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I. Writing Oral Narrative: The Role of Description and Self in Recording Living Traditions

> Lukhero's essay forcefully raises the question of the extent to which ethnographers, and in particular indigenous ethnographers, can gain access to the sentiments of the people they study without being captured by them. This empirical question is perhaps not as important as the disciplinary query: should the committed ethnographer solicit capture or try to avoid it?
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> J.A. Barnes, 1999/2000, cited in Schumaker, p. 259

At around the time I was finishing a monograph on the fictional oral narratives of the Tabwa people of Zambia, a number of doubts and questions that had been only touched on in that project reemerged to occupy my thinking.[1] At the base of these preoccupations was the problem of ethnographic authority as it has been debated over the last three or four decades. Questions of power, neocolonialism, inscription, and effacement—in the poststructuralist sense—forced me to reconsider the confusing and ambiguous experience of field research and the ways we represent it to others.[2] In particular, how can we preserve or at least frame the agency of the performers who contribute their artistry and self-assertion to our

1 See Cancel 1989.

2 As Jackson notes, it is important to "throw light on the anthropological project, for in both cases [of the dialectic between private and public performance] an interplay is implied between authorship and authority, and the knower and the known." (Jackson 2006, p. 292).

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work? In a related disciplinary question, I was not willing to carry out a purely "literary" analysis that considered mostly formal and thematic elements while playing down the living context of the storytelling sessions I had recorded. Yet, again coming back to the contextual or ethnographic dimension of the research, it was difficult to gauge exactly how much truly accurate information I could provide to the overall analysis.[3]

I will interrogate some ideas in the ongoing ethnographic/critical debate, and then suggest some strategies of description that will lead to a clearer, if not necessarily a deeper, understanding of the collection of story-performances in my fieldwork and, in particular, the narratives contained in the chapters that follow. There are many ways to go at the dynamics of living performances and these cross a number of scholarly disciplines. No one approach is entirely satisfying and any combination of methods can be both convincing and raise questions about their efficacy at the same time. I will selectively employ methods that grow out of ethnography, folklore, performance studies, literary studies and discourse analysis; ultimately using one or a combination of these as dictated by the specific situations of performance context. If there is a central concern in this project, it is to represent the storytellers who provided me material in as honest and evocative a manner as possible. "Analysis" will grow out of this concern and always return to the living situations and contexts of the field work's recordings.

Ethnographic Authority and Power

For over thirty years anthropologists, partly drawing on postcolonial and poststructuralist discourses, have been conducting a fairly radical reexamination of fieldwork and the ways it is transformed for publication. The scholars involved in this discussion are numerous, but we can profitably look at one of the more interesting discussions focusing on the historicizing of ethnographic theory and method. One of the earlier primary spurs of this discussion is Bronislaw Malinowski's field diary, published posthumously in 1967.[4] It is a fascinating work. The reader is exposed to the heretofore

3 Johannes Fabian identifies my concerns and intentions by wryly positing the scholarly genre of "the second book" wherein the researcher "having already fulfilled the academic obligation to publish his or her dissertation research in monograph form, now feels compelled (and free) to reflect on what that project was really about." (2008, p. 136)

4 Malinowski 1967.

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rare personal field insights of a seminal figure in ethnographic research. The loneliness, isolation, and periodic outbursts of xenophobia of the individual working in an alien culture are not only very human responses to the situation but also engender an intense familiarity for many who have worked in similar circumstances.

Moreover, we have evidence that Malinowski was aided by the conditions that promote the kind of research and scholarship that James Clifford, in his study of the work of Marcel Griaule, calls "ethnographic liberalism."[5] This process is framed by underlying colonial, religious or political power that allows the foreigner to move pretty much unimpeded through the area of study, empowered by the same forces that keep the local people under foreign or at least distant hegemony. From this rather privileged position, the ethnographer will often speak out against the oppressiveness of the colonial/national power structure that seeks to entrap, debilitate, or deculturate local societies. The ethnographer sees his or her efforts as something opposed, or at least not connected, to elements of that imposed hegemony. "We"—and I mean this is what I thought in 1976—are living with the local people and recording their culture in order that they have representation on the national and international level. Claims are often made for getting to "know" the other in unprecedented and unique depth through the tried and true forms of participant observation. The form of this representation will, naturally, be our unbiased, positive reporting of these ancient traditions and intricate art forms.[6]

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5 See Clifford 1983, p. 142. This insightful and thorough reading of Griaule's work sets it into a clear historical frame. Part of the study considers another French anthropologist, Griaule's contemporary and colleague, Michel Leiris, whose approach tended to move away from Griaule's certainty to throwing doubt on the concept of truly knowing another culture. "Griaule's energetic confidence in cultural representation could not be farther from Leiris' tortured, lucid uncertainty. The two positions mark off the predicament of a post-colonial ethnography. Some authorizing fiction of "authentic encounter," in Geertz's phrase seems a prerequisite for intensive research. But initiatory claims to speak as a knowledgeable insider revealing essential cultural truths are no longer credible." (p. 152)

6 When I was writing my dissertation on Tabwa oral narratives, I was both brought up short and also inspired by Ngugi wa Thiong'o's opening observations in his literary study *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature and Politics*. In his Author's Note, Ngugi warned against what Jomo Kenyatta had described as "professional friends and interpreters of the African…[who] have the arrogance of assuming they have more and closer natural ties to Africa than have Africans in the West Indies and in America. It is such people who acquire a most proprietorial air when talking of the part of Africa they have happened to visit; they carve a personal sphere of influence and champion the most reactionary and most separatist cause of whichever group among whom they happen to live. They are again the most vehement in pointing out the unique intelligence,

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The intervening years have seen a revision in my thinking, as not only humanistic but also social science writings have come to be seen as so many historically situated texts; texts that have specific points of view and particular ways of presenting material knowledge.[7] Questions of self and other, subject and object have been incorporated with historical perspectives that allow us to see such writing in context, as texts within larger frameworks and discourses. These concerns allow anthropologists, for example, to critically evaluate their methods and theories in a reflexive manner. History, language, power and empowerment are forces that suffuse ethnography of all types, despite particular methodological differences. One fascinating frame for these explorations is the first volume of the series "The History of Anthropology," entitled *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*, edited by George W. Stocking, Jr. (1983). Almost every chapter resounds with revealing information about famous fieldworkers—Franz Boas, Griaule and Malinowski, for example—and their projects, often using original field notes or early publications supplemented by the historical and contextual commentary of current critical scholarship. What I see, more than anything else, is the essentially literary core of the original writing. As Geertz and Clifford both suggest, we are actually reading/writing elaborated fictions, fictions that are, to be sure, new and eclectic in their generic make-up, but fictions, "not necessarily falsehoods," nonetheless. And, as Geertz emphasized, these are necessary fictions, for how else can we propose to do the near-impossible and write in any substantial way about cultures that are not our own?[8]

Troubled by just such concerns, anthropologist Michael Jackson followed two major monographs on the Kuranko people of Sierra Leone with a book he designates "an ethnographic novel," *Barawa and the Ways Birds Fly in the Sky* (Jackson 1986). Jackson, elsewhere, says of the book that it was "a point of no return, and of disenchantment. It ends at the edge of the sea: an ethnographer, unsure of his direction and identity, walking along the tide-line, looking down at a film of water that reflects 'pale grey

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amiability and quick wit of their adopted areas and groups." (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1972, p. xviii)

7 An important contribution to this reevaluation is Clifford and Marcus 1986.

8 Clifford, in his 1983 piece on Marcel Giraule, cites Geertz's 1968 essay on "Thinking as a moral act…": "Usually the sense of being members, however temporarily, insecurely and incompletely, of a single moral community, can be maintained even in the face of the wider social realities which press in at almost every moment to deny it. It is this fiction—fiction not falsehood—that lies at the very heart of successful anthropological field research…" (Geertz 1968, p. 154)

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clouds in a cocoa-coloured sky.'" (Jackson 1989, p. 1) In this extraordinary experiment, Jackson is able to say and do things that cross literary/disciplinary boundaries. He is able to act as an historian collating and telescoping details of the African and European explorer past, as well as weaving in family histories of his Kuranko associates to evoke the history and culture of a specific region and people. Further, he places himself in the narrative in both the third and first person, including elements of fieldwork in their profound lunacy as well as moments of gratifying insight and beauty, the various situations whereby the ethnographer is both the used and the user. His ethnographer—himself—ends the book with what most honest researchers experience, a combination of accomplishment and questions, of connectedness to local friends and a realization that those friends comprise only a small part of a much larger, more complex reality. Whose side are we on? Who has "captured" us? What is the significance of such designations?

