THE DOCUMENTARY IMPULSE: ARCHIVES IN THE BUSH

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I

A wide variety of documents exist in Cameroonian rural villages, few of which are likely to be preserved since many are not perceived as being worthy of long-term conservation as well as being vulnerable to damp, termites, and to recycling in the form of cigarette or wrapping paper. In this paper I consider the information contained in the different types of written record and how they interrelate. In a companion piece (Zeitlyn mss) I continue to discuss a diary written at my instigation over an eighteen-month period.

II

Anthropologists and historians alike are prone to a writing disease: "If in doubt write it down." We record things often for the sake of recording (sometimes without having a specific end in mind for any particular record).[1] Valuable serendipity often results, and our colleagues and successors, as well as the descendants of those we have worked with are sometimes the beneficiaries. Academics, and anthropologists among them, often seek out like-minded people to spend time with. This in itself raises some questions about the generalizability of information so received. But leaving that aside, the accounts of anthropologists and their key informants (for example Muchona [Turner 1967], Ogotommêli [Griaule 1965]) are striking, as much for the resemblances between academic and informant as for their putative differences.

[1]This is an instinct that professional archivists guard against. Archives are made in part by what they include, but also by what their administrators decide to omit.

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Although the "cognitive implications of literacy" debate might seem increasingly overdone, we still need studies of the practical effects of changing patterns of literacy on what *will become* the historical record.[2] Archivists in Europe and North America have long had to exercise skills other than those of conservation. Most importantly, they control what enters the archives, what documents have the opportunity to benefit from their specialist skills in conservation, and so on. Social historians in the late twentieth century bemoaned the selectivity of previous generations of archivists for not preserving the ephemera that documents the everyday lives of ordinary people. One example of this kind of selection may be found in the policy of the *Journal of African History*, which has a publication category that consists of "original documents and commentaries upon them." An paper based on a text written in French was rejected by them on grounds of linguistic inauthenticity.[3]

This is ironic when one reflects that documents written in Arabic have been published in the series: some languages are more authentic than others, the languages of European colonization being particularly suspect. Yet time is a great healer, and capable of rendering a linguistically inauthentic document magically authentic—consider, for example, the personal narratives of slavery (as collected in Curtin 1997), which some *JAH* editors should consider inauthentic as a consequence of their use of non-African languages. With the exception of the nascent Mambila literacy program, all literacy in the village where my research is based is in French. A century hence I cannot believe that any of the documents that might survive could be described as inauthentic on *purely* linguistic grounds. Language issues certainly pose additional problems of interpretation. There are undoubtedly translation problems between Mambila and French, but these types of problem are common in the historical record, and are not usually excluded from consideration on this account.

In rural Africa, as elsewhere in the world, historians have the opportunity to study at first hand the types of information and the different kind of document that are being created that may (or most likely may not) be

[2]Both sides of the debate have been exaggerated, so both the debate itself has become too polemical and through this the claims being made. See Theall 1992; Street 1984; Bloch 1975, 1998, and Zeitlyn 2001.

[3]31 October 1990: "We would be unlikely to publish a text that was given in Mambila but written down in French; for the text given orally we would want a transcription in the original language as well as a translation." David Robinson (p.c.). As far as I was concerned, the importance of the text was that the original Mambila conversation was between a father and his son. The son wrote the French document as a record of what he had been told independent of the prompting of any foreign researcher. The text has subsequently appeared as Zeitlyn 1992, as well as in Zeitlyn/Mial/Mbe 2000.

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available for future historians to study. Since the sheer quantity of paper is smaller it is feasible to study the overall pattern in a way that in most European countries is no longer possible (leaving aside issues created by the introduction of electronic media over the last twenty years). As ever, I am happy to acknowledge that Jack Goody has preceded me. Goody (with Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner) has documented the types of record kept by a Ansumana Sonie, a Liberian religious leader and businessman covering the period 1926-1959 (1987:196-97).

This is presented as a case study of the development of a literate mentality, yet without the survival of Sonie's papers the discussion could not proceed. They are concerned with the evidence for cognitive styles contained within Sonie's papers; here I am interested in a more general and preliminary point about what sorts of evidence currently exist and may survive to provide the raw materials for future historical studies. For the present this deliberately leaves aside the issues of the social, political and institutional uses of writing, and what it means to different groups within the village in question. Such issues are important and complex but are best considered separately following the general survey which is presented here.

