

IASA RESEARCH GRANT REPORT: PILOT PROJECT IN RE-STUDY AND REPATRIATION (DIGITAL RETURN) OF THE INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY OF AFRICAN MUSIC'S HUGH TRACEY FIELD RECORDINGS

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I. Introduction

Digital conversion of audio, photographic, and film collections in sound and audiovisual archives for purposes of preservation and accessibility has been the norm in archival practice since the 1990s. As a result, analog to digital conversion of many music heritage collections, such as the field recordings of Hugh Tracey at the International Library of African Music (ILAM) in South Africa, has been accomplished. With funding secured from the Mellon Foundation, Rand Merchant Bank Expressions Fund, South African National Heritage Council (NAC), and National Research Foundation (NRF), the recordings, films, photos, and documents in the Hugh Tracey Collection (hereafter referred to as the Collection) were catalogued and preserved in digital format from 2006–2008. The audio files and 1,000 images in the Collection have been accessible in compressed form via the Internet since late in 2008. Plus, Tracey's well-known *Sound of Africa* and *Music of Africa* LP series are available as CD compilations and as MP3 files from ILAM and various online vendors. Not surprisingly, the many and various opportunities for dissemination digital conversion of field recordings has afforded have brought with them ethical issues for cultural heritage archives which are briefly discussed below.

Prime among these issues is awareness in academe of the need to decolonize ethnographic disciplines such as ethnomusicology, anthropology, and ethnology, and by extension the archived collections of field recordings acquired during the colonial era that are their hallmark. The "Pilot Project in Re-Study and Repatriation (digital return) of the International Library of African Music's Hugh Tracey Field Recordings" was initiated as an effort in that direction, given that Tracey built his archive of thousands of audio recordings and still photos and 18 films from throughout sub Saharan Africa from the 1930s–1960s, at the height of the colonial era. Tracey made sure his recordings were preserved for future generations by establishing the International Library of African Music in 1954 as a research institute and archive devoted to study and publication of knowledge about African music and related art forms. He also disseminated his recordings widely through commercial releases in 78 rpm and LP formats intended to reach local and international markets. Technology of the time did not allow him to give copies of the recordings to the musicians who performed on them; nor did they receive a return from sales, due to recording industry standards of the time. Thus, although only in its infancy of implementation, this Project is intended as a concrete gesture in decolonization of Tracey's archive. Now, 60–70 years after Tracey made his recordings, nearly all of the artists have passed on and most descendants of the artists do not even know the recordings exist, much less that they might serve as a vehicle to sustain their music heritage.

Because they possess recordings of endangered music heritage, an equally important issue for archives is their responsibility to contribute to music sustainability efforts. Although digital conversion may ensure preservation of historic recordings, it does not ensure the continued performance of the music heritage preserved on those recordings. It is possible that the recordings will be preserved for the foreseeable future (provided the digital carriers withstand the test of time); and it is true that the material is more easily and widely accessible to all in digital format via the Internet. But, the reality of low bandwidth, sparse Internet accessibility and no electricity to recharge cell phones, i-pads, or laptops remains for many people in the southern hemisphere, especially in the rural areas where many collections of field recordings were created. This dictates that dissemination also needs to take place in

ways that reach people living without internet access and without electricity because of their remote locations and/or lack of resources as a result of marginalization and poverty.

Given these conditions and the ethical issues surrounding them, several related aims emerged for the Project as follows: to give back digital copies of Tracey's recordings in their source communities to the musicians recorded (if any are still alive) or to their descendants as a gesture of reciprocity, because they are entitled to have them; to give the material to music educators and community musicians in general for sustainability reasons due to the endangered status of many of the music traditions; and to re-study existing metadata at the time of digital return to correct errors and to gain more information.

Widespread changes of the digital age, such as mass migration and effects of global popular culture on younger generations, endanger the sustainability of cultural heritage and therefore musical traditions throughout the world. This makes it urgent for archives to return historic recordings; ideally, directly to culture-bearers. For ILAM, returning the recordings to the communities they came from is possible because Tracey's metadata tells us the locations where the recordings were made and the names of the artists who performed for him. A token monetary return is given to surviving musicians or their descendants, since so many of the recordings were released commercially. In fact, with the early 78 rpm releases, whatever gain there was went to Gallo Recording Company in exchange for Gallo's support for Tracey's field equipment and travel costs. It must be acknowledged that Tracey's lifelong mission was to preserve African music for future generations of Africans and to get it into the schools of Africa for the sake of its sustainability. Unfortunately the latter he never managed to accomplish due to lack of funding.