Jackson has authored at least three sets of essays that explore these questions in a more scholarly framework. While I cannot say I enjoyed these latter observations as much as the ethnographic novel, these at least have the advantage of spelling out his concerns in a prescriptive and thereby more replicable, theoretical manner. In *Paths Toward a Clearing* he describes and employs the elements of the book's subtitle: *Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (1989). In most of the essays, the author explores various levels and entities of Kuranko society using both written and observed sources. He does not hesitate to use personal, what we might call subjective, evidence to make his points, as he employs a good deal of biographical and autobiographical material. The result is a picture of a living and breathing society, one that is every bit as knowable and confusing as our own. One of the more interesting ideas Jackson puts forth is the efficacy of an existential model for understanding Kuranko social and self-images. Jackson is less concerned with proving one idea over another than emphasizing the plural and pluralistic qualities of Kuranko society, and how these extend into what had hitherto been considered static and proven social "facts." It is also a welcome departure from older models of dominant or unyielding "tradition," built on narrow notions of ritual, religion and kinship. He takes these ideas further in *Existential Anthropology: Events, Exigencies and Effects* (2005), wherein he asserts, beyond the Sartrean notion

> …so often associated with existentialism, that our humanity consists in our individual will-to-be, a striving for self-realisation or authenticity, for most human action is less a product of intellectual deliberation and conscious

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> choice than a matter of continual, intuitive, and opportunistic changes of course—a 'cybernetic' switching between alternatives that promise more or less satisfactory solutions to the ever-changing situations at hand. (p. xii)

Jackson focuses on notions of intersubjectivity and reciprocity to guide his analyses of cultural and social behaviors in a number of societies and, by definition, the terms tend toward an analytical approach that utilizes continual shifting and recontextualizing of primary data.

I would further go along with another of Jackson's assessments (1989) that seeing ethnography as only an elaborate literary genre tends to place too narrow an emphasis on the discipline as art form rather than social science.[9] It is much more helpful to consider a balance of approaches that places the elements of ethnographer, "other," location, and time into a flexible frame. Such a frame would allow for provisional statements of analogy as well as the understanding that such comparisons and contrasts are often based on frozen moments in time that reflect certain ideas, perhaps certain individuals, and not necessarily entire societies or "realities." Geertz locates two opposed but complementary approaches to ethnographic research, grounded in the kinds of writing that present the findings of the anthropologists Claude Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski. Lévi-Strauss has always had a strong inclination to look beyond surface, or even below underlying, cultural data to deeper systemic interpretations of human social order: "… Lévi-Strauss argues that the sort of immediate, in person 'being there' one associates with the bulk of recent American and British anthropology is essentially impossible: it is either outright fraud or fatuous self-deception" (Geertz 1988, p. 46). The other side of this assertion is that "being there" does engender positive, accurate interactions of observation, participation and, significantly, exchange and dialogue.

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9 Burawoy 2003 probably states an extreme version of the critique of Geertz's reflexive/discourse approach, "In his hands ethnography becomes a mesmeric play of texts upon texts, narratives within narratives. By the end of its cultural turn, anthropology has lost its distinctive identity, having decentered its techniques of field work, sacrificed the idea of intensively studying a 'site,' abandoned its theoretical traditions, and forsaken its pursuit of causal explanation. Theory and history evaporate in a welter of discourse. Anyone with literary ambition can now assume the anthropological mantle, making the disrupted discipline vulnerable to cavalier invasion by natives and imposters. Once a social science, anthropology aspires to become an appendage of the humanities." (p. 674)

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Africans "Write Back"

> Next day the anthropologist began taking down the words of informants sent by Saif….Shrobenius's head teemed with ideas. Reeling off spirituality by the yard, the men paced the courtyard with anxious, knit brows….Saif made up stories and the interpreter translated, Madoubo repeated in French, refining the subtleties to the delight of Shrobenius, that human crayfish afflicted with a groping mania for resuscitating an African universe—cultural autonomy, he called it—which had lost all living reality; dressed with the flashy elegance of a colonial on holiday, a great laughter, he was determined to find metaphysical meaning in everything, even in the shape of the palaver tree under which notables met to chat….African life, he held, was pure art, intense religious symbolism, and a civilization once grandiose—but alas a victim of the white man's vicissitudes. (Ouologuem 1971, pp. 87–88)[10]

Another important perspective is provided by some African scholars and artists on the findings of western anthropologists regarding African culture. Years before Geertz, Clifford and others began the deconstruction of heretofore standard ethnographic writing practice, Horace Miner published a satirical, though straight-faced essay in *American Anthropologist*, titled "Body Rituals Among the Nacerima" (1956). It is a classic cautionary piece on the power that vocabulary and frames of reference, i.e. discourse, can have on descriptions of other cultures. The above quote from Yambo Ouologuem's provocative novel *Bound to Violence* [*Le devoir de violence*], moves the focus beyond skeptical views of dominant discourses to the other side, the manipulation of ethnographic "data" by the local colonial subjects. That the process can work both ways must be, by this point in time, an accepted truism. It is also clear that African intellectuals have long been aware of the many ways their societies have been written by outside explorers, colonial officers, missionaries, social scientists, creative writers and, more recently, aid workers. Even people I encountered in rural villages were self-conscious, at least initially, about how photos I took of them might be received and interpreted by residents of "*Bulaya*," the generic word for Europe and other lands of white people.

Ouologuem's book spans a long period, but the section I cited is set in the early 1900s, when the German anthropologist Fritz Shrobenius—a thinly veiled caricature of Leo Frobenius—arrives in the West African land of Nakem and begins to buy up "authentic" artifacts of local culture

10 Originally, *Le devoir de violence*, Yambo Ouologuem (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p. 102.

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and aggressively elicit information about that society. While Ouologuem's intent here is wicked satire, there is also the irony that underlies it, which is that European ethnographic studies would serve as a source of information on "real" African culture for some of the brilliant black intellectuals who, in 1930s France, originated the revolutionary cultural movement called Négritude. Among others in that group, Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Senegalese poet and nationalist, used the images of African art found in Parisian museums and discourses of traditional cultures found in works of European social science to reconstruct an African past that he and his colleagues felt they had been denied by the deculturation processes of the colonizing mission.

In the mid 1930s, Kenyan nationalist and student, Johnstone Kamau, read anthropology at the London School of Economics under Malinowski. In 1938 he published his revised thesis as *Facing Mount Kenya*, under his new name, Jomo Kenyatta. Clearly, taking control of the ethnographic discourse of the time, forming the images of his own people, the Gikuyu, as he himself deemed proper, was an important step in Kenyatta's nationalist project. This kind of "writing back,"[11] would spur a new vision that was promulgated by postcolonial authors such as Chinua Achebe. In what many feel to be the seminal novel of modern anglophone African literature, Achebe brings the tragic story of the Igbo warrior Okonkwo to a bitter and ironic conclusion by switching narrative voice and point of view to the local British District Commissioner. In two paragraphs Achebe evokes a chilling and ominous premonition, whereby the D.C. seeks to encapsulate the epic story of this "native's" death into a single paragraph for the ethnography/administrative handbook he is writing, titled: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.[12] Reclaiming an authoritative voice in self-representation, then, remains an ongoing project for African writers and scholars.

