

* 20. Dynamics and variations in the conception and performance of (E)jengi, guardian spirit ...

15991 - Hunting taboo and Jengi of the Baka in southeastern Cameroon

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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The Baka have a peculiar taboo: the man who delivers the first spear blow or gunshot to an elephant is prohibited from eating the hunted animal's meat. If the hunter ate the meat, he would never again succeed to kill an elephant. Elephant hunts are often carried out with the gun provided by neighboring Bantu farmers. The gun owners usually take the tusks, and the Baka take the meat. After an elephant is killed, all of the participants in the hunting expedition, except the hunter who shot the animal, cut and smoke the meat. The hunter goes off alone to forage for honey. Some young men return to the village and perform Jengi who makes the dying of the elephant known to the people. They meet up with the others at the carving camp, where an elephant feast begins excluding the hunter. In the Baka hunting tradition, $m\epsilon$, the general term for the forest spirits, play an important role. They appear and perform a dance at $b\grave{e}$, the communal singing and dancing gathering. During the fieldwork in 2003, Mokondi, a kind of $m\epsilon$, were present at $b\grave{e}$ held before elephant hunts. However, the hunts fell into a draught, and then Jengi, the most powerful $m\epsilon$, came to the village. After its arrival the success rate jumped from 38% (5 kills out of 13 shots) to 83% (24/29). It is believed that Jengi is violent and aggressive in nature, but at the same time it guides the Baka to places where there is game to hunt, and guards them from all perils of the forest. Holding $b\grave{e}$ gathering with Jengi likely rendered the men shooting the guns be able to draw closer to the targets and accurately deliver fatal shots. Some Baka folk tales also imply the relevance of $m\epsilon$ to elephant hunt. There is a tale that describes a man who successfully hunts an elephant spends the night before as a $m\epsilon$, having donned its skin, and it is thus unclear for others whether it was the man or $m\epsilon$ who killed the elephant. Additionally, many tales repeatedly describe that engaging in a close relationship with $m\epsilon$, e.g. eating together, is an act that brings death to the Baka. On the basis of these points, it is possible to understand the logic behind the taboo. Provided the man who kills an elephant was to share the meat among the other members, if any of them were to die after eating the meat, the hunter would be deemed $m\epsilon$ and no longer be able to live with the others. Normally, nobody dies, which however confirms that the hunter has nothing linked with Jengi. Therefore, as long as the hunter wants both to live among the others and to retain the power of Jengi that enables him to kill elephants, he must avoid settling down the ambivalent state of his simultaneously being a human and a $m\epsilon$. In a contrast between the hunter with an empty stomach and the others with full bellies, the

ambivalent nature of the hunter, as well as of Jengi as bringers of both food and death, is reconfirmed and inscribed into the participants in the feast of elephant.

16146 - Ethnography and ethnomusicology of regional variants in the Baka's Jengi ritual

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Contrary to a general presupposition that the Baka's Jengi ritual is unchanging and homogeneous, many evidences point to its dynamics and diversity. From an ethnographical point of view, the pluriregional organisation of the ritual implies the introduction of regional distinctions which concern both the ceremonial protocol and the symbolic level. From a musicological point of view, the rituals of different regions appeal on different rhythmical patterns to accompany women's singing and Jengi's dance. As this phenomenon is unusual in ritual music in Central Africa, it questions Jengi's musical identity. The case study will examine musical features and include other symbolically relevant sound expressions. As Jengi is an ancient ritual in the Congo Basin, the authors question this diversity as well as the dynamics which express the co-existence of permanencies and diversification in the ritual expression.

16151 - The Baka Jengi and Mbendjele Ejengi in comparative context

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Ejengi or Jengi occupies a central place in the ritual systems of the Ubangian language-speaking Baka and Mikaya, and the Bantu language-speaking BaAka, BaYaka and Mbendjele. These groups are distributed across Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Gabon, and probably the western edge Democratic Republic of Congo. Bahuchet suggests that key elements of the Ejengi ritual complex were present among the proto-Baakaa ancestors of these contemporary groups during the 17th Century (Bahuchet 1992:357, 281-343; 1993:113-131). Mbendjele provide a detailed emic explanation for these differences, describing the conflict that caused the Baka to move westwards into Cameroon and Gabon and transform the symbolism and mystical power of Ejengi into Jengi.

Early twentieth century accounts describe the form of Ejengi/Jengi performances with many similarities to those observed today. However, studies of the ritual in recent years reveal contrasting symbolic elaborations, and differences in ritual performances. This paper will provide a comparative analysis of the Ejengi/Jengi ritual practices and symbolism from the perspective of the Mbendjele of Republic of Congo and the Baka of Cameroon. It will end by describing the contrasting ways that the Ejengi/Jengi ritual complex is responding and changing as it encounters the global forces of conservation and the international logging industry.