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Assessing music shift: adapting EGIDS for a Papua New Guinea community

Neil R. Coulter

1. Introduction

It is no secret that ‘lesser-known’ communities around the world are changing. Language shift is receiving increasing attention internationally – and rightly so. Although mechanisms of language shift are becoming clearer, changes in other cultural traditions are less understood. Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine explain that the purpose of their book, *Vanishing voices*, is ‘to inform the wider scientific community and the public of the threat facing the world’s languages, and, by extent, its cultures’ (Nettle & Romaine 2000: ix). As an ethnomusicologist, my primary interest lies within the phrase ‘by extent, its cultures’; a statement that assumes a close relationship between a shift in language and a shift in other cultural domains. I have lived and worked in Papua New Guinea (PNG) since 2002. In my interactions with villagers I have been struck by the lack of a common, obvious connection between language strength and the strength of expressive arts traditions. Some communities, in which vernacular language use is very strong, show little continuity in local artistic traditions. While intergenerational transmission of language in the home may be happening, local singing traditions have all but given way to Western-influenced styles. I would have assumed a more significant connection between language and other traditions, but instead, each domain seems to follow its own individual trajectory. Clearly the phrase ‘by extent, its cultures’ is more than a simple, direct relationship.

2. Research among the Alambulak

In 2003, Jude Mengumari, a speaker of the Alambulak language of Papua New Guinea’s East Sepik Province, invited my family and me to his home and work area to help document and preserve the signaling system of the *garamut*, a log slit-drum. At that time, the Alambulak numbered about 1000. The Alambulak language was strong; it was used in all domains except in elementary school instruction and business communication that went beyond the Alambulak area. It was used alongside Tok Pisin in church. Parents spoke Alambulak with their children, age-mates spoke it with each other, and women who had married in from other language areas tended to acquire Alambulak fluency. During the time I lived there from 2003 to 2006, however, I often

heard people express regret and remorse at the loss of local music traditions. This came not only from older people who wished that younger generations were more interested, but also from the younger people themselves, who affirmed that they really were interested. What puzzled me was the sense of helplessness I observed among the Alamblak people, as if they felt they were powerless to actively make changes. I initially hoped that my participant-observation fieldwork, and recording and publishing projects we engaged in together on a full-time basis, would stimulate increased Alamblak musical activity. Several years after having left the Alamblak community however, that does not seem to have happened.

Halfway through my main three year fieldwork period, I determined that I was observing a shift in music similar to what Fishman (1991) describes for languages. Focusing on Alamblak musical preferences as a form of music shift freed me from seeing things as an overly simplified traditional-versus-introduced dichotomy. A community's musical activities reflect a changing balance of preferences and experiences. Alamblak pleas to 'save our music before it disappears completely' were really calls for help to reverse music shift, but neither they nor I had a clear picture of what was really happening. Through Fishman's work I saw that language and cultural traditions are not merely 'safe' or 'endangered'. There are many more subtle gradations of vitality. Fishman summarized the various stages of vitality in his Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS). As I pondered the Alamblak situation – similar to many other places in Papua New Guinea – I decided that adapting the GIDS to evaluate music shift would help me and the Alamblak people see more clearly what was happening.

3. Music survey: Alamblak music categories

The first step towards an adapted GIDS evaluation was to gather information about musical knowledge, experience and confidence among community members. Alamblak people identify four general categories of music:

1. *Refonm* is a communal vocal style accompanied by the *watit* drum, an instrument type known throughout PNG by the Tok Pisin term *kundu* (Coulter 2007: 101–135). People of all ages are welcome to participate in *refonm*. Song leaders and drummers can be men or women, although usually drummers are men. Performances typically happen at all-night singing events, but *refonm* also sometimes occurs as part of larger, daytime celebrations, for example, the opening of a business course, a school celebration, or welcoming a prestigious visitor. A resurgence of *refonm* performances occurred in 2003, when Alamblak Christians began composing new *refonm* songs with Christian

lyrics. These new songs were never used within the church building, but they were popular at the all-night singing events.

