them while migrating, they must have had a specific reason why they preferred this instrument to the standard model. Alternately, it is possible that the Tusia brought their common xylophone with them to Sambla country, but while it underwent transformation into the Sambla baan, the instrument was modified to match the Tusia instrument that was less commonly played in order to emphasize the difference between the Tusia and Sambla traditions, further distinguishing the two from one another.

79 A secret mask language taught to initiates is also practiced among the Bwa, a Gur ethno-linguistic group who reside directly to the east of the Bobo. The Bwa mask language expresses information related to local oral history as well as other moral and philosophical beliefs of the community (Hanna-Vergara 1996; Roy 1985, 1987a, 1987b).
**Contexts for Performance – Ritual and Social Celebration**

The two main spheres in which the *baan* is played are ritual purposes, during celebrations that take place directly after specific sacrifices, rites, and other ritual activity, or for social gatherings that manifest purely for entertainment purposes. This distinction is somewhat ambiguous, however, because almost any occasion that calls for music will be accompanied by all the hallmarks of a large-scale social occasion: food and alcoholic beverages are prepared for consumption and sale, women and girls don their finest clothing, perfume, and makeup, children are cleaned up and dressed in clothes reserved for special occasions, and friends and relatives travel from other villages and cities to participate. The only exceptions are specific, serious ritual contexts that are restricted to certain individuals (see “Other Ritual Activity” below).

In short, when music is played and people gather together, it is considered a fête or celebration. Fêtes are occasions for friends and relatives to commune and catch up on local news, for young people to seek and be seen in search of potential mates, for children to play together, for busy adults to temporarily put their work aside and mingle in the community, and for dancing and general merriment. These fêtes are the primary loci for communal social interaction, animated by the presence of music and dancing, dominated by the *baan*.

The *baan* therefore fulfills several different functions in Sambla society. It is the central instrument to all modern Sambla music-making, having superseded other Sambla instruments (see below for instruments that existed before the *baan*). Its presence is required for most ritual activities to take place officially, and therefore it
is significant to the various systems of Sambla religious activities and beliefs.

Finally, the *baan* facilitates social interaction through articulation of the fête, and as such, it acts as a catalyst for communal gathering and helps maintain social cohesion.

**Life-Cycle Rituals and Central Focus of the Baan**

Rituals performed to mark the major events of life – birth, marriage, and death – are the most important social occasions in Sambla communities and represent significant investment of time, money, and effort. The rituals themselves require preparation by acquiring the proper animals for sacrifice, offerings of certain items that symbolize the sanctification of the event, and performing prerequisite series of acts before the actual ceremony may take place. Friends and relatives often travel far and wide to participate in these events, both to show support to the people involved, but also because these ritual acts comprise the bulk of large-scale Sambla social activity.

As social events, the actual ritual procedures, much of which largely consists of a series of sacrifices and prayers, are not nearly as significant in attendance, expense, and preparation as the fêtes that follow. In addition to the cost of sacrificial animals and other items required for the ceremonies, the families hosting the events are required to provide food for visiting relatives, enough *dɔlɔ* (S: *dɔɔ*, beer made from red millet or sorghum) for all in attendance, and often rented benches, chairs and sometimes a portable generator to power fluorescent lights to illuminate the area.

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80 The other major life-cycle event common in Africa, the puberty/initiation rites, are no longer practiced by the Sambla except in one village, Surukudingan.
throughout the night. Most Sambla families live in a perpetual state of abject poverty, so putting together the funds to host a fête is no small task, and takes all of the resources available to them through their extended families and other kinship relations.

Apart from the financial burden, an enormous amount of work is also required to host a fête, most of which is done by women and girls. Firewood must be gathered, food and millet beer are prepared and spaces need to be cleared for people to sleep. For weddings, traditional bamboo beds are offered to the new couple, and occasionally agricultural work is traded as a commodity in place of a dowry. One of the most important needs for a large gathering of people is water, which in some of the mountainous areas that have no wells, requires a one-hour round trip to a small stream and back, which women and girls make balancing large, wide bowls on their heads. The situation is exacerbated in the late dry season, the busiest time for ritual activity, when water levels are low and contain a high content of silt and other impurities.

Then the musicians must be considered, for whom these events constitute their primary means of making money. Fête attendees must come with enough money to give the xylophonists when their names are called, praises are sung, and personal songs are played. This is not just considered good manners, this is a requirement of the social contract. One does not attend a fête without money, even if it must be borrowed, and one would never accept praises from a musician without offering monetary remuneration for fear of severe supernatural retribution. One may see the
equivalent of hundreds of dollars exchange hands in the course of a single fête, which is an enormous amount of money in this community. Musicians are not rich, however. They do not have any opportunities to play in villages during the agricultural season, so the money they make from October to April must last them the whole year.

Second only to agricultural work, life-cycle rituals and accompanying fêtes represent the greatest investment of financial and human resources for the society at large. This speaks of their significance on two different levels. First, the events themselves mark the most important moments in a person’s life: when one is given a name and becomes part of the community, when two people unite to start their own family, and when one leaves the earth to join the realm of the ancestors. Secondly, these events are significant to sustaining the concept of community, social cohesion, and ultimately ethnic identity.

Like the institution of the *mangan* (see Chapter 2), the *baan* helps to unify a formerly heterogenous group of people into a unified ethnic identity. However, the *baan* operates on a dynamic social and expressive level, and not by the creation of a physical bond to the land that is associated with the *mangan*. There is nothing unique about funeral, wedding, or child-naming ceremonies in Africa, nor the concept of communal social activity. What is unique for the Sambla is the presence of the *baan* and the way in which it speaks, quite literally, to local individuals, families, folklore, and histories. The *baan* distinguishes the Sambla from their neighbors, which is particularly important considering their status as one of the smallest ethnic groups in
the country, and also because of the way in which Sambla society and ritual practices represent essentially an agglomeration of elements adopted and borrowed from other ethnic groups. Indeed, the roots of the baan itself lie in a foreign, imported tradition.

**Weddings and Baptisms**

For baptisms, commonly known as child-naming ceremonies, the presence of a baan is necessary, as is of millet beer, certain sacrifices, and other ritual items. In these ceremonies, which Burkinabes call baptême in French, the baan functions primarily as a means of celebration and dance, honoring the addition of a new member of society and the propagation of the community. My own experience with Sambla baptisms is limited compared to funerals. I only attended one such fête in the eighteen months I spent in Burkina Faso, and it was not in a village but in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso, where the protocols for such occasions may diverge from village traditions due to influences from other ethnic groups and practices.

The baan also animates wedding fêtes, accompanying songs from the Sambla wedding repertoire as well as songs that are composed specifically for the newlywed couple. While it is always preferable to have the baan play for dancing at any social occasion, its presence is not a requisite element of the occasion at it is for funerals and other ritual activities. I attended only one wedding celebration in Sambla country, which was different from any other fête I had attended. First, it

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81 While the Sambla do compose new songs in cases such as this, new pieces for baan have not been composed for many years, according to all of the Sambla xylophonists who have commented to me on the topic. New songs are either sung unaccompanied, like the ones I heard at the wedding fête described above, or they are written to melodies from previously-known songs for the baan.
occurred during the rainy season, a time in which I was told that celebration, music-making, and other ritual activity does not take place. This celebration also consisted primarily of singing and dancing by women and girls, who organized the event for the bride, but there was a notable absence of a *baan*. I was told that the reason for this was that the *baan* kept in that area was in disrepair and could not be played. However, I was there with my teacher, Sadama, and I knew that he had a functioning instrument at his compound, which was only fifteen minutes away by motorbike. Nevertheless, everyone seemed satisfied to sit and enjoy the festivities, watching the women and girls dance and clap along to unaccompanied songs.

**Funerals**

The grand social occasion that dominates where the *baan* is seen most frequently is the funeral fête, a common arena for most if not all of the xylophones practiced in this part of West Africa.\(^{82}\) Unfortunately, scholarly research has largely ignored the rich variety of xylophone traditions practiced in this region to date. The few scholars who have conducted research on xylophones found in Burkina have focused on groups along the Ghanaian border, holding a significant presence in northwestern Ghana, a far more popular research site for English-speaking scholars than Burkina Faso. Two dissertations that came out of UCLA in the early 1980s examined the use of the xylophone in funeral rites by the Birifor (Godsey 1980, see also 1984) and Sisaala (Seavoy 1982). The Birifor xylophone, called *kogyil*, is

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\(^{82}\) The only funerals that do not precipitate celebration or the presence of a *baan* are those for children and other young people, which are not considered joyous occasions.
related to the Dagari *gyil*, another West African xylophone that is well known in Anglophone academia.

The other xylophone tradition in the region that has captured the attention of a few researchers is practiced by the Senufo, a large ethnic group scattered around the borders between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Côte d’Ivoire. Some recent research on the Senufo xylophone done by Hugo Zemp examines the role the instrument fulfills in funerals (2004; vid. 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2005). Not only is the xylophone essential to Senufo funeral rites as it is among the Sambla, but it also employs a surrogate language system, one of the very few cited examples to date of a surrogate language in Africa that is articulated on a pitched percussion instrument.

During my stay in Burkina, my field excursions to observe the *baan* took place almost exclusively at funeral celebrations, which varied from large, lively celebrations lasting through the night, to large-scale series of events that lasted up to three days. It is difficult for me to give a general description of the events that take place at a funeral, since nearly every one I attended seemed to be different in some way. When I asked people to tell me the specific details of Sambla funeral rites, most descriptions were limited to a reference to a sacrifice and an ensuing fête where people dance to the *baan*. This is an obvious oversimplification. At various funeral celebrations, I witnessed activities ranging from standard fête activities like dancing and interacting with the soloist, to complex, choreographed theatrical dances by men

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83 Ingrid Monson was conducting research with Senufo xylophonist Neba Solo from Mali at the time of this writing. Her paper titled “Elusive Points of Departure: Variation and Repetition in Senufo Balafon and Hard Bop” was presented at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Honolulu, Hawai’i in November 2006.
in costumes, to an actual spirit possession. All funerals involve a series of animal sacrifices, but these also varied in scope, number, and frequency depending on the status of the deceased and which funeral in the series was taking place.

My knowledge of the details involved in the funeral rituals is incomplete; as a woman I was not privy to every event associated with the funerals I attended, particularly the actual interment, as women are forbidden from cemeteries. I am indebted to the work of Patrick Royer (1996) and the assistance of Samadou Coulibaly for supplying the information to which I did not have access while in Burkina.

Like all forms of cultural expression, the Sambla funeral tradition is fluid; it changes to accommodate new introductions and is influenced by others around it. Certain stages in the progression of funerary rites are accompanied by or replaced with Muslim or Christian services, depending on the religious preference of the deceased and his or her family. Other elements of these rites were permanently altered or removed by the influence of other, popular religious cults practiced at the time. Therefore, there is no standard or “typical” Sambla funeral, but the steps still reveal the basic structure of now archaic traditions.

The Sambla funeral occurs in either two or three stages, depending on the sex of the deceased. The first one, called *kikira* (“death-fresh”), occurs within the first 24 hours of the death, requiring xylophonists to be constantly on-call to travel to one of

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84 This taboo is common to most ethnic groups in the region.
the villages within their domain at short notice. The primary importance is to bury the deceased as quickly as possible, particularly if the death was a result of a contagious illness. The body is wrapped in white cloth and brought to a central clearing where people have gathered to witness the body and bid their farewell. This is the time when people express emotions of sadness and loss, and the general mood is somber. A Christian or Muslim service may also be performed at this time. The baan plays selections from a particular funeral repertoire, including the deceased’s personal song, but there is no dancing. The music stops when it is time to say prayers, and then the body is moved to the cemetery for burial, accompanied by all men present. The grave is dug by a person who is assigned this task, the kɔnsɔka, a member of the ka class who is usually a leatherworker (tsun-dege-ka) as his greater ka designation.

The second funeral is the kigoo (“death-dry”), which is sometimes called the “dry funeral,” that is, a funeral without a body. It is an important event in a family’s history, but also a significant celebration of the community. The kigoo takes place a minimum of 20 days to several months after the death, depending on the social position of the deceased, funds that are immediately available to the family, and the season. If the death occurs at the beginning of the agricultural season, for example, the family must wait until after the harvest to have the second funeral, since the

85 Xylophonists are not present in every village, so villages without xylophonists have specific musicians “assigned” to play for their fêtes. These assignments are determined by geographic proximity and kinship relation; certain fêtes in Bwende, for example, may have either Konates or Diabates play, depending on the family sponsoring the event.

86 Many elements of the traditional kikira have fallen out of practice due to the strong opposition that Christians and Muslims had to certain funeral practices, such as the burial of many bodies in collective underground chambers.
villagers are too busy working in their fields to attend social events, and money is also scarce until the first cotton crops have been sold in the late rainy season, around August or September. In contrast to the burial service, the second funeral is a big event for which many friends and relatives travel from neighboring villages and cities.

Originally, the kigoo involved symbolically elaborate rituals that lasted three days, but today the rites of the “dry funeral” focus on the divination that is performed to determine the cause of death. For this, a diviner, called kɔɔkɔmba (“grave-arrange”) throws cowries (fuie) and interprets the response by the manner and configuration in which the cowries land. Considering the Sambla’s significant preoccupation with the supernatural, it is important for people to know whether or not a person died of natural means. The act of throwing cowries is called kuie-din (“question-search”), signifying the diviner’s “search” for an explanation to something that is not yet understood (Go-Tasiu Coulibaly, pers. com. 12/22/03). If it is determined that the person died as a result of spiritual malevolence, further rites must be performed to determine the perpetrator and appropriate retribution.

The kigoo has transformed over the years from a series of public religious rituals and sacrifices, to a large-scale social event that celebrates both the family of the deceased and the community at large. Today, the traditional sacrifices are often augmented or replaced by a less-ceremonious killing of a large number of chickens to feed family members, and most modern kigoos last a single day and night.
The final ceremony, the *tsoce* (“quiver-to speak”), is considered the actual funeral service, functioning to separate the dead definitively from the world of the living. The *tsoce* normally occurs three years after the death during the so-called funeral season, a period of agricultural inactivity in the late dry season (March and April) that is reserved for funeral activity. This is an intense period of ritual activity for many ethnic groups of the region, as communities have very little to do in their fields and ample time to devote to the preparation and attendance of fêtes and ritual ceremonies. Sambla xylophonists are busiest during this period, often playing for more than one funeral in the same day. It is not uncommon to be in attendance at one event and be able to see and hear one or more other funerals taking place in the immediate vicinity.

The *tsoce* is the only funerary rite that has not been altered by other religious beliefs. It involves the ritualized distribution of the deceased’s belongings, including certain objects that all men must own, based on the belief that the spirit of the dead person will remain in the world between the living and the dead until his possessions have been distributed. The *tsoce* is only held for men, and the women have no equivalent procedure; women’s belongings are inherited exclusively within their matriclans and are distributed in private.

The diviner who attended the *kigoo* is called again for the *tsoce*, where he acts as interlocutor between the deceased and his patrilineal relatives. After belongings are distributed and the *kokoomba* has finished his communications, he performs another divination for the cause of death, to confirm the results of the first. Certain
animals are presented to the deceased by his patrilineal relatives, which are then sacrificed and distributed among the family of the dead and the kɔɔkɔmba.

Once all the sacrifices, divinations, and prayers have been completed, the baan may begin the fête. In a funeral setting this must be done by playing a solo prelude that is called baan-ne-tere (“xylophone-in-ask/test”). A Western musician may interpret this as a soloist’s “warm up” that he plays before performing in any setting. The name refers to “testing” the xylophone through a series of melodic figures played across the entire range of the instrument to check its tuning, gourd resonance, and other details of the instrument’s function before the performance begins.87 Sometimes minor adjustments to key and gourd placement must be made to achieve the instrument’s optimal sound. The exercises may include certain melodic figures unique to that xylophonist’s personal style and may allude to the song that is about to begin.

In contrast, certain baan-ne-tere are played for funerals, preceding all other music, dance, and celebration. In addition to checking the instrument for any structural problems, the baan-ne-tere is also played to call the chiefs of the village, past and present, to ask permission to perform for the upcoming event (Sa-Kɔɔn Konate, pers. com. 3/21/04). These baan- ne-tere tend to be very long interludes, lasting several minutes. They are serious in mood and extremely difficult. The soloist must be able to play the entire passage without making a single error, which

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87 This is a somewhat standard practice for most xylophone-playing in the region, called balan lenke in Jula. It is similarly considered a “warming up” and “testing” of the instrument before the performance commences in earnest.
the Sambla believe is punishable by death. Similarly, if a funerary *baan-ne-tëre* is played outside of a funeral context, spiritual retribution will be exacted through the sudden death of someone else in the community.

After this introduction has been played, the fête may begin. At this point the activities and events do not vary greatly from most other fêtes. People eat, drink, and visit with one another. People dance, just a few at first, building to a fever pitch after nightfall. The *baan* soloist is in constant communication with those present, calling to those dancing, calling others over to join the dance, and addressing certain individuals with praises, with the expectation of financial compensation in return. Within the repertoire of *baan* songs, everyone has a song that is associated with or “belongs” to them. It is possible for the same song to belong to more than one person of course, but nearly every adult present has a song associated with them, allowing the soloist to call their attention at any time by playing their name on the *baan* and immediately commencing the song associated with that person. At that point the person is obliged to respond by approaching the *baan* to dance to the song. He or she then engages verbally in short exchanges with the soloist, to which he responds musically on the instrument, and the individual finally pulls out a stack of small bills and proceeds to peel them off one by one, dropping them on the instrument as the soloist showers them with praises through the *baan*.

The fête lasts through the night into the early morning, when the women have risen and are busy preparing food and children for the day. At this point the

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88 Some of the more serious Sambla rituals and sacrifices prescribe long series of complicated acts that must be strictly followed, often punishable by death for even the smallest error.
xylophonists often stop to eat and rest, and younger relatives might take over the instrument and play until the fête completely disperses later in the morning. This period is considered more as an opportunity for the young players to practice rather than a continuation of the fête. The energy and intensity of the fête cannot normally sustain beyond dawn, and the music played by the younger musicians at this time is commonly regarded as background music or simply children playing around.

**Agricultural Work**

Since very little ritual activity takes place during the rainy growing season, xylophonists must endure a period of forced unemployment from June to September. Historically, only members of the *saa* class were farmers, while the *ka* were expected to earn their living through their respective trades; the *j̱n* worked on land owned by the *saa* and were fed and housed by them. However, arable land and wild game have become increasingly scarce today, and personal financial resources are not enough to support all *ka* for their work, so it is necessary for everyone to own a parcel of land and cultivate it in order to survive. Therefore, xylophonists today, like all Sambla, are also occupied with their land during the agricultural season. But this does not preclude them from playing music during the growing season.

Music that accompanies work is common in Africa, and this tradition among the Sambla predates the advent of the *baan*. Originally, work music was performed on a drum called the *dennin*, which became part of the ensemble of drums that accompany the *baan* after its arrival and development (see below for more on
instruments that existed before the *baan*). It is still occasionally played in that context – I once witnessed someone playing a *dennin* next to a group of men digging a large pit – but today, farm work is largely accompanied by the *baan*.

A *baan* is not called to accompany just any individual or family working in their fields, rather it is reserved for special occasions of group work called *kənən* or *kərən* (J: *leggi leggi*). Groups of men form farming associations and take turns working together in each other’s fields. This is necessary for certain tasks, such as clearing and tilling a field to prepare it for planting, which is strenuous, back-breaking work that would take too long for the members of a single family to accomplish on their own. With the whole group, a number of fields can be cleared and tilled in a day. The men make their way across the field in a straight line, turning over the earth with the traditional, manual hoe that is perennial in the region, and women follow behind to gather and clear away the brush that has been pulled up. Following close behind the men is the *baan*, playing from a repertoire of work songs that regulate the speed and rhythm of the work, giving the men something to focus on while making their way through their tedious, exhausting work, occasionally stopping to dance a few steps and compliment the musicians (see Figure 12).

The manner of performance in the group work context differs greatly from a fête. First, in order to be mobile, the *baan* must be worn by the soloist with a strap attached to each end of the instrument that is slung over the soloist’s shoulder. Because of this, a smaller *baan* must be made for use in the fields, as the standard *baan* is far too large and cumbersome for such a task.
Figure 12. A baan played for men clearing a field in a kørøn, or “group work.” Bwénde, 7/18/03.

Normally, a smaller ensemble of musicians plays the baan when accompanying farm work, primarily for greater mobility to follow the men as they progress across the field, but also because the agricultural season is busy for everyone, and fewer musicians are available to play at any given time. Often the baan is only played by two people in the fields instead of the standard three: the soloist, who adapts his part to incorporate essential elements of the bass part, and a young boy to play the accompaniment, who stands opposite the soloist, walking
backwards as the musicians keep up with the men. The accompanying drum ensemble is similarly often stripped down to a single *dennin* or *lunka* player (see Figure 13).

![A baan in the field, played by two xylophonists with a single lunka. Bwende, 7/18/03.](image)

A separate repertoire of work songs is played on the *baan* in the fields (see Chapter 4 for more on *baan* repertoire). These songs exalt the virtues of farm work, compliment the workers for their physical prowess, and warn against the consequences of laziness. In addition to these songs, the xylophonists may play personal songs for any of the men present, both to acknowledge and inspire their work. Once the work is finished, the musicians may be given a small amount of
money, but normally their compensation is given in the form of a large lunch and copious amounts of millet beer that is enjoyed throughout the day (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. Men enjoying dɔ (J: dolo), traditional millet beer ubiquitous in this region, while taking a break from their work in the fields. Bwende, 7/18/03.

*Other Ritual Activity*

Sambla religious life is sustained though nearly constant attention to ritual activity, whether in the form of maintaining personal and family shrines or performing regularly scheduled sacrifices to appease ancestors and spirits associated
with the earth and sky. One main function of religious ritual activity is to detect malicious supernatural activity, often referred to as witchcraft or *la sorcellerie* in French scholarship. This preoccupation with “bad magic” has been a perennial distraction for many Sambla; it caused a flurry of religious change in the mid-20th century, as they exchanged religious cults with neighbors in rapid succession, always in search of a more effective protection against malevolent supernatural activity (cf. Royer 1996). Religious beliefs changed so rapidly during this period that a comprehensive listing of all Sambla religious practices past and present would be too ambitious for the present context. Religious cults also vary by region, village, and family lineage, and I did not have an opportunity to learn about many of the practices local to the northern Sambla villages. Based on my current knowledge, I have grouped religious practices into the following categories:

1. **Antiquated traditions** – religious cults and other rites that are no longer practiced; includes the adolescent male initiation rite called *nogo*, which today is only practiced in Surukudingan (S: Kuruweeko).

2. **Contemporary practices common throughout Sambla country** – this category includes all remaining life-cycle ceremonies (listed above), and certain religious cults, such as the cult of *bwem*.

3. **Contemporary local practices** – religious practices that are specific to a particular lineage or locale, such as sacrifices made to a family cult shrine, or the annual sacrifice to a large mountain in Torønso. This category also includes sacrifices specific to the xylophone, which are generally done in the instrument’s home village.

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89 The practice of witchcraft and other supernatural phenomena are often scorned and dismissed by elite, educated Sambla living in cities, who view such beliefs as backwards and primitive. This tension between traditional beliefs of the village and modern behaviors and ideas associated with the city and ultimately European influence is somewhat common throughout Africa. It can create a considerable amount of conflict between Africans who want to participate in the global community and view this type of change as “progress,” and those who view such attitudes as a threat to the preservation of their traditions and culture.
4. **Christian and Muslim holidays** – many Sambla have converted to either Christianity or Islam, though for most village-dwelling Sambla, local religious cults take precedence over global religions. Nevertheless, most Sambla celebrate major Christian and Muslim holidays together, regardless of their personal faith, a common practice in this region of Burkina Faso.

Before discussing Sambla religious practices further, one influential religious cult from northern Côte d’Ivoire called the Water of Moussa should be mentioned to illuminate the forces that have influenced the development of contemporary Sambla religious activities, an important domain of Sambla music and the *baan*.\(^{90}\) The cult was started by a Senufo man named Moussa who lived near Sinimatiali, a town situated on the route between Bobo-Dioulasso and Abidjan that is traveled by migrant farmers from western Burkina each dry season to work in coffee and cocoa plantations in southern Côte d’Ivoire. After a series of revelations, Moussa claimed that God granted him special powers that enabled him to detect and eliminate witchcraft by distributing water he had blessed to believers. It was believed that those who were guilty of witchcraft would go mad upon contact with this water, and the cult swept up through the region as people clamored to demonstrate to their communities that they were innocent of any potential accusation of witchcraft.