When digital conversion of the Hugh Tracey Collection was accomplished and the recordings made accessible online from ILAM's website in 2008,¹ we finally knew the full extent of the Collection and were in a position to disseminate it as widely as possible. A first gesture was to supply digital copies to national archives in Zambia and Swaziland and to university music departments in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. The Collection was also disseminated through ILAM outreach projects including creation of a travelling museum exhibition (installed in 11 different historical museums throughout South Africa since 2010) and publication of two music education textbooks intended to get the music heritage out of the archive and into communities through the schools. These projects gave the general public, teachers, and school children access to Tracey's field recordings, images, and films; and they have worked to raise awareness of the existence of ILAM and its role, since its inception, to promote knowledge, appreciation, and sustainability of African music.

The first opportunity to carry out digital return to source communities did not materialize until 2014 when, thanks to a request from Tabu Osusa, Director of Ketebul Music, for information needed for a Singing Wells music instrument sustainability project in Uganda, support to launch the Project was offered from the Abubillah Music Foundation.² The Project

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- 1 Since late 2008, it is no longer necessary to physically come to ILAM to access the Collection. The online catalogue, with numerous search options, offers metadata and a 30 second audio clip of each Hugh Tracey recording. Digital files of the recordings and the document archive are available from ILAM for research purposes upon request.
 - 2 The Abubillah Music Foundation funds the Singing Wells Project which was established in 2011 by its Director, Jimmy Allen, in collaboration with Tabu Osusa, founding Director of Ketebul Music, an NGO recording studio in Nairobi. The fieldwork, conducted in August 2014, was only possible due to this support. To view numerous outcomes of Singing Wells projects including this one, visit www.singingwells.org.

commenced late July 2014 with fieldwork in Kenya in the Rift Valley (Kipsigis recordings)³ and in the Lake Victoria region (Luo recordings). The initial fieldwork brought with it realization that effective digital return had to allow for basic problems in rural Africa, such as lack of electricity and lack of playback equipment for CDs or digital files. This presented a very concrete issue not anticipated: the need to offer equipment in cases where people have no electricity and/or means for playback. The solution found in the moment in villages in Kenya was to purchase inexpensive portable radios with USB ports and rechargeable batteries. Giving such devices was necessary in almost all cases of return in rural villages with no electricity in Malawi in May 2016, but in Mombasa and Malindi recipients either had CD players or devices with USB ports to which the recordings could be transferred as MP3s. Unfortunately, often recipients do not have expensive smartphones with adequate storage capacity for large audio files, which means transferring the audio files to cellphones is not a reliable option.

2. Digital Return in Mombasa

Support from an IASA research grant for a second effort of the Project in Kenya covered travel, subsistence, and research assistance costs for implementation in Mombasa and Malindi in February 2016. I carried out digital return (in CD and MP3 format) and re-study of Hugh Tracey's 49 field recordings made in 1950 and 1952 in Mombasa and 28 field recordings made in Malindi in 1950. I was assisted with all logistics of locating descendants of musicians and others to whom the recordings were returned and with documentation of the process by Ketebul Music staff members, photographer Patrick Ondiek, and sound engineer Steve Kivutia, who were part of the team that did the repatriation and restudy of Kipsigis and Luo recordings in 2014 mentioned above. My fieldwork dates were integrated into their busy schedule filming a television documentary on traditional music in Mombasa. Their project dove-tailed well with mine in that the people helping them with the film were able to help with locating local collaborators. The mini-van and driver hired for the Ketebul film project was provided for our considerable transport needs. The transport and the help from Steve and Patrick was gratis thanks to the generosity of Ketebul's Director, Tabu Osusa.

Preliminary work done in advance of the actual fieldwork was as follows. Steve and Patrick were sent MP3s of the Mombasa and Malindi recordings and PDFs of the soft bound field notebooks for each location containing track lists of the recordings (2 CDs, Mombasa; 1 CD, Malindi) and scans of Tracey's fieldcards inscribed at the time he made the recordings. Names and addresses of the musicians, their language, instruments played, translations of song lyrics, the location where each of the songs was recorded and miscellaneous comments are given on each fieldcard. The CDs and notebooks were compiled at ILAM by ILAM's sound engineer, Elijah Madiba and his assistant, Jason Speckman under my supervision. The metadata in the field notebooks provided Steve and Patrick with essential information about locations and names of musicians recorded to use for their preliminary work. They also found assistants with connections to local music to help locate descendants of the musicians Tracey recorded.