Figure 1. *Reform* performance, at a daytime celebration, 2004



2. *Yahrim* is music performed on a set of transverse bamboo flutes (Coulter 2007: 136–162). A full set of *yahrim* flutes includes five different lengths. Each flute sounds one pitch, with the three longest flutes able to overblow to an octave above. In performance, the flute players play in an interlocking technique, using the combinations of flute pitches to create melodies. Performance traditionally occurred in the men’s house as part of initiation. The origin story of the flutes tells of a time when women discovered the possibility of producing sound with bamboo. Soon, however, men seized the flutes and declared them a secret, sacred possession of the men. The flutes remained hidden from women until male initiation rituals ended in the early 1970s. Christianity entered the Alamblak area in the late 1960s. The Alamblak men who became Christians felt that it was wrong to keep the flutes hidden from women, so they brought the flutes into the open. Today, women can be present at *yahrim* performances, which are held in the same locations as *reform*, but they still do not touch or play the instruments. *Yahrim* has been the music style of choice for tourist shows, performed in Mayungwafi village for groups of tourists from the nearby Karawari Lodge.

Figure 2. An outdoor *yahrim* performance, 2005



3. The wooden slit-drum, known in Tok Pisin as *garamut*, is a common instrument type found throughout Papua New Guinea, especially in the northern half of the country (for an overview of published *garamut* studies, see Niles 2010). The Alambalak *garamut*, called *nrwit*, is a hollowed length of tree trunk, between 4 and 6 feet long, and between 2 and 4 feet tall, with a long, thin opening in the top (Coulter 2005, Coulter 2007: 72-100). The *nrwit* player holds a beater stick, 3–4 feet long, and strikes a nodule at the edge of the slit with the blunt end of the beater. The deep, resonant sound from the *nrwit* carries over a great distance and can be used to send messages within or beyond the village. An individual nuclear family might own one *nrwit*, which rests on the ground just outside the family home, sheltered from the weather by the overhanging eaves of the roof. Alambalak people stated that previous generations used the *nrwit* to say anything that people could say, although the signaling system is not sonically imitative of the spoken language. By the time of my fieldwork, the system had fallen into disuse, and only a few older men were able to play the signals. Other people said that they could understand some signals when they heard them, but could not themselves produce *nrwit* communication. Today, the primary use of the *nrwit* is announcing the death of a village resident. A *nrwit* outside the church building at Munduku Station

(within Amongabi village) signals the beginning of Friday and Sunday morning church services. The beat pattern used for the church is one that the Evangelical Brotherhood Church denomination uses throughout their mission stations in PNG. As it is not derived from the actual Alamblak signal system, people referred to it as ‘Tok Pisin *garamut*’.

Figure 3. A small *nrwit*



4. The fourth category of Alamblak music performance is a miscellany of any recently introduced, primarily Western-influenced, music: especially pop music on the radio and Christian songs learned in church or at denominational conventions. As in many places in the country, Alamblak young people are enamored of ‘power band’ instruments: guitar, keyboard, and drums. As in other places, these influences are becoming stronger, obviously changing preferences and informing choices.

3.1. Adapting the survey tools

Those four general music categories became the basis of a methodology for assessment. Continuing to explore the links between sociolinguistics and ethnomusicology, I considered the tools of the language surveyor (Blair 1990). Data gathered during language surveys can be used to map dialect boundaries and gauge language shift. I was interested in similar issues, but focusing on music choices. Of the common language survey tools, two seemed particularly adaptable to assessing music shift: the Self-Evaluation Questionnaire (SEQ) and the Recorded Text Test (RTT). Each of these approaches offers participants a different way of demonstrating knowledge or ability. The SEQ is a set of questions about a person's perceived ability in, or experience with, language use. In the music adaptation, I created a set of 30 questions that asked about people's experience and knowledge in the four main categories. The survey included questions such as 'Have you ever made a *watit* drum?', 'Do you attend *refonm* performances?', 'Have you ever composed a new *refonm* song?', etc. The SEQ asked about specific skills or experiences. In addition, the SEQ asked about the participants' parents, to find out how people perceived the musicality of the generation above them. In asking this of each participant, I hoped to get some idea of where the breakdown of continuity happened. The SEQ is unavoidably subjective, since it relies only on what people choose to say about themselves. However, attitudes about musical proficiency are an important factor in revitalization; a community that collectively feels inadequate regarding musical creativity may be less motivated to engage in revitalization projects, at least without outside encouragement. As I carried out this survey, crowds gathered to watch, and sometimes people nearby would supply answers that the participant either did not recall or (sometimes in the case of questions about parents) did not know. The group participation was welcome during the SEQ, which often became a lively time for discussion.