III

The Mambila lie on either side of the Nigeria/Cameroon border, mostly living on the Mambila Plateau in Nigeria. A smaller number (c. 12,000) are to be found in Cameroon, especially at the foot of of Mambila Plateau escarpment, on the Tikar Plain. My fieldwork was restricted to these latter groups, and in particular to the village of Somié. Somié had a population of approximately one thousand (based on the official 1986 tax census) at the time of initial fieldwork. Self-sufficient in food, the villagers have grown coffee as a cash crop since the early 1960s.

Cameroonian Mambila on the Tikar Plain have adopted the Tikar institution of the chiefship, yet their social structure otherwise closely resembles that described for the Nigerian village of Warwar by Rehfisch (1972) based on fieldwork in 1953. Zeitlyn (1994) includes a more general ethnographic introduction. Although visited by various colonial administrators from time to time throughout the first half of the twentieth century the administrative story of Somié really begins in 1964 when the village moved to its current site and the newly independent state built a dispensary there. Around the same time a Catholic mission was established in the neighboring village of Atta. A Catholic primary school was started in Somié which was later replaced by a Protestant one. A state primary school was not established until the late 1980s. State interest in the village

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concentrated on the collecting of tax, the issuing of national identity cards and ensuring membership of much of the population in the single political party, the CPDM (until the advent of multiparty democracy in the 1990s). The documentary legacy (or trace) of this interest is one of the themes of this paper.

IV

After this general introduction I proceed to survey the available types of document that are currently found in the village of Somié. The following list is based on my continuing research in that one relatively remote Cameroonian village. The types listed will, I believe, generalize easily to a wide swathe of central Cameroon and much of the Nigerian middle belt, and possibly much wider.

It may seem somewhat grandiose to describe all of the following as data, yet it is important, I believe, to recognize that that is exactly what they are or could be, and that they may be of use in a variety of different research projects. The following list attempts completeness and comments on the likely preservation (or not) of the records as well as the types of research that they could contribute to.

School registers: these record name sex and age of children at school.[4] School registers are the basic source of standard measures of educational level—the local rates are relatively low in percentage terms. The registers are maintained by the head teachers of both the Public (state run) Primary school and the older Protestant Mission school. There was once a Catholic Mission School but that has long closed—there is no trace of its registers in the village nor at the village of Atta, the nearest Catholic Mission. Since head teachers move fairly often (every two to five years seems typical) the conservation of registers seems uncertain at best. Once fees have been paid the register is used as the basis for annual returns which are reported to the local administrative center, Bankim, formerly Banyo. These returns completed the records have served their purpose; they are not immediately discarded but little interest is expressed in preserving them. They are held in the village in the school building itself or in the house of the head teacher, and are vulnerable to being tidied up especially when the teacher is transferred.

Registers of Birth and Death certificates: birth certificates are issued in the village and the master book from which they are issued includes a copy. Every year, or as books are completed, they are returned to the

[4]See comments below about birth certificates; ages can be manipulated so that a child is recorded as having the 'appropriate' age for their registered class.

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local administrative centre (now Bankim, formerly Banyo), where they are held in the municipal archives. Birth certificates are needed for a variety of administrative reasons and so most people now have them. However, the very need for them causes problems which we need to take account of. In order to attend school a child needs a birth certificate, to prove that they are the correct age for a class. In effect some birth certificates are issued in order to validate a child's entry into school. This is widely known in the village: sometimes the age order of a sibling set according to the birth certificates is different from birth order! Death certificates are issued in principle in the same way as birth certificates, but in practice they are far less commonly issued - being needed only for civil servants and other salaried employees whose widows are entitled to a pension. State Marriage certificates also exist (in principle) but to date none have been issued in the village (they have been issued in the neighboring, larger, village of Sonkolong which has a larger and longer established non-Mambila hence immigrant population). The only villagers with such documentation are civil servants who have got married in the cities where they work.

Dispensary records: These are maintained by a staff that changes regularly and the care with which the records are kept (let alone preserved) reflects the changing dispositions of the dispensary staff. Separate lists are maintained of pre-natal attendance and other general medical consultations. In December 2000 the records available went back to 1991. It has not been possible to trace earlier dispensary records. The pharmacy sends requests for drugs to Ngaoundéré, the Provincial capital 400 km distant, via Bankim under health care regimes that have changed dramatically in recent years - from one in which (intermittent) supplies were available for free to one in which a charge is made to enable restocking (see Regis 2003: 139-47 for a description from further north in Cameroon).