3 Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gi8xeDrsQTs&feature=youtu.be> to view a brief documentary video produced by Singing Wells regarding the digital return and re-study of Tracey's Kipsigis recording "Chemirocha" about the American singer, Jimmy Rodgers that was a hit in the 1950s.

Mr Mbarak Ali Haji, composer and leader of Lalelele Orchestra, Mombasa's only remaining taarab orchestra and Mzee Swaleh Mwatela, a respected Mijikenda musician and teacher were secured as our research collaborators for Mombasa. For Malindi our collaborator was Mr Said Mwhui, brother of Mzee Mwatela. Their role was to locate people to return the recordings to and accompany us when we made contact with those people.

The work began in Mombasa where Tracey recorded 6 songs by the Jawhara Taarab Orchestra on 25 May 1952. Mbarak Ali Haji located three men with ties to the orchestra: Ahmad Chaka, son of Nasor Khalfan who was a composer and singer who also played violin, oud, and bass guitar with the orchestra; Salim Khamis who started playing accordion and oud with Jawhara Orchestra in 1956 (four years after Tracey made the recordings); and Hamid Abdalla, nephew of the orchestra's clarinet player whose name was Badi Hemed. It was pre-arranged for us to pick up Mbarak and then the three men he had located to assist us. A group interview session was spent listening to the recordings from Steve's laptop and then looking at Tracey's several photos of the Jawhara Orchestra on Steve's I-Pad. Tracey's field cards for the 6 recordings list the instruments played, the name of the orchestra's leader, and names of three singers, one of whom was Nasor Khalfan whose son, Ahmad Chaka, was present with us. The other instrumentalists are not named. It was exciting that they were able to identify all but one of the orchestra members. Identifying the musicians in the photographs of the Jawhara Orchestra adds valuable historical information to the documentation created by Tracey back in 1952. Ahmad Chaka was moved to tears and held his hands over his heart when he heard his father's voice on the recordings.



Figure 1. Jawhara Taarab Orchestra photographed in Mombasa, 25 May 1952. International Library of African Music (ILAM) photo, used with permission.

A nearly immediate outcome of giving the recordings to Mbarak Ali Haji was that the 6 songs recorded by Tracey were rehearsed by his Lalelele Orchestra and performed on 26 March 2016 at the Malindi International Cultural Festival. This was only a month after the recordings were returned to the orchestra's leader—clear evidence of how return to source com-

munities promotes sustainability of the music heritage involved. Mbarak could not tell me often enough how important these recordings are to him because Mombasa taarab is unique from Zanzibari taarab and it is dying out. He is devoting himself to keeping the tradition alive with his orchestra; the recordings from the Tracey Collection gave him and his orchestra the opportunity to hear how the music was played in 1952, in the Mombasa style. Several copies of the two CDs of Mombasa recordings were given to Mbarak, and one set to each of the other men who assisted. They were all given permission to make additional copies for anyone with an interest in the music.

Two additional encounters for the Mombasa recordings were arranged by our other assistant for Mombasa, Swaleh Mwatela. He first took us to meet with the family of the late Paul Mwachupa (famous singer, songwriter, guitarist) in Mazeras Village, approximately 20 kilometers west of Mombasa and then back into Mombasa to meet at a street café with an elder musician, Mr Omari Kaka (b. 1935), who has been a drummer for the *kimungwe* dance of the Majikenda/Giriyama since 1955. Tracey recorded two dances, *juba* and *kimungwe*, on 16 October 1950 in Mombasa. These dances originate from the Malindi district. Mr Kaka told us the dances are performed for weddings and funerals as entertainment, and explained that there are only two songs for the *kimungwe* dance. Drummers use two *mushondo* drums, one tall, the other shorter, and a metal plate called *debe*, played with sticks, that keeps the rhythm for the dance. There are still some villages where people do traditional Giriyama dances and the dance groups are brought to perform at culture festivals. During the playback of the dance songs Swaleh Mwatela was clapping the rhythms and singing along. His brother, Mwahui, told us about additional lyrics for the *juba* dance song not translated by Tracey that tell about how the Kenyan army fought the Germans in WWII.