The RTT is an exercise in listening to and identifying a number of audio samples. In a language survey this might mean hearing a recorded story and then answering a set of questions about the content. For the music RTT, I created a playlist of ten audio recordings from the three indigenous Alablak categories: *refonm*, *yahrim*, and *nrwit*. Each survey participant heard the examples and tried to identify each one. I defined 'positive identification' very broadly: the name of the song, any of the lyrics, something about the content or meaning of the song. If people could say almost anything about the audio examples they heard, I counted it as a correct response. I ran a pilot-test of the playlists with two men who I knew to be knowledgeable about Alablak music; between the two of them, all of the examples were correctly identified. In order to control the amount of neighbourly assistance during the

RTT, I created two playlists with similar but different examples, and then alternated the playlists, which were played in a somewhat random order. RTT participants heard the examples through headphones, to limit the amount of assistance from other people nearby. This procedure was new to the Alamblak people, but it seemed to be acceptable, except in a couple of cases in which listening to headphones seemed too new an experience for the participants to be able to answer to their true ability.

No music shift survey can be completely objective. By using these two different survey methods, however, I hoped to broaden the kind of data that I was gathering. An assessment that depends solely upon spoken responses by community members is subject to the variations of how people in different places represent themselves: do people make much of what may be only small ability, or do they say little about their substantial ability? On the other hand, an assessment that relies on observations by an outsider may notice some things not apparent to insiders, but it also risks missing vital insider perceptions. The Alamblak music survey is not perfect, but it is an attempt at a decent balance of surveying styles, giving people more than one way to demonstrate their knowledge and experience.

3.2. Music survey results

I surveyed almost 100 people in total – about 10% of the population – usually giving the SEQ and RTT together as one complete survey. The results were as I expected. For looking at music shift I found it most helpful to present the survey results according to age groups. I divided the participants into two groups: age 30 and younger, and 31 and older. People age 30 and younger would have had a significantly different life experience. They were the first generation that grew up in an independent Papua New Guinea, went to school, did not go through initiation rituals, and heard about Christianity from childhood. Figure 4 shows the SEQ results about participants' own abilities according to the percentage of affirmative responses, grouped by age. Figure 5 shows the SEQ results for what participants said about their parents. The final graph (Figure 6) shows parents and participants together, clearly showing the decrease in self-professed knowledge and experience in Alamblak music, while more recently introduced styles are steadily growing, though are not widespread.