In Zambia, in the Luapula Valley, Ian Cunnison's historical and ethnographic texts have been used to valorize local customs and political practices. More significantly, one of Cunnison's research assistants, Chileya J. Chiwale, went on to conduct his own research in Lunda culture and history, especially in the collection and analysis of praise poetry. Building on an earlier history produced by a committee of elders, under the auspices of the Lunda king, Mwata Kazembe XIV, and French Catholic

11 See Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989.
12 Achebe 1959.

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Missionary Fr. Edouard Lebrecque,[13] Chiwale and Mwata Kazembe Munona Chinyanta XVIII collaborated on a study of Lunda customs and, in particular, the annual kingship festival, the Mutomboko.[14] Another long term research assistant at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute—later changed to the Institute for African Studies—Matshakaza Blackson Lukhero, built on earlier work by European researchers and wrote studies of his own people, the Ngoni of Zambia. Like Chiwale, Lukhero had a hand in reviving and codifying an annual kingship rite, the Nc'wala.[15] In all these cases, local people have found textual models to either validate or rewrite for their own purposes. Zambian scholars have consciously set out to conduct their own forms of fieldwork and evaluations of older studies.[16] The work of all non-local, and even indigenous, scholars needs to be open to similar revision and reclamation, especially as it applies to such linguistically dense representations as oral literary traditions. Clearly, whatever I write about Bemba-language oral performances is in many ways preliminary, even considering the substantial degree of collaboration that I've sought in the process of transcription, translation and interpretation.[17]

13 See Kazembe and Labrecque 1951.

14 See Chinyanta and Chiwale 1989.

15 See Lukhero 1993.

16 An excellent example of local African scholars revising work done earlier by Europeans is Chipungu, ed., 1992. Zambian anthropologist Owen Sichone evocatively states one of the reasons for him choosing to become an anthropologist was his "dissatisfaction with the accounts of Zambian life that I read in the classic literature and a desire to rework them from a Zambian perspective." (Sichone 2001, p. 371)

17 Numerous African universities contain departments of Anthropology or Sociology staffed by western-trained anthropologists. There is no shortage of monographs and articles by African ethnographers. The point I want to make is that ethnographic discourse is contentious and the scope and intent of even indigenous scholars vary widely. Sichone notes, "Many African scholars dislike anthropology intensely. I have frequently heard many political scientists and economists insult each other by referring to aspects of their work as 'anthropological'. The tarnished reputation of the discipline is blamed on anthropology having participated in the imperial strategy of divide and rule. But was anthropology the handmaiden of imperialism in a way that geology, cartography and land surveying were not?" (Sichone 2001, p. 370) Some well known ethnographic monographs by African scholars include: Francis Mading Deng, *The Dinka of the Sudan* (1972); A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo, *Traditional Ideology and Ethics Among the Southern Luo* (1976); Philip O. Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo People* (1974), etc. Bernard M. Magubane offers a well-known set of critiques of colonial social science practices and alternative African scholarly approaches that have been collected in a set of essays (2000).

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Researching Oral Traditions (1976–77)

> Fieldwork, then, is a process of intersubjective construction of liminal modes of communication. Intersubjective means literally more than one subject, but being situated neither quite here nor quite there, the subjects involved do not share a common set of assumptions, experiences, or traditions. Their construction is a public process. …That the communication was often painstaking and partial is an equally important theme. It is the dialectic between these poles, ever repeated, never quite the same, which constitutes fieldwork. (Rabinow 1977, p. 155)

When I began conducting research in Zambia in 1976, I was only vaguely aware of the unusually rich tradition of ethnographic and sociological studies in what used to be called Northern Rhodesia. While the history of this research is well documented, I want to briefly describe the framework of scholarship that evolved and how I came to interact with it. Although Zambia is not the only former colony to be well represented by a large corpus of ethnographic and historical social research, the creation of a formal institution for these endeavors suggests a deep commitment to such efforts by the colonial power. The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute came into being in the late 1930s. It both grew out of and was spurred on by the efforts of pioneering ethnographers such as Godfrey Wilson, Audrey Richards and Max Gluckman.[18] Following the Institute's establishment, a most impressive coterie of researchers would eventually produce numerous ground-breaking studies, creating a nearly unprecedented body of data and methodological practices, modeled on what was broadly identified as "British functionalism," that would serve future scholars in that and other regions of ethnographic endeavor.

Links to seminal thinkers of British social anthropology were prevalent among these scholars, many of whom were students of Malinowski and/ or A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. By the late 1940s, a strong link between the Institute and Manchester University grew into a continuous reciprocal flow of scholars and publishing opportunities. Some of the most influential and highly regarded book-length studies of the time appeared under the Manchester University Press/Rhodes-Livingstone Institute imprimatur, for this reason the authors of these monographs are collectively known as the "Mancester School". At independence, the name was changed from Rhodes-Livingstone to the Institute for African Studies, linked to the new University of Zambia. From its inception, directors of the Institute were

18 See Schumaker 2001.

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themselves respected researchers who enabled affiliates in their projects, perpetuating a tradition of thorough and careful fieldwork. Consequently, there was a near industrial amount of scholarly production coming from the IAS in the 1950s through the early 1970s.[19]

From December 1975 until March 1977 I conducted research and field work in Zambia under the auspices of the Institute for African Studies. My initial exposure to the Institute was as a resident research affiliate, expected to take part in the intellectual and quotidian life at that location and on the campus of the University. Armed with a good deal of archival work, personal contacts, written government permission and ten weeks of intensive language study my wife and I began almost ten months of field work in three Tabwa villages. We were sanctioned by the government and university, and this allowed me to secure the help and cooperation of local government workers at schools, health clinics, fisheries, courts, game control, and agricultural stations. However, once "officially" situated, the work began with no guarantees that local people would help us in our endeavors to record storytelling traditions. In fact, it seemed most people were suspicious of us, not because of political relations with South Africa or Rhodesia,[20] but simply because we were strangers and did not fit the usual conceptions of what white people might be doing in the area. We were not missionaries, doctors or technical advisors. We did not have children, so some neighbors were not even convinced that we were really married; some thought we were brother and sister. Paul Rabinow discusses a similar situation in his memoir *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977):

> In fact, I was forcing my way into the village through my official connections. That was the only way that it could be done. Informing the officials had been

19 Moreover, the seminal early studies have led to a more recent secondary wave of revisionary work, treating the same areas and people that some of the more famous the Institute researchers had written about. For example, Audrey Richards' *Land, Labour and Diet: An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe* (1939) has been revisited and recontextualized in Moore and Vaughan's *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutritition and Agriculture in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890–1990* (1994). Similar revision has been conducted on William Watson's socio-economic study *Tribal Cohesion in a Money Economy: A Study of the Mambwe People of Zambia* (1958) by Johan Pottier in *Migrants No More: Settlement and Survival in Mambwe Villages, Zambia* (1988).

20 From the end of the 1960s to the late 1980s, Zambia was frequently under a state of emergency because of its involvement as a "Frontline State" in the wars of liberation in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Southwest Africa (Namibia), Angola, Mozambique and, finally, South Africa. Security concerns often focused on foreigners, especially whites, who stood out so obviously. See Molteno 1979 for what was at the time a common opinion of the US role in the region and the suspicions brought to bear on foreign, especially American, academics and researchers.