The popularity of the Water of Moussa was particularly strong in all Sambla villages except Surukudingan (S: Kuruwëeko), where they believed that their own anti-witchcraft cults were powerful enough to detect and repudiate sorcery. Ironically, Moussa required his adherents to reject other local, animist cults and

\(^{90}\) Information on the Water of Moussa religious cult was drawn from Royer 1996, Chapter Six.
destroy all fetish and power objects associated with them, even though fundamentally his cult did not differ significantly from the other anti-witchcraft cults he rejected.

The Water of Moussa permanently affected Sambla religious practices in two major ways. The order to destroy all family and village cult objects effectively wiped most former religious practices out of existence, and many no longer remain in living memory. Thousands of believers from across the region flocked to the shack where Moussa dispensed ladles of the water through a small window. The pilgrims were instructed to bring their family’s cult objects with them to the site for their mass ritual destruction, and any objects that could not be transported had to be destroyed upon their return home. Many of these objects had been in families for decades or possibly centuries, and the loss of religious history was immeasurable.

The second major change effected by the Water of Moussa was massive conversions to Christianity and Islam in the years after the cult had waned from popularity and significance. Moussa, a practicing Muslim, did not advocate a particularly religious doctrine; he only specifically rejected animist practices. Religions that did not acknowledge the existence of witchcraft, such as Christianity and Islam, were acceptable. Therefore, as interest in the Water of Moussa waned, the Sambla were left without any of their former, animist cults, and Christianity and Islam were left as the only potential options in their perennial quest to eradicate witchcraft. Christian missionaries and Muslim clerics saw this window of opportunity as a chance to expand their congregations, and it was during this period that many Sambla converted to one of these religions. In general, most village-
dwelling Sambla are not devout practitioners of Christianity or Islam today, sometimes mentioning such an affiliation as an afterthought. Nevertheless, it has become common practice for the Sambla to celebrate major holidays from both religions, considering them to be “for everyone.”

Despite the disruption in the practice of traditional religion that Moussa caused, the Sambla have gradually returned to one of their most important former cults, the cult of *bwen*. Most village-dwelling Sambla now practice this cult avidly, partially because it had no competition from former cults that the Water of Moussa had wiped out.

The case in Surukudingan, however, is somewhat different. This village has managed to sustain their family cults and some other ancient practices since before the Water of Moussa hit Sambla country, notably the male initiation rite called *nogo*. I am not privy to many details of the *nogo* initiation, but I do know that it is somewhat typical in that it requires boys within a certain adolescent age range to spend a period of time together out in the wilderness, where they learn skills essential to their adult lives. They return to the village after the period has ended, and the initiation is celebrated. Because the *nogo* is only practiced in Surukudingan today, some of the specialized knowledge taught during the initiation that is taught during the initiation period, such as the secret language *dioku* (“dio-language”), only exists in this village.91

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91 *Dioku* is a powerful, secret language related to the cult of *dio*. I never had an opportunity to hear *dioku* spoken, but I was told that it is still actively taught and spoken by the initiated in Surukudingan. According to other Sambla with whom I spoke who have heard *dioku*, the language bears no resemblance to either Sambla dialect and is completely unintelligible to the uninitiated. Samadou
In many ways, the fête that accompanies religious cult activities differs little from other fêtes in which the *baan* plays. Most of these activities involve a series of sacrifices made on a shrine of some sort – either a personal or family shrine, or possibly another power object, such as the *bienkote* gourd on the *baan* – and sometimes offerings of food, drink, or other objects are made. Once all details of the rite have been attended to, the *baan* starts to play and the fête begins. Apart from certain songs reserved for specific occasions, the music and activities of these fêtes do not differ greatly from others.

One exception is the ritual that accompanies sacrifices to the *koko*, a modern practice that is common throughout Sambla country. The *koko* is a horrible, mythological monster from Sambla folklore that is believed to have the ability to drink whole lakes and eat entire villages at once. Sacrifices are made to the *koko* at regular intervals, at which time it makes its appearance. The only people permitted to participate in this ritual are men who have been initiated to the *koko* through a process of “washing the face,” including all xylophonists. All of the non-initiated must remain in their houses during this time, because it is believed that they will immediately perish once they lay eyes on the *koko*. Normally only adult men are initiated to the *koko*, but young boys from families of xylophonists are also initiated so that they may be able to play for the occasion. Sacrifices are made to the *koko* to keep it appeased and maintain harmony with this mysterious creature of the bush. A song, “Koko So,” was written for this creature and is played for it during this ritual.

*Note:* Coulibaly suspects it may be a variant of Senufo, though I have no evidence that either proves or disproves this theory.
A certain amount of terror is used to sustain belief in the powers of this supernatural being. Stories are regularly told about the horrible monster’s habits and appetite, and these tales come to life in the minds of the uninitiated as they can hear the strange, terrifying sound of the beast making its way through the village as they remain locked inside their houses. The secret of the *koko*, normally known only by the initiated, is that this otherworldly sound is actually created by a bull-roarer, which is considered the *koko* itself.92

Many local ritual activities specific to certain lineages or villages are practiced at regular intervals throughout Sambla country. One such practice occurs in Toronso that commemorates a small mountainous outcropping that is a major geographical point of reference in the village (see Figure 15). This small mountain, which is more like a large hill, is called Senogo, and the song “Senogo So” was composed for the sacrifices that are made to it every year. There is nothing particularly special about this ritual; a series of animals are sacrificed by the appropriate individuals, and a typical fête follows. Senogo is believed to watch over and protect the village, another conduit for ancestral activities, so these sacrifices are made out of respect and maintenance of this protective arrangement. This rite is another way in which the Sambla maintain their connection to the land, a relationship that is also established by the *mangan*.

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92 This secret was revealed to me by Samoudou Coulibaly, who has been of enormous assistance throughout my research period. He told me this one day while we were talking about the *koko*, making no ceremony at divulging such a major social secret. Instead, he laughed it off as he told me, indicating that he thought it was nothing more than a village superstition invented to scare children that caused people to believe that the sounds made by a small piece of wood were instead coming from a terrible monster (pers. com. 12/22/03).
The *baan*’s central role in Sambla social and ritual life demonstrates the degree to which it was embraced as an integral element of Sambla culture and identity. Most of these activities cannot officially take place without the *baan*, but what filled these rolls before the *baan*? The Sambla claim that they did not have any other dance music traditions before the xylophone, but that does not mean they did not have any music. Once the *baan* tradition was fully accepted by the Sambla, their former music practices changed forever, they were either absorbed by *baan* ensemble, or they faded out of use, some to near extinction. The way that the roles of these older music practices changed when the xylophone was introduced is reminiscent of an ecosystem: when an alien species is introduced, existing species have to adapt, migrate elsewhere, or become extinct.
Sambla Music Before the Xylophone – Other Sambla Instruments

When speaking with Sambla about the baan and how and why they adopted it, most people cite the same need: the Sambla had no dance music tradition and wanted to have one of their own. They had been familiar with Tusia xylophone music before the development of the baan, due to their close geographical proximity and historically close military and kinship relations, but they never had a xylophone or dance music of their own until the Tusia brought the baan to them. The ensuing changes in the Sambla musical landscape can be best understood by examining older music traditions and how they functioned in society.

Figure 16. A dennin (center), with a lunka on the left, played with a baan. Konkolikan, 3/9/03.
The praise singing tradition tumaa so, discussed above, is still practiced today by some of the ka kan, but with increasingly fewer practitioners each year. Many Sambla fear it will soon become extinct. Most people who identify themselves as ka kan instead play one of two drums that existed before the arrival of the xylophone: the dennin and the lunka. The traditions surrounding these instruments in the days before the baan is largely unknown, but rather than fall into extinction as some other archaic instruments have, the dennin and lunka were absorbed into the ensemble of small percussion instruments that accompany the baan (see Figures 16 and 17).

Figure 17. A lunka (left) played with a baan. Bwende, 1/1/03.
According to the Diabates, the *dennin* was used to accompany work in the fields and elsewhere in the village before the advent of the *baan*. I once saw a man in Toronso playing a *dennin* for another man digging a large pit, so these archaic uses still exist to some degree, but normally any music accompanying work today would be played on the *baan*. The *lunka* belongs to a complex of armpit tension drums found throughout the Sahel and Savannah from Senegal to Nigeria. The Dagbani of northern Ghana, a Gur ethno-linguistic group whose music is well-known among many students of African music, play an instrument called the *luna* or *donno*, which bears a close physical resemblance to the Sambla *lunka* (see Locke 1990), so it is possible that the Sambla acquired the *lunka* from this or another Gur neighbor.

The last member of the *baan* ensemble is a pair of small clay pot drums called *piin*. These drums, played with two short sticks, are tuned to two of the notes on the *baan* scale. These instruments came from the Tusia xylophone tradition, where they are called *plin*, and were brought to the Sambla with the xylophone. Si Traore, a Tusia xylophonist from the village of Kurinion, claims that the *plin* are older than the xylophone (pers. com. 3/25/04). If this were true, it would support the theory that the xylophone may have also been brought to the Tusia by an outside group, just as the Tusia brought it to the Sambla. Only xylophonists play and make the *piin*, distinguishing them from the other drums that are strictly the domain of the *ka kan*. The rhythms played on the *piin* are unique to each song and interact with the xylophone parts as one of the constituent elements. In contrast, the *dennin* and *lunka* play somewhat outside of the xylophone parts, providing a rhythmic framework on a
larger, structural scale rather than weaving in and out of the interlocking xylophone parts as the *piin* does.

The remaining Sambla instruments are not associated with the *baan*, and most have either become marginalized or completely fallen out of use since the reign of the xylophone in Sambla music. One of the oldest and most culturally significant Sambla instruments that predates the *baan* and retains its importance and function in Sambla society today is a royal drum called the *dan-dunnun*. This instrument resembles the *dennin* that is played with the *baan* in that it is also a barrel-shaped drum played with a stick, but I never had an opportunity to see one of these rarely-played instruments so I do not know the degrees of similarity or difference between the two. The *dan-dunnun* is a highly sacred drum associated with the *mangan*, a figure that is central to the creation and maintenance of Sambla identity (see Chapter 2).

According to Alexis Traore, the chief of Karankaso during the period I was in Sambla country, the *dan-dunnun* is the oldest of Sambla instruments (pers. com. 4/18/04), though this opinion may simply be based upon its relation to the institution of the *mangan*, one of the oldest and most significant cultural practices in the construction of Sambla identity (see Chapter 2). The *dan-dunnun* is only played for certain occasions involving the *mangan*: the “*mangan* capture,” when an individual from the community becomes the new *mangan* by ritual transformation from human to sacred being, and funeral services for the *mangan* or any male members of his clan (Go-Tasiu Coulibaly, pers. com. 12/22/03). The instrument is kept in the *mangan’s*

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93 *Dunnun* is the generic term for “drum” in Sambla.
house and is played by certain musicians who are also *kɔɔ-so-ka*, or grave-diggers, and have been trained in its performance. There are no specific rhythms or songs associated with the *dan-dunnun* or the *mangan*; the musicians simply play songs associated with the particular individuals involved in the occasion.

Traore told me of two other Sambla drums older than the *baan* that are no longer played today. One is another set of pottery drums larger than the *piin* that are called *taafun*, once played by warriors. The other drum, called *tinman*, was a signal drum used to call names and summon people across long distances. No other information was available about its physical appearance except that it is longer than the *dan-dunnun*, has two heads, and tapers in the middle section like an hourglass, indicating that it may have been similar in design to the lunka. These drums no longer exist today except in broken pieces of past drums saved by certain families as familial artifacts.

The remaining Sambla instruments consist of a variety of flutes, some very old and extinct, and others that are still in use. The most common instrument mentioned in response to my inquiries is the *pion*, a transverse flute first invented by adolescent boys to entertain themselves while herding cattle (see Figure 18). This flute is still played today, either alone or with other instruments, though it is forbidden for a *pion* and *baan* to play together at a sad event such as the first two

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94 The Sambla were formerly considered a particularly fierce warring people, though that association is no longer held today. The *taafun* drums were probably the ones mentioned among the items that were left behind after the Sambla had retreated from a battle in the anticolonial war of 1915-16 (Saul and Royer 2001:227).
funeral ceremonies. Because the pion and baan sometimes play together, the pion repertoire includes songs played on the baan, and more significantly, I was told that speech can be articulated on the pion in the same way as it is on the xylophone.

Figure 18. Pion flute played by unidentified musician. Bwënde, 4/18/04.

I received widely conflicting information about the pion in my conversations with villagers, particularly surrounding the question of the chronology of the pion and its musical speech in relation to the baan. Based on my information, the pion

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95 The pion can be played at the third funeral, generally about one year after the death, since this is considered a joyous occasion. I could not elicit clarification on why the two could not be played together on the other occasions.
probably predated the *baan*, but I doubt that the speech surrogate practiced on the *baan* originated with the *pion*, as I was told by brothers of the chief of Bwënde (S Ponda Martin Traore et al, pers. com. 4/18/04). The speech surrogate tradition inherent to *baan* performance clearly originated with the Tusia xylophone, but it is possible that a simpler, more elementary surrogate language was practiced with the *pion* before the advent of the *baan*. If this were true, it is possible that the *pion* speech system influenced the development of the *baan* through its tuning. One of the major transformations that marked the creation of the *baan* as a tradition distinct from the Tusia xylophone was the change in its tuning, made to accommodate the Sambla language (see Chapter 2).

Most of the other flutes described to me also appeared to have some capacity for communication. Whether or not this communication was in the form of simple signals or actual, prosodic speech is unclear, but the explanations of these instruments that were given to me usually included communication as an integral function of the instrument. The *sio* is an end-blown signal flute with one hole on top and a second one on its side, similar in design to many end-blown flutes found throughout Africa. The *sio* was only used to signal certain events, such as the death of a chief or a call to arms in the case of a war (Go-Tasiu Coulibaly, pers.com. 12/22/03). The *sio* is not commonly played anymore today, though an existing instrument is currently held by the family of the chief of Bwënde.96

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96 I had occasion to see this flute played during a New Year’s Day celebration in Bwënde, accompanied by an ensemble of *dennins*. Mamdou Diabate, the younger brother of my teacher
Another early Sambla flute, called the *boo*, is made from an animal horn and is associated with the male initiation cult of *nogo*. The *boo* is believed to be the most ancient of Sambla instruments (Sa-Ndoga Martin Traore, pers. com. 4/18/04). The *boo* is played by a leader in call and response fashion with a group playing smaller versions of the same flute, called *kɔbi* (antelope-horn). Because the male initiation only survives today in Surukudingan, the *boo* only exists today in that village, though it is also played occasionally for weddings and while threshing *fonio*, a small grain common in the Sahel and Savannah that is the first crop harvested during the agricultural season. The language spoken with the *boo* is probably not as advanced as the *baan* speech system. I was told that this flute was used to call people’s names, though I received no further information on its communicative uses.

The last flute, called *sɔɔ*, is somewhat like a whistle, and it was affiliated with the cult of *togo*. The *togo* is sometimes referred to as a final or “elder initiation,” done for the elderly when death is imminent or a tragedy has recently befallen the family. Like the initiation for adolescent males, the *togo* initiation and the *sɔɔ* flute tradition are only practiced in Surukudingan. The *sɔɔ* is similar in design to the *sio*, an end-blown flute, but smaller. During the *togo* rite, the *sɔɔ* is played “on the body” of the elder by a child. Afterwards, the flute is worn by the initiate on a cord around the neck as a power object of protection. The *sɔɔ* was the only Sambla flute described to me that did not employ a speech surrogate system.

Sadama who now resides in Vienna, became nostalgic when they began playing, and commented on how they spoke an “ancient” version of their music language.
A trend has emerged in the development of Sambla music practices after the *baan* was introduced, namely, that function dictates the survival or extinction of music traditions, as it often does for other cultural practices. The *taafun* warring drums fell out of use once the occasions for warfare waned, and the *boo* and *sɔɔ* initiation flutes disappeared in the regions where the Water of Moussa wiped out initiation practices. The *sio* flute and *tinman* drum, two instruments that were once used to communicate messages and summon individuals by calling their names, have similarly become extinct, possibly because these functions are currently fulfilled by the *baan*. The instruments that remain in use include the *dennin* and *lunka*, both of which have been absorbed into the *baan* ensemble, and the *pion*, which was originally developed for entertainment purposes. Because this flute had no specific role, it did not suffer extinction as the other instruments have, though the Sambla, who categorically consider the *baan* as the center of all their music-making activities, generally regard the *pion* as a novelty today.

Despite the conflicting and incomplete accounts I sometimes encountered regarding these instruments, it is likely that some of these instruments did in fact employ a rudimentary surrogate language system. These systems may have acted as the seed for the language that is expressed on the *baan* today, combined with the more sophisticated Tusia speech surrogate from the *ñan* tradition. As mentioned above, this theory provides a possible explanation for the tuning change that was enacted in the process of adapting the xylophone to local needs, resulting in the
creation of the Sambla *baan* tradition. The next chapter provides a detailed analysis of the music performed on the *baan*, including an examination of the speech surrogate.
CHAPTER IV: The Evolution of Tradition: The Music of the Baan

The music of the baan is some of the most dynamic, interactive, multi-faceted, and virtuosic music that I have ever encountered, in Africa or elsewhere. Anyone who hears a baan in performance for the first time is likely to be immediately impressed by the complexity of the music and the many layered melodies that weave in and out of one another. The interlocking parts create a densely textured matrix of notes that fall into place with machine-like precision, but articulated through a tempo that subtly ebbs and flows together like the breath of a living organism (refer to CD track #1). For some people unfamiliar with the tradition, the music creates a sensory overload, and they simply do not know how to orient their ears to the music in reference to a central pulse or primary melody. However, to Sambla who have grown up hearing and dancing to the music, it is as natural to them as any other element of their daily lives. The fact that their spoken language is articulated through its performance creates an even more intimate link between the baan and a fundamental sense of Sambla expression and communication.

If I were to describe the musical characteristics of the baan tradition with the terminology typically used for Sub-Saharan African percussive music traditions, the baan would not seem remarkably different. It employs cyclical repetition of patterns, heavy use of syncopation, interlocking parts, has inherent melodies and rhythms, and a soloist who plays above a texture created by subordinate parts, interacting with
dancers and other participants in the musical event. Even the use of a surrogate language is found elsewhere in Africa.

Despite these shared characteristics, however, the baan is unique in relation to other African music traditions, even to other xylophones played within the same geographic region. This is, of course, a subjective evaluation based upon my own musical experiences, but I am not alone in this assessment. During the 18 months of my field research, I spoke with many different xylophonists who lived in the Bobo-Dioulasso area, representing a variety of the ethnic backgrounds found in the region. Without exception, each one told me that the Sambla baan was the most challenging of all xylophones played in the region, and each admitted that the instrument was beyond his technical abilities. This not only alleviated my anxieties about the difficulties I had learning the music, but it was also the first time I had ever heard an African musician indicate that the music from another ethnic group’s tradition was more complex and challenging than his own. It dawned on me that it was not my status as an outsider that made this music impress me so much; even local musicians, with their legendary hubris, were not too proud to admit that this instrument surpassed their technical abilities.

The challenge now is to be able to explain exactly how and why this music is so extraordinary, considering that most of its characteristic traits are shared by many other African music traditions. What sets the baan apart from the Mande balañ, the Balanta kadj from the Casamance region of Senegal, the Ugandan amadinda and akadinda, and the countless other African xylophone and other melodic traditions
practiced across the continent? The best way I can describe music performed on the
*baan* is that it bears many of the typical characteristics of other West African
percussive traditions, but to a deeper degree: more syncopation; deeper and more
complex levels of interaction among the parts because of the melodic dimension
added to the tightly interlocking and complex polyrhythmic texture; a thicker, denser
texture; more inherent rhythms and melodies emerging from that texture; more
interaction with spectators through surrogate speech; and even more people playing
on a single instrument.97 The three musicians’ collective hands create six distinct
parts, each exploited to the fullest by simultaneously interacting with multiple other
parts, fulfilling a unique role in relation to each. Playing the *baan* demands a superior
level of musicianship, technical virtuosity, musical intuition and sensitivity, and sheer
strength and endurance, making it the most difficult West African xylophone tradition
that I have encountered to date.

While this is not an exceptionally technical description of the music, it is my
impression of it on a visceral level, drawing upon my past musical experience and
knowledge of other genres of African music. My goal in this section is therefore to
break down the music into the fundamental elements by which I understand it,
explain the mechanics behind the construction and performance of the music, and
explain how I understand the music to be perceived. This account is understandably
limited to my own conceptualization of the music, but it is informed by information

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97 These descriptions are generalizations that apply to most but certainly not all other African
instrumental traditions. Other xylophones, such as those practiced in Uganda, are played by six or
more musicians at once. The point I am making here is that these qualities that I am describing about
the *baan* are not typical in the overall realm of African instrumental music, and virtually non-existent
in this particular combination.
gleaned from my teachers and other Sambla with whom I interacted throughout my stay. My understanding is by no means comprehensive, particularly in relation to the surrogate language. I was not able to learn the Sambla spoken language well enough to understand the speech in the music; the Sambla people whom I came to know were doubtful that an outsider would ever be able to learn the xylophone language. Nevertheless, the most I can offer is how I came to learn and understand this music after eighteen months of careful instruction, practice, and observation. Musical understanding and expression is always subjective, emotional, and intuitive. The following description is true to my perception of the music, based upon information given to me, directly and implied, and my own musical sense and experience.

Music and its tendency to move about the globe, crossing ethnic, political, geographic, and linguistic boundaries, has been described as one of “the most indefatigable tourists of the world” (Tappert 1890:5). While this statement was originally made in reference to pieces of performed music, the same can be said for the material culture of music, namely musical instruments. The xylophone is one such case, having propagated in Africa through the movement of people and culture. The instrument appears in a swath across the continent, from Mozambique, through Central Africa, across West Africa to the coastlines of Senegal and Guinea. The distribution of the xylophone in Africa was first mapped and discussed by Olga Boone (1936), which was used as the basis for examinations of African xylophone distribution by later scholars, most notably Lois Anderson (1968), the controversial findings of A. M. Jones (1971), and Roger Blench (1982).
With the exception of the Mande *balañ* and the Dagari *gyil* and related instruments, detailed accounts of the remaining xylophone traditions practiced in the regions of this distribution map are spotty at best, and even less is known about how and when the instrument made the geographic and cultural leaps it did between the numerous and diverse communities that now have xylophone traditions. In the previous chapters I have outlined the xylophone’s movement between two small communities in this remote corner of West Africa, and some of the cultural and functional characteristics of this new tradition that was borne out of the processes of acculturation and adaptation to a uniquely Sambla setting. In this chapter I discuss the more technical aspects of *baan* music, highlighting the specific changes that were made between the Sambla and Tusia traditions, as well as some of the most remarkable aspects of the music as an African tradition in context.

My explanations incorporate a number of transcriptions, an imperfect means of visually representing the music, but one that serves my purposes to varying degrees. In order to outline as many different sonic aspects of the music as possible, some of the examples are represented by different transcription systems, each adapted to this music in ways that were most logical to my eyes and ears. In order for the examples to make sense, most transcriptions correspond to tracks on the accompanying CD, indicated in the caption of the transcription figure. Please note that the recordings do not always reflect exactly what is represented in the

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transcription; the recording may either include some parts not represented on the page, or they may omit some elements that are in the transcription. Nevertheless, the recordings offer the best sonic element available to properly understand the musical characteristic under discussion. Discrepancies are noted where applicable.

**Notes on Transcriptions and Terminology**

In this chapter, I grappled with some very difficult and complex musical concepts and structures, some of which I only partially understand. The greatest difficulty, however, lies in translating the understanding I gained through my experience of living among the Sambla and learning the music for 18 months into an English-language academic document meant to be read by fellow scholars and enthusiasts. Like most other West African communities, the Sambla have no specific or technical vocabulary for music that parallels Western music terminology. Much of what I learned on the *baan* came not from talking or explanations, but through playing, listening, and feedback through gestures, facial expressions, and sounds of encouragement or displeasure.

In my explanations and analysis, I frequently use Western musical terms such as tuning, meter, mode, rhythm, beat, pulse, and melody. The reader should note that these are not translations of Sambla words, but Western concepts that most closely represent the music based on my understanding of it. Sometimes, terms such as “rhythm” work well, its use justified by the practice of French-speaking Sambla musicians to use the French equivalent *rhythme*, and there appears to be no
dissonance in meaning when the term crosses cultural boundaries. In other cases, terms such as “mode” may be farther removed from a Sambla way of thinking or talking about music. But the terms used in this chapter most effectively communicate the proper musical concepts as I understand them, and great care was used in the application of these terms in order not to carry too many inaccurate implications carried over from their usage in their original, Western musical contexts.