Figure 4: Alamlak SEQ results by participants' age groups

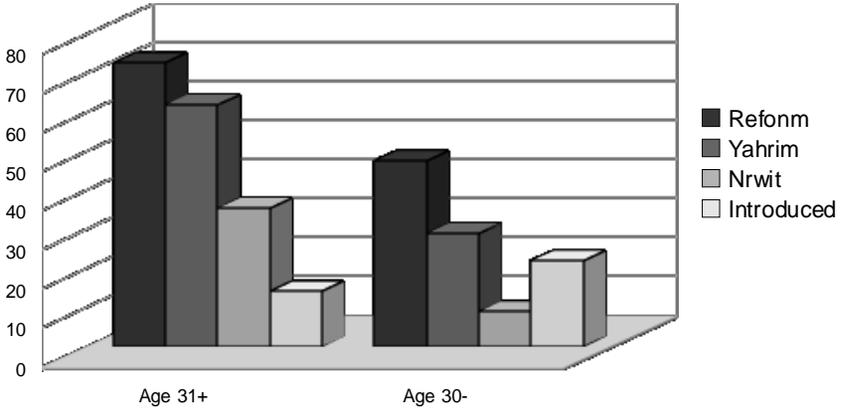


Figure 5: Alamlak SEQ results for participants' perceptions of their parents

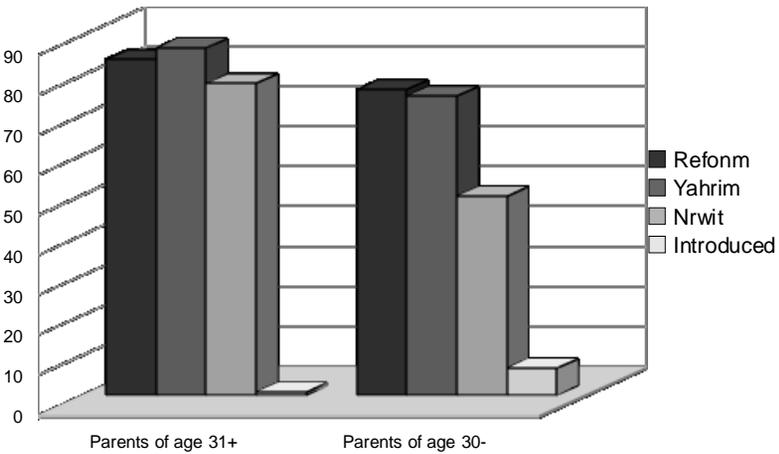
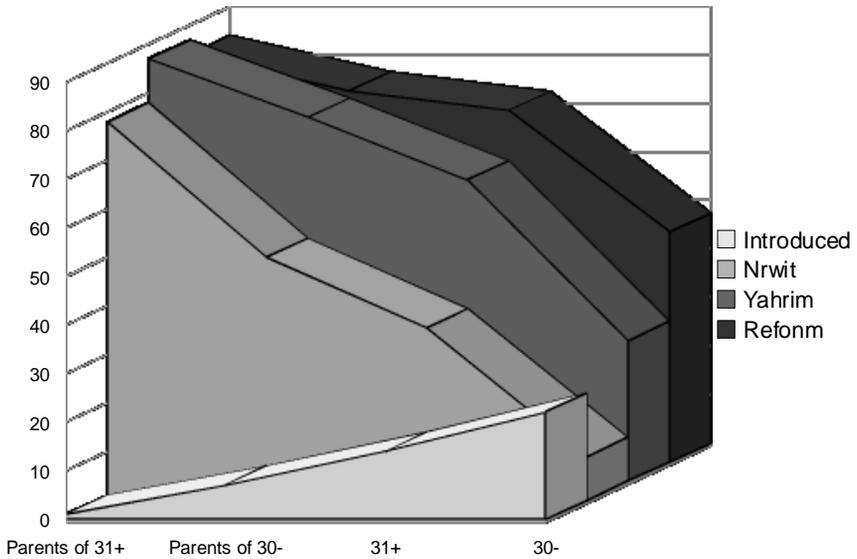


Figure 6: Alambalak SEQ results, parents and participants combined



The RTT could not ask about parents, nor did it include the fourth category, 'Introduced'. The RTT results, grouped by age, are shown in Figure 7. Just as the SEQ showed a downward progression of what Alambalak people believe they know about their own local music, so the RTT results show that older people can more easily identify audio examples of those three categories – even though in general the younger people are more comfortable with audio technology and headphones. A final graph (Figure 8) shows the combined results of SEQ and RTT: a clear picture of weakening indigenous music. Opportunities for Alambalak people to make music together are declining. This is a reason for concern if, as Charles Keil suggests, '[t]hat kind of physical grooving, being together and tuning up to somebody else's sense of time is what we're on the planet for' (Keil & Feld 2005: 24). The Alambalak music survey points to a time when very few people will be able to groove together in any kind of musical style.