Personal medical records: individuals are responsible for keeping their own medical records, so most people have a "carnet" or in some cases several—reflecting different patterns of treatment at different medical institutions. A "carnet" is a notebook in which records of consultations, diagnoses and prescriptions are kept. Hospitals and dispensaries sell small notebooks with a printed form on the first page or within the front cover for personal and basic medical details, adding height weight and blood group to name, date and place of birth information, as well as name of next of kin. Many people use school notebooks instead.

Royal Palace archives: logs of cases heard, "procès-verbal" (minutes of meetings), tax assessments and certificates of nationality. The Chief is recognized by the state as a 'Chef de troisième degré." He is the first port of

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Sex	m	f	m	m	f	m	f	m	f	f	m	f	f	f	m	m	m	f	f	f	m	m
Age	66	58	50	21	18	32	25	29	17	39	20	61	22	47	25	38	14	14	24	15	78	45	47
Identity card	y	y	y					y		y		y		y		y					y	y	y
Student ID card	y	y						y		y			y										y
Birth cert			y	y	y			y		y	y				y	y	y	y	y	y			y
Tax receipt	y		y			y										y						y	y
Voters card	y	y	y					y		y		y		y		y						y	y
Church member - ship card	y	y				y	y					y	y	y	y				y		y		
Certificate of coffee sale	y																						
Coffee ID	y																						
CEPE*				y	y						y		y			y							
BEPC**				y																			
Baptism				y	y									y	y		y	y	y	y			
Facture								y															
Assurance scolaire									y		y					y							
School fee receipt									y														
JEELC carte											y							y					
FPC carte (femmes pour christ)																							
Cath Girls centre														y									
Training certs (e.g. building)															y	y							
															sewing × 2								
Marriage cert																							
CPDM member-ship card																							
School transfer certificate																y							
Medical certificate																							

*Certificate d'Etudes Primaire Cycle

**Brevet d'Etudes Primaire Cycle

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m	f	f	m	m	m	m	f	m	m	m	f	m	f	m	m	m	m	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	m
52	49	16	16	28	32	31	21	19	22	17	35	17	50	55	15	12	28	23	36	60	67	22	48	24	21	69
y	y			y	y	y					y		y	y			y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
y	y	y			y				y			y										y				
	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y				y	y	y		y		y	y		y	y	y	
y				y	y	y			y					y			y									y
y	y			y		y					y		y	y			y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
y	y	y			y	y					y		y		y			y		y	y		y	y		y-
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call and the conduit through which much administration is achieved. The issuing of new identity cards, the organizing of the annual poll tax census, as well as the hearing and resolution of disputes all is done via the Palace. Many of these activities are accompanied by documents, but few are kept since the main archival responsibility is felt to lie with the instigators, the national administration as embodied in the offices in Bankim. Cases which are resolved by the chief and the seniors often end in a ritual oath taking (extensively discussed in Zeitlyn 1994). In such cases the supernatural sanctions that are invoked make record keeping un-necessary. Other cases are not so easily resolved and some are referred by the chief to the civil authorities in Bankim—from whence they can go to the assizes in Banyo. One of the notables spent a long time as secretary to the court of the Lamido of Banyo. In retirement in the village he served as the secretary of the village chief until his death in 2004. As part of this he recorded some of the cases heard by the chief and notables (who often act in the chief's absence).

Two examples follow:

Audience Ordinaire Du 10 Janvier 2000
Composée de Messieurs
Mougna André
Mglagnié Paul
Yamgbé Lucas
Mena Ahmadou
Djaourou Hassan
Yokomi Oumarou Sécrétaire

L'audience est ouverte à 10 heures.

Affaire: Abdoulaye aide boucher en séjour à Somié pour action dangereuse C/ sa femme la nommée Soumou ménagère en séjour à Somié.

Action grave faire sortir les couteaux dans la nuit du 8 janvier 2000 à partir de 3 heures du matin. Drogage excès de prendre le vin.

Lutte contre sa concubine la nommée Soumou.

Sir: Abdoulaye Déclare que c'est sa femme en mariage coutumier qui a été faite devant Djaouro, Hamadjam, Yamba, il y a de cela 4 mois.

Sir: Soumou il n'y a pas de mariage entre nous. Il a seulement demandé à la famille.

Le coupable a pour domicile à Allat (Banyo) Abdoulaye fils de Njeyong et de Baasso.

Soumou Ndjongur Elisabeth né vers 1966 à Allat (Banyo) fille de Landa Zinza Retea ménagère domicilié à Bertoua.