With that in mind, I would like to define some of the terms that I use in order to clarify the discussions of the music that follow. The smallest, regularly recurring common unit of time, described by Nketia as the “density referent” (1974:127), is called a “pulse” in this analysis. Pulses grouped together into larger, common units are called “beats,” which often function as the time that is followed by the dancers. Repeating units of music played by different parts of the ensemble are called “cycles,” each defined by a certain number of beats. It should be noted here that the definition of a beat and a sense of meter can be fluid in Sambla music, as different beats can be heard at once in the music. Occasionally the music contains simultaneous beats made up of different numbers of pulses indicating what many ethnomusicologists call polyrhythms or cross-rhythms, although this rhythmic orientation can also be expressed while keeping the integrity of the pulse across the parts. This is a common phenomenon in Sambla music, as it is in most West African instrumental traditions.

Transcriptions are often a challenge in dealing with any type of music, as the transcription is so closely bound up in the transcriber’s perception of the music.
These issues are even more pronounced when the music from an oral tradition is represented by a notation system originally devised to represent a foreign music system, both geographically and musically. Most of my transcriptions have been done in a slightly modified Western notation. I found that the five-line Western staff works well to represent baan music the way that I understand it. Treble and bass clefs are used to indicate the range; however, the actual pitches sounded on the instrument do not match those represented by the lines and spaces on the staff. I chose to represent the music as if the scale of the baan corresponded to the pitches of a C-major scale, with the tonic or first scale degree represented as C, the pitch that sounds a fifth above it as G, and the dissonant diobaanden pitch as D#. This decision was made to represent most clearly the intervallic relationships between the pitches for one accustomed to reading Western staff notation. Similarly, the rhythms in the transcriptions are sometimes close approximations, as the subtle stretching and contracting of timing in performance is nearly impossible to represent within the limitations of Western notation. In other cases, the rhythms in some transcriptions were transcribed as accurately as possible in order to highlight differences in rhythmic behavior and sensibility during different sections of the performance.

**Baan Tuning – from Tusia to Sambla**

Tuning systems in West Africa are as diverse as the varieties of instruments and vocal traditions practiced across the region. All documented xylophone traditions indigenous to Burkina Faso are tuned to pentatonic scales, the most prevalent type of
tuning in Burkina and adjacent regions of Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mali. These scales contrast with the heptatonic tunings of the Mande balafon and kora, the most well known Mande instruments outside of Africa and two of the most widely dispersed instruments across West Africa.  

The *baan*, like countless other examples, is considered unique to the Sambla and a major indicator of ethnic identity due to the transformations the instrument underwent once it arrived in the community. The tuning of the *baan*, and more significantly the way that it changed from the Tusia original, represents one of the most intimate representations of Sambla-ness because of its connection to the Sambla language.

One of the most important elements of *baan* performance is the speech surrogate, represented by the melodic passages played by the soloist that correspond to the prosody of spoken Sambla, a three-tone language (see below for more on the Sambla speech surrogate). The Tusia also practice a speech surrogate in their xylophone tradition, and the Konate and Diabate xylophonists who migrated into Sambla country evidently continued that practice in their new context. However, they found that the scale of the Tusia *ñan* did not fit exactly with the tonality of spoken Sambla, so the tuning was changed to accommodate the language (see Figure 23 for scale comparison). A connection between the instrument’s tuning and the spoken language of the people who play it is not unique to the Sambla or Tusia. Bernard

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99 The Mande balafon is also played in Burkina Faso, but it is a minority instrument among the plethora of Burkinabe xylophone traditions. The balafon, or *balañ*, is believed to have originated in the Mande heartland, near the border that separates present-day Mali and Guinea.

100 This reason for the tuning change was explained to me repeatedly by countless Sambla, musicians and non-musicians alike.
Woma, an internationally renowned player of the Dagara gyil, claims that the tuning of that xylophone was also determined by the Dagari language. Furthermore, he attributed the different tunings of all varieties of xylophones in northeastern Ghana and southwestern Burkina Faso to differences in language (pers. com. 7/11/07).

I am not able to explain specifically how the spoken language can determine different pentatonic tuning systems in so many communities. The most obvious indicator is that the languages in question are all tonal languages, so it is possible that the tonality of each language falls upon a certain pattern of intervallic relationships between pitches that are then transferred to the tuning system of the xylophone. While every xylophone tradition in this area is not able to speak with the same versatility as the Sambla baan, the compositions that are played on these instruments are songs with texts, so the music must still correspond to the verbal speech in a way that does not distort the tonal contour of the text so much that it changes or obscures the meaning of the words.

In an account of the genesis of the use of the xylophone in Dagara funerals, Mitchel Strumpf quoted one of his informants, Mario Tadoo of the village of Gwo in northwestern Ghana, with the following possible explanation that supports this theory:

At one time there were no xylophones at the funeral until somebody decided to make something to match the pitches sung in the funeral chanting. They cut some wood and used trenches for vibrating chambers. They laid the keys on the trench and discovered that the gourd that he usually carried water in made a different sound when he struck the xylophone keys. He heard different sounds from different-sized gourds and he put these gourds to different size (sic) pieces of wood. This was accomplished in the area of Gwo. (Tadoo in Strumpf 1976:108)
This statement, combined with Woma’s claim that tuning differences in xylophone traditions is attributed to difference in language, suggests that it may not simply be the relative relationship between high, middle and low that defines the connection between tuning and speech. Another element of phonemic intelligibility may be embodied by the actual intervals between these tones and the pitches themselves, which become as much a part of the spoken language as accent and pronunciation. If this were the case, it would explain how a tuning scale can be generated from the sound of a spoken language, and why the tuning of the Tusia *pian* had to be changed once the instrument arrived in Sambla country and underwent its transformation into the Sambla *baan*. Sambla and Tusia are linguistically distant, belonging to two different language families (see Chapter 1 for a more detailed explanation of linguistic categorization), so it may logically follow that each language employs a different tonal paradigm. The potential importance of the intervals between tones in the comprehension of tonal languages in Africa and possibly throughout the world may highlight an additional, meta-musical aspect of these languages that is not commonly addressed in their linguistic analysis or instruction.  

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101 A series of experiments was conducted to demonstrate a correlation between speaking a tonal language and the ability for absolute or “perfect” pitch, the results of which were presented at the Acoustical Society of America’s Annual Meeting in San Diego in 1999. The data show a consistency of absolute pitch when comparing the same words spoken on different days in Vietnamese and Mandarin, both tonal languages, within a margin of less than one semitone. This study suggests that an absolute pitch may be associated with particular words spoken in tonal languages, which would support the notion that a scale could be generated from a language. Taking this theory further, the intervals between these pitches may also be significant phonemic information in tonal languages. See Deutsch et. al. (2004: 339-356) for published results of the study.
Regardless of the exact characteristics that determined the specifics of this tuning change, it was the single most important transformation that distinguished this new version of the xylophone from its Tusia original. Additional unique characteristics of the Sambla baan can also be traced to Tusia sources: the practice of three people playing at once, the bienkote (ñemɔɣɔfiri, the sacred gourd suspended under the largest baan key), and the reddish coating on the gourds, for example (see Chapter 3). The tuning, however, has the greatest effect on the overall sound of the music, and this is the characteristic that is based purely in an intrinsic aspect of Sambla-ness, something with which all Sambla have an intimate relationship: their spoken language.

This connection is also relevant to the difference between the northern and southern Sambla dialects, as the tunings differ slightly between the two regions. The scale itself is the same in all of Sambla country, but I found through anecdotal evidence and the instruments that I heard played during fêtes that the octaves on northern instruments tend to be wide, that is, slightly more than 1200 cents, compared to the octaves in the southern region that correspond more closely to a perfect octave (see Appendix I for sample tuning measurements). Roderic Knight noticed a similar phenomenon in the tuning of the Mande balañ and kora. He called this phenomenon “vibrato octaves,” and postulated that so-called wide octaves may be intentionally created on the Mande balañ to fulfill an aesthetic preference, especially

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102 I was only able to measure the tuning of one instrument from the northern Sambla region, but I did hear northern instruments played on other occasions, and by my ear, they were tuned with wide octaves as the one I measured, though I cannot quantify the intervals.
when the instrument is played in pairs (1991:4-16). Among the Sambla, the tuning discrepancy between the north and the south was explained to me as a way to account for the different accent of the northern dialect in relation to the south.\footnote{This information was given to me anecdotally in the course of lessons and casual conversations, either by French-speaking Sambla or translated into French from Sambla. I heard this from several different people on different occasions and settings, including the chief of Karankaso.} There also seems to be some prejudice against tunings from the other Sambla region among xylophonists, which was demonstrated to me one day during a lesson.

A musician from Karankaso, the administrative center of Sambla country that also lies in the northern region, had left his instrument in my teacher’s courtyard one morning while he was in town. During a break in my lesson, my teacher Sadama and his younger brother Seydou, who assisted in my lessons by filling in the third part, amused themselves by playing around on the visitor’s instrument. A minute or two into each song, they broke up into fits of laughter and were unable to continue playing. I had no idea what they found so funny. To my ear the instrument sounded badly tuned, but I could not tell how it sounded to them. The owner of the baan was a respected, professional musician, so I assumed that he tended over his instruments with the same care and precision that the other xyloponists did. At the Diabate family compound in Toronso, someone was always in the process of taking apart, retuning, remounting, or otherwise tinkering with his baan, never taking it out to perform until it was exactly as he wanted it.\footnote{Due to the tendency of wooden objects to expand and contract when subjected to widely fluctuating temperature and humidity in the sahel and savannah, the pitch of the wooden keys on West African xylophones can change over time. This phenomenon has also been noted on the Dagara gyil (Mensah 1982:145).}
I asked Sadama and Seydou why they were laughing, and they stared back with a dumbfounded expression. “Just listen to it!” Sadama cried, and they recommenced the piece they had been playing. The shimmering dissonance of wide octaves rippled through the otherwise warm, sonorous harmonies, and after a few moments Sadama and Seydou had again broken up into derisive laughter. Not convinced that we were hearing exactly the same thing, I persisted with the inquiry. Sadama straightened up, looked at me, and played a few different octaves to highlight the source of humor. “Don’t you hear it?” he asked. “It’s not pretty!” followed by more laughter.105

I was puzzled by their reaction. Even if this instrument was from the northern region, both communities share the same repertoire. They attend each other’s fêtes and dance to each other’s music, so I did not understand the difference or Sadama and Seydou’s reaction to it. I asked if there was something wrong with the baan, but they indicated that it was as it should be. I still did not understand and asked why it sounded funny to them. “Because it’s from Karankaso!” they cried together, falling into another laughing fit while playing the instrument in an exaggerated, ridiculing style. The real issue here began to make itself evident to me. The scale is one of the most important characteristics to the overall sound of the baan, and because it is determined by the accent and sound of the spoken language, discrepancies in the way that the scale is tuned can evoke images of the people to whom this accent belongs.

105 The Jula phrase for “it’s not pretty” (o man di), was the typical phrase Sadama used to express dissonance. For example, if a wrong note was accidentally played in a context where it did not belong, it would create a dissonance (sometimes a minor second interval), which Sadama would describe as “not pretty.”
Associations with those people are therefore transferred to the attitudes one has toward the sound of the other’s language, and consequently their instrument and its tuning.

After recounting this incident to Samadou Coulibaly, an uncle of the Diabates who faithfully assisted my research as language instructor, translator, and cultural interpreter, he smiled and told me that this did not surprise him. While there is no apparent animosity between the northern and southern Sambla today, the two groups have been at odds in the past. During the era of Jula domination, the northern Sambla decided to cooperate with the Jula but the southern region tenaciously resisted, regarding the northern Sambla as easily manipulated pawns (see Chapter 2). Past events such as these have colored each group’s attitude toward the other, and while they maintain a strong sense of solidarity when together, each region has its own scornful or disparaging remarks to say about the other in private. This fact alone is not surprising, but to see this dynamic emerge over a difference in tuning revealed the profound cultural significance that a tuning system can embody.

**Key Names, Intervals, and the Diobaanden**

Each note of the baan scale has a name, as illustrated in Figure 19. These names may reveal something about the position of the key within the scale or its function within a melodic or harmonic context. The central pitch of the scale, which would be called the tonic or tonal center in Western music, is called baanja, or “xylophone-mother” in Sambla, which is usually the eighth slat up from the bass end
on the instrument keyboard. This slat, or key, was explained as the “home” or “starting point” of the instrument, and can be considered the end points of the scale, together with its octave equivalents. Therefore, I discuss the tuning of the instrument in reference to the *baaña* as something roughly equivalent to a tonic or first scale degree.

The *baaña* is the only pitch of the scale that has a different name in the upper two octaves of the tuning, where it is called *sirakua* (no translation). No one was able to fully explain why this pitch has a different name in the upper octaves, though I ascertained that this pitch may not retain its central role in this upper register, where the soloist often plays linear, melodic lines that signify speech. The musical activity in the middle to bass range of the instrument is primarily comprised of interlocking parts. The pitches in this range of the instrument are more functional in that intervallic relationships within these parts construct the modal/harmonic context of the song. The pitches within the speech melodies played in the upper range must correspond to the modal context of the song, but their function in a speech context is to create the intervallic relationships that mimic the tonality of spoken Sambla. Therefore, the pitch that corresponds to the *baaña* key in the speech range of the scale would not necessarily function in the same way as a “xylophone mother” as it does in the lower register.
Figure 19. Tuning of the Sambla *baan*, and the layout and names of its keys. The scale is expressed by the closest equivalent diatonic numeric representation (i.e. 1-7), with the scale of the Tusia *pan* for comparison. Average intervals between scale degrees, based on my measurements of the tuning of five different instruments (see Appendix I), are expressed in cents. The “home” pitch indicated on the *pan* can be perceived as the end points of the Tusia scale, as the *baaña* and *sirakua* are in the baan tuning.
The fourth scale degree in the *baan* tuning system, called *torøntørøn*, is very close to a perfect fifth above the *baagna* or *sirakua* that precedes it. While its name has no direct translation, the fact that this pitch is one of three in the scale that has a unique name that is not in relation to another key is indicative of its functional importance within the context of the scale. The important relationship between the *baagna* and *torøntørøn* is evident throughout the music performed on the *baan*, even in different modal contexts (see below about *baan* modes). The close relationship between the two pitches is better understood knowing that the interval separating them is very close to a perfect fifth on nearly every instrument that I measured. This phenomenon may support theories that suggest inherent properties of the perfect fifth interval in constructing melodic and harmonic movement that transcend other cultural constructions of harmony and mode.

The third and fifth scale degrees do not have their own names; rather they are identified by their location in relation to the *baagna* and *torøntørøn*. The fifth pitch precedes the *baagna* and is called *baagna-cøtenøn* (“mother-key-above”), and the third pitch precedes the *torøntørøn*, or *torøntørøn-cøtenøn* (“*torøntørøn*-above”). These designations are not names as much as they are descriptions of physical placement, which suggests that they hold a subsidiary role in the tuning scheme. This physical description of pitch is contrary to the Western notion that treble pitches are “high,” and bass pitches are “low.” Within many African music traditions, particularly those in West Africa, the opposite is true. The Sambla also describe pitch height by the physical altitude of the key in relation to the ground, which was explained to me in
the course of my lessons when I asked why they described “going down low” as moving toward the treble end of the instrument. They explained that treble notes were closer to the ground and therefore “low” because of the smaller gourds under the keys, and conversely, the bass notes are described as high because of the larger resonating gourds suspended under them.106 This is why the fifth scale degree, which is the key just adjacent to the baqna on the bass side, is considered “above” the baqna, and similarly for the third scale degree in relation to the tørøntørøn.

The remaining pitch that has not yet been discussed is also the most interesting, both sonically and conceptually. The second scale degree, called diobaanden (“dio-xylophone-child”), adds a dissonant element to the sonority of the baan by virtue of the intervals it creates with other pitches of the scale.107 The name refers to dio, which is the name of an important religious cult that was borrowed from the Tusia (see Chapter 3), but the concept of dio also has a greater cultural meaning. The primary association with dio for the Sambla is secrecy; anything that is shrouded by guarded information can be considered dio. For example, the secret language taught to young men during the nogo initiation is called dioku (“dio-language”). The only people who can speak or understand dioku are those who have undergone the nogo, a group that is limited to adult males in Surukudinjan and a handful of elderly

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106 Heather Maxwell was given the same explanation for this manner of describing pitch direction in her study of the Minianka xylophone played in eastern Mali (1998: 52-53). This reversal of high-low in relation to pitch has been noted in other xylophone traditions (see Charry 2000: 325-327, Mensah 1982: 144).

107 The term “dissonant” in this case is not a haphazard use of Western music terminology in a foreign context. Rather, I use it deliberately to carry the same meaning to both native and Western listeners of baan music. The term is used here to mean “a harsh, disagreeable combination of sounds,” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). When used incorrectly, Sambla xylophonists describe the sound of the diobaanden as “not pretty,” and that it “doesn’t belong” with the rest of the notes in that particular context.
men in other villages. The word *dio* is also used by the Sambla in place of other dangerous or spiritually charged words, such as the *koko*, the mythological monster that can swallow lakes and eat entire villages, which is signified by the sound of a bullroarer (see Chapter 3). According to Samadou Coulibaly, the *koko* is a secret used primarily to scare children, and only those who have done a ritualistic “washing of the face” ceremony know its true identity. He defined *dio* as a “great social secret” that can only be discussed in very particular circumstances (pers. com. 10/31/03). Therefore, because the true identity of the *koko* can only be discussed in the presence of the initiated, it is called *dio*.

The concept of *dio* translates to the musical realm in an interesting way. Just as a social secret would be considered to carry great importance to the Sambla, the use of the *diobaanden* key in *baan* performance is limited to certain songs of great importance, and it is generally not used in speech passages. Its dissonant nature in the context of the *baan* tuning system causes the sound of the *diobaanden* to stand out from the other pitches on the instrument. This created either a deliberate effect of tension and release that is inherent to the aesthetic of the music, or an unpleasant dissonance when accidentally played in contexts where it does not belong. The effect it creates depends on its melodic and harmonic context, which is determined by the mode of the particular song (see below).

Understanding the intervallic relationship between pitches of the scale is essential to understanding the effect of the *diobaanden*. The intervals are presented in average cents, based on the tunings of instruments that I measured, but the names of
their equivalent diatonic intervals are also included for descriptive purposes (see Figure 19). The use of these numeric designations here should not be understood to imply that the baan tuning aligns exactly with notes in the diatonic scale. While intervals in the baan scale do match diatonic intervals very closely, the discrepancies between the Sambla and diatonic scales should be considered fundamental to the unique sound of the baan. Despite these differences, the intervallic relationships between some of the pitches of the baan scale may sound familiar to one accustomed to Western tonality. For example, the baaña, törøntørøn cøtenøn, and törøntørøn keys of the baan scale create an easily recognizable major triad, and the important relationship between the baaña and törøntørøn in many baan compositions parallels the tonic-dominant relationship in Western music.

The average diobaanden is slightly less than 300 cents, or a minor third, from the baaña, or first pitch of the scale, and slightly more than 100 cents from the third key, the törøntørøn-cøtenøn. Stating it in terms of a Western scale, the diobaanden is slightly less than a minor third above the first scale degree, and slightly more than a half step below the third one. Furthermore, the average interval between the diobaanden and the baaña-cøtenøn, or fifth note of the scale, is slightly more than 600 cents, which is equivalent to a tritone in Western music.

While I reiterate that the use of this terminology should in no way imply rules of Western functional harmony, certain concepts drawn from Western music theory do parallel the sonic perception of these tones in Sambla music. If Western

\[108\] Please see Appendix 1 for baan tuning data and an explanation of my averaging methodology.
theoretical concepts were applied to a baan scale, the minor third and tritone intervals would be considered “weak” in that they create dissonance within the dominant tonality established by the 1-3-5-6 scale pitches creating two perfect fifths: between the first and fourth scale degrees (1-5), and between the fifth and third (6-3). I point out the use of the perfect fifth, because it is an interval that is exploited heavily in Sambla melodies and simultaneously sounded pitches.

The dissonance created by these so-called weak intervals, when used in inappropriate places, is described as “not pretty” by a Sambla musician. However, just as in Western music, dissonance does have a place for appropriate use in Sambla music. The dissonant intervals, each attributed to the presence of the diobaanden, create an exquisite tension within the music, particularly when the “half step” interval between the diobaanden and the tørtørøn-cøtenøn is exploited. Therefore, virtually any time the diobaanden is played, it stands out from the other notes. Because of this, Sadama told me that baan players do not attach resonating gourds under the diobaanden keys (see Figure 15 in Chapter 3, note the periodic absence in the rows of gourds on the Sambla model). Resonators would make the sound of the diobaanden too strong, disrupting the balance of the sound.

The diobaanden is only played in certain modal contexts, for particular types of pieces. In general, the pitch is reserved for songs used in ritual contexts or those that recount an important piece of history, and it is not used in most lighter, secular

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109 The 1-5 interval had an average 33-cent discrepancy from 700 cents (perfect diatonic fifth) on the instruments I measured; the 5-3 interval averaged a 40-cent discrepancy. Among all of these intervals that I measured and calculated, more than 70% were within 50 cents of the perfect fifth interval.
songs composed for entertainment. Fie-Si\text{\textvisiblespace}ji Konate described the *diobaanden* as something that is used to signify something that is “culturally serious or important” (pers. com. 12/22/03). This statement does not imply the secrecy that is normally inherent to the concept of *dio*, but the way that he characterized the songs that include the *diobaanden* does indicate the same sense of importance implied by the sense of secrecy surrounding *dio*. The restrictions on this pitch also extend to speech contexts; the *diobaanden* is not played in any of the speech surrogate passages in the solo part with the exception of two phrases, “thank you,” and “I’m hungry.”

Comparing the Sambla and Tusia scales in Figure 19 illustrates the modifications that were made to the tuning of the *\text{\textvisiblespace}nan* to accommodate the Sambla language in the transformation to the *baan*. The *ba\text{\textvisiblespace}na*, *\text{\textvisiblespace}tor\text{\textvisiblespace}nt\text{\textvisiblespace}r\text{\textvisiblespace}on\text{\textvisiblespace}-c\text{\textvisiblespace}oten\text{\textvisiblespace}on*, and *\text{\textvisiblespace}tor\text{\textvisiblespace}nt\text{\textvisiblespace}r\text{\textvisiblespace}on*, which create a 1-3-5 major triad in Western music terms, are the pitches that remained unchanged from the Tusia scale. The #4 of the Tusia scale was replaced by the b3 of the Sambla scale. This retained the close, half step interval of the Tusia scale, but it was placed next to the third rather than the fifth degree of the scale. The Tusia scale features another interval between the 7 and 1, or fifth and first degrees of the scale, but this interval was not retained on the *baan*. Instead, the fifth pitch of the Tusia scale was lowered about 200 cents to create a major sixth and a minor third from the *ba\text{\textvisiblespace}na* or *sirakua* on either side of it on the Sambla model.

This is probably the most dramatic difference between the two scales. Changing the fifth scale degree eliminates the second half-step interval from the

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110 This phrase is discussed in an example below in the context of the speech surrogate.
Tusia scale that adds to the tension of the music played on the *pam*, but instead it creates a tritone relationship with the *diobaanden* in the *baan* scale, adding a different type of tension to the music. The character of the music remains similar in a certain sense, but it is achieved through a different kind of intervallic relationship than the sixth scale degree has with the home pitch of the Tusia scale. Again, the impetus for this tuning change has always been attributed to the differences between the Sambla and Tusia languages, but it has resulted in an ingenious way of shifting the tuning of the scale while maintaining some of the same spirit of tension and release in the music.

Some of the specificities of the *baan* tuning embody deeper meanings than I was able to comprehend, due to its intimate relationship with the spoken language and speech surrogate that is an intrinsic part of *baan* performance. However, some of the relationships that I highlighted between different pitches in the *baan* scale will be evident with a closer look at the music it creates. The particular nature of these relationships in any single piece is determined by the mode of the piece, and their importance is evident with a closer examination of the way that individual parts interact within the matrix of interweaving rhythms and melodies of each song.