Figure 7: Alablak RTT results by age groups¹

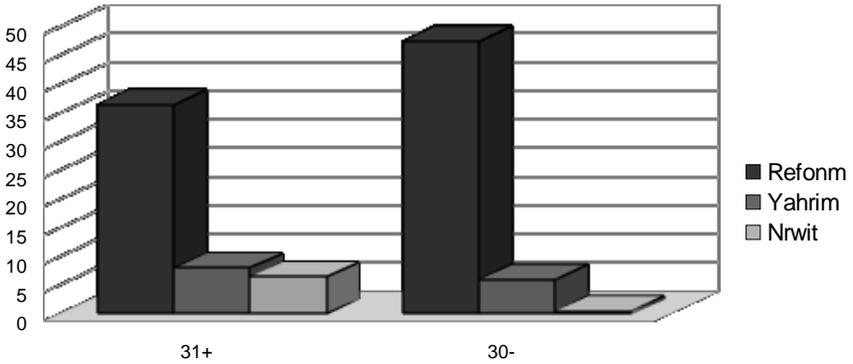
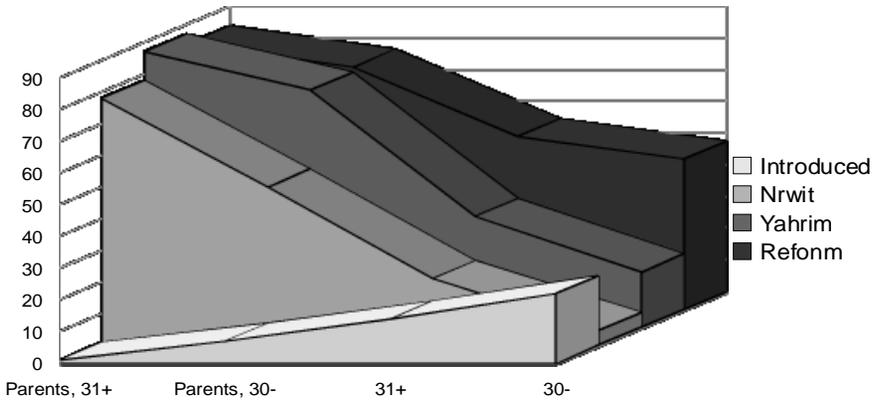


Figure 8: Alablak combined SEQ and RTT



¹ Why did the younger age group do better at identifying *refonm*? A few of the older people had difficulty understanding the listening/identification process and because there were fewer participants in the older age group, this skews the results..

My experience with Alamlak music shift had started with generalities – ‘we’re losing our music and we don’t know what we can do about it’ – but had now moved into a clearer definition of ‘we’re losing our music’. The second step was to find answers for the rest of that statement: ‘we don’t know what we can do about it’. In order to do that, I assessed the Alamlak music categories on an adaptation of Fishman’s GIDS.

4. The Graded Music Shift Scale

Fishman’s GIDS has served language advocates for almost twenty years. Other language shift assessment models are also available, including UNESCO’s ‘9 Factors’ (UNESCO 2003). Recently, Paul Lewis and Gary Simons proposed an expanded GIDS, or EGIDS, to fill in some of the perceived gaps in Fishman’s original (Lewis & Simons 2010). The EGIDS (Table 1) comprises thirteen stages of language vitality, keyed into the same numbers that Fishman used. Some stages are now split into ‘a’ and ‘b’, with new stages added above and below the original framework. The EGIDS stages are labelled, from strongest to most endangered, as follows: International, National, Regional, Trade, Educational, Written, Vigorous, Threatened, Shifting, Moribund, Nearly extinct, Dormant, and Extinct.

The EGIDS framework is not transferable to music without some changes. This is due to the different implications of ‘language use’ and ‘music use’. It is relatively easy to determine when people are using and understanding a language, but much less clear when looking at music styles. For example, musical stability does not require all people in a community to be expert musicians, nor can there be any universal expectations for frequency or regularity of music performance. However, a number of general principles for music vitality do exist. A musical style is endangered if only the oldest generation still has any proficiency in that system. If general interest in the community has shifted to another musical focus, then other styles are in danger of disappearing. The loss of traditional contexts or functions for music performance signals danger for the related music styles. The locking-in of a repertoire, especially in a ‘tourist show’ context, may lead to a loss of new creative expression. In short, though music shift is a slippery concept and difficult to look at objectively and comparatively, it can be identified and assessed. This can lead to more informed decisions for local communities interested in revitalizing endangered traditions.

Table 1: Expanded GIDS (Lewis & Simons 2010)

<i>Level</i>	<i>Label</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>UNESCO</i>
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, government at the nationwide level.	Safe
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.	Safe
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.	Safe
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.	Safe
5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the country.	Safe
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.	Safe
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.	Vulnerable
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves, but none are transmitting it to their children.	Definitely endangered
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.	Severely endangered
8b	Nearly extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use it.	Critically endangered
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency.	Extinct
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.	Extinct