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Le conseil de Notables condamne l'accusé Abdoulaye une amende de 50000 mille francs à payer la dite somme dans un mois.

Audience Du 15 Janvier 2000
Composée de Messieurs
Mougna André
Mena Ahmadou
Nyakaté François
Yamgbé Lucas
Mâma Simon
Yokomi Oumarou Sécrétaire

L'audience est ouverte à 8 heures moins 15 mn.

Affaire: Mougna André C/ Siténé Emmanuel pour discution sur le champ.

Sir: Mougna, il y a de cela des années que mon père avait arrête. c'était bien large mais comme je n'avait pas encore et que les gents on commencé à travailler je ne pouvais rien dire et le reste j'ai travaillé. Maintenant j'ai trouvé que Siteni a tracé ce champ je ne sais le pourquoi.

Sir: Siteni, de mon côté je ne sais pas que son frère avait arrêté il y a des années. Moi, ce que je connais nous étions nombreux, que nous avions arrêté, il y a Nyakati, Nafa, Lebang, Gona Paul, et d'autres. Ces sont mes témoins qui vont justifié et lui aussi, il m'avait dit qu'il travail en attendant que j'arrive. Et maitenant que suis arrivé et que je veux traviller il refuse.

Le conseil de notables a pris comme décision que la commission doivent allés et voir la situation. Le demandeur Mougna a déclaré qu'il a laissé la où Siteni a tracé et pris.

L'affaire est finie.

Communal work: Designated individuals, typically literate young men, are put in charge of recording the contributions made by village residents. These are mainly in kind but also include money gifts for particular causes (e.g., visits of a local administrator and so forth). The lists are read out in village meetings and the donors applauded. Similar lists are also made of contributions to funeral expenses, which are a different kind of communal enterprise. After being made and possibly read out at a meeting, no further use is made of the records, although those of the more substantial collections are retained, so the secretary says, so that they can be used to check on anyone making a false claim to have contributed. I know of no such cases.

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Records of rotating credit society meetings: maintained for life of the society which varies from three months to ten years, although most tend to be between two to six months (see further discussion in Zeitlyn 2003). The exercise book in which the records are kept is discarded once it is full and the credit society has completed its cycle.

Personal documents: birth and marriage certificates, tax and party membership cards (once necessary in order to pay tax and obtain identity cards). Photographs and photo albums also are a form of personal documentation—see further discussion below. Identity cards are valid for ten years. They are occasionally kept once expired. Some children have kept the identity cards of their deceased parents saying that these contain the only photographs they have of them. Tax and Party membership cards are annual. Many people retain several years worth as evidence of good faith especially if their current documents have expired!

Graves: wood and cement. People are buried behind houses and in graveyards associated with the Protestant and Catholic missions, and another for Muslims. Some graves have wooden crosses, a few have been cemented. Little or no information is recorded on the graves and no records are kept of burials in these graveyards.

Shop signs: painted on metal sheets, wood boards and plywood. A few portraits have been painted by a villager after his studies at Douala Art School. However, he is not a permanent resident in the village, and since 2001 has been based in Bankim where he has a roadside stall.[5]

Financial records: employees recording takings e.g. maize mills, There are several small shops in the village. None that I could find maintain stock records, nor any kind of long-term accounts such as were kept by Ansumana Sonie (see references above). Where people are employed to staff a maize mill or kiosk, then short-term records are kept to enable the proprietor to match stock and revenue but these seem not to be linked to any large-scale financial record keeping, nor are they retained over the long term. Some receipts from wholesalers in nearby cities, such as Bafoussam, are kept in case they are accused of selling contraband produce from Nigeria (a realistic concern both because of the contraband that is sold and the financial exigencies of the local police and customs officers). No one that I talked to seemed interested in book keeping over the longer term. Some shop keepers hold official business licenses, others aspire to having them. However, as I note below, at least one local carpenter has been keeping records over the last few years, and one mill

[5]Examples of his work are available via the Internet as part of the Virtual Institute of Mambila Studies (VIMS) (at <http://lucy.kent.ac.uk/VIMS/Bolo/bolo.html>).

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owner keeps short term records for his own satisfaction (as far as I could establish he does not use them to make summary accounts).

Coffee: coffee is the main cash crop grown in the region. Each coffee farmer has a log book in which their name, age, names of parents are recorded, as well as the number of coffee trees planted, with the date and place of issue. Some people have separate receipts from the local processing factory, issued when they take delivery of sacks of coffee, and countersigned when those sacks are subsequently paid for. Smaller amounts may be recorded on the back of a coffee growers' log book.