*Baam Modality: “Belonging” to a Key*

Modality is the term I have applied to another musical concept of the *baan* that I discovered in the course of discussing the different *baan* key names with Sadama, when he revealed that each song is associated with a particular key on the
instrument. More specifically, he said that each song “belongs” to a certain key, later explaining that this key was the most important pitch to the song. When asked to explain what he meant by important, he demonstrated the solo part to a song and said that the key it belongs to is the key that is most frequently played and where the melody returns. To reiterate his point, he paused the melody each time that it arrived on the pitch in question and tapped the key repeatedly, demonstrating its dominance in the tonal context of the song. By his definition, I likened these important keys to tonal centers, and later I began to understand that these “home” keys that Sadama spoke of referred to something like tonic pitches of a mode. With a moveable tonal center, a hemitonic pentatonic scale can create very different sounding modes, especially with the dissonant addition of the diobaanden. As I discussed above, the diobaanden creates intervals with the rest of the scale that add variety and tension to the strong modality created by various combinations of 1-3-5-6 (see above for more details on tuning). I discovered that the diobaanden can serve different functions within a piece, depending upon the mode. For some songs, it is a prominent element of the melody, and therefore sounds like more of a natural, organic element of the song. In other songs, the diobaanden appears only periodically, often at a point in the rhythmic and melodic cycle where it creates a tension and resolution that marks the periodicity of the cycle.
Figure 20. Three baan modes and their location on a baan keyboard. The pitches within the modal scales and intervals between them are expressed by the nearest diatonic numeric representation for illustrative purposes only. Pitches noted in italics signify the diobaanden; slats highlighted in bold signify the baapa/sirakua pitches.
Of the twenty songs I learned to play in the course of my apprenticeship, six songs “belonged” to the *baña*, or first scale degree, eight songs to the *tørøntørøn*, and six songs to the *tørøntørøn*. I interpret this indication of “belonging” to a key as evidence of modality, with each mode named by the slat functioning as its modal center (see Figure 20). I do not know if the *baña*-cøtenøn is associated with any other songs that I did not learn, but Sadama did say that the *diobaanden* does not fill this role for any of the songs. Therefore, each of these twenty songs is associated with the first, third, or fourth scale degrees.

The concept of modality is important for understanding the orientation on the instrument of each *baan* composition, but it is also significant in the speech surrogate employed in *baan* performance. Because the mode determines the intervallic relationships between the scale degrees, the intervals between syllables of text “spoken” on the *baan* must change according to the mode of the composition that serves as the speech context (see below for a more detailed explanation of the *baan* speech surrogate).

**Creation and Performance**

The number of songs in the *baan* repertoire is impossible to determine. Common claims by Sambla xylophonists say that a group could sit down and play for four to five days straight, and they still would not play every song that exists in the repertoire. Considering this and the historically adaptive nature of the tradition, I was surprised when I was told that no one is composing new music for the *baan* today.
The general reason I was given is that it is too difficult, that no one alive today could compose such complex music anymore, and there is little to no recognition of individuals who composed the existing songs that are played. This anonymous characteristic of the creative source for the music facilitates a general belief that the songs were not composed by humans, just as the Sambla believe that the instrument itself was not invented by a human.

While the Sambla do recognize that the *baan* was brought to them by the Tusia, most people I encountered said that they had no idea who actually invented the instrument originally, just as they do not know who composed the songs. The only story that I was told that offered a possible explanation of its origins was given to me by Fiye-Sinje Konate of Konkolikan, a story that is both mythological and thematically consistent with beliefs about some other West African musical instruments, particularly the part of the story that attributes the initial creation of the instrument to a mythological or supernatural source. Konate claimed that very long ago, a Tusia hunter went into the bush and climbed a tree to wait for animals to come by. While he was waiting in the tree, a *jinn*, or mythological dwarf/spirit that lives in the bush, came along and pulled out a xylophone he had hidden in the grasses. After playing it a while, the *jinn* put it back and left, and the hunter descended from the tree to examine the instrument. Once he began to play, the *jinns* knew that he was touching their instrument, came back, and asked the hunter how he found the xylophone. The hunter explained that he saw the *jinn* and that he wanted to learn how to play the instrument, so the *jinns* taught him to play it, how to construct it, and
even showed him the specific types of tools that he needed to build it. Konate did not identify the era or specific village where the xylophone originated, but this was the story that was perpetuated by the Konate xylophone clan (pers. com. 12/22/03).

When I asked Sadama and others from the Diabate clan of xylophonists, no one knew this story or had any idea where the *baan* might have come from before the Tusia brought it to them.

While compositional form varies slightly from song to song, there are some general tendencies in the performance practice of the *baan* repertoire. Each song usually begins with an introduction played by the soloist. This not only sets up the melodic and modal characteristics of the song, but it also alerts the other players that the soloist has decided to change songs in the middle of a performance. In fact, segues often occurred in this way, abruptly after the previous song had run its course. Some of the example transcriptions used in the text contain this introduction; others do not, but they are included in the transcriptions in Appendix V.

At the end of the introduction, all three xylophonists begin their cyclical phrases that make up the composition. By cycle I am referring to ostinato patterns played by each part that comprise the bulk of the compositional material for the song. The cycles played by the accompaniment and bass parts differ slightly from the solo cycles in that they are often shorter (4 or 8-beat cycles), and they are meant to be heard combined with the other parts. The solo cycles can be longer, covering several of the shorter cycles played by the other two parts, and these patterns are often meant to be heard above the other, combined parts. In addition to the patterns, the soloist
also has purely linear melodies that embody the part of the song text that could be considered as a verse: melodic passages that express the song text through the speech surrogate, which can vary throughout the performance of the piece. Some of these lines of text and the melodies they create are predetermined; others may be extemporized in the course of the performance based on the themes of the original lyrics, or inspired by participants in the fête who are in the vicinity of the baan. The soloist alternates between this “verse” melody and the cyclical patterns, which could be thought of as the chorus or refrain. While the soloist is playing ostinato patterns that interact with the solo and bass parts during these “chorus” passages, the right hand of the soloist can still perform linear melodic lines that represent basic speech passages during these ostinato passages (more on the roles of the left and right hands of the solo player will be explained below in “Part Interactions”). These elements are evident in the specific examples examined below.

After the first cyclical verse and chorus passages played by the soloist over any number of repetitions, many songs change to a secondary melody, one that often shifts up an octave toward the treble range of the instrument and accompanies a faster portion of the dance. The musicians often refer to this portion as “heating up” (Fr: chauffement), implying that the increase in energy resulting from increased tempo, volume, and pitch heats up the musicians, dancers and anyone else present.
Learning and Perceiving a Baan Song: An American in Burkina

Learning to play the baan was by far the most difficult, frustrating, even maddening musical experience of my life for the first few months of my stay in Burkina. At that point in my life, I had had several years of experience learning other West African instrumental traditions: the Mande balañ and jembe, various traditions of Ghanaian drums, Mandinka kutiro drumming of Senegambia, and Senegalese sabar and tabala drums. While I found all of those instruments challenging, after a few years of experience performing African music, I was usually able to grasp the logic of the rhythms of a new African instrument and how they fit together rather quickly. The baan was another story altogether. Despite my daily two-hour lessons, which sometimes took place twice daily while I was in the village, it took at least three or four months before I could properly orient my ear to the rhythms and be able to hear where the parts fit together in relation to each other. Some songs took even longer than that. I soon realized that the major cause of my struggles lay in the way that I learned the music compared to how Sambla children learn it.

Normally, when a Sambla boy begins to learn the baan, he starts by playing the accompaniment part and gradually works his way up through the bass part to the solo, once he is an adult. Furthermore, by the time he first holds a mallet in his hands, the child is already familiar with the sound of the music. He knows the melodies, how the parts are supposed to sound together, and how the dances align with the music, as he has attended fêtes since birth, often swathed to his dancing mother’s back. This experience at an early age helps orient the child’s ear to the
melodies and rhythms of the music. Children are always present at fêtes, observing the dances of the adults and mimicking their movements. Even the time that children spend riding on their mothers’ backs as they dance contributes to this familiarity, as the child has the kinetic experience of moving with the dances in tandem with the mother’s body, internalizing a sense of bodily movement in conjunction with the music before the child is even able to stand. This agrees with Pantaleoni and Serwadda’s description of how Africans learn dance drumming: Sambla children learn “the whole simultaneously with the parts,” and they do not rely on hearing “stress for rhythmical precision,” as my Western-trained ear was inclined to do (1968:52). Rather, it is the dance that provides a structural rhythmic orientation to the music, as is the case in so many African music traditions.

My baan education diverted from the traditional African model in some important ways. First, my introduction to each piece did not begin by becoming familiar with the complete composition followed by learning the individual parts. Instead, my first contact with the music happened in my lessons, where the song was fragmented and parceled out to me one section at a time, learning each part on its own before combining it with the others. Being unaware of the total composite before learning its constituent elements was my greatest handicap in learning the music, and it was probably the most important difference between my baan education and the traditional Sambla pedagogical model.

Lacking this prior internalization of the totality of baan compositions and the dances that accompany them, I did not have the same frame of reference that a
Sambla child would have when I first learned each *baan* composition. Because of this, I heard each individual part as a melody on its own, ignorant of how it was meant to interact with the other two parts and the resultant melodies they create together. In a polyrhythmic, or in this case, polyphonic texture in West African percussion music, individual parts do not stand on their own with the same identity that they have in an ensemble context. Each part defines the other, as Chernoff pointed out in his description of African music in a Ghanaian context (1979:52), and so the parts need to be heard together in order for their true functional identity to be heard.

Because I learned single melodic lines first in my lessons, my ear naturally assigned a beat to the melodies I heard in the individual parts, which fell into a meter that felt the most natural to my perception. This beat placement was invariably wrong, in that it often contradicted the beats felt in the other parts and followed by the dancers. As a result, my perception of the individual parts transformed each time I played them within in a new context and heard the beat in a different place, making the song sound like an entirely new piece of music to me with the addition of each new part.

One reason why my ear was so easily misled in the course of my lessons is the highly syncopated nature of *baan* parts, which obscures the pulse as one of its characteristic traits. Syncopation is common in most African percussion traditions, but the music of the *baan* presented the most extreme case of this that I had ever
encountered.\footnote{A more detailed discussion of \textit{baan} compositions and their parts is found below.} While this presented one of the biggest challenges to my process of learning the instrument, I eventually overcame it and could play all three parts of each song that I learned, with the ability to drop in and out at will, keeping my place all the time. I point this struggle out not only to highlight the complexity of the music to a foreign ear, but also to give insight into the music via understanding the way that it is learned, taught, and ultimately perceived by someone outside of the culture as opposed to someone within it.

Another important way that my pedagogical model differed from a traditional one was in the order in which I learned the parts. Sadama began each new piece by teaching me the solo part before the accompaniment and then the bass, rather than starting with the accompaniment and moving up through bass and eventually to the solo, as a Sambla child would do. The accompaniment parts are generally simpler and do not employ any variation. The child first learns to play the accompaniment on its own, and then plays with the bass and solo parts until he has developed the ability to maintain a consistent rhythm over a long period and follow the fluctuations in tempo inherent to the music. His first experiences playing with all three parts usually take place with other children, either at play on their own, or at a fête put on by children for their own enjoyment. Once an adult player has determined that the child has developed enough skill and sense of musical timing to play in an adult fête, he is ready to perform in public and begin learning the more complex and variable bass parts.
Eventually I realized that Sadama approached teaching the songs to me in this way because the solo part contains the primary or “top layer” of the melody, which embodies the song. This is the only melodic line that is contained within a single part, and the song is the central focus of the piece, so I assume he felt it was essential that I grasped that element before confusing me with the supporting parts. By starting with the accompaniment part, however, the Sambla child learns how the texture of the supporting parts is constructed before learning how the solo melodies are placed on top of it. This way, the supporting parts do not turn the music upside down when added to the solo, which it did to my ears. In learning the supporting parts and how they fit together, the student must hear the inherent melodies produced by the full supporting texture. That is, one hears melodies that emerge from the three parts played together correctly, but no single person plays these melodies. Rather, they are comprised of segments of different individual parts that fit together in a cross-rhythmic and cross-melodic fashion.

I soon discovered that in a full baan performance, I began to hear these inherent melodies in addition to the top solo part, and the melodies that I had initially heard in the individual parts vanished within the ensemble texture. These inherent melodies provide the cross-rhythmic and cross-melodic relationships that comprise the essence of a baan composition. They are essential to the dance, as they often highlight a beat or particular rhythmic pattern that the dancers must follow, and they

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112 Baan compositions were referred to as songs in every language that was used in my lessons (S: so, J: donkili, F: chanson). When Sadama taught me the melody of a solo part, he also referred to it as the song.
are as much a part of the song’s identity as the lead melody that embodies the song text.

The inherent melodies also function as a framework for variation in the bass and solo parts. These two players have room to vary and improvise on their patterns, but the notes in their parts that contribute to the inherent melodies that are essential to the composition must be maintained. The unchanging accompaniment part helps provide a structure that maintains the compositional integrity of the song while the solo and bass players explore their improvisational potential. The specific way in which each part interacts with the others provides a framework for these relationships (see “Part Interaction” below).

The music of the baan is highly developed in the realms of both solo playing, with the virtuosity of the individual parts, and ensemble playing, the relationships and interactions of the individual parts that create the final product. I cannot stress enough how impressed I was by the exceptional level of musicianship that baan players possess. Technically, they are able to keep the extremely complex, multipart music with many different levels of interaction straight in their minds. They have the virtuosity to play technically difficult parts with precise accuracy, all while working in their own variations and interpretations of the parts, including the speech surrogate melodies played by the soloist. They also exhibit a remarkable sensitivity to subtle fluctuations in tempo in any of the other parts, responding immediately by adjusting

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113 By using the term “essential,” I am referring to a Sambla perception of the music. While I may not be able to identify the exact essential elements to each song, I am aware of certain parts of the music that Sadama pointed out to me that must be maintained for the dancers as well as the compositional integrity of the song. He usually pointed these elements out either when my pattern slipped out of phase with the others, or when I asked him to show me the parts that the dancers follow.
their own parts to maintain cross-rhythmic accuracy. On top of all this, they must have the physical strength and endurance to play all night long without stopping, a typical demand for any Sambla music-making occasion. By the end of my two-hour lessons, during which I stopped and started frequently and spent much of my time listening to Sadama demonstrate the parts, I was completely exhausted.

Learning the baan was difficult, but also one of the most musically satisfying experiences of my life. The journey I traveled in figuring out how to hear and play the music developed my own musical sensitivity and technical abilities immeasurably. I hope that it also helped me figure out how to explain the music to those not familiar with it, attempting to bridge one of the greatest cultural gaps between Africa and America that I have ever straddled. It was within small “a-ha!” moments that I reached my musical epiphanies. Sometimes I figured them out on my own, other times Sadama was able to facilitate them for me. One of the most important of these moments happened one day when Sadama very nonchalantly revealed the key to me: each of the six hands playing the baan has a specific function in relation to the other parts, and it was only when I was able to listen for these relationships that I felt I had begun to learn how to listen to the music properly.

114 This was actually frustrating for me while I was learning, since my tempo did not always remain consistent as I struggled to play difficult passages together with the other two parts. I wanted the other players to keep a steady tempo so that I could hear when I sped up or slowed down, but they were so sensitive to a regular ebb and flow in the tempo that they simply adjusted their parts to fit with my irregular patterns.

115 Musicians occasionally rotate in and out of the performing ensemble in the early portion of the fête, but one set of musicians typically plays for the bulk of the evening, beginning around 10:00 or 11:00pm and continuing until daybreak. Sadama and the other xylophonists often described this, citing the exceptional endurance needed to play for a fête.
Part Interaction: Inner vs. Outer Parts

One of the most valuable lessons that I learned throughout my research period in Burkina was that sometimes the most valuable information did not come to me by careful interviews and meticulous note-taking, but by falling casually into my lap. My understanding of how each of the constituent parts interacts to create the whole texture of a baan performance can be attributed to this passive investigative style.

One day in the middle of a lesson, Sadama casually mentioned that the accompaniment part was meant to “go with” the left hand of the solo, and the right hand of the bass. These four hands interact in different ways: sometimes by a straight alternate interlocking; other times by the parts weaving in and out of each other while constructing the many inherent melodies for which baan music is known. I call these four hands the “inner parts” (see Figure 21), comprising the supporting patterns that create the majority of the dense texture of melodies one hears in a baan performance.

The name of the accompaniment player in Sambla, baan-le-kpan, translates to “xylophone-in-complete,” indicating the accompaniment’s role in filling in or “completing” the parts played by the other players. The bass player is called baana-beren, or “xylophone-mother-player,” indicating that the bass focuses on the baana key or supports the music by reinforcing the tonal center with his lines. The soloist is called baan-tsin-gyera-beren, or “xylophone-under-place-player.” This name implies that it is the soloist who is the one playing at, or “under,” the place where a fête is

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116 In Jula, he said, “U be ṭogon fe,” or “they are together.”
happening, in that the *baan* is played while seated on the ground, therefore physically “under” the dancers and others present. When people talk about a fête and who play for it, the soloist is the only one mentioned, even though two other xylophonists and three to four drummers are also present. Because the soloist leads the music and interacts with those present through the speech passages, the other players are considered subordinate to the soloist by their supporting role, are essentially interchangeable, and are therefore not mentioned by name (Samadou Coulibaly, pers. com. 11/17/03).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 21.** Physical position of solo, bass, and accompaniment players in relation to the *baan*, grouped by inner and outer parts. Note that the left hand of the bass also contributes to the inner parts at times.
The two remaining hands, the right hand of the soloist and left hand of the bass player, have their own special relationship, and I refer to them as the “outer parts.” The function of the outer parts is largely determined by the right hand solo part, which plays the main melody by which a song is known, as well as all of the speech, both in the form of song lyrics and communications with other individuals present at the event. The left hand of the soloist performs dual duty, sometimes contributing to the texture of the inner parts, sometimes joining in with the melodic lines that are dominated by the right hand, and other times jumping back and forth across the keyboard, doing both at once. The left hand of the bass also performs multiple functions. It contributes to the texture of the inner parts, but it also functions by outlining and supporting the “harmonies” of the song and parallels the melody played by the soloist’s right hand. This relationship is not an exact parallel, but more of an abstraction of the melody, as certain pitches and intervallic movements coincide, anticipate, or follow the right hand of the solo part. I describe this type of left hand bass movement as “shadowing” the solo part in that it follows the same general melodic contour, but it moves around independently as well.

Because the bass player is allowed to elaborate and vary his part, within the limitations of the essential inherent melodies, rhythms are often delayed or stretched, with other auxiliary notes added to create a more compelling melodic line in the bass. The outer parts can and do contribute to the inherent melodies of the piece, but their

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117 I use the term harmony to imply that certain combinations of pitches are considered “correct” in their modal context by the Sambla, and others are not. The rules surrounding their combination implies a similar aesthetic embodied by the general meaning of the word “harmony,” but my use of the term should not imply any other concepts or functions associated with Western harmony.
primary roles are to play melodies that are heard on the periphery of the inner matrix of interlocking and intertwining parts. In other words, the outer parts frame the inner parts, both physically and musically. The melodies played by the outer parts maintain more of their independent melodic identity within the context of all three parts, unlike the inner parts, which transform from their individual to group identities when combined.

It is important to keep in mind that all three of the baan parts and each of the six hands perform multiple functions at once, resulting in the multipart system of densely woven melodies that emerge from the matrix-like texture created by each of the six hands. At any given moment, different segments of the cyclical patterns played by each of the three parts can contribute to two or more inherent melodies heard by the listener. The following examples will illustrate some of the melodies that can be heard, darting in and out of perception, within the texture of the orchestral sound of the baan.

Transcription 1. “Nogo So” fundamental pattern. This song is in the baapa mode, that is, the baapa represents the tonal center, and its pitch is notated as a C. [CD track #2]
Transcription 1 shows the basic cyclical pattern played by each part for the song “Nogo So” (“Nogo song”), as they were taught to me. This song was originally played for the male initiation rite called Nogo, which is no longer practiced except in the village of Surukudingan (see Chapter 3). Right and left hands have been separated on each stave to delineate the six separate parts, and their vertical alignment with each other and notes on the other staves shows the interaction among the parts. This transcription is helpful to illustrate the fundamental pattern for each individual part, and how the three parts fit together in relation to each other. However, it does not necessarily give an accurate description of what the listener actually hears when the song is played. The bass and solo players create their own variations of these patterns, and the accompaniment part generally remains unchanged. In the few instances where an accompanist varies his part, it is usually only by pitch substitution, not significant rhythmic variation.

Transcription 2 shows some of the inherent melodies that can be heard during a performance of “Nogo So.” The different shaped note heads indicate which player contributed each note of the melody in question. Please note that these examples are based upon a strict adherence to the parts as they are notated here. The inherent melodies in an actual performance would vary according to the individual styles of the soloist and bass players as they create their own variations of these parts. These melodies have been isolated and notated here to represent just three of the possible

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118 In each transcription that represents an entire two-handed part, notes with stems up are played by the upper (treble) hand, and notes with stems down are played by the lower (bass) hand, i.e. stems up notes would be played by right hand solo, right hand bass, or left hand accompaniment (see Figure 20 for player orientation to the instrument).
inherent melodies that could be heard in the performance of this piece. Furthermore, different ears may hear different inherent melodies from any single baan performance. All of the examples I use in this chapter are meant to represent possible examples to illustrate my points, and they do not by any means represent an exhaustive account of the music.

Transcription 2. “Nogo So” three inherent melodies from possible combinations of inner parts. The notehead shapes indicate parts. [CD track #3, acc and bass only]

The top and middle staves in Transcription 2 represent the melodies produced by pairs of hands that play directly adjacent to each other but belong to two different players. Each of these two examples show an alternating interlocking relationship, with the accompaniment articulated on the odd-numbered pulses, as defined by sixteenth notes, and the inner hands of the solo and bass parts on the even-numbered pulses, which could be considered as off beats. The first staff and the last beat of the second staff demonstrate the tendency in baan compositions for the same key to be struck by different players directly after one another. The parts may have been
arranged differently so that a single person played multiple iterations of the same note, but the nature of baan music prefers that the parts to work together to create this effect. This was yet another characteristic of the baan that Sadama cited as one of the most challenging aspects of its performance. Many of the songs require one player to hit a key directly after another one has, as demonstrated here. As the tempo of the performance mounts to break-neck speed, careful control of the mallets is required to avoid sloppy and potentially painful mid-air collisions.

This idiomatic aspect of baan performance adds to the technical difficulties of playing the baan, which is an interlocking polyrhythmic texture that requires absolute rhythmic precision for the dense matrix of parts to fit together properly, like so many other African percussion traditions. However, precision in this case is multidimensional. While correct note placement is roughly guided by equal subdivisions of the dance-defined beat, in practice the music is not performed with such mathematical accuracy. Instead, baan players add life to the music by stretching and compacting the tempo of the rhythms, making the music swing, lilt, or even sound as if it trips along, slows down, and then catches up with itself again. On top of this, the tempo tends to be pushed, played ahead of the beat, adding another dimension of tension to the music, driving it forward and fueling the dancers. The incredible rhythmic sensitivity of baan players is exploited by this practice, as every
stretch or push of the beat is accommodated by the other parts, ensuring that each
note falls in its correct slot in relation to the parts surrounding it.119

Such rhythmic irregularity has been noted in other African percussion
traditions, such as Wolof sabar, Mande jembe, and even the Mande bala (Waterman
1995: 93, Polak 1998, Knight 1973: 270-271). However, rather than considering this
flexibility in timing as “irrational anticipations and retardations” (Kubik 1988: 77, in
Polak 1998: 30) or as part of a system of a “limited number of sophisticated patterns”
(Polak ibid.), in the baan tradition, my sense is that variable microtiming is driven by
the nature of the melody itself and other unique characteristics of each particular
song. That is, every musician adds flavor to the music by playing with the timing of
the rhythms, but there seems to be no discernable micro-patterns of inflection of the
type described by Polak that are used in more than one song.120

119 My teachers’ abilities to adjust to minor tempo fluctuations were so sensitive that if I began to rush
or drag the tempo to any degree while playing with them, they simply adjusted their tempo to match
mine, allowing the entire piece to speed up or slow down accordingly. This frustrated me to no end
because I wanted a steady, metronome-like tempo to play to so that I could sense my own rhythmic
inconsistencies, but I had to learn how to do that on my own.
120 These rhythmic flexibilities can be articulated on specific notes in the melody for expressive
purposes, or on the melodic cycle of the song in a pattern of ebb and flow that can be described as a
“wave” that speeds up when the texture is dense and slows down as the texture opens up and almost
comes to a pause before starting again.
Transcription 3. “Koko So” excerpt, showing three melodic themes in the solo part (A-C). Round noteheads in the solo part represent notes played by the right hand, and triangle noteheads represent those played by the left hand. [CD track #4]
“Nogo So” demonstrates one type of interaction between baan inner parts, where the accompaniment is in direct interlocking alternation with the other inner parts. Transcription 3 shows another example that demonstrates a more complex way in which the cross rhythms and melodies of the inner parts can interact in a baan composition. The title, “Koko So,” means “Koko Song,” played for occasions relating to the mythical creature called koko. This song uses the diobaanden key, which does not appear in every composition, and is an indicator of a song that has some ritual or social importance or element of secrecy about it. The koko is in fact shrouded with fear and mystery, and only the initiated may be allowed to see it (see Chapter 3).