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> unavoidable, but their approval had made the affair a dangerous one from the villagers' perspective. To think that these rural countrymen should have accepted my proposal at face value and graciously granted it in the spirit of mutual respect between cultures is absurd. Why, the villagers asked, should a rich American want to move into a poor rural village and live by himself in a mud house when he could be living in a villa in Sefrou? Why us? Why get ourselves into a situation where the government holds us jointly responsible for this stranger? What's in it for us? The risks are all too evident. (pp. 77–78)

Our initial contacts and early friends and neighbors were educated Zambians of one type or another: the local school teachers, the local health clinic workers, people who worked for the government fisheries, the court clerk, and the Rural Council postman. All spoke at least some English and all had some prior experience with "Europeans." Because these people, often not from this particular area or not even native speakers, all spoke Bemba with much greater facility than either my wife or I, they served as initial bridges to the local people. They provided introductions or explained our presence there. In fact, the original idea of settling in Mukupa Katandula came from a Scots Catholic White Father who worked in the district. He felt the village was the most remote of the three Tabwa chiefs' courts and therefore was, by his thinking and mine at the time, more "traditional." It was also his early intervention that spurred the village authorities to approve our stay and help to find us a government house that was at the time unoccupied.

My first efforts to tape record storytellers were characterized by uneven and at times inadequate language skills. As I struggled to transcribe the material, I began enlisting the help of several local schoolboys. They became another inroad to village residents. After a while, for their own reasons, people decided to get involved with our efforts to record stories, and I had a fairly steady stream of storytellers to work with. We established a method of compensation that involved the giving of gifts over time, rather than a simple "payment" for stories told. Although I still felt deep down, in retrospect quite naively, that the stories should be freely provided in the spirit of scholarly cooperation, the preservation of vital traditions, and the avoidance of commercialization or commodification of these verbal arts, it became clear that the exchange of gifts or services was one of the most common ways to establish relationships between people. In fact, what I was doing was forming ties that, over the years, have proven to be both personally gratifying and professionally invaluable.

As the year progressed, and we moved to the two other main villages of the Tabwa chiefs, Kaputa and Nsama, our language skills improved

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dramatically and we were able to conduct everyday interactions much more effectively. The initial uncertainty and self-consciousness over being the center of attention wherever we walked, of being stared at constantly, of frustrations over not understanding what people were saying or knowing how to express ourselves had faded into a more comfortable and secure situation. We progressively came to know and interact with our neighbors and get involved in various everyday activities and special occasions. Later, my wife and I ended up spending almost two months in the Northern Province capital, Kasama, where I did translation work with two students from Malole's St. Francis Secondary School. After another month or so in Lusaka, we returned to the US where the task of writing the dissertation would be completed.

In all this time, I never questioned the notion itself of my presence among the Tabwa. Trained in a renowned area studies program and rigorous academic department, using a half-century of ethnographers, folklorists and literary scholars as my model, and sanctioned, as it were, by Zambian church and state, I simply went in and did my research, initiated some marvelous friendships, enjoyed the company of a host of different nationalities and social strata, and went home. As with many scholars, the period of reflection really began when writing up my data and trying to transcribe and translate the stories I'd collected. The more I wrote and translated the more obscure the conditions of research and the contexts of the performances became. I was literally textualizing living events, distilling story texts, and isolating moments out of a continuum, and this was somehow depleting the richness of my experiences and the complex interactions that surrounded these sessions.

Though I found ways to incorporate more and more of these elements into what eventually became my first monograph, I became increasingly uncomfortable with the use of an ethnographic frame in my writing and with the necessity to take charge of all these cultural elements and order them for my readers. Nowhere in this writing, for example, is there a sense that Zambia was undergoing many changes as we sat in villages and recorded stories. That our neighbors were also undergoing changes was not evident in the way I wrote about them. I remember being most obviously struck by this notion in 1988, when I realized that my closest friend among the Tabwa, a man very near to my age, was himself undergoing fundamental upheavals in his life that I'd never expected. A devout Jehovah's Witness, with a close relationship to his family and a propensity for industrious, back-breaking labor in farming, salt-making and fishing,

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my friend revealed to me in 1988 that he had divorced his wife and gone to work for the government cooperative union. This also meant that he had to leave the Watchtower movement that prohibited involvement in secular government activities. Somehow I'd set him into a static, rather romanticized image that depended on all these socially defining elements and was rather shocked, perhaps even disillusioned, that he'd taken such a different course in his life. Why had I so easily framed him in such a position, somehow immune from the possibility of personal change?[21] This eventually brought me back to the problem of representation in my writing and thinking.

Locating a Discipline/Method

There is, moreover, a hazy boundary between the study of oral narrative performance and what might strictly be termed ethnographic research. The former is in some ways harder to pin down than the latter. In my initial work, I did not ignore individuals or their social contexts, indeed that kind of information was important in locating them and their storytelling efforts within Tabwa society. However, the premise then and now is that their creations rely upon aesthetic form and a cultural knowledge of narrative conventions and imagery. The way the narratives worked involved the manipulation of a very old system of discourse, image and structure to create seemingly fresh, new narrative experiences. Ethnography, if it takes up storytelling performance at all, often focuses on the social over the aesthetic, looking for what the tales or performances say about the society. Geertz may see the Balinese cockfight as a kind of art form, but his concern is what it says about the Balinese.[22] Even discourse analysis kinds of approaches often lose the art—at the same time claiming to be identifying aesthetics—in favor of evaluating performances in frames of linguistic competence or the jockeying for power in social relationships.[23]

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21 Jackson makes a similar point when he says, "Clearly, therefore, it would be a mistake to reduce any person to some abiding essence or self that remains constant throughout an entire lifetime, or to reduce a human life to the general conditions that define his class, her culture, or his credo. Even to speak of variations on a theme is a misnomer, for any one moment every variation is in effect experienced as a theme." (Jackson 2006, p. 294)

22 See Geertz 1973.

23 These approaches are grounded in the work of Roman Jakobson, but more readily in the pioneering work in language and ethnography of Dell Hymes (1964, 1974, 1996). Important studies in this vein include Bauman 1986; Labov 1972; Scollon and Scollon 1979; Shuman 1986 and 2005; Tannen 1982.

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In any event, although my work certainly crosses disciplinary boundaries, in the end I am not an ethnographer. I don't focus on the same concerns and do not try to build models that broadly explain cultural behavior. This, therefore, might be the boundary between ethnographic and oral tradition scholarship that keeps me mostly on one side rather than the other. My observations are more likely to look at behavior or intent only in specific situations without drawing wider conclusions, except for the instances where overlap with other examples seems obvious and suggests recurring patterns. Moreover, my aesthetic evaluation of a performance is drawn from the combination of story elements and the storyteller's skills in conveying that narrative vision to an audience.

In a very real sense, then, one concern I had about this study is identifying my object of investigation; narrative "text" and/or performer and/or context. The question was simplified in 1988–89 by going to places where I knew virtually no one and ended up with a pretty clear object of study: video records of the performances, memory, some field notes and whatever other printed or oral data I could apply to the events and their various texts. Consequently, this could not approach the deeply interactive research explored in Tedlock's marvelous evocation of a spectrum of earlier studies that attempted real dialogical engagement.[24] His citing of an ethnographer/local subject interaction from Dwyer (1982) suggests the ongoing and shifting paradox of trying to represent such interactions.

> Dwyer: And what do you think that I think about you? What might I say to myself about you?
>
> Faqir Muhammad: You're the one who understands that. Why, am I going to enter into your head? (p. 285)

Titon (2003) describes a related consideration when it comes to discussing living performances, which is the unavoidable textualization that scholarship entails.