Church documents: temporary baptismal registers (master copies are held in neighboring village of Sonkolong for the Protestant church (EELC) and Atta for the Catholic church (Diocese of Ngaoundéré). The Catholic Mission at Atta was founded in 1965. Catholic baptismal records prior to this may be found in the Bankim Catholic Mission (and some of the earliest dating to the late 1940s in Foumban). The village catechists and others active in the church hold lists of choir members, and other church organizations (such as "Femmes pour Christ"). The resident Protestant Pastor keeps a variety of documents but none for very long—he makes notes for funeral orations and sermons for major festivals and sometimes has someone count the number of people present, but, at present, no attempt is made to preserve such records, and, indeed, old papers are systematically discarded when his house is tidied. That said it should be noted that the incumbent (in December 2001) was interested in archiving, and he kept other papers such as the records of the 15 August Meetings (see below). We have discussed the problems of record keeping and he is keen to establish proper archives for the Protestant Mission in Somié.

Records of the 15th of August Meetings: During the public holiday associated with the 15th of August, villagers and the educated 'elite' (of people from the village but now working in cities) meet to consider how the village can be improved. The formal organization is called the 'Association pour le Développement de Canton de Somié' (ADECANSO) and this has a savings account (originally in Bankim, now in Somié itself). As well as the bank book other records are kept, for example, the minutes of previous meetings. Copies are held by the chief and by various literate seniors in the village, as well as in the Agricultural Post.

Posters and Calendars: a variety of different calendars and posters are available in the village. These advertise beer, or other commercial products; or feature the governors of Nigerian provinces, the strongest men in the world, the exploits of Osama Bin Laden (available for sale in the village by December 2001), the virtues of a religious life, monkeys dressed in human clothes, musicians and so on.

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Announcements - notices of dances and football matches are pegged to the tree outside the main village bar. A sample follows. These are extremely ephemeral:

Du Nouveau à Nassarao
Boum Boum Boum
Vibration - Animation dans la localité de Nassarao. Speciale fête du Ramadan 2001-2002
Evenement a ne pas rater à l'occasion de la fête du Ramadan. Il vous est organisé une grande soireé dansant dans cette belle localité de plaisir Nassarao- ooo - Nassarao- ooo!
Animation sonore M.C. pop music de Douala est avec vous ce jour de la XIIe fete du Ramadan. A la cabine technique nous avons M.C. Jordan l'homme aux doigts magiques au cerveau d'ordinateur. Seul capabale de 500% d'animation. Ce jour nous avons au programme du (Soukouse Zengue, Makassa, Mapouka, Zouk, Bitkussi, Rap, Soul, Techno, Danse Nojack, slow salsa etc...)
Venez nombreux montrer vos talents pas de danse. Prix d'entreé 500F.

Agricultural Post: the village agricultural post is the base of an agricultural development officer (a civil servant) and it has a variety of documents dating back to the early 1990s when the current office was built. Earlier files are either lost or have been transferred to Bankim. Files are typically sent to Bankim where they are often typed, and from there to Ngaoundéré or Yaoundé, the national capital. Copies of the typed files are returned to the village where they are stored, and referred to depending on the progress of the relevant project (inevitably many do not progress). According to the current incumbent (in December 2001) the files are of the following categories:

1) Communal work groups formally constituted so that with the support of the Agricultural Development Office they can apply for funds e.g. for start up credits from NGO's or the various development funds of foreign Embassies in Yaoundé. One sample document records the Groupe Initiative Commune-Ngnogossen Bourkie - Somié founded 22 May 1996 linked to the Association Mambila Kwandja pour le Development (AMAKWADE). They wrote to the Canadian Embassy asking for funds but they were unsuccessful. At the same time their file was passed from the Agricultural Post to Ngaoundéré for formal recognition (in a letter dated 22 July 1996) as a Groupe Initiative Commune in accord with law 92/006 of 14 August 1992. In June 1997 this request was rejected since their constitution did not conform to the formula laid out in the law.

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They were invited to re-apply but did not bother since by that time they had heard that their application for funds had been unsuccessful. In late 2000 there were twelve such groups in Somié. These were in varying states of activity and dormancy, depending on the season, the inclinations of their members and the success of any projects initiated by the group (it should be understood that most credit applications are to expand existing initiatives, to enlarge their scope or to improve the marketing. The actual functioning of a communal work group is not dependent on the success of obtaining grants, although the enthusiasm of its members may be conditional upon this).