This song features much longer cyclical patterns in the accompaniment and bass parts, as well as longer, more linear, and a more diverse set of melodic themes used in the solo part (only two are shown here, see Appendix V for the full transcription). This song also differs slightly from the last example in that the left hand is used more in the primary melodic line in the solo part, playing only occasional repeated notes to contribute to the inner parts.

According to Sadama, “Koko So” is in both the baana and tɔɔntɔɔn modes. I wasn’t sure how this could be until I looked at the transcription and I realized that the melody appears to “modulate” when it changes between the A and B melodic themes. During the A theme, the baana functions as the tonal center, the pitch that is played most often and that closes each melodic phrase of that theme. During the B theme, the tɔɔntɔɔn, notated as a G, performs that function.
Transcription 4 shows a reduction of the inner parts for “Koko So.” The accompaniment pattern follows a sixteen-beat cycle, the bass pattern is an eight-beat cycle, and the solo contribution varies according to which theme is played. This example includes the right hand of the solo during the A theme as one of the inner parts, which is representative of that hand through most of the melodic patterns played by the soloist. By using different notehead shapes to indicate the parts from which each note in the reduction comes, the transcription shows a more complex interaction between the four elements, or hands, of the inner parts than the more straightforward alternation in “Nogo So.” Transcription 5 shows three possible inherent melodies that are heard coming out of the inner parts. Again, the notehead shapes demonstrate a more complex interaction between all three parts in creating these melodies than in the prior example.

Transcription 4. Reduction of “Koko So” inner parts.

Transcription 5. Possible inherent melodies in “Koko So” inner parts.
A few observations can be made about the cyclic patterns played by the inner parts when looking at the reduction. First, the texture of these parts together is much more dense than any of the individual parts, none of which contain regular sixteenth note figures. The sixteenth-note rhythms are created by syncopations between the parts. This phenomenon is also seen in the prior example, “Nogo So,” where a solid sixteenth note pattern is made by combining two eighth note rhythms offset by a sixteenth. Second, the density of the pattern of the combined inner parts follows a particular rhythmic form for the first twelve beats, and then changes to a slightly less dense pattern in the last four beats. This is also the section of the pattern that contains the *diobaanden*, introducing tension to the tonal fabric of the parts. Finally, this rhythmic change in the final four beats, to a less dense eighth note pattern, functions in a way to prepare the ear for the *diobaanden*, at which time the rhythm hangs for an extra sixteenth on the dotted eighth rhythm, placing a longer period of silence around the pitch relative to the other inner parts noted above. The dissonance of the *diobaanden*, made more noticeable by this reduced rhythmic density, marks the periodicity of the cycle and builds momentum to its repetition by the tension of the *diobaanden* leading into the repetition of the cycle.

Transcription 6 shows the outer parts for “Koko So,” or the lines played by the right hand of the soloist and left hand of the bass player. This example shows both the A and B themes of the solo melody, to demonstrate the interaction of the parts with melodic lines with two tonal centers, which are used at the phrase resolution that aligns with the cadential effect of the *diobaanden*. The bass hand
plays a regularly repeating cycle, which changes slightly on the fourth iteration, in conjunction with the change in rhythmic density of the combined inner parts. With the exception of the last note, the left hand of the bass only strikes three keys: the baapa, the torontorocon cotenon, and the torontorocon. These are the same notes played by the solo part through the entire phrase, with the exception of the diobaanden that is brought in at the cadential figure in the phrase.

Transcription 6. “Koko So” outer parts, with the solo A theme (baapa mode) and B theme (torontorocon mode, notated as G).

These two outer parts from “Koko So” demonstrate the relationship between these two hands as it was explained to me by Sadama. The bass and solo outer parts use the same pitches, which coincide occasionally. While the pitches are not always articulated by the bass at the exact time as the soloist, the pitches appear within the syncopated rhythmic context of the bass pattern in a way that anticipates and delays their articulation in relation to the solo part. The two different themes, which represent different tonal centers, are both accommodated by this bass line. For
example, the same pitch is sounded by both outer parts on the first beat of each measure of the B theme, on the third beat of the first and third measures of that theme, and on the syncopated final beat of each measure.

The pitches align between the parts slightly differently in the A theme. Looking at the first measure of the theme, the pitches align with the C articulated by the bass on the first beat, the E on the second beat is delayed slightly after it was articulated in the solo part, the pitches of the third beat align, and the syncopated E on the fourth beat aligns with the E played by the solo part. The remaining three measures of the example demonstrate a similar relationship of alignment, anticipation, and delay of simultaneous pitches in each of the parts. The left hand of the bass can therefore be viewed as an abstraction of the solo line. Due to the highly improvisational nature of the solo part, and to a lesser extent in the bass part, these relationships may vary, but the pitches played by the two outer parts will match, defining the desired tonality of the composition.

I would like to reiterate here that the notion of pitches that “sound sweet” together and those that do not are very important to the aesthetics of Sambla music, according to what Sambla musicians have told me. While using the term harmony does not carry the same set of rules and effects that it does in Western usage, the Sambla have a clear aesthetic of consonance and dissonance that directs how pitches are combined in baan compositions. Building on the idea of consonance, or pitches that “sound sweet” together, I will refer to whether or not a pitch is appropriate in any given context. The outer parts, therefore, provide the structural framework for
rhythm, periodicity, and tonality, and they partially define the pitches that are appropriate to play at any given point within the cycle. This is demonstrated best in this example by the presence of the *diobaanden*. The only point where it is appropriate to play this pitch is on the last beat of the cycle, as it is notated above.\(^{121}\) The tonality of the composition as a whole is determined by all three parts and how that they fit together within the periodic cycle.

**Rhythmic Characteristics of *Baan* Music**

The depth and complexity of the *baan*, as well as any African xylophone tradition, lies in the interaction of the two axes of rhythm and pitch. While many percussion traditions incorporate drums of different pitches to achieve a “melodic” effect within the rhythmic texture, the precise tuning of a xylophone brings this dimension to a much higher level, especially when the aspect of speech performance is considered. Because so much Africanist ethnomusicological writing focuses on rhythm, I hope that this thesis offers a balance to the discourse by focusing on melody, harmony, and other dimensions of determinate pitch in African music. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget how the *baan* tradition relates rhythmically to its non-pitched cousins played elsewhere in the region. I would like to discuss here briefly some of the relevant characteristics that are somewhat typical or representative of the rhythmic aspect of *baan* music. As I mentioned earlier, the rhythms were the

\(^{121}\) I would caution against thinking of these cycles as having a beginning, middle, or end, as they are not conceptualized in that way by the Sambla. This is a standard caveat in many writings on West African percussion traditions (see Locke 1982:225). I tend to think of West African rhythmic cycles as circular rather than linear, but the limitations of Western notation used here does not allow me to present the music in this way.
most confusing element of the music for me as I learned to play it, so I will cite some brief examples to illustrate these traits.

The drum ensemble that accompanies the *baan* always consists of at least one *lunga*, and generally a pair of *piin* drums, each tuned to two of the pitches from the *baan* scale, and a *dennin*. The latter, the lowest pitched drum, plays a line that is not as dense as the others and appears to highlight a structural dimension to the rhythm that the dancers follow, similar to the *dundun* in a *jembe* drum ensemble, or even a bass drum in a Western drum set. The two *piin* play rhythms that interact with those in the inner parts, sometimes mirroring inherent rhythms that emerge from the texture. The most important characteristic to remark about the parts played by the accompanying drum is that they are *not* largely based upon ostinato patterns. The rhythms that the drums play can therefore be perceived as ornamental and derivative of the *baan* patterns in that they provide rhythmic counterpart, punctuation, and variation.

The *lunka*, however, is an exception as it has another rhythmic vocabulary altogether. Not having had the opportunity to examine the *lunka* rhythms more closely, I have not been able to figure out the logic behind how its rhythms correspond to the rhythms of the *baan*. I was told that the *lunka* can also “speak,” as other similar models of armpit tension drums have been noted to do elsewhere in West Africa, but I was not able to collect any more information about what the drum says and how it fits with the music it accompanies. Adding another dimension, when more than one *lunka* plays, they each play a different line. I hope to discover more
about the *lunka* aspect of the *baan* repertoire in the future. The remaining discussion here will therefore focus purely on the rhythmic aspect of the *baan* parts alone.

Transcriptions 7 and 8 show two different transcriptions of the song, “Mini Soko Ke Soenpe,” which translates to “women-beautiful-are-one-not,” or “Beautiful Women are Plenty.” The first example is in staff notation to show how the parts fit within the metrical structure of the dance, which is notated with beats divisible by three subdivisions, roughly parallel to the Western equivalent of 6/8 or 12/8 time. The second example is done in Time Unit Box System or TUBS notation,\(^{122}\) which highlights other aspects of the music that are not as easy to see in Western notation. The interaction of the parts is more clearly visible in the TUBS notation because each part and hand is differentiated by color, and the horizontal and vertical alignment of the music is all together in one image. The *diobaanden* is indicated in the TUBS notations by a darkened box, to illustrate how articulations of that pitch occur together in a predetermined section of the cycle. During more linear improvisations in the solo line, the *diobaanden* may only be played at these moments of the cycle.

The rhythms in each of the three parts have a tendency to stress the offbeats, or white squares, than the strong part of the beat highlighted in grey, defined as the beat followed by the dancers. This effect is accomplished primarily by articulating more notes on the offbeats than on the beats upon which the dancers’ steps fall. Thus, the beat is often musically defined by an absence of sound, rather than an audible

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\(^{122}\) Time Unit Box System notation was first developed by Philip Harlan at UCLA and used to notate African music by James Koetting. It later became popular for notating African percussion music for the benefit of teaching students who do not read Western staff notation.
stress typical of Western music. In this context, therefore, the rhythms of the dancers’ feet can be considered an additional rhythmic element of the music necessary for its complete realization, highlighting the strong integration of music and dance in West African musical expression.

The result of this effect is three alternate metrical structures that can be interpreted in each of the three parts. Two of them are duple meters, each stressing a different offbeat subdivision as its downbeat, and the third is a ternary meter displaced from the dancers’ meter by one eighth note. The duple/ternary polymetricality of this example shows how music of the baan exploits the fundamental 3:2 polymetric relationship that is characteristic of many West African percussion traditions. Despite these rhythmic and metrical displacements, one line or hand within the texture does articulate the dancers’ meter, though it is not easily heard through densely polyrhythmic and polymetric texture or the other parts.

Each part has been retranscribed in Transcription 9 to show the meter in which the part is most easily felt by me when played on its own, and Transcription 10 shows the felt metrical scheme superimposed on the TUBS notation. While these notations represent how I interpreted the music while I learned it, it is not necessarily my own, outsider impression. Each time I realized that I heard a part incorrectly when first learning it, I demonstrated to Sadama where I heard the beat making a physical gesture while I played to emphasize the point in the pattern where I felt it. His usual reaction was that it could sound that way alone, if it were its own song, but as a part of the greater composition, it needs to be heard with the other parts to hear
the correct beats. I was ultimately able to discover the “correct” way of feeling the 
beat for each of the songs that I learned by asking Sadama to tap his sticks together at 
the beat that the dancers followed. Once I understood that communal perception of 
the music paralleled with the dance beat, I often stopped him in my lessons when 
learning a new part to have him tap the dance beat along with each individual part so 
that I could learn it with the proper metrical orientation.

But metrical perception of baan music does not end with the dancers’ steps 
alone. I occasionally discovered that other Sambla musicians also had multiple 
interpretations of the beat: the overall beat that the dancers followed, and another one 
that matched the individual part, helping the musician keep in time with himself and 
the other musicians.123 My impression was that it was not necessarily wrong to hear 
the beat in different places as the music was played. Rather than focusing on the beat 
the dancers followed, it seemed more important to be aware of it while hearing 
multiple points of coincidence and alternation within the grand scheme of the 
performance. That is, there is no single beat or metrical pulse, but many, just as the 
cycles do not necessarily have a beginning or end, but different points where one 
could start or stop playing.

123 Once during a lesson in the village I was having trouble finding where my part fit in, and I could 
not hear the stress where Sadama indicated it. I turned to a musician sitting next to me and showed 
him where I heard the beat by tapping to show physical stress where I heard it. He admitted that he 
also heard it there when he played it, because it made it easier for him to stay together with the group.
Transcription 7. “Mini Soko Ke Soenže” ("Beautiful Women are Plenty"), basic pattern for all three parts, including three possible variations of the right hand solo line (A-C). (tôrontôron mode, notated as G) [CD track #5]

Transcription 8. “Mini Soko Ke Soenže” in TUBS (Time Unit Box System) notation.
Transcription 9. “Mini Soko Ke Soenqe” notated polymetrically, one full cycle of the bass part. Eighth notes are grouped to demonstrate the metric feel heard in each part when played alone; dotted barlines indicate the perceived metrical stress. X indicates beat followed by the dancers [CD tracks #6-8]

Transcription 10. “Mini Soko Ke Soenqe” in TUBS notation, with numbers reflecting the beat placement according to the polymetric transcription above.
By listening to the recording of the full ensemble and individual parts while following Transcriptions 7-10 (CD tracks 5-8), one can hear how the rhythmic phrasing of the music does not naturally articulate a pulse where the dance beat falls. Melodic and rhythmic figures tend to begin right before or right after the dance-defined beat. Looking at Transcriptions 8, one can see a note that does fall regularly on the beat is the *diobaanden* in the upper hand of the bass. Not only is this pitch unstable in the tonal scheme of the song, but it is also a rhythmically short note in a sequence that alternates between long and short notes in the ternary meter of the accompaniment part. In such a rhythmic context, the longer note has more metrical gravity and is more easily heard as the strong part of the beat, with the shorter note functioning as a pick up on the third offbeat. This rhythmic pattern is felt throughout the bass part, shifting the metrical stress as it is notated in Transcription 9.

Another example of beat displacement occurs between the accompaniment upper hand and solo lower hand, which combine to create a double eighth note motive that falls on the two offbeats of every dance beat, never coinciding with it. These figures oscillate between the *baaña* and the *diobaanden*, a pitch that creates tension and an expectation for release up to the *tørøntørøncøtenøn*, which does not occur. The upper hand of the solo similarly exploits the offbeats, only articulating notes on the beat in places that melodically sound like passing or pickup tones. The lower hand of the solo part, conversely, is the only single line that articulates the beat that the dancers follow. This line consists of another alternating quarter note-eighth note pattern, but the longer note of this line falls on the strong beat of the dancers’
meter. I eventually learned to focus on this line to hear the dancers’ beat while playing, but it was very difficult to do so while playing, as whichever part I was playing, either the bass or accompaniment or the upper hand of the solo part, detracted from a strong sense of metrical pulse in this line.

Transcriptions 11 and 12 show another example of how the beat can be obscured by the rhythmic and melodic nature of the individual parts, as well as other complex polyrhythmic qualities inherent to many baan compositions. The meter in this example, “Sikëmëë Dondo” (“grandson of Sikëmëë”) can also be notated in 12/8 time to reflect the beat followed by the dancers. Looking at the transcription in Transcription 11, however, it is immediately apparent that the rhythm of the solo melodic line falls irregularly against the beat. The triplet figures begin on weak subdivisions of the beat, causing some notes of the melody to fall fractions off the main beat of the dance, straddling the strong part of the beat but not articulating it. The TUBS notation in Transcription 12 illustrates this graphically. I should note that this transcription does not represent a stylized version of the melody, but is a true representation of the rhythm each time it was demonstrated to me at all tempos.
Transcription 11. “Sikëmëë Dondo” excerpt, reflecting metrical structure followed by the dancers, with each beat divided into three pulses. (tɔŋtɔngɔn cɛtɛnɔn mode, notated as E) [CD track #9]

Transcription 12. “Sikëmëë Dondo” excerpt in TUBS notation. The diobaanden aligns in three different parts.
Transcription 13. “Sikemee Dondo” Notes are beamed to show how subdivisions of the beat can be grouped in pairs, indicating an alternate set of beats grouped by three (i.e. $\frac{3}{4}$ time) that can be felt in addition to the beat followed by the dancers. Dotted barlines indicate perceived beat organization. [CD tracks #10-12]

Transcription 14. “Sikemee Dondo” excerpt in TUBS; beats in alternate 3/4 feel indicated by numbers.
When the melody played by the soloist is heard alone, it falls more naturally into a 3/4 meter, as notated in Transcriptions 13 and 14. This meter is felt in the upper melodic line, and it is reinforced by an ascending three-note motive in the lower solo hand that aligns with the beat structure of the meter. In addition to this, both hands of the accompaniment and the lower hand of the bass all contain a three-note motive that is identical to the lower solo hand in rhythm and contour. The lines in the bass and accompaniment parts are all descending lines, and figure in the lower hand of the solo hand is ascending by contrast. Therefore, five of the six hands playing the baan fall more naturally in a 3/4 meter than the 12/8 meter followed by the dancers. But this is not where the metrical ambiguity ends.

Transcription 15. “Sikemee Dondo” cascading lines in bass, accompaniment, and solo parts, each displaced by one eighth-note subdivision. The numbers outline the order in which each three-note motive starts on different subdivisions of the beat. [CD track #13; note: this track only demonstrates accompaniment and bass parts]

Each of these parts that contains a three-note motive is offset from one another by one eighth-note subdivision of the beat. The figures begin in succession in the order of lower bass, lower accompaniment, upper accompaniment, and lower solo
hands, creating a cascading texture among the parts, as indicated in Transcription 15. Each of these lines reinforces a 3/4 meter feel in each of their respective parts when played alone. When played together, they fit into a matrix-like structure, but one in which the periodicity followed by the dancers is nearly impossible to hear because each of these lines contradicts this meter in a different place.

Just like the previous example, the beat followed by the dancers is articulated in this dense texture by one single line, the upper hand of the bass part. This hand plays an eighth-note-quarter-note sequence beginning on each beat, the only hand that regularly falls on the dancers’ beat. However, when placed literally in the middle of the other five hands, each articulating a 3/4 meter on all subdivisions of the beat, it is very difficult to hear the lone upper bass hand steadily marking out the dancers’ time.

Therefore, the song “Sikemee Dondo” illustrates how the basic West African polyrhythmic structure of 3:2 can permeate a baan composition on two different levels: in the solo melody, which uniquely places the 3:2 structure on offbeats in a ternary meter; and polymetrically by superimposing a strongly 3/4 feel over a 12/8 metrical dance structure. Obscuring this sense of time even more is the technique of four cascading lines, each offset by an eighth-note subdivision of the beat, creating four conflicting downbeats in the 3/4 metrical feel. It is no wonder that so many local musicians are so confounded by this music; most other polyrhythmic and polyphonic practices in local music traditions are much more straightforward in the meter that the dancers must follow.
This example illustrates rhythmic characteristics that I found to be typical of 
*baan* music: the listener or player must not focus too strongly on orienting the music 
around a single beat, because in such multidimensional music, a beat can be heard in 
many different places at once. The beat followed by the dancers may be considered 
the “dominant” beat if one were to arrange different pulse perceptions in a hierarchy, 
and it is essential that *baan* players be aware of this beat as they play. It is also 
essential that the soloist articulates the dancer’s beat in his playing in order for his 
speech passages to be understood properly, and one could assume that most listeners 
hear the music organized metrically around the beat followed by the dancers because 
they are also following the speech played by the soloist. However, my impression 
was that there is not necessarily a “wrong” place to hear the beat per se, just different 
ways of hearing the music depending on how the listener’s ear is oriented. The 
listener may depart from the dominant dance meter to hear the different metrical 
dimensions of the various layers of music created by the interlocking parts, and this 
sense of time is heard alongside, or perhaps “under” the dominant dance beat. 
Listening in this way reflects the multidimensional quality of the music: one is aware 
of where the body moves against the music, but one is also aware of the smaller 
movements taking place inside the music. These internal rhythmic logics are often 
articulated in parts of the dance, either by an extra, syncopated step added between 
between beats, or a movement made somewhere in the upper or middle portion of the 
body, usually the arms or hips.
While playing the baan, proper listening and perception of the music requires an awareness of the smallest subdivision of the beat, what I am referring to as the pulse. It requires the ability to hear a multitude of beat cycles and metrical structures at once, not necessarily placing more emphasis on any single one. These subdivisions can be heard in more than one dimension, by hearing them within one part and across the three parts, creating a sense of what I described as a “matrix” of interlocking parts. This is the approach that I found to be most useful to listening and understanding baan music.

**The Baan Soloist: Song and Speech**

The solo part has the most important and sophisticated role in the baan ensemble. The soloist is the leader, he dictates the songs, tempo, when to start and stop, and engages in speech with attendees. When a baan is played at an event, the musicians who play are identified by the soloist only, never any of the other players, despite the fact that two other xylophonists and two to four drummers also play in the ensemble. The soloist creates the identity of the music in a performance by virtue of the speech that imbues most of his playing, and those who know the baan well can hear one played in the distance and identify the soloist by his particular style.

It takes many years to develop the skills necessary to perform as a baan soloist in public. In many performances that I witnessed in Burkina Faso, the soloists
who performed in official settings were rarely younger than 35 to 40 years old.\textsuperscript{124} In addition to the lead patterns for each song, which embody the lyrics of the songs themselves, the soloist must be able to improvise variations to the song patterns, and most importantly, insert speech passages into the music that communicate with the dancers. For this the soloist must be well versed in local histories and genealogies, which is another aspect of the knowledge base required to be a competent soloist. The speech passages can occur in two different settings: either within the context of the song, in which case it must fit melodically into the tonal and modal scheme of the song and the particular passages where the speech is played; or the soloist speaks and interacts with various spectators between songs, when only the soloist plays in response to comments and requests made to him by attendees.

I will discuss the latter case first, where the soloist engages in extemporaneous speech with various people in attendance at the fête. In a typical Sambla music-making setting, once the music starts, it continues all night. Occasionally other musicians will rotate in and relieve players who have been performing for a while, but once the event really gets going late into the night, the most experienced players are expected to keep the music coming until dawn. In the dozens of fêtes I attended over an 18-month period, I never witnessed a break in the action once the event entered the most energetic period of the performance late in the night, usually around

\textsuperscript{124} However, younger musicians can always be found playing during incidental moments in the event, before or after the main \textit{baan} players have performed. This is viewed as “play,” and is not considered part of the music that makes the event. People do not gather and dance at these moments, except for children. Sometimes the younger players also organize their own fêtes, which gives the younger musicians a chance to play for other young people in a typical dance setting. All of these activities are considered vital training for their later, official role as Sambla musicians.
10:00 or 11:00pm. While there are no breaks in the performance, there are moments
between songs when people can approach the baan and make requests. During
these moments, most of the players have a moment to catch their breath, but the
soloist must stay alert and be ready to respond to any request.

Typically, what happens in one of these exchanges is that someone will
approach the musicians and ask for a particular song to be played. That song might
be his or her own personal song, or it could be the song of a relative, a friend, the
deceased, in the case of a funeral, or anyone else who might be associated with the
event. The soloist might then respond by asking why he should play that song, in
which case the requester would mention something about the person for whom the
song is requested, or something about the text of the song itself, which may contain a
moral message or story of an important historical event. At this point the soloist
draws upon his knowledge of the people and history of the region, and he will begin
to “sing” praises on the baan to the person requesting the song, which would oblige
the requester to give money to the soloist as an expression of gratitude. As the soloist
continues the stream of praises and great deeds done by the subject’s ancestor’s, the
attendee continues to peel bills off a stack in his or her hand and drop them on the
xylophone. This monetary remuneration for praises is not just polite or gracious, it is

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125 Occasionally a new player will come in to relieve someone who has been playing for a few hours to
ensure continual music throughout the night. For this purpose, several members of the xylophonist’s
family will be present at the fête. However, I have witnessed events when the same soloist played for
as many as ten hours straight without stopping.