Adapting the EGIDS for music requires a reduction and redefinition of the stages. I call this adaptation the Graded Music Shift Scale, or GMSS (Table 2). I like the term ‘music shift’ because it affirms that music preferences are constantly changing; the word ‘shift’ need not imply downward movement towards endangerment. The dynamic movement implied by ‘shift’ avoids more historically complicated terms such as ‘preservation’, or even the current term of choice, ‘sustainability’.² The GMSS comprises eight stages – the same number as Fishman’s original GIDS, but the stage numbers of each framework do not correspond exactly. Though the GMSS is smaller than the EGIDS, most of the stages are equivalent to EGIDS stages. In order to foster dialogue across the disciplines, I have retained the name of each stage as in the EGIDS. The GMSS stages are (from most to least stable): International, National or regional, Vigorous, Threatened, Locked, Shifting, Dormant, and Extinct. The sole departure from the EGIDS terms is Stage 5, Locked – the stage at which a music style is performed for tourist shows or other non-functional occasions, therefore the repertoire is not being added to, but is frozen. This is an important consideration for music, because the goal of revitalization is surely exemplified by a community that is actively creating, developing, and changing music. Revitalization is not the preservation of an unchanging repertoire where people no longer feel competent to alter or add to it. I do say this cautiously, affirming that mere novelty cannot be the ultimate goal, any more than a set, frozen repertoire is. The ideal is between these two extremes, where people are joyfully participating in music with full creative freedom.

The primary focus of the GMSS is music *use* by the home community. Popularity, prestige, public reception, commercial recordings – these are not unimportant in revitalization, but they are not the main emphasis here. Revitalization must include actual use, with people playing around in that stylistic space. Although the upper levels of the GMSS include regional, national, and international support, the focus always remains on the home community. Therefore, the crucial stage for music revitalization is Stage 3, Vigorous. This is the point at which the music’s existence is very stable, and continued creation within that style is assured. This stage says nothing about how often the music is performed, but simply that people have ‘sufficient opportunities for performance’ and that young people are able to learn through observation, participation and in appropriate educational contexts. Stability

² However, there is excellent work being done under the name of ‘sustainability’, including Griffith University’s *Sustainable futures* project (Griffith University 2011) and Jeff Todd Titon’s thoughtful blog called *Sustainable music* (Titon 2011).

Table 2: Graded Music Shift Scale (GMSS)

EGIDS level	GMSS level	Label	Description	Movement considerations
0	1	International	A music reaches this level when an international 'community of practice' forms around it. Ideally, international participation in this music will include performance as well as consumer consumption.	<i>Movement upward:</i> N/A <i>Movement downward:</i> Any number of factors could contrive to move this music downward, but that doesn't have to mean it is weakening in the home community.
1, 2	2	National or regional	The music's reputation grows beyond the home community. Community members may receive financial or other support from the regional or national level. People outside the home community learn to perform the music, and the performance becomes iconic of the region or nation. Though not the ultimate goal of music revitalization, it can increase confidence in the home community. The music's high profile might open doors for community development in other domains.	<i>Movement upward:</i> If an international community of practice would be beneficial to the home community, explore options for wider exposure and participation. <i>Movement downward:</i> There may be a fine line between this level and Level 5, especially if the music becomes relegated to certain regional or national functions.

6a	3	Vigorous	<p>This is the pivotal level for music vitality. In this level, oral transmission and largely intact contexts of education are sufficient opportunities for performance and young people are learning by observation, participation, and appropriate educational contexts. A music can exist comfortably at this level without needing to move higher.</p>	<p><i>Movement upward:</i> Continue fostering the growth of music through varied contexts, recording, and documentation. Be open to new innovations based on older styles. Consider whether higher level support (GMSS Levels 1 and 2) would practically benefit the community and the music.</p> <p><i>Movement downward:</i> Assumptions that the music is now perpetually stable could blind community members to changes as they happen, eventually causing downward movement.</p>
6b	4	Threatened	<p>The first level that hints at downward movement, toward endangerment. Music is still performed, but changes are becoming noticeable: diminishing performance contexts, more time given to more recent introductions, more rural-urban movement.</p>	<p><i>Movement upward:</i> Foster more intentional contexts for passing on knowledge. Consider incorporating local music education into the schools.</p> <p><i>Movement downward:</i> Lack of specific goal-setting for the future of this style may endanger it.</p>
N/A	5	Locked	<p>The music is known by more people than just the grandparent generation, but its performance is restricted to tourist shows or other contexts that are not integrated into the everyday life of the community. The performance repertoire is fixed and nothing new is being added to it. Participation, creative freedom, and grooving decline noticeably.</p>	<p><i>Movement upward:</i> Find new and existing contexts for this music. Record and document. Encourage educational contexts and new contributions to the repertoire.</p> <p><i>Movement downward:</i> This music is vulnerable to the loss of the performance context, or competition for time and effort of practitioners.</p>