> A deeper dilemma turns on the practice of performance analysis, for insofar as analysis constitutes its object, it is forced to remove performance from living processes and treat it as a text. This dilemma appears to be inherent in our scholarly procedures, not only because we write our scholarship as text but because analysis and interpretation are directed at objects, and if a text is anything that can be interpreted, then there is no interpretation without text. And so even when performance theory has driven folkloristic analysis,

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24 Tedlock 1995.

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> transcribed texts remain in our work, embedded now in new interpretive contexts. (p. 78)

This challenge is at the base of how we choose to examine story performances and will constitute, along with the ongoing questions of reflexivity, authority and local individual assertion, the methodological discourse of this study.

This current project explores ways to consider narrative performances, and to concentrate on representing these performances and how I gathered them, entailing what is often referred to as "the vagaries of fieldwork," among other concerns. Moreover, because what I recorded in 1988–89 was shaped by whatever the performers wished to give—or, more accurately, "sell"—me, the material I will consider here is a generic mix of mostly "fictional" narratives, proverbs, heroic praises, some history, and some explorations of topics people felt were of significance. Though the recordings and transcriptions form objects of analysis, "texts," they will be only part of a wider examination of the situations and contexts of the performance events themselves. As an example of how I focus on these various events, I will describe the conditions of recording the efforts of a particular group of Bemba performers, and suggest how these can be used to evaluate the material. The goal of such a discussion is to open the examination to factors of performance context and ethnographic immediacy, thereby keeping the performance and collection in an actual historical moment.

My initial example is taken from research carried out during the 1988–89 academic year. I was teaching at the University of Zambia on a Fulbright award and conducting research in urban and rural Zambia. This period followed two intensive returns to the Tabwa area, for six months in 1983 and three months in 1985, to collect more narratives and information for my first monograph. My research goal in 1988–89 was to record material from all the Bemba-speaking groups of Northern and Luapula Provinces. The task was much greater than I could realistically accomplish during university holidays and the ten weeks of spring term that I was given leave, but I did manage to visit and record performers from five ethnic groups; securing a somewhat representative sampling from each. The nature of the work militated against my method of long-term collection and analysis among the Tabwa people. Rather than live in close proximity to and interact daily with neighbors I came to know fairly well, I was forced to depend on very brief concentrated visits with a variety of people. My entrée into these different communities was, similarly, of a varied nature. For example,

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I visited the village of the Bemba Paramount Chief Chitimukulu armed with a letter of introduction from the Chief himself. What hopefully is clear from the following description is that I was working with people who did not know me, or even of me, but who were willing to help on a friend-of-a-friend basis. On more practical terms, this meant an early and concerted necessity for negotiating the appropriate compensation for people's time and help. In the Tabwa area, my credit, in a manner of speaking, was good. This meant that I could stop and record or discuss material almost anywhere I'd been earlier without prior consultation about money or gifts. It was generally known that at some point I would compensate people who assisted me. Working in new areas required that we set the exact conditions of compensation. For a Bemba royal bard, this meant agreeing to a set price for the entire session beforehand. For some Lunda storytellers it meant establishing an arbitrary but strictly adhered to three-story minimum for a specific payment. How did this affect the performance events? We can examine this question with evidence from the following performance session.

Chitimukulu is the Paramount Chief of the Bemba, one of Zambia's largest ethnic groups. He was also, in 1989, a Member of the Central Committee, one of the more prominent non-elected government posts in the country. I had first met Mr. L.M. Ng'andu, whose royal title was Chitimukulu 36, Mutale Chitapankwa II, in a rather remote village while he was visiting his constituents prior to national elections, and he encouraged me to drop by and see him.[25] Some five months later, I did, in fact, visit his office in Kasama, and he gave me a letter of introduction and names of people to see in the area around his home. He added what at the time seemed a curious caveat, saying he wasn't sure anyone would pay attention to the note but that I should try in any case. When, accompanied by my eight year-old son Daniel, I later visited the chief's village these comments became clearer to me. Near to Chitimukulu's capital, I recruited a teacher at Malole's St. Francis Secondary School, Mr. S.M. Kalunga, who had kindly agreed to help with introductions. We tried to see several people whose names were provided by Chief Chitimukulu but were mostly unsuccessful in finding anyone at home. However, at the local courthouse, we met two men whose names had been on the list and arranged a visit for the next day.

25 See my chapter on Bisa storytelling for a more detailed description of my first interactions with Chitimukulu.

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When we returned to the courthouse at around 2:30 PM there was no one around. We inquired as to where everyone had gone and ended up at the nearby home of the "headman" of that section of the village.[26] There was a group of some twenty men and women drinking *katubi* inside the house. This beer is generally made from finger millet and is distinctive for the frothy, thick residue that floats on its surface. It is therefore sipped through a straw that is forced down through the surface layer to the warm liquid at the bottom. Daniel and I drew a good deal of attention as we sat down on small stools against one of the walls. However, things loosened up noticeably after I tasted the *katubi* and pronounced it to be of high quality. [*Ee, ciisuma*. (Yes, it's good.)] Then I drew some laughs when I responded to exhortations to have some more by saying "*Saana*." [That's plenty.] Mr. Kalunga and I reminded the men of our agreement of the previous day, and we were invited outside to discuss the matter. The local court magistrate and the headman eventually emerged and spoke to us about our desire to record oral traditions. Supplementing the note from the Paramount Chief, I tried to validate my status by stressing my identity as a university lecturer on research assignment, brandishing a dog-eared copy of my UMI bound dissertation. At around this time, a short, compactly built man who was probably in his late 50s walked up and started shouting rapid-fire words at me. I recognized the style as *imishikakulo*, or Bemba praise poetry. I found the experience uncomfortable since, from a Western perspective, that tone of voice is culturally a sign of anger or insulting language and it was aggressively spewing from someone I'd never met. Further, the Bemba words themselves are often archaic or at least heavily allusive, so I felt the disadvantage of understanding almost nothing of what was being said. After a minute, the man spoke with the court magistrate and made it clear that he would not perform without first settling the payment of compensation. I said I'd pay after seeing what was performed, but he would have none of it. Down deep, the fellow really put me off and I didn't care if he performed or not, but people around him seemed to be taking his side, so I eventually settled on paying a set sum, roughly twelve

26 The term "headman" is mostly a carryover from the colonial era, but it remains the most common gloss of the Bemba language title "*mwine mushi*," "owner of the village." Essentially, headmen are lineage leaders whose relatives and non-blood constituents live under his authority in a section of a larger village. His duties include acting as an intermediary to the chief, settling disputes as an initial local court of appeal, before the matter needs to be brought to the chief or civil authority, and involvement in daily arrangements concerning labor, land, familial duties and so forth.

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or fifteen dollars, to the court magistrate who would then portion it out at the end of the session. When we came to an agreement I placed a bench next to the courthouse and set my camera on a tripod.