126 The information about baan-human exchanges between songs is drawn largely from personal
communication with Sadama and Seydou Diabate (6/23-24/07), as well as my own observations at the
dozens of Sambla fêtes that I attended from November 2002 to May 2004.
expected and required. Not to do so would result in serious social sanctions, which can make life very unpleasant in such a small, close-knit community.

Giving money to musicians as they perform is a very common practice across West Africa. At one time, many musicians born into a hereditary, endogamous social class of musicians, like the Samba xylophonists, earned their living as performers, and this was the vehicle by which they made the bulk of their income. Among the Sambla it was no different, since at one time the saa, the original proprietors of the land, were the only ones who farmed in the region, so the ka artisan class would have had to support themselves on their trade alone (see Chapter 1). 127 Today all rural dwellers must farm in order to survive, but musicians still depend upon this source of income to supplement the meager earnings they make with their crops. Non-musicians also typically engage in some other occupation apart from farming for the same reason.

It is within these exchanges that the most remarkable quality of the baan is expressed, because in these conversations, only the attendee is speaking verbally; the soloist communicates entirely by playing the baan. I have never once heard a soloist sing or address a fête attendee verbally while performing, but he is able to communicate with anyone present, spectators or musicians, at any moment. It was my hope to learn the Sambla language well enough to be able to understand this

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127 Sadama enjoyed telling me repeatedly that “back in the old days” (J: fɔlɔfɔlɔ), Sambla xylophonists did not farm or do any other work besides playing the baan, which was their sole means of support.
musical language, but I quickly discovered that this was an entirely unrealistic goal for an eighteen-month stay. 128

Eventually I discovered that not even all Sambla are able to fully understand everything that is said on the xylophone. Although many xylophonists like to claim that every Sambla, down to the smallest children, can understand every word spoken on the baan, I have found this not to be so. In speaking with Tene Traore, a revered tumaa ka and elder member of the Konate xylophone clan, she informed me that many Sambla do not understand the baan language, or at least can only understand some of it. She was not able to identify any pattern that showed who might have a better understanding than others, except that people from families of musicians obviously had a deeper understanding than most non-musicians, but even that did not always hold true (pers. com. 12/23/03).

For example, Samadou Coulibaly, who is an uncle to many of the Diabate xylophonists, cannot understand much of the xylophone language beyond identifying his name and certain common phrases when they are played. He attributes this to his absence from the village throughout much of his life while he pursued his education in Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou. Tene said that others within the village learn the language according to the amount of effort they put toward it. She compared it to a class of students in school: some students learn the material well, some do not, and still others fall somewhere between the two extremes. The reasons for this variability

128 When I told people my intention of learning the baan language well enough to play and understand it, they laughed and asked if I intended on staying ten years.
can be many, but the fact remains that just like anything else that is learned, there is no uniform rate of retention among different individuals (pers. com. 12/23/03).

Tene felt that the language was easier to understand while dancing. I had heard this anecdotally from several different people throughout my research, but I did not initially see the connection between the dance and the speech. She said it was a matter of attention, that the dance made you pay attention to the music in a certain way. Eventually, as I grew to understand the music more through playing and talking with musicians, I realized that the dance orients the body to a beat in the music, “the beat,” so to speak, that was discussed above in the section on rhythmic characteristics. By physically moving the body in time with the music, the brain can focus on a metrical orientation of the soloist more easily, considering the complex polymetric quality of many baan compositions, and the language of the speech passages comes through more clearly. Therefore, the speech passages, which follow the rhythm and tonal contour of spoken Sambla, must be played so that the natural stresses that occur in verbal speech align musically with the rhythmic stresses felt by the dancers. Misplacing syllabic emphasis can make many languages difficult to follow, but in the context of a tonal language like Sambla, it can change the entire meaning of a word or passage. I will return to this idea later in my discussion of musical phrase context.

The second context in which the baan speech surrogate is employed is within the course of a song, with the entire ensemble playing. There are essentially two types of speech playing during these moments: speech that is contained within the cyclical, repeated patterns played by the soloist (see above transcriptions for
examples); and speech that occurs when the soloist breaks out of the patterns and engages in purely linear soloing. The speech articulated in the former context is lyrics to the songs. I learned many of these passages in the course of my lessons, and I found them to be somewhat standardized. I say somewhat standardized because there is always room for the soloist to vary any of his lines and add his own personal touch to any musical expression. Nevertheless, whenever I played the songs that I learned for other Sambla in the villages, they all reacted with a familiar recognition of the speech expressed in my playing.

The context of purely linear soloing may also contain lyrics to the songs, and there are elements of these passages that are also considered standard. These portions elicited the same familiar reactions and expressions of approval that I had articulated the phrases correctly. However, these purely linear passages are the moments when the soloist has the freedom to improvise the most. I have heard songs that I know played in many different fêtes, and it was rare that I heard the soloist play lines that sounded anything like those that I learned for the song. It was explained to me that this was because the soloist is free to improvise by restating the lyrics. He was not changing the overall meaning or message of the song, but he was using his own poetic license to express these themes with different words. Musically, the melodies sounded completely different, but to the Sambla who can understand the xylophone language, it is the same song, but sung differently.

In addition to reinterpreting the lyrics of the song, the soloist also frequently addresses other participants present at the occasion. He may call out to a dancer and
comment on his or her dancing style or apparel, or he may call out to someone who is not dancing to come in and join the circle. Much of the soloist’s speech that is directed at people involves asking for some kind of remuneration, usually money, beer, or both. Again, the soloist is free to say whatever he pleases while he is playing, and if anyone he addressed did not fully understand what was being said to him, someone else would quickly step in and translate the xylophone speech for them. Regardless of what the soloist is saying, however, he must always fit the phrases within the musical context of the song. This means that he needs to adjust his phrases to the mode of the song as well as the particular tonal characteristics of the various points in the cyclical pattern.

Speech Context Example

The most fascinating aspect of Sambla baan music that initially drew my curiosity to it as a research subject was the speech surrogate element of the music. Because the Sambla have been the subject of so little prior research, published literature on their language is as scant as the existing literature about any other aspect of their culture, so my understanding of the Sambla language and its articulation on the baan has relied solely on what I learned during this research expedition.129

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129 The only study on the Sambla language was published in 1971 by André Prost, a French missionary who spent decades living in Burkina Faso and Mali and wrote extensively on dozens of African languages. His study is only a cursory overview of the Northern Sambla dialect, and according to Samadou Coulibaly, he incorrectly identified the language as having four tones, while Samadou believes there are only three. This is only one of several inaccuracies of this linguistic study, which is notably not designed as an instructional guide to the language.
A handful of studies on African speech surrogates exist, dating primarily from the mid-twentieth century and the late-1980s. The best-known works on West African speech surrogates have focused on the well-known hourglass-shaped tension drum known under a variety of local names, namely Yoruba *dundun* from Nigeria (Euba 1990, Waterman 1990), Dagbani *luna* from Ghana (Locke 1990), and Hausa drum traditions (Ames 1971). Each work is unique from the other, but they share many of the same relevant characteristics and conclusion. All three languages are tonal, and they are represented by replication of the rhythmic and tonal contour of the spoken language. Musicians also rely on the use of stock phrases that are pieced together to communicate the desired message. Because of the limited phonemic representation potential by rhythm and pitch only, many drum patterns could correspond to more than one possible spoken expression, and comprehension of these drum languages is therefore limited to a subset of the population who have had the time and opportunity to build familiarity with the genre. Ambiguous phrases are figured out by considering the context of the speech, and repetition of phrases for aesthetic musical effect gives the listener extra time to work out their meanings.

Musically, these drum languages are subject to the limitations of their musical context in rhythm, length, and periodic tonal vocabulary. The same phrase might be expressed differently if uttered in the course of different songs, in order to fit aesthetically with the rest of the ensemble. The result is a set of musically-expressed poetic texts that are both profound literary works of art and beautiful music expressed in a West African context of polyrhythms and multi-part relationships. This aesthetic
freedom with the musical texts poses two major challenges. One is for the performer, to be able to both knit together a meaningful fabric of stock phrases that is relevant to the occasion and musically compelling within the limitations of the musical context. The second is for the listener, who must also be able to understand the phrases that are articulated to fit into different musical contexts, a phrase that may already be ambiguous by similarity to another text. Characteristics such as these are what make the music so impressive and alluring, while limiting its participants to those willing to put the time and effort into learning it.

The Sambla baan tradition mirrors many of the traits I described above. Sambla is a three-toned language with a recognizable rhythmic gait and melodic flow that falls naturally into musical expression. The ability to understand the music is not universal among the Sambla, but it is not necessarily an esoteric skill, as Locke described of Dagbani luna speech (1990:125). Most Sambla can understand their name and at least a handful of common phrases, but not everyone can understand all of the extemporaneous speech, such as that played between songs (Tene Traore 12/23/03). Like the three other West African examples, considering the social and textual context helps focus interpretation, but the speech goes by in a rapid, constant stream, with minimal repetition to facilitate comprehension, as in the prior examples. Based on my observations, everyone present at a Sambla fête engages with the music and responds to the speech of the xylophone. A smaller percentage of the crowd will approach the baan between songs and engage in instrumental-verbal exchange with the soloist.
The *baan* is subject to the same limitations of musical context as the three drum examples, with a more complex tonal capacity by virtue of being a melodic instrument with a standardized tuning. The *baan* repertoire has different modes that alter the intervalllic relationship between scale degrees in relation to the tonal center. The periodicity of the supporting cycles also embodies a sequence of tonal combinations that parallels the concept of Western harmony, but not in a functional sense. *Baan* music, like the Mande bala, tends to oscillate between two or three sets of pitches that are assigned to certain points within the cycle (see Knight 1984b). It does not follow a functional progression of chords like Western art music practice, and the music is cyclical rather than the through-composed nature of Western music. In the *baan* tradition, there is also a larger period, usually of two or four cycles, that is marked off by use of a different tonality at one point in the period, such as the *diobaanden*. The structure of a composition by mode, melody, and a sequence of pitch sets must all be taken into consideration in *baan* speech playing.

In order to demonstrate the ways in which the context can affect the way that speech is expressed in *baan* music, I chose a statement that is heard often in a *fête* context and which I heard in the context of learning each of the twenty songs during the course of my research. This phrase, “*n junun ne ṣunumë dzō ka,*” which translates literally as “my head is spinning from hunger,” is a common way that a soloist creatively asks someone to bring him a beer. The standard way of expressing hunger verbally in Sambla would be to say “*dzō tsin mwe,*” which means, “hunger is with me.” However, the musical expression of that phrase is not as melodically pleasing
as “n junun ne yunume dzo ka.” Furthermore, as Sadama and Seydou explained to me one day, the former example expresses an actual desire to eat something, while the latter is understood to mean that the xylophonist would like a beer (pers. com. 11/29/03). 130

I chose this phrase both because it is a common phrase that was one of the first that I recognized on my own, and also because it is a rare example of a phrase that is played using the diobaanden. This key may turn up occasionally in melodies of songs, but it is rarely used in speech passages added to a song’s text. Considering that the diobaanden is normally reserved for culturally or spiritually important themes, I cannot explain why this phrase, while poetically charming but rather mundane in meaning, uses this sacred key. It does, however, serve my illustrative purposes well here.

The type of speech that this example represents is part of incidental and extemporaneous speech passages played throughout a performance, those that relate directly to the moment and people present. These speech passages may be played alone, between songs while the other musicians sit out, or within the context of any song. The pitches of this phrase are therefore adjusted to match the tonal variability of all the different songs of the repertoire. The rhythm and intervallic relationships between pitches, however are maintained in each variation of the phrase, as I illustrate below.

130 The assumption here is that “hunger” is used to express a desire for alcohol. It is no secret that baan musicians consume more alcohol than other people in their community. To be fair, any Sambla fête involves large-scale consumption of alcohol by most who are present, particularly those who spend most of their time dancing to the baan.
“Ka Kan Doen” (торонтон котенон) “Koko So” (торонтон, баана) [2]
“Tan Fogo Bo” (торонтон котенон) “Ji Te So” (торонтон) [4]
“Togo Mon Don” (торонтон котенон) “Ce Don So” (баана) [4]
“Brun Bre So” (торонтон котенон) “Sikemee Dondo” (торонтон кот.) “Ala Ka Min D’i Ma” (торонтон)
“Ja Don So” (торонтон котенон) “Ji Te So” (торонтон) [4]

“Koko So” (торонтон, баана) [2] “Ji Te So” (торонтон) [4]
“Tan Fogo Bo” (торонтон котенон) “San Cobe Di” (торонтон)
“Bwende Gwo Sera” (баана) “Mini Soko Ke Soenpe” (торон.)
“Son Sera So” (баана)
“Gwo Siri Sanjaape” (торонтон котенон) [2]

“Tue Gwo Sera” (баана) “Gwo Siri Sanjaape” (тор. кот.) [2]

“Nogo So” (баана)
Transcription 16 shows the seven different ways that the phrase was played within the context of seventeen of the songs that I learned to play in my baan lessons. As in other transcriptions, the diobaanden pitch is represented as a D#. Under each version I have listed the songs in which the phrase was played in that variation, and the mode of each song. For some of the variations (A, D, and F), all of the songs with which it fits are in the same mode, and most of the remaining variations can be played in one of two modes, with a few exceptions.

A few commonalities can be pointed out in this set of variations and songs. In general, the pitch that serves as the tonal center for the mode of each song is played on the second to last beat (in 17 cases) or last beat (6 cases). Two examples, “Sikèmëë Dondo” under variation B and “Gwo Siri Saŋnaŋe” under variation C, are both in the tøntøntø cøtenøn mode and do not fit into this model. The rhythm of each variation is identical, as is the general tonal shape and direction. The diobaanden is never used in the last or second to last beat of this phrase (Sadama Diabate pers. com. 11/29/03). It would appear then that the last two beats of this phrase function as the tonal “anchors” that relate it to tonality of the song. The other pitches in the phrase are determined by the tonal contour of the spoken words and the pitches that are melodically appropriate to its context. When listened to in this way, the beat where the tonal center is played has a cadential gravity to it, feeling like a resolution.
Transcription 17. Excerpt of “Koko So” with stylized speech played over the supporting parts. The floating measures on top show the standardized version of the song melody (baaña and trörtør modes; C, G). Example phrase (version B) is grouped by brackets. [CD track #14]

While the specific pitches in each variation can change according to the music to which it is played, the tonal relationship of each pitch relative to the other is maintained in each example, implying that this aspect of the melody contains important phonemic information. The pitches in each example can be classified in one of three categories: high, middle, or low, with the two extremes represented by the upper and lower limits of the range of each example. Using this as a tonal
vocabulary, the nine notes of each example follow this tonal contour: middle-high-
high- high-middle-low-low-middle-middle. This shape corresponds to the three-tone
contour of the spoken phrase ("n júnún ne ñùnùmë dzo ka"), as does the rhythm.

In order to see exactly how the pitches of the variations relate to their tonal
context, I have transcribed a few examples as they are played within the course of the
song. Transcription 17 shows one way the phrase can be played in the context of
“Koko So.” All of the linear melodies played by the soloist in this excerpt represent
speech, going in and out of the regular song lyrics to fit in the extra phrase. The way
that the lyrics are played in this example are also more rhythmically stylized than the
basic rhythm of the song, as it was taught to me. The fundamental relationship of the
rhythms with one another has not changed, just as the structural tonal contour of the
phrase examples in Transcription 16 are maintained in different tonal contexts.
Transcription 17 demonstrates how solo lines are rhythmically fluid when played by
the soloist, stretched, condensed, anticipated, or delayed, but still in the same general
part of the cycle as they were when demonstrated to me.

The example in Transcription 17 shows the B version of the phrase played in
the song, but version C would also have been appropriate. Both versions have the
same notes on their last two beats, which appear to be the critical pitches to fit into
the tonal scheme of the song. Since “Koko So” is in the baaña mode, the baaña pitch
should ideally be played on the third beat of the phrase according to how most of the
patterns align with their modal contexts, and the other pitches align with those that
would be played in the regular song melody at that point, represented in the floating

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measures above the staff. The only other variation I had heard of this phrase that had this pitch in that place was version G, which uses the *diobaanden* pitch. While the *diobaanden* is a part of the “Koko So” tonal vocabulary, it is only played in the song melody at the one moment in the cycle where it is articulated in the supporting parts. This point in the cycle is a transitional one, where the supporting cycles begin their patterns again, and placing the phrase there would sound musically awkward. Therefore, the horizontal axis of the music, the groups of pitches that are assigned to each beat of the cycle, and the vertical axis, or melodic timing and placement, both determine the placement and tonal vocabulary of the phrase in this example.

Transcriptions 18 and 19 also demonstrate how the tonal center of the mode in which the example phrase is played functions as a tonal and metrical anchor for the phrase within the song. Both examples use the tonal center on the second to last beat of the phrase, the notes that represent the syllables, “nu-me,” and in “Ja Don So,” Sadama returned immediately to the tonal center pitch (E) and sustained it for a few beats directly after playing the phrase, as he did in the “Koko So” example above. This not only reemphasizes the pitch that functions as the tonal center, but it also makes the phrase mimic the melodic action of the melody that would normally occur at that point in the cycle. In the first iteration of the phrase in “Koko So,” the return to the C mimics the sustained C in the melody shown in the floating measures above the staff system, and the phrases in “Ja Don So” return to the E, representing the repeated notes on that pitch played in the bracketed portion of the standard form of the melody. During “Bwënde Gwo Sera,” he does not reiterate the tonal center in the
same way, but he does put metrical emphasis on those pitches. The first time he played the phrase (Transcription 18), the notes that represent the “nu-me” portion fall on major points of coincidence in the supporting cycle. In the first iteration, those syllables fall on the first of two beats in the cycle that are the only place where both the accompaniment and bass parts have the same rhythm, dotted quarter notes on the beat. Then he immediately restated it again so that those pitches aligned with the beat that he recognizes as the beginning of the accompaniment cycle.\footnote{I make this claim based on the fact that any time Sadama played the accompaniment cycle alone, he always started it at this point. It should be noted that some baan parts have melodies that naturally begin and end at definite points when heard on their own. These points do not necessarily coincide with phrasing felt in the other parts.}

Each example fits into the tonality of the song in its own way as well. In Transcription 19, I bracketed the portion of the main melody that would normally be played at the moment where the example phrase is played, in order to compare the use of pitches in the phrase in relation to the melody. The beginning of the phrase matches the use of three C pitches at the beginning of the melody, and the second half of the phrase also mimics the use of pitches in the melody, though in a slightly different order. For “Bwende Gwo Sera” in Transcription 18, the melody is more variable throughout the song (see Appendix V for full transcription), but the upper solo hand of each variation relies heavily on the pitches notated as C, E, and G, which are also the main pitches used in the example phrase. The A pitch is used more as a passing or harmonic tone in the main melody, reflected in its use as the pickup to the example phrase as it is played here.
Another characteristic trait of baan speech that is demonstrated in these three examples is the rhythmic manner in which the passages are played. This is evident in the transcriptions in Transcription 17 and 19, and in the audio example that corresponds to Transcription 18 (the rhythmic variation of the song’s melody was not easily represented by the transcription). Each of these examples shows that speech passages tend to be stylized in a way that diverges from a regular rhythm that
corresponds to any metrical feel of the song. Rhythms of speech passages cut across
the more regular rhythms of the supporting voices, causing them to stand out better
from the other voices in the song. This way of playing also more closely represents
natural patterns of verbal speech, which by nature do not commonly fall into regular
structured patterns or metrical cycles. It also helps catch the attention of the listener,
by departing from both the song’s regular text and regular meter, alerting the listener
to pay special attention to the passage, because the xylophonist is addressing someone
present at the event, or making some other spontaneous, extemporaneous comment to
no one in particular.

Transcription 19. “Ja Don So” excerpt with example phrase (version A).
(torøntøn cøtenøn mode, E) First bracketed passage represents the
melody that normally belongs in the place where the example phrase is
played. [CD track #16]
This idea of attention is an essential component of *baan* speech comprehension. I was unable to accurately assess what percentage of Sambla have some understanding of the xylophone speech surrogate, and the degree of their understanding. An empirical study with different members of the community asked to “translate” the same passage spoken on the *baan* would have given me such data, but I was unable to pursue this.

When I asked xylophonists and members of their immediate families how much of the population can understand the xylophone language, they categorically claimed that every Sambla can understand every word spoken on the xylophone, even the smallest child. This is one of the first things I can remember being told when I began my research, and it was repeated to me throughout my stay. When I spoke with others, however, I heard a different story.

Samadou Coulibaly, who helped me at various points throughout my research, is a relative of the Diabate clan, but as his name suggests, he is not a musician himself. Further distinguishing him from his Diabate relatives, Samadou had not only attended school, but he held a Master’s degree in linguistics from the University of Ouagadougou.\(^{132}\) Samadou attended primary school in his home village of Karankaso, but he moved to Bobo-Dioulasso as a child to pursue secondary education, and eventually to the capital city for his university studies. Samadou therefore represents an urban Sambla, part of a growing contingent of Sambla who

\(^{132}\) Traditionally, Sambla musicians do not attend school, both for financial reasons, and also because they need to spend so much time practicing in order to develop the skills necessary to perform as a musician for their communities.
left their villages to seek more job opportunities in urban areas, including Bobo-Dioulasso, Ouagadougou, Abidjan, and Bamako (see Chapter 1).

Samadou freely admits that while he is related to the Diabate xylophonists through marriage, he is not proficient in any type of music, nor can he understand the xylophone language, with the exception of his name and a few common phrases. His reason for this is the fact that he left the village as a child, and was not around the music enough while he was growing up to internalize the xylophone speech and be able to understand it. With this explanation, it would seem that most urban Sambla cannot understand the xylophone speech, but this is not necessarily true. I encountered other urban Sambla whom I deduced, through informal discussions, could understand at least some of the musical language, although to varying degrees.

In the Sambla villages, however, I also discovered that the characterization that the Diabates had given me may have been an exaggeration. During my research, I was fortunate to have an opportunity to interview the great Tene Traore, a renowned tumaa ka, or ka kan musician who specializes in praise singing, a tradition that predates the advent of the xylophone in Burkina Faso (see Chapter 3). Tene was a member of the Traores who were related to the Diabate musicians through marriage, and was considered the most senior member of the extended family. She was well known outside of Sambla country, having been broadcast singing on Burkina’s national television network in 1982. Her elder status and reputation as a singer made
her the foremost authority on matters of regional music history, as well as a wealth of information on any number of topics.\textsuperscript{133} 

While speaking with Tene about genealogies and the \textit{tumaa} tradition, xylophone speech was mentioned in passing, and she made an offhanded comment that only certain people can understand the xylophone language anyway. This caught my immediate attention, since I was always eager to learn more about the language and how well it is understood by the Sambla population in general. Not giving me any real specifics, Tene simply told me that not everyone can understand the xylophone language, and while musicians generally understand it better than non-musicians, that alone is not necessarily an indication as to whether or not someone will understand the language, or to what degree. She made the parallel to learning in school: some students learn the material well, others do not, and most people fall somewhere in between. The key seems to be the level of effort and attention the individual devotes to learning the language.

I wondered if it made a difference where the person lived or how often they heard the music, but Tene maintained that everyone who lives in the village hears the music just as often as everyone else, so there is virtually no variability in contact with the music for village inhabitants. The only factor she mentioned that influenced how well someone may understand the xylophone language was dance. Some believe that it is easier to understand the xylophone language while dancing. Though this was consistent with much of the information she gave me, she did not elucidate the topic

\textsuperscript{133} Unfortunately, I was only able to conduct one interview with Tene, as she passed away in early 2004.
any further than this. I asked some of the others present during the interview about this, and they suggested that this might be a matter of attention: a dancer must concentrate more closely on the music than the other fête attendees, whose primary attention is likely occupied with conversations and other personal interactions.

This revelation brought several issues to mind. This was the first authoritative account that I heard, given by a musician herself, that not all Sambla understand the xylophone speech, as the Diabates had repeatedly claimed. Furthermore, there seems to be no pattern that accounts for who understands the language and who does not, apart from individual motivation and effort. Finally, a connection was made between physical movement and speech comprehension, which immediately made me think of my own xylophone lessons, when the importance of listening was constantly reinforced. As I continually struggled to let go of my old listening habits and hear the music the way my teachers did, I was periodically reminded that if I could see the dancers, the music would make more sense to my ears.