2) Documentation of farmer grazier disputes. Particularly during the dry season these are a common occurrence and therefore produce many files. Once resolved there is no further interest in the documents.

3) Documentation concerning fertilizers, herbicides and other phytosanitary products that are distributed via the Agricultural Post.

4) Annually there are local (arrondissement de Bankim), regional/departmental (Mayo Banyo) and provincial competitions for the best field farmed by a communal group. There are files for the entries from Somié.

5) From 2000 the Agricultural Post has also been given the responsibility of undertaking AIDS awareness work - on the basis that the development officer was in regular touch with a wide range of different people. Some files concerning this work are therefore now being kept in the village office.

Savings bank: Caisse Populaire Co-operative de Somié—a national institution; a village branch was established in mid-1998 and had some fifty accounts by late 2000, by late 2002 it was regionally moribund since, allegedly, the accounts had been emptied by the officials running the bank.

V

Funerary Photographs: On 13 May 1947 Gilbert Schneider, the first missionary to be based on the Mambila Plateau, was called to the funeral of one of his friends. Norikam was dead. He was asked to photograph the body, tied to a ladder and propped upright beside his sons. He was told that it was common to keep corpses tied to ladders until all the children could be gathered to see for themselves that their parent was dead (see photos published in Schneider 1992:15-16). (Schneider's colleague, Paul Gebauer documented among the neighboring Yamba, graveside post-mortems were sometimes carried out when there was a suspicion that the deceased may have been a witch - photos in NY Metropolitan Museum

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(Reel 108) taken in Mbem Village in October 1939 and partly published in Gebauer 1964:34). More recently, the previous chief of Somié was similarly photographed on a chair after his death in 1977 (although the photograph appears not to have survived).

Anthropologists are still being called to funerals to take funerary portraits. Photographs of the dead are treasured, although in at least one case that I am familiar with, the photographs of a son killed in a car crash in 1953 were so upsetting for the mother that another son took them away from her (and has since mislaid them). Such events form part of the documentary flow. Within days of a death a photograph may be annotated. In December 2000, ten days after a death, DZ was shown a print on which a cross had been drawn on the forehead of the deceased. In this case names and dates had earlier been written on the back of the photograph, although the name of the photographer (DZ) had not been recorded.

VI

There are some interesting, albeit exceptional, cases in which documents have survived: in 1951 a colonial district officer reported being shown a tax assessment made by German officers between 1909 and 1914 in the Nigerian village of Kabri.[6] The same document was shown to DZ in 1993. And a handful of individuals have written local histories typically of their hamlets or villages. These are exceptional in themselves but I note they are political in orientation and do not include their authors except as political players (e.g., Zeitlyn 1992—based on the work of Mbe Charles; also in Zeitlyn, Mial and Mbe 2000). These are histories in the great historical tradition going back to Bede and his successors rather than the life histories championed by subaltern studies and before that social historians such as inspired the twentieth century Mass Observation project (now archived at the University of Sussex, Brighton).

In a rather different case, the relatively young son of a senior notable, after his father's death has written summary notes of the different "medicines" and treatments he has inherited from his father. During one ritual performance in January 2003 he occasionally checked his notes to ensure that he was doing it properly. It was at this point that I realised that his notes were written on the blank facing pages of drafts of the Mambila

[6]Du Boulay (1951) is a copy of a German tax book issued to the Arnado Kabri on 24 February 1909. The signature is illegible (on the basis of the notes to Moisel's maps, it may be Derselbe). On 13 April 1911 an officer called von Stemman (no first name is given) offered it to Badju, and reissued at Banyo on 12 May 1914. It records two village censuses, one dated 14 January 1914, the other undated.

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translation of the New Testament (which had been circulated for comment by the translators)!