The first performer, with an audience of around twenty people, was the magistrate, Mr. Chituloshi. He discoursed on the importance of heeding wisdom provided by one's society, illustrating it with the tale of how a grasshopper outwits a hornbill trying to eat him. He then explained the tale by coming back to the significance of group knowledge and values. His delivery was slow and emphatic. The audience was polite but did not really seem to be engaged by the tale. I replayed the audiotape for all to hear and then recorded the second performer, Mr. Bernard Chitompwe, the headman. After a brief introduction, Mr. Chitompwe launched into several elaborate praises, employing the same style that the earlier man used to welcome me. This same man responded to the praises with a shouted word "*pama*" [Go on! Right on!] This performance caused a bit more of a stir among the audience, which now numbered around forty people. During these performances, my son sat next to or near Mr. Kalunga. After the two performances, Daniel took to moving around a bit, returning to his seat only when groups of children or adults surrounded him, staring in curiosity or trying to engage him in conversation. This interest in the strangers waned as the performances heated up. The third person to perform was the man who had greeted me, Mr. Ng'ongo Yuba, who also introduced himself as Kangwa Kabunda, a royal bard, or *ing'omba*. He performed with a young man who played a single-headed drum, while he himself played a double-headed drum that hung from his neck and shoulder by a thin rope. Mr. Yuba introduced himself and his accompanist in elaborate terms, then proceeded to play the drum vigorously, as women in the audience began to ululate. When he stopped playing Mr. Yuba sang a different kind of praise song called *ing'omba* or drum poetry.[27] Yuba's performance of this genre consisted of taking a deep breath and singing loudly and rapidly, bending at the waist as he expended the air in his lungs. He then rose up straight as he inhaled deeply and did the same thing for the next set of verses. During one of these renditions, as the drumming

27 Both the style of poetry and its practitioner are called *ing'omba*. The bards often play the two-headed drum called *ishingilili*, that incorporates both a "male" (high) and "female" (low) set of tones. Mr. Yuba was accompanied by a young man playing a smaller, cylindrical drum called "*sensele*". See Mapoma 1974, on Bemba royal bards and their instruments.

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intervened between instances of singing, an older woman, also in her 50s, joined him rather spontaneously, to sing harmony to the poetry and dance to the drumming. By now, there were over one hundred people in the audience. Most of them responded to the performers by laughing in a delighted way, ululating, or making encouraging exclamations like *Pama*! or *Eeya*! When the performers stopped, I replayed the entire session on my video monitor. This caused more excitement. Mr. Chitompwe sang more *imishikakulo*, and Mr. Yuba performed more *ing'omba*, with his, now two, accompanists.

By this time, people had pretty much turned all of their attention to Mr. Yuba's efforts. The audience swelled to nearly two hundred participants. It seemed to me that I'd become a simple functionary at this point, there to record whatever people chose to do. After each playback, the performers seemed to try to outdo their earlier efforts. A man came to tell me that the women insisted on singing some of *their* songs. So we moved to the rear of the courthouse, where the crowd was not yet packed, and I recorded singing, drumming and dancing that became more and more controlled by the women. They did not like the drumbeat set down by Mr. Yuba's accompanist, so a woman took over that drum. Then, during the performance of a song, one young woman spontaneously jumped into the central clearing and began to dance as the song came to an abrupt close. She was embarrassed by the action and fled back into the crowd. Soon thereafter, however, women encouraged her to return, and she and a much older woman, easily in her mid 60s, danced together to another song. This performance intensified the already strong level of audience response and participation, as evidenced by the almost complete involvement of all present. By the time the last performance began, with a woman dancing at the center of attention, there was almost no distinction, almost no space, between performers and audience. In fact, performers, spectators, camera and cameraman were all but enveloped in one rhythmically moving mass.

It was by now nearing sunset and we had been at it for almost four hours. We prepared to take our leave by packing up and thanking our hosts and performers. As the crowd dispersed, Mr. Yuba insisted we return to record some *really* good material and visit him at his home where he would have the time, space and control to perform his specialties. Mr. Kalunga, Daniel and I mounted our vehicle and drove back to Malole then continued on to Kasama.

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Though a broad, formal study of this session would obviously focus on the verbal texts of material created by Mr. Yuba and the other performers, it is also clear that the event itself makes an interesting subject for analysis. Even when considering the taped material, it is important to take into account the dynamics of large gatherings, and my use of video and audio playback, as well as my presence as both an economic and archival source.

So, an analysis of the material collected at this session—besides a thorough consideration of the verbal texts of story, praise, dance and song—would include a description of the factors that led to and surrounded the various performances. It is important to note the history or lack thereof of my relationship to the people performing and reacting as an audience. They were not familiar with me or my work. The performances formed the core of activity and attention to such an extent that people virtually forgot the camera, my presence and the notion of compensation and were carried along by the competitive and expressive energies of the session.[28] The material itself would require detailed work with previous studies and local experts in these genres, since much of it was fairly esoteric and particular to the things that constitute the repertoire of a royal bard and to the themes and images, mostly from initiation songs, that the women wanted preserved.

My role here was primarily as an instigator, secondarily as a recorder. Understanding these conditions help me to evaluate what I have elsewhere called the performance context of any tale or session.[29] This data can be important for understanding elements of style or intent on the part of a performer, as well as framing types of audience response, or lack thereof. Do people perform more energetically when they are being paid? I would say this was not a significant factor for at least the women participants, as was evidenced by the spontaneous performances that evolved from the otherwise elicited recording session. Further, realistically, I doubt that the men who initially negotiated their own compensation were about to share any of it with the virtually amorphous group of women. It is also worth looking deeper into the manner in which women participated in then took over the session, beginning with the first woman who danced with Mr. Yuba and including the many women who drummed, sang and danced. If nothing else, it is clear that the first woman broke into an initially

28 See Schechner 2003, for a wide-ranging discussion of the many elements and types of performances.

29 See Cancel 1989 and 1988–89.

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male event, and that the other women eventually formed a communal rather than individual expressive performance entity.[30]

We are really looking at considering the historical moment of collection and performance as it pertains to the collector and his or her collaborators, as well as what the situation was politically and socially in that area at that time. What I mean is that Zambia in 1988–89 was experiencing economic and political instability that led not only to the prices set for performances but also the attitude of the performers towards any particular researcher. While we did not know it then, due to broad national dissatisfaction and unrest, the long-standing government of President Kaunda was only little over a year from being voted out of office in the first multiparty elections in decades. In my case, I was aided immeasurably by introductions from local people, but this still did not place me in the same circumstance that held sway when working among the more familiar Tabwa. Also, my status as a university lecturer was ambiguous. It helped me receive official sanction to conduct research, but, because the university was experiencing unrest among the students and faculty due to financial and curricular issues, it made me a bit suspect in the rural areas as well. Ordinary people often had little sympathy for what they perceived, and relatively speaking not entirely incorrectly, to be privileged students and faculty trying to get more for themselves at the expense of taxpayers and government. Moreover, depending on the area visited, the people's feelings about the government varied dramatically. Even armed with a letter from the Bemba Paramount Chief, I still had to negotiate and scuffle for the performances I eventually recorded. This said something about chiefly and governmental power and its influence when the chief/government official was not around.[31] Ultimately for a lot of the performers in this study, cash or in-kind payments were the deciding factors, while in some other cases, as with the women at Chitimukulu's capital, I sensed a clear, overriding concern for expressing and preserving ideas for posterity.

30 I will examine concerns of gender in performance in some of the chapters that follow, but clearly in this session there was a sense that women wanted to express themselves as a group in the material being recorded.

31 It became clear to me some time after the recording session that this particular Chitimukulu was not as popular as some of his predecessors, in part because he sought to change some of the older, traditional ways of doing things. In 1994, when I returned to the area, I visited Chitimukulu Mutale Chitapankwa at his *musumba*, or palace, and he provided me with a long autobiographical account that I videotaped. In it, he talked about some of the traditions of the kingship he'd been seeking to change.