7, 8	6	Shifting	The grandparent generation is proficient in this music, but fewer contexts exist for passing it on to younger people. Possibly the younger people do not express interest (or are perceived that way by their parents and grandparents). The music is not dead or endangered at this level, and can be revitalized, but signs point to downward movement and likely endangerment.	<p><i>Movement upward:</i> Facilitate performances of this music. Create contexts in which the older practitioners can interact with interested younger people. Record and document.</p> <p><i>Movement downward:</i> If the tradition is not documented, and younger people have few opportunities to learn, then further endangerment is likely.</p>
9	7	Dormant	Functional contexts for performance are gone, but recordings and other ethnographic description exist. A community could re-acquaint itself with the music, but its rebirth would likely be something different than what it was.	<p><i>Movement upward:</i> Look at documentation with community members and discuss why the music is no longer performed. Find out if anyone is able to create anything in this style, or if elements of this style have been adapted into other music systems.</p> <p><i>Movement downward:</i> Only if documentation is lost or destroyed.</p>
10	8	Extinct	No one in the community is capable of creating or performing in this style. Probably no performance has occurred in the lifetime of anyone currently living. No documentation exists. This is rarer, as most musics grow into other styles, or stylistic elements are perpetuated in related styles. But people may be able to name music styles, genres, instruments, or ensembles that they have never actually heard.	<p><i>Movement upward:</i> Not very hopeful. Record whatever information is available. Encouraging conversation about this lost music may cause people to think more about other weakening musics.</p> <p><i>Movement downward:</i> N/A</p>

will not only look different from one place to the next, but also for different styles of music within the same community. In addition, stability exists beyond the outward appearance of the performance. A staged or mass media production may well be integrated into the life of the community, or it may be on Stage 5, Locked.

The final column of the GMSS details considerations for upward or downward movement from each stage. In this way I hope to free this framework from a default negative assumption: that the music being assessed is necessarily moving downward, towards endangerment. Any music at any stage on the GMSS can move upward, towards greater strength, and indeed, this final column on the table presents some ideas for upward-movement from each stage. The column also briefly explains what factors might cause the music to fall to a lower stage. The purpose of the GMSS is to push community stakeholders towards activism in their music, not just to show what stage their music is currently at. As the balance of available music is always changing, the GMSS should encourage people to become involved in those changes and to take more control over their expressive arts traditions.

4.1. Placing Alamblak music on the GMSS

Looking at the data gathered about Alamblak music traditions, each of the three local styles can be placed on a different GMSS level. *Refonm* is the most stable of all the musical styles in the survey. People still perform *refonm* occasionally for their own enjoyment, as well as using it for big celebration days. During performances, children observe what their parents and grandparents do, so intergenerational transmission is occurring. I would put *refonm* on either Level 3, Vigorous, or 4, Threatened. It is stable but perhaps not 'vigorous', with clear signs from the survey that knowledge and experience are declining. If Alamblak people wanted to strengthen *refonm*, they might create more regular, frequent performance opportunities, and possibly incorporate *refonm* instruction into the elementary school curriculum or other educational settings. Another difficulty for *refonm* vitality is the *watit* drum needed for the performance. While I was living with the Alamblak, *Refonm* performances were often delayed or cancelled because no one could find a *watit* to play. A decline in material production, coupled with young men not being trained or experienced in drum making, is contributing directly to the decline in performance opportunities. Therefore I would recommend agreeing on a time and place where the older men could teach the young men how to make a *watit*, in order to ensure the continuity of the tradition and the increased opportunity for *refonm* performance. In fact, loss of instrument-making skills is a factor in all Alamblak traditional music shift.

Yahrim is in more danger. At Level 6, Shifting, it is moving downwards. Older, initiated men are still performing, but the younger generations not able to. Young men express interest in learning *yahrim*, but without the context of the initiation ritual, they are left without a clearly defined setting for learning. The last *yahrim* performance I know of, in the Amongabi area, was in March 2006. This is a big indication that *yahrim* may be headed toward Level 7, Dormant, where it will exist until someone decides to resuscitate it. The full repertoire that is remembered by its current practitioners was recorded, with copies of the recordings distributed among the community. However, this has not stimulated growth in the musical style. In addition, the tourist shows in Mayungwafi, sponsored by the Karawari Lodge, ended in about 2005. Though this might not have been the ideal performance context for revitalization, it is certainly another closed door for the future of *yahrim*.