The importance of dance in understanding polyrhythmic textures is par for the course in most West African percussive traditions, since the dance steps often either reinforce important rhythms in the music, or the rhythms created by the footsteps provide the final part that completes the instrumental polyrhythms. Drummers are often instructed to learn the dances they accompany so that they may internalize the rhythms kinesthetically, and sometimes, when a dancer and drummer are working out a specific passage, it is not uncommon to see them “singing” the dance to each other, as they can verbally articulate physical movements through onomatopoetic
vocalizations of drum patterns. With music on the baan, however, this concept is taken one step further in helping not just the musicians but also the listener in correctly organizing the many different layers of musical activity for optimal comprehension.

Therefore, the variability in comprehension of the xylophone speech surrogate is dependant upon at least three different influences: whether or not the individual grew up in the village, affecting how much he or she was exposed to the music growing up; the level of personal motivation and effort in learning the language; and the amount of time that the individual has spent dancing to the music while paying conscious effort to the speech surrogate. Despite having learned all of this, however, I am still unable to characterize or even estimate what percentage of Sambla can understand the xylophone language, or the average level of comprehension among the general population. From my own observations, I have noticed that a core group of people who regularly interact with the xylophone tends to form at each fête, though others will occasionally perk their ears up to something that is said on the instrument, much as the human ear is able to distinguish words or phrases spoken in a crowded room that have some sort of personal significance to them.

When the Xylophone Doesn’t Speak – Other Aspects of Baan Performance

While most of what the soloist plays is speech, not all of it is. Occasionally, a xylophonist inserts passages of pure improvisation that do not communicate verbal meaning. These passages can be either cyclical patterns or linear melodies. The
Sambla distinguish this type of solo playing from speech playing by calling it “baan-ne-bee-kwi,” or “xylophone-in-do-thing.” I happened upon this type of playing and its name in a lesson one day when I asked Sadama the meaning of a melodic phrase he had added to the song “Koko So.” He told me that it had no translation, and that it was something extra added to the music that they play to show off. He explained it as a way that a soloist can show that he “knows the baan” (Sadama, Seydou, and Fatogoma Diabate, pers. com. 6/13/03).

At a later date, Samadou Coulibaly explained the name to me more thoroughly. Baan-ne-bee-kwi refers to a thing that a player can do with (“in”) the instrument that is not a habitual way of playing. The phrase is constructed from a common Sambla expression in which the first word could be substituted with another object or action to indicate a non-habitual way of doing something. Specifically, the action has been changed by adding something to it, as in another gesture. For example, sanma-ne-bee-kwi (“dance-in-do-thing”) would refer to a person who has altered a dance by adding another gesture or movement to it. This phrase is used to describe behavior that is associated with feeling good or showing off, so another example might be someone who jumps for joy while walking down the street, perhaps to express happiness for a sudden windfall of good luck (pers. com. 10/31/03).

Bringing it back to the baan example, baan-ne-bee-kwi refers to playing done for the enjoyment of both the player and the audience. The types of passages played by the soloist in these cases can manifest itself in the two distinctive styles of playing employed by the soloist: cyclical patterns that interact with the other players’ parts to
create the greater interlocking texture, or linear melodic playing. The former would be considered a case of variation, which the bass player also incorporates into his patterns.\textsuperscript{134} The linear non-speech improvisation is an interesting case, however, since all the xylophonists I spoke with claimed that all linear playing represented speech.

Rather than search for a deeper meaning within this “showing off” playing style, I can assume that the development of baan-ne-bee-kwi playing in the baan tradition was a natural product of musicians’ desire to add a bit of themselves in their playing. All of the xylophonists, and indeed all of the musicians I have ever met in West Africa share a common pride in their music as being his or her own. Individual expression within a commonly shared tradition is a topic I have explored in the past through examination of improvisational style in Mande balañ performance (see Strand 2000).

\textbf{Conclusion}

The baan tradition exhibits many of the same hallmarks of most other West African percussion traditions: layered ostinato patterns accompanying a solo line, polyrhythmic textures with interlocking rhythms that create inherent patterns, music intended to accompany dance, and a correlation between music and language. Yet, the baan has more than what can be described in these terms alone. When watching a

\textsuperscript{134} The accompanist is not allowed to vary his part, since he is usually a younger player still building fundamental skills, and also because the bass and solo parts can vary their parts more freely when the somewhat simpler accompaniment part remains unchanged.
performance or listening to a recording, it is clear that the whole is so much more than the sum of its parts. The previous analysis has explored the various tonal, modal, rhythmic, metric, and linguistic aspects of the music, elements that all come together to create what the Sambla simply consider to be their music.

I hope to continue exploring this fascinating music culture and continue to discover more about the speech surrogate in particular, the element that initially drew my curiosity to the instrument. I have discovered a staggering depth to the music of the baan, as the more I learn about the music, the more I realize that there is so much more to learn.
CONCLUSION

When an uninitiated observer sees the performance of a *baan* and hears the music for the first time, he or she is immediately struck by the density and impressiveness of the music. The listener’s ears may take some time before being able to take in everything that’s going on and figure out where to orient oneself to a point of reference to find a beat and sense the musical organization. Visually, the rapid movement of six hands moving across the keys at dizzying speeds without ever colliding midair is both hypnotic and confounding at the same time. The more one learns about the music of the *baan*, the more impressive and fascinating it becomes.

This study has shown that the *baan* represents more than just the music that is played on it. When the instrument is considered thoroughly within its historical context, taking into account ethnic relations and alliances of a region, migration patterns, precolonial aggressions and conflicts, the complex and far-reaching effects of colonization and the nature of different Africans’ relationships with colonizers, and even the geographical landscape of a region, the story of an instrument like the *baan* gains another dimension, as did my project.

This thesis reflects the arc that my project took while I was in the field, and two distinct sections in the writing can be clearly delineated: an ethnohistorical section that traces the genesis of the Sambla as a people and the *baan* as a music tradition, and a description and analysis of the *baan* and the music played on it.
Therefore, two sets of conclusions can be drawn, though they are not necessarily exclusive of one another.

In the history of the Sambla, the *baan* can be seen as a powerful tool in the articulation of ethnic identity for a minority ethnic group forged from an amalgamation of different ethnicities from the region. The *baan* has become part of the story of the creation of the Sambla as a people and as a culture, distinct from their surroundings, with a unique culture and stunning music tradition that is linked to their close friends and neighbors, the Tusia, but noticeably different as well.

The emergence of the *baan* as a Sambla tradition follows the same paradigm as the emergence of the Sambla people and the formation of their own ethnic identity. After separating from the Samogo and becoming isolated in their present region, they began to combine with members of other ethnic groups who migrated into the area. Their language gradually changed from the original Samogo, probably from the influence of the languages that immigrated into the community. Establishing propriety over the land where they settled through the Sambla earth chief, or *mangan*, was a major step toward ethnic unity, as they continued to welcome foreign newcomers into their growing community, inserting themselves into the web of Sambla kinship relations.

The final step in this process was the *baan*, which entered Sambla society much in the same way that many other foreign elements entered. It was brought to them by a neighboring ethnic group, they welcomed it, adapted it to fit their needs and reflect their preferences, and they made it their own. Then, surprisingly, this
instrument marginalized prior Sambla music and became the centerpiece of all Sambla ritual and social life, becoming well known throughout the region as one of the most challenging and impressive xylophone traditions.\footnote{A Sambla group frequently wins the prize for “Best Traditional Music” in the competition held at the biannual “Semaine Nationale de la Culture” (National Culture Week) held in Bobo-Dioulasso. The Diabates took home this prize in 2002.}

The \textit{baan} has not simply become another element of Sambla culture, like a religious practice adopted from the Bobo that they may try out for a while until they find another that they like better. The \textit{baan} has arguably become the most significant cultural marker for the Sambla. With the \textit{baan} as he centerpiece of every social and ritual activity, it has come to symbolize the Sambla and nearly every facet of their life, whether it is in the realm of work, play, or worship.

The second section of this work, represented in Chapters 3 and 4, contains a more literal and analytical description of the \textit{baan} and its music, revealing not only how deeply embedded the instrument is in Sambla culture, but also the level of sophistication and complexity in everything from tuning, modes, multipart interaction, rhythm and meter, and surrogate speech. The depth to this music that I mentioned at the end of the last chapter can be imagined as layers of tradition that have accumulated over time and space to create this ethno-musical amalgam that has reinvented itself as a reflection of Sambla identity.

Understanding the modal system of the music is essential in understanding how melodies, and the speech embodied in them, must articulate and resolve. The presence of the \textit{diobaanden} creates an element of mysticism and uncertainty,
represented through sonic tension and dissonance, and the interaction of all three players’ hands reveals the complexities in the mechanics and construction of the multifaceted music that is played on the *baan*. Each of these aspects can be viewed as part of a larger system of musics in the immediate region as well as all of Sub-Saharan Africa, yet they all express qualities that are unique to the *baan*.

The speech surrogate is by far the most complex aspect of the music in my mind, a view that is supported by the fact that it takes decades for a Sambla musician to master speech performance on the *baan*. The speech context analysis I conducted revealed some important facts about how speech is articulated in the music. First, that it follows the rhythmic and tonal contour of spoken Sambla, which was already assumed, but also that the note choices are limited by both the mode of the song and the specific pitches of the regular song melody that the speech passage is replacing. This means that each phrase does not have a fixed melodic formula but can be adapted to a variety of contexts as long as the rhythm and general tonal contour are retained. The intervals themselves are not necessarily the same in each utterance of the same phrase, but the pattern of interval direction is the same. I would like to investigate this more closely to see if there is more information retained in the different utterances of the same phrase to determine what other aspects of the speech are communicated musically.

Issues of rhythm and meter within the polyrhythmic, multi-part texture of the *baan* are equally as complicated to consider in the performance and perception of the music. The nature of the music allows for the variable perception of the beat,
depending on one’s role as a dancer, performer (and which position on the instrument), or casual listener. A dominant metric structure exists to orient the dances and the speech, but listeners are not confined to this single way of hearing the music.

The more one listens to the baan, the more one is able to hear the depth and density of musical events, and each of the inherent rhythms and melodies that emerge from this texture created by six hands and a few auxiliary percussionists can take on its own identity, changing the sound of the rest of the music. I have discovered that listening to the baan is not about focusing on a single, dominant melody or beat, rather it requires an ability to hear many different identities that the music may have, defined by different melodies, metrical structures, and beat placement. Therefore, the idea of a single “correct” way to orient one’s ear to music is moot. If meter and rhythm are viewed as fluid as the many different layers of melodies created by the gestalt of the interlocking parts, then one could assume that the listener is free to move in and out of different metrical and rhythmic frameworks, hearing each element of the music on its own terms, before sliding back into the dominant metrical framework, as defined by the dance and speech patterns. To me, this is part of what makes the music so exciting and satisfying to experience, you never know what is going to jump out of the music at you, or how your ear is going to respond.

Areas where I would like to continue research are numerous, but my primary interest is to continue pursuing a deeper understanding of the speech surrogate. The key to this aspect of the music seems to be the ability for phonemic representation in
the music, which is a track that I would specifically like to pursue in future research. Evidence that I have gathered to suggest this so far is the fact that the Sambla are able to speak languages other than Sambla on the *baan*. For example, there are several songs with Jula lyrics in the *baan* repertoire (see Appendix IV), and while Sambla and Jula are both Mande languages, they are distant within the language family and are mutually unintelligible languages. Even more distant from Jula is English, but Sambla xylophonists had no trouble playing my name, Julie. When I asked how, I was always given the same explanation: because the Sambla language also has the sounds for “j,” “oo,” “l,” and “ee.” How these sounds are performed on the instrument and understood by others is still a mystery, though my theory is that the intervallic relationship of the phrases may in some way communicate phonemic information (see analysis in “Speech Context Example” in Chapter 4).

Overall, studying the Sambla and the *baan* could be a life’s work if one intended to fully document the speech surrogate and trace its roots back through the Tusia and beyond. Part of this work would necessarily involve branching out to neighboring groups in the rest of the region, which has been overlooked by academic research just as the Sambla have. A look at Appendix II shows ethnic groups in the region that play the xylophone – and these are only the ones that I know of. Clearly the western region of Burkina Faso presents a wealth of untapped research, full of endlessly fascinating music traditions for which the Sambla can be viewed as somewhat of a model: small ethnic groups, living in close proximity to one another, freely exchanging beliefs and traditions, exhibiting what may seem like a high degree
of similarity when observed from afar (i.e. they the xylophone), but when examined up close, the rich uniqueness of their culture shines through.

This region is an important, historical crossroads. For centuries western Burkina has been traversed by ancient trade routes connecting the Sahara with the coastal tropical regions, bringing a wide diversity of peoples into this small trading center. Many battles have been fought to control the economic trade of the region, and it contains a lot of history. Despite all this, there are no large kingdoms or famed chieftaincies represented in western Burkina. The Mande Empire who once controlled the region lies mostly to the west now, and the Gur groups associated with the tropical coastlines and Mossi plateau are to the east and south. But in this small region of western Burkina, between Bobo-Dioulasso and Sikasso, Mali, there is a web of cultural wealth that bridge Mande and Gur together through the various cultural connections that have formed among the small groups residing there. The Mande Sambla and Gur Tusia are just one example, and the baan is an example of what can result from these alliances. I hope that more will be uncovered about this extraordinarily diverse and musically rich region, the part of Burkina that is known locally as pays balafon.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX I – BAAN TUNINGS

The following tables represent measurements I made of four different baans while I was in Burkina Faso. Measurements were made with a Korg AT-12 Auto Chromatic tuner. I did not measure the actual pitches with the tuner itself, because the complex overtones inherent to the sound of baan keys renders the pitch measurement feature of the tuner useless. Instead, I played the key and adjusted the pitch generated by the tuner until the two pitches matched, according to my ear. I then noted the number of cents that the tuner had to be adjusted away from its base pitch to match the pitch of the key, noted in the following format: C# +32, Bb -13, etc. Using this as my raw data, I then calculated the interval in cents between each key, and used these figures for the remaining calculations listed in the tables below.

These tables are not intended to provide a definitive record of baan tuning systems. A fair amount of deviation exists among the four specimens, especially between the southern and northern (Karankaso) models. The sample size is not large enough to provide statistically relevant findings. They are helpful, however, in calculating average intervals and demonstrating the tuning variability in the instruments represented here, to supplement discussion of tunings in the text.
Key:

- 1=bapa / sirakua, 2=diobaanden, 3=torontorn cotenon, 4=torontorn, 5= bapa
cotenon

- Intervals are expressed in cents; other abbreviations are also drawn from Western
terminology (i.e. m3 = “minor third,” P5 = “perfect fifth,” O = “octave”)

- Measurements in **bold** can be considered inaccurate due to keys that were either
broken or otherwise recognized as being out of tune

- Average intervals are listed at the bottom of each column, listed first in cents and
then by diatonic interval plus or minus deviation in cents. Figures in **bold** are not
calculated into these totals.
## Sambla Xylophone Tuning Comparisons

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Appendix 1a. Sambla Xylophone: Tuning Comparisons of raw data. Xylophone #4 from Karankaso represents northern tuning, the others are all from southern villages. Instrument name indicates location and owner of the buan.
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<td>O +95</td>
<td>O +47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20 +68</td>
<td>20 +42</td>
<td>20 +63</td>
<td>20 +205</td>
<td>20 +95</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30 +125</td>
<td>30 +53</td>
<td>30 +97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>O +30</td>
<td>O +21</td>
<td>O +16</td>
<td>O +1</td>
<td>O +9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20 +57</td>
<td>20 +31</td>
<td>20 +4</td>
<td>20 +64</td>
<td>20 +37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30 +90</td>
<td>30 +62</td>
<td>30 -6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>O +28</td>
<td>O -2</td>
<td>O +29</td>
<td>O +18</td>
<td>O +18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 +44</td>
<td>20 +13</td>
<td>20 +51</td>
<td>20 +61</td>
<td>20 +42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30 +84</td>
<td>30 +70</td>
<td>30 +88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>O +5</td>
<td>O -2</td>
<td>O +42</td>
<td>O +47</td>
<td>O +23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20 +9</td>
<td>20 +221</td>
<td>20 +75</td>
<td>20 +68</td>
<td>20 +51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30 +197</td>
<td>30 +280</td>
<td>30 +126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>O +11</td>
<td>O +20</td>
<td>O +30</td>
<td>O +43</td>
<td>O +26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 +20</td>
<td>20 +39</td>
<td>20 +51</td>
<td>20 +86</td>
<td>20 +49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30 +34</td>
<td>30 +85</td>
<td>30 +89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix 1b. Sambla Xylophone: Average Tuning Comparison. Average interval distances from each instrument, combined to create an overall tuning average based on these four examples. The slightly different tuning of #4, a baan from the northern Sambla region, can affect these greater averages.
## Sambla Xylophone Tuning Comparisons - Direct Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diatonic intervals</th>
<th>2-Step Intervals</th>
<th>3-Step Intervals</th>
<th>Octaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4-5</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5-B1</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3-B4</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4-B5</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1-C2</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2-C3</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3-C4</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4-C5</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5-D1</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1-D2</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2-D3</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3-D4</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4-D5</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5-E1</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>283</td>
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<tr>
<td>E1-E2</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2-E3</td>
<td>174</td>
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<td>141</td>
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<tr>
<td>E3-E4</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4-E5</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5-F1</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 1c. Sambla Xylophone: Direct Tuning Comparisons. Each interval is compared to its equivalent on the other instruments, which can be read horizontally across the tables. Different octaves are indicated by letter (A, B, C, etc.), beginning at the bass end going toward the treble.
### Tusia Xylophone Tuning Measurements/Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diatonic intervals</th>
<th>Composite Intervals</th>
<th>Octaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>octave</td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>403</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interval</td>
<td>M3 -17</td>
<td>m2 -15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samba</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equiv.</td>
<td>m3 -33</td>
<td>m2 +25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 1d. Tusia *pan* tuning, based on the measurement of a single instrument, with comparisons to averages values from Sambla measurements.
APPENDIX II – GOURD-RESONATED XYLOPHONES OF BURKINA FASO

**Ethnic group common name (indigenous language name\textsuperscript{136}) – xylophone name**

1. Bamana/Jula/Maninka (-kan): balañ (includes both heptatonic and pentatonic varieties)
2. Birifor (birfɔr): kogyil, bogyil?
3. Bobo (bɔbɔ-sya)
4. Bwa (bwamu): cooza (?)
5. Dagara (dagari)\textsuperscript{137}: gyil
   a. dagaar-gyil: 17-18 keys, largest and oldest gyil
   b. logyi, kouri-gyil / ko-gyil: 14 keys, used for funerals
   c. bore-gyil / bogyil: 14 keys, used for harvest and spirit possession dances
   d. gbin / gbun: 14 keys, smaller version of dagaar-gyil, entertainment
   e. gyil-muo: 14 keys, same tuning as kuori-gyil, used for funeral, harvest, pre-harvest dances
   f. lob-gu / agu-gyil / gyil-gu: 14 keys, smaller version of gbin, worn around the neck, formerly used on battlefront to announce fall of enemy’s leader
   g. gyil-kolinko: 12 keys, “miniature” version of dagaar-gyil
6. Jan (jãane): chøku, babono (sled xylophone, used for training before full version)
7. Gan (kãasa): minthoreego
8. Gouin (cerma): bwana
9. Karaboro (kar)
10. Lobi (lobiri): jɔɔ / jɔɔɔ / jɔɔnbo (funeral xylophone), buurjɔɔ (initiation xylophone)
11. Puguli (pwo):
12. Sambla (seenku): baan
13. Senufo (bãmbarge, sipire, senari, tagba / tagwa): jegele, kpoye (?)
14. Siamou (semè): nyël (generic)\textsuperscript{138}
   a. semè nyël: ritual xylophone
   b. sya nyël: borrowed from Tusia
   c. bambar nyël: borrowed from “Bambara” – also known as Jula or Senufo
15. Sisaala (sisali): jengsi
16. Tusia (we-ten): jian

\textsuperscript{136} Ethnologue (internet)
\textsuperscript{137} Mensah 1982:142
\textsuperscript{138} Kersale (1997a – disc.)
APPENDIX III – SAMBLA GLOSSARY

The words listed here are representative of the vocabulary of the southern Sambla dialect. For a glossary of Sambla terms in the northern dialect, see Prost (1971a).

Because I do not have definitive or comprehensive knowledge of the tonality of all the Sambla words I know, I have not indicated tonal markings in this glossary. Therefore, many of the words contained here may have one or more other meanings depending on its tonal contour.

For some examples, the Jula or Tusia equivalent is included for comparison or reference.

**baan** – the Sambla xylophone, acquired from the Tusia (T: \(\ddot{n}an\)).
- **baanden** – “xylophone child;” xylophone key
- **baan-le-kan** – “xylophone-to-complete;” xylophone accompaniment player
- **baan-ne-bee-kwi** – “xylophone-in-do-thing;” improvised passages by the soloist that do not correspond to speech passages
- **baan-ne-tere** – “xylophone-in-ask/test;” passages played alone by the soloist at the beginning of a piece or event, or sometimes for specific funeral purposes. In it the soloist “tests” some of the melodies of the pieces he intends to play, and also “asks” permission to perform from all village chiefs, alive and dead. Also interpreted as “greeting” the xylophone.
- **baan-tsin-gyera-beren** – “xylophone-under-place-player,” soloist (only one recognized as the player at a particular place, others are subsidiary)
- **baan-ma-beren** – “xylophone-mother-player;” xylophone bass player.

**beren** – to beat something / play an instrument
**bi** – animal horn
**bien** – to play (music – any instrument other than xylophone)
**bienkote** – “swollen testicle-gourd;” description of male symptoms of elephantiasis; nickname for \(\ddot{m}\ddot{e}\ddot{m}\ddot{\ddot{g}}\ddot{g}\ddot{f}\ddot{f}\ddot{r}\ddot{f}\ddot{i}\ddot{n}\) to be used by non-xylophonists.