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An analysis of the performances described above would also take advantage of the curious aftereffects evidenced by my presenting Chitimukulu with an audiocassette of the event. While in his Kasama office, he listened to one of Mr. Yuba's songs and told me it was "not correct" in some of its historical assertions. I thought little of this until five years later when I visited the Chief at his court and he summoned Mr. Yuba to our meeting. The man had changed dramatically, looking rather unkempt and haggard, acting very submissive in the Chief's presence, and reacting to my greetings very solicitously. Chitimukulu had earlier told me that Mr. Yuba had fallen on bad times, as some people in the village had been accusing him of witchcraft. During our meeting the Chief demanded that he produce a more accurate version of the song he'd performed earlier, but he responded by saying he could not remember which song he'd been singing and would have to see or hear the performance so that he could make his revisions. This incident says a lot about the significance of royal praises and the concerns nobles might exhibit over how they or their ancestors are portrayed.[32] Clearly, Chitimukulu had a sense of how my recordings might present him or Bemba history to a wider academic or public audience. A thorough analysis of the earlier performance, with detailed knowledge of the often allusive imagery of royal praise poetry would combine with this latter epilogue to provide a richer understanding of the roles played by bards and their art at the court and in the wider society.

In each location I stopped to do research, slightly different conditions were in effect. Among the Bemba of Chief Nkula, I was sanctioned by a Catholic missionary, which gave me easy and effective access to the people living around the Ilondola mission. On the other hand, people did not perform tales that were at all ribald. In fact, one man performed a fascinating tale that he explained as being about the Catholic Church, with one of the wiser characters representing the Pope. Among the Bwile of Luapula Province, I was aided by the fact that Chief Puta was enthused with my project and called a meeting of a number of his headmen and councilors, some thirty or so men. He led off with a brief historical narrative then a shorter reminiscence, then around five of his colleagues followed with a series of fictional tales. My visit to the Bisa in the Munyamadzi

32 A similar occurrence can be examined in some detail regarding historical information imparted in a narrative by the Bwile Chief Puta in 1989 and how this was received and then modified by his successor during a visit in 2005. The original performance is referred to below and presented in more detail in Chapter V on Bwile oral performance.

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Corridor was facilitated by an American researcher who had, at that time, been living and working off and on with that group for over twenty years. Two Zambian graduate students I'd been working with at UNZA provided initial entrée into two Lunda villages for recording sessions. Again, while it is speculative to discuss the motives of the people who allow me to record their material, I'd reiterate one obvious and sensible conclusion is that most do it for the compensation, a compensation that takes the form of cash, goods, fulfilling obligations and/or garnering attention. However, there is another factor to consider and that is why do some performers turn in outstanding efforts and others seem to be going through minimal motions? Here I believe that an alternate motivation is a combination of pride and interest in the project. Older people often want to see the material preserved, while many younger people mostly relish holding the stage and having the opportunity to show off.[33]

Reflexively, there are at least two concerns I have in my descriptive, not entirely "analytical," writing. The first is that I try to honestly present myself as a player in the ongoing event. The second is that I avoid the temptation to become the star player in that event, writing others rather than simply acknowledging our several texts and trying to work within and, perhaps more significantly, between them.[34] So, to this end, I include both photos of the performers and a subtitled DVD record of the performances so that, limited as this technical framing of the sessions might be, the video record can at least give the narrators a greater presence in this discussion. If nothing else, these video records and my descriptions will provide a more direct representation and, therefore, some form of agency to the performers included here. Moreover, the lesson that has been forming in my mind over the years pertains to the fact that people are not necessarily their performed stories—though in many ways they

33 West 2007, discussing his relationship with his local subjects among the Muedan people of Mozambique, makes an important point about how one of the elders he worked with "'saw in me a kindred characteristic,' I believe, because he knew, that in my writings, I would attempt to produce of the Muedan world an order of my own description—because he appreciated that such interpretive visions *of* the world necessarily constitute a means of leverage *on* the world." (p. 81)

34 A good examination of texts by writers from the colonized world satirizing the notion of anthropologists as heroes, is Graham Huggan's essay "Anthropologists and Other Frauds." (1994) He examines Ouologuem's novel as well as works by Alejo Carpentier (1999), considering Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Albert Wendt (1999), rethinking the impact of Margaret Mead in Samoa. Jackson 1989, also notes that we can "no longer assume that *our* texts have some kind of epistemological superiority over *theirs*." (p. 168)

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are "performing" themselves—and their lives do not begin and end when I arrive then leave. We need to see ethnographic data in the form of recorded observed activities, in my case story performances, as limited, in some cases misleading, information. I was reminded of this fact a couple of years ago, when my friend and colleague, who had been my host in 1989 at the Bisa village of Nabwalya, sent some photos from that visit. One of the shots was of the recording session at the place where people had gathered to harvest their sorghum crop. In the photo, the perspective was from the back of a performer, framing my son Daniel, a friend named Marie who'd accompanied us, and me sitting on stools or chairs in front of someone's house, with the video camera on a tripod and many audience members around us. At the time I saw this snapshot I'd been studying the video record of this session for nearly fourteen years, but had forgotten many of the details revealed by this photo. Seeing what the performers were seeing altered my perspective of what was encompassed by the overall tone and experience of that recording effort.

We can discover behavior or attitudes that might help us to understand pieces of people's lives and perceptions, but at the same time we need to carefully set these against the mountain of social and cultural relationships that are beneath the surface of not only our but our subjects' recognition. Ultimately, I want to represent the oral traditional performances of Bemba-speaking people within a writing style that moves from close reflexive observation and the careful recording of details to the recognition that true and thorough analysis and interpretation is often limited and, indeed, limiting in its need for absolute or unifying conclusions.[35] I believe it is the rare researcher, particularly someone who is not a member of the society being studied, who can truly attain a deep knowledge of that culture.[36] Most

35 Jackson 2006, notes some of the limits of both reflexivity and trying to take the stated views of others at face value when he says "we can neither assess the truth of our understanding *representationally*—in terms of its fidelity to the espoused views and observed practices of others—nor *confessionally*—as a disclosure of our own ulterior motives and unconscious desires." (p. 293)

36 Some examples of what appear to be in depth insights and near total immersion in African societies include Stoller's intimate study of the Songhay (1989), and, in an amazing longitudinal study, Colson and Scudder's reporting on the Gwembe Tonga (1958, 1971, 1988). Griaule's unprecedented work with Ogotemmeli (1965) purports to reveal some fascinating details of the Dogon way of life and cosmology, though how this was gathered and written, and how that framed the information, remains a matter of scholarly debate (see, for example, Clifford 1983). A last example is Stuart Marks's long term study of the Valley Bisa of Zambia and their interrelationships with their environment and the practice of hunting. (See Chapter IV below and, Marks 1979, 1984, 2005, 2008, etc.).

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important in this anthology are the narrative performances themselves, since these are what the storytellers chose to present and shape for their audiences, and for my camera.[37] Most of what I provide to these efforts is meant to contextualize and describe them as accurately as I can.

Bemba-speaking Groups

The five ethnic groups represented in this project all fall under the linguistic range of the language spoken by the largest of the groups, the Bemba of Zambia's Northern Province. Linked historically by a common migration from what is today the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Bemba, Bisa, Bwile, Lunda, and Tabwa all trace their origins, or at least the origins of their chieftaincies, to the Luba people. There are, therefore, strong linguistic and cultural links between numerous Zambian and Congolese societies. Matrilineal systems of descent are a common bond, as are, for the most part, economic practices, kingship and clan structures. In Zambia, or rather its earlier incarnation as Northern Rhodesia, the British colonial government and various Christian missionary groups, especially the Roman Catholics, early on chose a dialect of the language spoken by the Bemba people as the standard for education, evangelization, electronic media and official communication in this region of the colony/country. This led to numerous publications, initially and most significantly translations of the Bible, that reified the Bemba language over the other languages/dialects spoken by the related ethnic groups in the region. At times, the numerous other groups found it convenient to identify themselves with the larger, more influential Bemba polity, and at other times they felt it important to assert their own ethnic identities.[38]

While there are at least a dozen groups that identify themselves as related to the Bemba but constituting separate entities, it would be another kind of project to closely investigate and try to define how each group determines this difference.[39] Certainly, in the instances that I've recorded

37 A good overview of approaches to African oral literature, past and present, is provided by Finnegan 1992 and 1997; and Okpewho 1992.