Signaling on the *nrwit* is already at Level 7. Recordings and documentation exist, but people are not using the signaling system. Kondak, the acknowledged expert who taught me the *nrwit* patterns, died in 2010. People could, if they choose, re-learn the *nrwit* patterns, likely in an adapted form rather than the exact traditional system; at this point, it seems unlikely. As mobile phones become a larger part of communication in Papua New Guinea, people will have the option to send text messages, similar to the *nrwit* signals. When I asked an Alamblak friend about this, he pointed out an important difference: the *nrwit* sends one message to entire villages at once, but text messages are sent only to one individual. Community involvement is a Melanesian ideal that is not well-suited to mobile phone communication.

5. Conclusion

Several years have now passed since my full-time involvement with the Alamblak community. I have made short visits back to Amongabi annually and continue to care about my friends there and the music shift we studied together. I wish that my conclusion here could be more optimistic about Alamblak music revitalization. The music survey was beneficial, the GMSS stages have helped me think about the Alamblak soundscape with more clarity, and the goals and plans for revitalization seem sound. Unfortunately, despite the recordings, documentation, interviews, surveys, commissioned instruments, sponsored performances, and general interest and encouragement, Alamblak musical styles do not appear to be any stronger now than they did in 2003. The first question I ask, then, is: what difference does any of this make? It is an important question for me, personally, because of my concern for my Alamblak friends and my hopes for the very best for their lives. Beyond that, it is an important question as more funding is

awarded to cultural revitalization projects from the international community, whether through UNESCO or other aid agencies and NGOs. As Helbig (2008: 53) wrote, ‘complexities arise when identities are forced into templates formulated by international institutions’. It is worthwhile to consider a broad range of assessment tools and activities in order to minimize the negative effects of these complexities as much as possible.

I have learned through this research that reversing shift cannot happen without strong local advocates who are brave enough to step out of the cultural trends and work toward a very different objective. Although Alambak people are now more aware of music shift, there is not yet a local champion motivated to reverse the shift. People talk and express regret, but without action. I resonate with Steven Feld’s anguish over Kaluli cultural shift (Keil & Feld 2005: 180):

I have depicted the Kaluli as having a musically coherent kind of universe. And the question that you can throw at me is, if it’s so damn coherent, why aren’t they resisting...? Why isn’t [their music] helping them stay strong? ... To what extent are people making choices now that are in any way adaptive? Or are we just seeing something which is an extremely profound pattern in Papua New Guinea, where people are extremely dramatic and expressive and make a lot of quick changes, like dropping ceremonies and then reviving them?

The best-designed revitalization project, with all the money in the world, cannot motivate people to do what they will not choose to do themselves.

A second question is: how does the GMSS handle musical hybrids? Music is a lot more fluid and flexible than language. Every musical style changes over time even when it is considered a stable, viable style. The GMSS seems to lock musical styles into one specific identity. One interesting, though brief, development in Alambak music in 2008 was when a youth leader in the local Lutheran church took melodic and lyrical elements from *refonm* songs and paired them with guitar, tambourine, and *watit*. The result was an entirely new style, hybridized from several unrelated musical elements. This young man moved away from the village and the musical trend did not continue, but it was well received and even used in church services, where pure *refonm* itself has never been. Such hybridization is one of music’s greatest departures from language. In many cases, hybridization is probably the most appropriate direction for music to develop. Yet, musical elements surviving in new, hybrid forms complicate assessment by instruments such as the GMSS.

Consideration of hybridity must push the current 2-dimensional GMSS into a fully 3-dimensional structure.

The final question is: is continued study of music shift of real value to related areas, such as language? I began this research project assuming connections between different cultural domains that might be coordinated in revitalization efforts. Even though I have not always seen a close connection between language use and expressive arts, I still feel that collaborative research will yield the most satisfying results. What would a more complete assessment of linguistic and cultural shift in a community look like, and how would it benefit local community members? I look forward to continued collaboration between all researchers and local stakeholders, moving toward stability and creative freedom.

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