**ble** – big
**boo** – older sibling
**boo** – woven mat

**bure** – (n.) initiate

**bwen** – spirit of the bush, jinn (J: \(\ddot{j}\ddot{i}\ddot{n}\ddot{n}\)\n
**cobe** – witch or other malicious entity that attacks and “eats” people wandering in the bush after nightfall.
daga – younger sibling
dan-dunun – royal drum, only used to announce death of the mangan.
daane – hunter (J: donso)
dennin – small, barrel-shaped drum played with baan. Existed before the baan, and played by ka kan.
dio – “social secret,” anything that is sacred, secretive, or otherwise imbued with spiritual power
diobaanden – second note of baan scale, “dissonant.”
dioku – “dio language;” secret language taught during initiation (nogo).
dø – millet beer (J: dolo)
døø – in front of / alongside
doo – child
doo nee – baby
dunnun – drum
dan-dunnun – royal drum played only for the installation of a new mangan
dze – good/sweet (J: di)
dzo – mouth; hunger
firin – to sweep
fin – two (20
føen – wife
føgø – to wash/bathe
fuie – cowrie shell
gi (or ji) – power objects and cults
gi-ki – “gi-house,” structure within every Sambla compound used to house cult and power objects.
gio – to see
gø – to learn
gødege – morning
gua – land/region
guo – village
guo-sera – village chief (“village guardian”)
guo-jen-ka – “village-in front of-ka;” ka family that is selected to be in charge of affairs of the chief, his family, and the village.
gun – under
guru – too much (J: kojugu)
gyera – place
janen – evening
jen – in front of
jio – thirst
jo – water (J: ji)
jon – slave class, a status usually obtained through personal debt or as a means of controlling anti-social behavior.
ju – to say
jun – the bush, used loosely to refer to any location outside of a Sambla residence.
ka – artisan class; includes
  baan-beren-ka: xylophonists
dio-ka: spiritual protectors
tsun-dege-ka: leather workers
  ka kan: a separate class of praise singers and practitioners of certain Sambla instruments that existed before the xylophone.
kan – white, pure, clean
ke – to go
ki – death
ki – house
  kidöö – literally “in front of/alongside the house,” implying the extended family members living in a single compound; used primarily in greetings: “a kidöö kuon?” (how is your family?).
  kisera – chief/head of family (generally the father/husband)
köbi – antelope-horn
kök – short
kërmba – to arrange
kön – head
  konkö – skull
konön (kön) – “group work” done by a collective that takes turns working communally in each member’s fields.
ko – large, antelope-like ungulate
kö – grave
  kökëmba – “grave-arrange;” diviner, seeks reason for person’s death (north: togota)
kösi – friend
koko – mythical monster that can drink lakes and eat entire villages. Its physical manifestation is sonically represented by a bull-roarer, also known as koko.
konsoka – grave-digger
koo – to (local staple made from millet or corn flour and hot water)
komin – nine (9)
kote – hollow calabash gourd receptacle with neck intact; often used to transport water.
kouy – calabash gourd (in natural state)
kpoo – chair/stool
ku – language
kuie – something that is unknown or not understood, question
  kuie din – “question search,” the act of throwing cowries by a diviner in search of answers to something that is not known or understood from the ancestors, such as the reason for a person’s death.
kure – man
kuri – circumcision
kwaa – to farm
  kwaañsa – farmer
kwe – to sing
kya – basket
kye – hand
kyere – to sleep
lunka – armpit tension drum played with baan; may have originated in another group
maan – rice (J: malo)
mangan – spiritual “chief” of a Sambla territory (one or more villages)
mi – to drink (J: min)
mini – woman
  mini faga – “woman-steal,” marriage by elopement
  mini sege – “woman-new,” bride
  mini sege sennan – “woman-new-husband,” bridegroom
  mini sɔnma – “woman-dance,” marriage ceremony (J: furu siri)
  mini tsin bwɔ – engagement of a young girl (arranged marriage).
mo – person (J: mɔgɔ)
mɔnsɔrc – headscarf
mween – small
na – four (4)
en – to come
ni – father
nɔnɔnɔsan – food
  nɔnɔnɔnɔsan – to eat
nogo – male initiation ritual, only practiced in Surukudingan (Kuruweɛko) today.
noñ – five (5)
nan – mother
negege – wrist bells worn by Sambla xylophonists; also worn on male dancer’s ankles
nege – salt
nɛmɔgɔfirin – composite gourd hanging under largest bass key on a baan; considered
  a fetish and “father” of the instrument; locus of baan sacrifices; acquired from
  the Tusia (T: toŋ)
pin – to run
piin – small, clay pot drums played with the baan, tuned to two of the notes of the
  baan scale; played by xylophonists; acquired from the Tusia (T: plin).
pogo – plastic or gourd ladle
pwe-sera – “knife-holder,” person designated to perform all of the family’s ritual
  sacrifices (north: kpeden-sera)
sa – river
saa – class of landowners and farmers; descendants of the original settlers of the area
  and those considered the only “true” Sambla.
saga – sheep (J: saga)
san – personal shrines kept in the owner’s house: small ceramic bowls filled with
  water, or small, ovoidal structures of clay that protrude from the ground.
san kire – to pray
sennan – husband
seeñ- – prefix used to express anything Sambla
  seeñgua – Sambla country
  seeñku – Sambla language
  seeñkure – Sambla man
  seeñmini – Sambla woman
sege – new
sera – guardian/keeper (J: tigi)
si – clay pot
sia – Bobo-Dioulasso
sijin – market, week
sio – to marry
so – to bury
sonma – dance
so – song
soen – one (1)
soko – sweet, nice, beautiful (J: jí)
son – sky
  son.ta – sun (“sky-fire”)
sue – three (3)
ta – fire (J: tasuma)
tegon – chicken; also the number 20
tigi – to stop, to climb
tiø mini – co-wife
tiçon – clay or wooden bowl
to (tyo) – to know
tó – ten (10)
togo – “final initiation,” performed on elders to prepare them for death.
tsee – to ask
tsin (v.) – to jump, often used in reference to dancing
tsin (adv.) – under
tumaa – praise (tumaa ka – “praise singer,” tumaa so – “praise song”)
tiye – to speak
tye – black
wée – money
APPENDIX IV – SELECT BAAN REPERTOIRE

My repertoire

The following are the titles and information about the twenty songs that I learned to play on the baan. I learned all three parts, solo, accompaniment, and bass, as well as the song passages and text from my primary teacher, Sadama Diabate, assisted regularly by his younger brother Seydou (a.k.a. Kanajwe). The mode of the piece is indicated in parentheses (see Chapter 4 for more on baan modal system).

1. “Bwënde Gwɔ Sira So” (baapa); “Bwënde-village-chief-song”
   This song commemorates the chief of Bwënde (S: Gbenegun), and it is played at any event where the chief is present. It may also be played in his absence, if anyone present wants to commemorate him by requesting the song. It is always followed by the song, “Brunbre So.”

2. “Brunbre So” (torontor cotenon)
   Meaning unknown.

3. “Çe Don So” (baapa); “blacksmith-child-song”
   This song commemorates the life of a blacksmith by honoring the blacksmiths’ children, who will perpetuate the family work and tradition. In the song, the xylophonist says that if he can’t do his work (play the baan), he will become a “normal person,” someone who can’t do specialized work like playing the baan. It is the same for the blacksmith, who also practices a vocation that is specialized and passed down through generations of blacksmith families, just like the art of the baan.

4. “Gwɔ Siri Sanñaõe” (torontor cotenon);
   This song reminds people that one day every one of us will die, no matter what you do or say. Mortality is what binds all humans together, despite our differences.

5. “Ja Don So” (torontor cotenon); “lion-child-song”
   This song was composed for the Diabate family of xylophonists, whose nickname is “lion’s child,” implying that they are vicious like a lion. However, this viciousness is not expressed through violence, but through playing the baan.

6. “Ji Te So” (torontor);
   This song is associated with the cult of dio, and it is played at times when sacrifices and offerings are made for dio. Playing this song makes the dio “come up” (J: “wuli”), which refers to the potential for spirit possession when it is played.

7. “Ka Kan Doen” (torontor cotenon); “ka kan-children”
   This is a song directed to children of the ka kan, but it is actually a praise song for the ka kan and their music tradition.
8. “Koko So” (*baŋa, tɔrɔntɔrɔn*); “koko-song”

This song is played for the annual emergence of the Koko, or terrible mythical beast that terrorizes villages and young children. Only adult men and xylophonists who have been initiated to the Koko may participate in the ceremony, and this song is played to accompany the Koko, which is represented by the sound of a bull-roarer to terrify the women and children hiding inside.

9. “Mini Soko Ke Soenje” (*tɔrɔntɔrɔn*); “woman-beautiful-is-one-not”

This song proclaims the beauty of Sambla women everywhere. It was composed during the reign of Si-Boro Traore, the cruel and notorious canton chief assigned to Sambla country by the French in the early 20th century. Si-Boro was known for coming into villages, lining up all the women, and taking whichever ones he wanted as his wives, regardless if they were already married. This song pleads to Si-Boro that there are many other beautiful women out there, so he should leave their women alone.

10. “Nemundara” (*baŋa*); (name of a Tusia village)

This song was written to commemorate a battle against Samori Toure that took place in Nemundara. Samori was not defeated in this battle, but the story states that it ended with his retreat. The lyrics of this song taunt Samori as he runs away with his troops.

11. “Nogo So” (*baŋa*); “nogo-song”

*Nogo* is the Sambla initiation rite, which is only practiced today in the village of Surukudingan (S: Kuruwëëko). This song is played for the initiates to dance when they make their celebrated reentrance to the village after their period of initiation in the bush.

12. “San Cobe Di” (?); “god-cobe-gave”

The *cobe* is a witch, whose description matches that of similar figures in folklore across the Sahel. The Sambla believe that the *cobe* wanders the bush at night, capturing people and “eating” them. After a ritualized consumption of the body, it is replaced with a surrogate. The person wakes the next day unaware that anything has happened, but will die within three days. This song says that even the *cobe* was given by god, demonstrating how he created all things, both good and bad. One verse in the lyrics urges people to get their business done quickly and early so they can get home and avoid the *cobe*.

13. “Senogo So” (*baŋa*); “Senogo-song”

This song is played for the annual sacrifice and ritual to commemorate Senogo, the montain-guardian of the village of Torɔnso.

14. “Sikëmëë Dondo” (*baŋa*); “Sikëmëë-grandson” (Sikëmëë is a person’s name)

Meaning unknown.
15. “Son Sera So” (*baaña*); “sky-chief-song”  
The “sky chief” the song refers to is the *mangan*, who is attributed with the ability to bring rain. This song commemorates the *mangan*, and it is played at any event related to the *mangan*, such as fêtes or sacrifices made to him.

16. “Tan Fogo Bo” (*torøntørøn cøtenøn*)  
Meaning unknown.

17. “Togo Mon Don” (*torøntørøn*)  
This is a unique song in that it is both very old and the text is a combination of Jula and Sambla. When discussing this song, Sadama told me repeatedly that he cannot translate the entire text into Sambla, because of the “old Jula” used in the lyrics.

18. “Tue Gwø Sera So” (*baaña*); “Tue-village-chief-song”  
Praise song for the chief of Torønso, known as Tue in Sambla.

19. “Ala Ka Min D’i Ma” (*torøntørøn*); “May god give you what you need,” [Jula]  
This secular Jula song is associated with young men and can be played at any celebratory occasion.

20. “Yan Ka Di” (*torøntørøn cøtenøn*); “here-is-sweet (good),” [Jula]  
This is another secular song in Jula, this one expressing pleasure that things are not as hard as they once were in the past. The lyrics say that long ago, everyone had to eat from a calabash bowl, but now people have plates that they can eat from. This example symbolizes that while things may still be hard, people today are better off than they were in the past.

**Farming Songs**

These are songs played for work in the fields during the agricultural season. The work is done by groups of people in farming associations. The event is called *koron* or *kron* in Sambla, or *leggi leggi* in Jula. Most songs are in Sambla, and those that are in Jula are noted.

1. “Doon Soen” (“child-one,” or “Only Child”)  
This song discusses the plight of the only child, who must do all of the farm work himself. The implication here is that they are all better off that they can do the work together, rather than doing it as an only child.
2. “Fon Tsin So” (“Fonyo Threshing Song”)
   This song tells the story of a powerful wealthy person from long ago (J: faama or mansa). When anyone was in need, they could go to him for help. Because he farms so much, he always has food to share with those who are hungry. Fonio is a small grain known under various names, such as “Malian couscous” or “petit mil,” (“small millet”). It is the first crop to harvest in the early summer, and is also sometimes called “early rice.” It is a very small, nutty brown grain that is roughly the same size as very large grains of sand.

3. “Fɔrɔn Doon” (“Monkey’s Child”)
   Meaning unknown.

4. “Kamelenya Bɛ Kungo Ra” (“The Young Men are in the Bush,” Jula)
   All the strong young men are out working in the fields (bush). The lyrics and speech played in this song are in Jula, but it is considered a Sambla song.

5. “Ko Min Bɛ ðɛ Muso ðɛnɛ A ðɔɡɔn Te ðɛ Kungo” (“He Who Greets a Woman Well Has Nothing to Say in the Bush,” Jula)
   The title to this song implies that a man cannot brag to a woman if he has no abilities “in the bush,” implying farm work.

6. “Kua ðɔɡɔn ðnãɛ” (“farmers-together-are not,” J: “sɛnɛ ðɔɡɔn te”)
   If there is no group work (kron), there will be no food and people won’t eat.

7. “Kungo Wulu” (“Bush Dog,” Jula)
   People work like dogs in the field, but they become strong from the hard work. The title translated to Sambla would be “Jímɛ Jíjɛ.”

8. “Kure Lin ðnɛ Sonta Je” (“man-is-fleeing-sun-from,” or “Hunger Will Kill Your Wife”)
   When the sun is high at noon, hunger can kill. Another line refers to how it (hunger/the sun/famine) can kill not only you, but your wife and family, too.

9. “Mèɛ Lèɛ ɛjɔ Ta ɛn Fìɛnɛ a Dzɔ ɛn Togo Doe” (“they-say-that-bone-heats-in-your-mouth-will-remain-still”)
   The moral to this somewhat vague song is that if you don’t want to work, you won’t have anything (food); you won’t find anything to eat.

    You put the salt in the work to do it well, just like you put salt in the sauce to make it taste good. The song is telling the workers to “put some salt” in their work.

“Jeliba is not reserved exclusively for farming, but it is played in this context as well. The song says that people who don’t give to the jeli (in this case, baan player) are not good (don’t please the jeli). This song serves as a reminder that the baan players are musicians and must be paid for their work."
APPENDIX V – SELECTED TRANSCRIPTIONS

Below are selected transcriptions of some of the songs that I learned in the course of my lessons during my research period. For each transcription, the solo, accompaniment, and bass parts are all written on separate staves, and where possible, notes with stems pointing up represent the upper/treble hand (right hand for solo and bass players, left hand for accompaniment player), and notes with stems pointing down represent the lower/bass hand (left hand for solo and bass players, right hand for the accompaniment player).

The transcriptions include an introduction played by the soloist, the basic, repeated patterns played by each part, variations of the patterns for the solo part if applicable, speech passages for the song played by the soloist, and some songs have a secondary section where the players move up an octave and either play the same patterns, a variation of the former patterns, or entirely new patterns for the second part of the piece, which is generally faster and accompanies more animated dancing. Essentially, whatever Sadama taught me to play for a particular song has been included in the transcriptions. Different melodic themes have been marked A, B, C, variations are indicated as A’, B’, etc. The order of patterns, solo passages, and other musical events is not presented as a set form or composition. Rather, it represents one of many ways that the piece can be performed, and the patterns are also shown without any personal variation that the soloist and bass players would apply to their respective parts, which is an essential quality to the performance practice of this music.
List of Transcriptions:

1. “Bwënde Gwɔ Sira So” – song for the chief of Bwënde
2. “Ja Don So” – lion-child song
3. “Koko So” – song for the Koko
4. “Nemundara” – song for the village of Nemundara
5. “Senogo So” – song for the guardian mountain of Torønsø
6. “Sikëmëë Dondo” – grandchild of Sikëmëë

* see Appendix IV for more complete explanations of each song
Bwènde Gwo Sira So

Solo

Acc.

Bass

8

Solo

Acc.

Bass

15

* verse variation I
second melody begins here
Senogo So
Sikèmèè Dondo
Pattern rises an octave and increases in tempo, with slight variation

* solo speech passage

etc.
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Arutiunev, Serghei A.

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Bazin, Jean

Bazin, Jean and Emmanuel Terray (eds.)

Beier, Ulli

Bendor-Samuel, John and Rhonda L. Hartell

Berliner, Paul F.
Binger, Captain Louis-Gustave

Bird, Charles

Bird, Charles and John Hutchison and Mamadou Kanté

Blench, Roger

Bognolo, Daniela

Boone, Olga

Branger, Danièle

Camara, Sory

Carlson, Robert

Coulibaly, Samadou

Charry, Eric

Conrad, David C. and Barbara E. Frank

Cooke, Peter

Crozet, (Dr.)
Delafosse, Maurice  
Delobson, A.A. Dim  
De Tressan. cf. Lavergne de Tressan.
Deutsch, Diana, Trevor Henthorn, and Mark Dolson  
Dwyer, David J.  
Englebert, Pierre  
Euba, Akin  
Godsey, Larry Dennis  
Goody, J. R.  
Gordon, Raymond G., Jr. (ed.)  
Greenberg, Joseph H.  
Hale, Thomas A.  
Hanna-Vergara, Emily G.  
Hartog, Thierry

Hébert, Jean P.B.


Institut National de la Statistique et de la Demographie

Jessup, Lynne

Johnson, John W.

Johnon, John W., Thomas A. Hale, and Stephen Belcher (eds.)

Jones, A. M.

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Locke, David


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Moralés, José

Morse, Mary Lynn

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Nikièma, Norbert

Nketia, J. H. Kwabena

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3/21/2004; Konkolikan, Burkina Faso

Traore, Alexis
4/18/2004; Bwende, Burkina Faso

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4/18/2004; Bwende, Burkina Faso

Traore, Si
3/25/2004; Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso

Traore, Tene
12/23/2003; Bwende, Burkina Faso

Woma, Bernard
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DISCOGRAPHY

This discography is an attempt to catalog all of the recordings that feature African xylophone music, available and out of print, as well as recordings of music specifically from Burkina Faso. It includes some videos that are devoted to African xylophones and archive recordings. It is divided by country and region of Africa. This is and will remain a work in progress, and while I would like it to be comprehensive, that may simply be an unattainable goal.

Incomplete information is indicated with a question mark. For the listings of recordings from Burkina Faso, I have indicated the ethnic group(s) represented in the recordings in parentheses at the end of the citation, unless the ethnic group is indicated in the title. No parenthetical indication is made on recordings of Burkinabe music that does not include xylophones. Reissues have been indicated where appropriate.

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Bisceglia, Jacques, prod.

Broekhuysse, Jan
1973 Samo-Muziek mit Boven. Tropen Museum, RC-266. (Samo)

Chorale Naaba Sanom
1977 Special Festac, Lagos. Club Voltaïque du Disque, CVD-005. (Mossi)

Coulibaly, Lassina

Coulibaly, Lassina, and Yan Kadi Faso

Dabiré, Gabin

Diabate, Mamadou
2001 Sababu Man Dogo. Extraplatte, 470-2. (Sambla and Jula)
2002 Keneya. Extraplatte, 510-2. (Sambla)
2003 Sira Fila. Extraplatte, 610-2. (Sambla and Jula)
2005 Folikelaw. Radio Österreich, 384. (Sambla and Jula)
2006 Kamalenya. Extraplatte, 710-2. (Jula)
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2009 Sambla Fadenya, Extraplatte, 870-2 (Sambla)

Diara, Kassoum
1996 Kassama Percussions. Playasound, 65170.

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2004 Dianako. Playasound, 65278.

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Djembe, Tahiru

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Drame, Adama
1979  *Rhythms of the Manding*. Philips.
1997  *30 Years of Jembe (San Bissaba Foli)*. Playasound, 65177.
2001  *Tama (Voyages)*. Sunset France/Playasound, 65244.
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2003  *Duniya*. [unknown label] (French)

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1962  *Haute Volta*. Ocora, SOR-10. (Mossi, Lobi and Bambara/Jula ?)
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1999  *Prophet 9 : Burkina Faso*. Kora Sons/Philips, 538720-2. (Lobi
          xylophone ; Gan, Bisa, Mossi)

Echo del Africa National (also Dynamic Jazz and Dynamic los Bobolais)

Fà Kiyen Yiriba

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1960  *Gom Kou dougou*. Philips, 424.811. (Mossi)

La Famille Dembele
1997  *Aira Yo, La Danse des Jeunes Griots*. Arion, 1596.

Farafina
          2026-2).
          Intuition, 3206).

Fomtugol
n.d.  *Haji Pendo*. Daqui, 332023. (northern – Fula, Touareg ?)
Foofango
1999  *Foofango*. Contre-Jour, 006. (Fula-Western fusion)

Frères Coulibaly (Badenya), Les
1999  *Burkina Faso*. Studio Son, 026 22 3091. (Swiss)
2002  *Seniwe*. Trace, 38801.

Gaudin, Bernard
1967  *Sons et Visages de l’Est Volta*. Independent, DT-506/507. (Gurmantche, xylophone?).

Hill, Richard, prod.
1977  *Sounds of West Africa: the Kora & the Xylophone*. Lyriciord, M1830.

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Bwa xylophones)
1983  *Rhythms of the Grasslands: Music of Upper Volta, Volume II*. Nonesuch,
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1997a  *L’Art du Balafon*. Arion, 60403. (Siamou, Birifor, Gan, Dagara, Dian, and
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1997b  *Burkina Faso: Réjoussances chez les Siamou*. Peoples/Arion, 920.
2003  *Tambours et djembes du Burkina Faso*. Playasound. (DVD)

Kienou, Amadou
2004  *Sya (Djembe, Tama, & Chant)*. Dunya, FY8083.

Koko du Burkina Faso

Koné, Madou and Benno Sterzer
2001  *Balafon – Songs from Africa*. Extraplatte 322-2. (Jula)

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Landaya (feat. Mamadou Diabate)  

Loncke, Sandrine, prod.  

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1956  *Au Cœur du Soudan*. Le Chant du Monde, LD-S-8246. (Bwa, Bamana)  

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1998  *Koudougou*. Daqui, 322002. (Mossi)

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*n.d.*  *M’Demba et Mignamba*. Disques Dom, V2. (Mossi)

Various artists (unknown or not indicated)  
197-  *Afrique noire: panorama de la musique instrumentale*. Longue Durée, 409. (Lobi)  
1997  *Afrique*. Ocora Radio France, 560065. (Lobi)  
1997  *La Voix des Peuls*. Harmonia Mundi.  
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2002a  *Masters of the Xylophone: Friend, Well Come!* Villebon sur Yvette, France : Super XAO. (VHS)


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Houis, Maurice


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Okie, Packard L., prod.

1955 *Folk Music of Liberia.* Folkways, FE-4465. (“Mandingo” balafon, probably Maninka)

**Mali**

Bangaly, Lamissa.


Diabate, Kélétigui

2004 *Sandiya.* Contre-Jour, 012. (originally released in 2001)

Diallo, Yaya

Keita, Molobaly

Kochyne, Serge

Kone, Ladj
1959 *Présenté par Amara Kamara*. Philips, 424.803 BE. (jeli/Senufo?)

Koulibaly, Sinali
1959 *Sinali Koulibaly et ses Balafons*. Philips, 424.802 BE. (Senufo)

Prudon, Robert, prod.

Sacko, Monkontafe
n.d. *‘Echos du Mali.’ Sacko Monkontafe Accompagné par Diabata Mamadou et Sissoko Dialy Mady*. Vogue, EPL-7763. (not sure which type, accompanies singer)

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1995 *Hommage à Lamissa Bangali*. Yattassaye.
1998a *Cinporoko Nonougoro – Jeff Sharel Remix*. Cobalt, HBM281. (LP House remix)
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Kouyate, Diombo and Sourakata Koite

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Suso, Foday Musa  
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Bobo, Bissa, Yarsé, Mossi, Bwaba, Fulani, Gouin, Jula, Kassina, and  
Marka, unknown which include xylophone).

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**Lobirifor-Dagarti**: Bawa (2 xylophones, 2 drums, 1 flute, castanets,  
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frame drums), F2; Sebere (recreational/cult dance: 2 xylophones, drums,  
castanets, 2 knee buzzers on dancers), F2; Sukpere (xylophone, drum,  
double gong, castanet); Gun (xylophone played by Karaba Lobi: Pøw  
købø, Kunbil arful wak, Bør, Nai Døndø), LD 1-5  
**Sisaala**: Guola (Recreational: xylophone, drum, 2 metal castanets)
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Gonçalves, Armindo
2004  *Xylophone Masters: Angola*. Marimbalafon, MBCD 005. (Mbundu)

Cameroon

Nikiprowetzky, Tolia
1965  *Musiques du Cameroun: Bakweri, Bamileke, Bamoun, Beti*. Ocora, OCR-25. (Bamun xylophone, Bamileke-Bafoussam *djan*)

Ritzenthaler, Robert and Pat
1961  *Music of the Camerouns*. Folkways, FE-4372. (Bamenda *njung*)

Central African Republic

Duvelle, Charles
1962a  *République Centrafricaine*. Ocora, OCR-11. (Dakpa)
1962b  *Musique Centrafricaine*. Ocora, OCR-12. (*kalangba* and *lingassio* xylophones)

Le Bonin, Sylvie, prod.

Chad

Groupe Gosrabe
2004  *Xylophone Masters: Chad*. Marimbalafon, MBCD 007. (Sara, Sarakaba)

Group Guelbe
2004  *Xylophone Masters: Chad*. Marimbalafon, MBCD 004. (Sara.

Congo (Brazzaville)

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Tracey, Hugh

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Democratic Republic of Congo

Tracey, Hugh, prod.

Verwilghen, Loe A., prod.
1952  *Folk Music of the Western Congo*. Folkways, FE-4427. (Bapende xylophone)

Equitorial Guinea

Courlander, Harold
1950  *Music of Equatorial Africa*. Folkways, FE-4402. (Yaswa marimbas)

Madagascar

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Courlander, Harold
1957  *Africa South of the Sahara*. Folkways, 4503. (Chopi timbila)

Tracey, Hugh, prod.


Tanzania

Blacking, John
1956  *Music from Petauke of Northern Rhodesia, Vol. 2*. Folkways, FE-4202. (Nsenga limba [one-note xylophones w/calabash resonator], ulimba [eight-note xylophone “with spider web mirltons”])

Tracey, Hugh, prod.
Uganda

Badhiru, Balyagomba

2004 Xylophone Masters: Uganda. Marimbalafon, MBCD 006. (Mbaire)

Tracey, Hugh

1950 Music of Africa Series No. 8: Music of the Uganda Protectorate. London, LB-832. (Nyoro ntara; Ganda amadinda)


Zimbabwe

Tracey, Hugh, prod.

1950 Music of Africa Series No. 19: Songs from the Roadside No. 2 – Rhodesia. Gallotone, GALP-1113. (reissued?)