38 See Cancel 2006, on how claiming Bemba identity has vacillated over time for some segments of the Lunda population.

39 Crehan 1997, for example, examines historically how the Kaonde of northwestern Zambia underwent a series of classifications under British rule that had profound effects on their socio-economic lives. A broader study of how colonial rule first imposed certain notions of identity on indigenous peoples then how these identities persisted in fundamental ways is edited by Leroy Vail (1989).

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oral history or had access to published and unpublished studies, it is clear that each society has its own story of how it came to the place where it now lives. While the Lunda and Bemba, for example, both claim they originated from a place known as Kola, among the Luba in the Congo, and followed the same physical route into Zambia, historical studies suggest that the migration might not have taken place at the same time or along the same route for each group.[40] Their respective oral histories, and the scholarly studies that built on these and other types of documented evidence, point to the evolution of several kinds of political states and systems of royal succession that are also unique to each entity. Royal lineage, for example, is not reckoned in the same way between the Bemba and Lunda and succession is figured in dramatically different fashion. Similarly, the Bwile and Tabwa have differing stories of how they came to be. In the case of the Bwile, I recorded a brief account about their arrival in the place they now live and how a historical/mythological offence by a "captain" of an early Lunda king resulted in land being ceded to the Bwile in compensation.[41] Elsewhere, I've documented the origins and migration of the Tabwa, again from Kola but on a different path than that taken by the Bemba and Lunda.[42] The Bisa of the Luangwa Valley share their ethnicity with the Bisa who live near Lake Bangweulu, on the boundary of Luapula and Northern Provinces. While these historical accounts are significant in explaining how foreign kingship systems came to dominate the original inhabitants of these regions, it is difficult to point to these narratives as the central formative elements in ethnic identities. My intention, therefore, was to collect narratives from as many Bemba-speaking groups as I could, in order to consider a comparison of their stories, themes, performance techniques, etc. In fact, these fictional and non-fictional stories have suggested mostly a good deal of cultural overlap between the groups, certainly as it pertains to common plots, images, tropes and styles of performance. If any dimension can be more profitably explored to gauge ethnic identity among these groups, it is probably their relative levels of economic practices, prosperity, prospects and opportunities. The northern Zambia region has had a complex history of conquest and migration followed by British colonial rule then the post-independence national government that has strongly influenced

40 See A. Roberts 1973, and Cunnison 1959 and 1961.
41 See Chapter V on Bwile performance.
42 See my 1981 PhD dissertation, "Inshimi Structure and Theme: The Tabwa Oral Narrative Tradition."

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how groups see and define themselves. These subjectivities and group claims of identity remain, at least for some groups, in an ongoing state of flux. Benedict Anderson's seminal notion of "imagined communities"[43] is a simple yet not unreasonable way to view how ethnicity is figured for at least a number of the smaller groups. Shifts in notions and assertions of group identity have been reflected in contemporary Zambia by the relatively recent proliferation of annual traditional festivals and rites.[44]

Following Up Original Visits

An added dimension to the study is material I collected in a follow-up visit sixteen years after the fact. Zambia had undergone some intensive changes since 1988–89. The current ruling party, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), is the one that unseated President Kaunda in 1991. The former socialist economy had been liberalized, along with those of many other countries in the third world following the fall of the Soviet Union. Former parastatal organizations and businesses had been privatized, with all the familiar concomitant consequences: a huge rise in unemployment, the weakening of social welfare institutions such as health care, education and housing, and a dramatic shift in the way business was conducted. Subsidies for crucial foods, such as the staple maize "mealie meal" flour [*mukaiwa* (Bemba)], were done away with. The currency was allowed to "float" at its actual value. In the short term these economic measures, mandated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, took a severe toll on the Zambian population. Based on visits in 2003 and 2005, I also saw evidence of how desperation breeds innovation and industriousness. This was obvious in my travels in the Luapula and Northern Provinces, where many young people were now running businesses such as private transport of goods and people, in the form of mini-buses or cargo lorries, and starting up shops that catered to technical or business needs, in the form of internet cafes and office services. With the sudden availability of many imported goods, young entrepreneurs were building and stocking dry goods stores or restaurants with an eye towards attracting customers to more aesthetically pleasing venues. The national demographic was definitely getting younger, due in large part to

43 Anderson 1991.

44 Cancel 2006, alludes to this phenomenon when discussing the Lunda annual kinship festival, the Mutomboko.

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the dropping of the average life expectancy to around thirty-seven years of age, a continually rising birth rate, and the tragic thinning of the sexually active population by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In the case of education, the government had loosened bureaucratic restrictions on fund-raising and local control. Parents and teachers had more of a say as to where national monies, meager as they were, would be spent. This local empowerment, a consequence of seriously depleted public coffers, could be seen in many local government institutions. I can't guess what all this means for the future, only that it has resulted in notable economic and social changes, diminishing the importance of the extended family as people often cannot afford to care for their relatives, especially surviving kin of AIDS victims, and increasing instances of individual assertion and innovation. That all this is accompanied by deep poverty, chronic unemployment and desperation in what is considered one of the world's poorest countries, only adds to the complex mix of extant conditions characterizing Zambia today.

In 2005, armed with photos of each performer, printed transcripts of their narratives, and DVD recordings of the performances I attempted to retrace my steps and find out a bit more about the storytellers. Having gotten to know them only on video for many years, my intention was simply to discover or augment biographical information about each performer, to properly credit them for their efforts and give readers, and myself, a chance to "know" them better. Since I was not able logistically, to spend the time in any one place required to truly chart the lay of the land, the data I collected was ultimately fragmentary and often raised more questions about these performers than it really answered. Moreover, of the thirty narrators included in this study, nineteen, possibly twenty, had died by the time I'd returned to seek them out. Of the ten who were still alive, I could not reach the area where five still lived, and though I reached the village of another narrator, she was not immediately available. I actually had a chance to speak to only two of the remaining ten performers. Yet this reflects the nature of the entire study, given that I did not in 1988–89, and could not in 2005, spend the time to get to know the people and the places as well as I'd consider sufficient for a proper exploration of the interpersonal and socio-cultural milieu in which they lived. The more recent experience elicited a strange feeling of nostalgia and loss, directed at people I'd only gotten to know on videotape. Having gathered the information, however, I include it in the form of footnotes and postscripts to most sessions in order to add more depth to my initial observations and to aid in forming an overview of the project's results.

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Method and Focus of Chapters

In the chapters that follow, I will employ several methods to evaluate performances and the verbal texts of the various narratives collected from, in order of appearance, people who ethnically identify as Tabwa, Bemba, Bisa, Lunda and Bwile. Detailed observation, similar to what Geertz refers to as "thick description," will be my central method. This includes information about how the recording sessions were arranged, the immediate contexts of performers and audience, details on compensation for the work and description of performance techniques that include use of voice, gesture and mime. I will include information about the particular ethnic groups being recorded and socio-historical information pertaining to the time of the performances as necessary and/or available, though this will not in most cases be a vital part of analytical assertions. I identify and sometimes evoke the traditional context of fictional narratives, based on the broader formal characteristics and conventions of story-construction and thematic focus. This will be based on my earlier work on Tabwa narrative and, obviously, on a much broader body of published and unpublished studies of oral traditions in and outside of Africa. Every chapter will have a different focus, based on the amount of cultural and personal information I was able to bring to bear on each performance session. In the next chapter, considering the productions of two Tabwa performers, I will provide a more detailed frame for the analysis of the performances that comprise this study.

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