Letters. Kin in cities send letters to relatives in the village. Children ask parents and elder siblings to send money for school fees and contributions to their keep. Parents explain why they are short of funds and cannot send all that has been asked. There are also letters sent from one village to another and even within the village. The following is the text of a letter dictated by Mougna André on 29 December 2001 and written down by his son Issiah, sent by child the thirty metres to the house of Nggwa (Ngoua) Paul where his son Begemi Jean read it aloud to him. It concerns Gangné (Ganyi), the Nigerian born 'younger brother' of Nggwa who as kin of Nggwa's falls within his sphere of responsibility:

Mougna André Somié le 29 décembre
Notable à Somié
et Wéwé Bornabas
Bien cher beau Ngoua Paul

Tout simplement pour te saluer et te dire nous nous portons bien. Nous te donnons ce petit bout de papier pour le problème de la dote qu'on avait parlé c'est comment? L'année passée Gangné avait dit que Dieu nous donne la patience qu'il va vendre les pistaches, jusqu'à maintenant il n'a pas vendus. Les gens de la famille maternelle avaient loi et Gangné vous nous avez donné la dote on a tout mangé. Gangné avait dit qu'il ne connaît pas le feu Ngoua, il doit donner chez nous. On avait déjà coupé la dote (150,000FRs) Nous voulons cet argent ces deux jours, la dote n'est pas pour nous, il nous dérangent, il faut qu'on les remettre

In other cases I do not have copies of the texts concerned. In December 2002 a quarrel between a senior man, his daughter-in-law and son took a serious turn when at a meeting ostensibly to reconcile the parties (at which the aggrieved juniors did not appear) the father presented two documents (dictated by him to a neighbor who was literate in French) to the village secretary. He read them and then summarized their contents to the gathering of notables. The longer text document summarized his quarrels with his daughter-in-law. The second, shorter letter was a testament that if the son continued to side with the son's wife against him, his father, then he would repudiate him as his son. I later asked him to show me the texts but he refused to show them to me. When I discussed this with another notable who had been present at the meeting he expressed vehement disapprobation about such a use of writing. He said the letters were like poison. My sense of our conversation is that disputes like this nor-

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mally can be resolved by the notables and will, in time, be forgotten. But documents can revive a dispute thought to be long dead. I should add in passing that in the course of this conversation I mentioned a dispute that had been heard at the Chief's court seventeen years before and which had been the focus of one of the chapters of my dissertation. The notable, who had been one of those present when the case was heard, remembered the names and details although for him it must be one of hundreds that he has helped resolve.

The final example is a letter written on 11 January 2001 after a small group of elders met in a hamlet behind the main village (Mial, Beya, Nggeya, Jia as secretary). They wrote a letter to their in-laws in the neighboring village of Sonkolong where one of Nggeya's daughters had married, asking for the bridewealth to be paid. In both cases by writing letters they were attempting to increase the pressure on their in-laws. Since in the latter case one of the parties is also active as a local historian it would not be surprising if a copy or a draft were retained by a member of the family. How long it may survive, though, is difficult to guess. Paper records have hobbesian lives in many African villages: nasty, brutish and short.

VII

In order to gain a general idea of what types of documents were held by individuals in the village, I asked one of my regular secretaries to collect information on fifty individuals (this is tabulated below). The style of the listing and the degree of completeness itself reflects his understanding of documentation and its purposes. For example, only one person is mentioned as having medical records, although I suspect more of those listed below had them. This reveals some of the difficulties in obtaining accurate data of a general nature - it was hard to explain that I wanted to see what *sorts* (no matter what kind) of documents people held. The interviewer concentrated on administrative documents (apart from noting a single certificate recording a serious illness). Ordinary dispensary notebooks were not noteworthy in his view. Personal letters and photographs were never mentioned, nor were old school books. Although there is a general word for "paper" (*derua*, borrowed from Fulfulde) in the Mambila language, the only examples in common use are those of officialdom.

This introduces a bias to the survey process which I think it is necessary to recognize. The problem is that there is no easy way to talk about 'documents' or 'papers' in a sensible yet neutral fashion. In the end I had to accept that the systematic data collection exercise was flawed; biased

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towards the documents of bureaucratic administration. Yet even allowing for these flaws it reveals something of the underlying patterns of what documentation exists. As a response to this recording bias I have attempted to list the other sorts of documentary evidence available in the village (see above).

Diaries: Inspired by Pat Caplan's (1997) book *African Voices* (which I first read when I was in the village in Cameroon) I asked several people to keep diaries for me - mainly to see what this would elicit, rather than having any specific or clear purpose in mind. In one case my request has clearly chimed as the writer is continuing - albeit under my influence, and with inducements (I pay a small retainer for the work undertaken in my absence). But I have had very little influence over the content—and several of the others who I asked to keep diaries have not so persevered, so there is an internal contrast available. Why one person is so minded and others not is something that leads to a variety of autobiographical blind alleys and takes us to the brink of pop-psychological speculation. Instead of pursuing that line I prefer to examine the texts, which I do in the companion piece to this article (Zeitlyn mss).

VIII

What does this show? Certainly, that the documentary impulse is alive and well and, as can be seen in the success of the diary experiment, it can develop its own momentum. The long term contribution of this village to world history is still uncertain. But the collection of materials is increasing and throughout this century they are likely to increase still further in quantity. Moreover, through increasing access to technologies of reproduction (e.g., photocopiers and computers) their survival rates are likely to increase by the distribution of copies both within the village and its diaspora. Local authors such as Mial and Mbe will have less need of collaborators such as the foreign anthropologist in order to disseminate their work. We await the results with eager anticipation since accounts from neighboring villages, let alone neighboring groups, express local competition through rival claims of autochthony and/or domination. Publication with local distribution may inspire more work to resolve such dilemmas.

Personal documents such as diaries have an as yet untested role to play. The diaries I have mentioned were written on my instigation but, as I have documented, a few people had already started keeping, what in effect are diaries and other records. One case already heard at the chief's court used personal records (receipts) for pre-wedding gifts in the arrangements for a divorce. I anticipate diary entries being produced as

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evidence used against other records, already being kept and known to be kept in the chief's palace. Debate about the validity of records, be they historical or of village disputes, is evidence of skepticism which, although it exists in the village, currently is only rarely expressed in public.

To help readers interpret the table on the next verso and recto pages, I list some sample entries in full:

1) A family group - including the records held by a man, his two sons and daughters-in-law.

Senior Man

Tax receipt; Identity Card; Electoral Eligibility Card; EELC Church Membership card; UCCAO Coffee growers Co-op membership card (issued 31/5/89) - the reverse of which has twice been used as a receipt for coffee sacks delivered to the factory and their subsequent payment.

First son

Birth Certificate; Tax receipt; Identity Card; Electoral Eligibility Card; EELC Church Membership card; Certificate of Baptism.

First son's wife

Birth Certificate; Identity Card; Electoral Eligibility Card; EELC Church Membership card; Certificate of Baptism.

Second son

Birth Certificate; Tax receipt; Identity Card; Electoral Eligibility Card; EELC Church Membership card; Certificate of Baptism.

Second son's wife

Birth Certificate; Identity Card; Electoral Eligibility Card; EELC Church Membership card; Certificate of Baptism.

2) Young man, active as Protestant catechist.

Birth certificate (copy); Identity Card; Electoral Eligibility Card; Three Tax receipts; Membership card of AMAKWADE (Association of Mambila and Kwandja Development); CEPE (primary education certificate); Notes for BEPC; Receipts for the BEPC exam entry; Receipts for entry in primary, secondary schools; School insurance receipts; Student Identity Card; EELC Church Membership card; Certificate of Baptism.; Junior EELC Church Membership card; Evangelisation Card; EELC liturgy; Daily Bible program; This year's daily Bible reading program; Last year's daily Bible reading program; Certificate of 'Holding to the Good'; Documents of Holy Scripture; Calendars, old and new; First and Second level certificate of Mambila language training; Certificate of [linguistic] Monitor training; Certificate of Activity as Animator in the Mambila Language; Certificate of Mambila literacy; Certificate of training in Mambila literacy training; Certificate of participation in the Mambila alphabetiza-

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tion program; Certificate of attendance on an Applied Linguistics course; Receipts for his pots, radio and cassette.

3) Carpenter in his thirties. It should be noted that this man has been keeping a variety of records over the years - mainly concerning his work as a carpenter but also concerning family affairs such as the illness of his brother. None of these were deemed worthy of mention when I asked him to list the documents in his possession. He has a plastic bucket (with lid) of assorted papers. Although the systematic data listing was compiled by the man whose papers are listed under 2) above (whose list tends to completeness by including receipts) it is certain that many of those interviewed in the collection process focused exclusively on official (governmental or religious) documentation.

Identity Card; Tax receipt for agricultural and pastoral income 2000; Tax receipt for individual payment (poll tax) 2000; Electoral Eligibility Card; Local tax receipt ; Work certificate 22 November 1982 Banyo; Birth Certificate 1964

He also has work records and other personal notes, going back c. ten years. These notes record work done: the dimensions of houses he has built, and the payments received for the work. They also record occasional disputes within his family and between him, his family and others.

His wives:

First wife: Identity Card; Electoral Eligibility Card

Second wife: Identity Card; Electoral Eligibility Card; Birth Certificate 1974

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