In the meeting with Paul Mwachupa's family we listened to five songs by the Rhythm Experts Band, a trio of guitar, drums, and saxophone led by Joseph Silasi, Tracey recorded on 15 October 1950. They include two versions of a Paul Mwachupa song entitled "*Mapenzi ya kwetu sisi*" (trans. Our Love). On his return trip in 1952 Tracey recorded six songs performed by Paul Mwachupa with a fellow guitarist, Henry Timothy on 25 May. One of the six was Mwachupa's hit song entitled "*Ajali Haikingiki*" (trans. "You can never avoid an accident"). It tells the story of a tragic drowning accident when a truck carrying passengers celebrating a wedding ran over the ramp and plunged into deep water at a ferry landing in Mombasa. Mwachupa's grandson, also a guitarist, told us of how this song is known throughout Kenya—all the bands played it—but his grandfather always complained about other musicians pirating his songs. The public loved his songs and he was very popular, but unhappy because others made money off his songs and he received no return.

3. Digital Return in Malindi

The following morning we drove up the coast to Malindi⁴ where our local assistant, Mwahui Mwatela, took us to descendants he managed to locate through contacts at the Mekatili Malindi District Cultural Association. First we went to the home of Fatuma Ali M'bwana, a relative of Mwana Bibi, in 'old Malindi'. There we met family members including Mwana Bibi's granddaughter, Thuweba Bacha. Mwana Bibi sang 4 *vugo* dance songs with a group of Swahili women for Tracey on 13 October 1950. *Vugo* is a female dance performed by women at weddings and other celebratory occasions. Two cylindrical, double sided, laced hand drums and horn rattles played with sticks are played by women. On Tracey's recordings there is

4 Kahithe Kuru, traditional dance scholar serving as a consultant for the Ketebul film, accompanied us for the fieldwork. Her detailed fieldnotes were added to my research data.

also a man playing a double-reed Zumari oboe. Tracey commented on his fieldcard, “these Zumari oboes are bought from the Arab sailors who come down the coast every year in their dhows, sailing before the monsoon winds in each direction between the African east coast and the Persian Gulf” (H. Tracey fieldcard for “*Mwache Aukereze Mvumo*” [trans. “Let Him/Her Cut the Mvumo Tree with a Saw”], 13 October 1950). We played Tracey’s recordings for those present and soon the granddaughter, Thuweba, got up to dance and sing along. Thuweba proceeded to play a recording of what Mwahui called “modern *vugo*” for us from her cellphone. She explained that she is the singer, she performs with a *vugo* group, and she is carrying on from her grandmother. When asked if new songs are composed, she responded that traditional songs are adapted with new lyrics; for example, the songs may be turned into campaign songs with candidates’ names. Thuweba sang a *vugo* wedding song for Patrick when she was told he is getting married soon.

Next we picked up two women, Kache and Tabu Chadi, both daughters of the singer Chadi wa Boyi who sang two *gonda* dance songs with Giriya men for Tracey on 13 October 1950. They sang along with the recordings playing from the vehicle’s CD player as we drove out of Malindi to Kijiwe Tangi, a village where their brother, Mzee Kadenge Chadi wa Boyi, lives. Mzee Kadenge had invited a group of men who play drums for *gonda* to be present for our meeting, evidence that the dance is still performed in the area. Now up in his 70s, Mzee Kadenge still performs *gonda*. He clearly remembered being there when Tracey recorded his father; he remembered the equipment, the truck, the speakers, etc.; he was 8 or 10 years old at the time. He confirmed that the recordings were made at the District Commissioner’s office in Malindi, located in a place called Shella. He even remembered who Tracey recorded next after his father, another singer from a nearby village named Chandaruwa Waya (this was confirmed from the track list of Malindi recordings and our fieldcard scans—he sang two *msego* mourning dance songs for Tracey that day. He immediately recognized the songs recorded of his father and mentioned he had heard them once before from an LP. He sang along and did the *gonda* dance steps and arm movements while sitting outside his house. Again, the recordings were played from Steve’s laptop. The younger of the sisters was only 2 years old when her father died. She cried as she listened to the recordings and later told me how grateful she is because these recordings are the first time she has ever heard her father’s voice. We continued with conversation about Hugh Tracey and his work and that day he came to Malindi and how it was that Mzee Kadenge was able to remember who performed after his father.

4. Archives, History, and Renewal

Carrying out digital return of music heritage recordings is a complicated, daunting process that is made more difficult by the high costs involved. It is hoped, however, that this account of one, all too brief and incomplete, effort that made contact with only a very small percentage of the families of musicians recorded by Hugh Tracey in Mombasa and Malindi, has demonstrated the reasons why the work is valuable and needs to be done. Far more remains to be done, but the recordings are in the hands of some descendants of the original artists and some musicians in the communities where they were created. The value for the people receiving the recordings is self-evident. I conclude with an account of a coincidental meeting while attending the 2017 annual conference of IASA in Berlin that further shows the value of making the reciprocal gesture and the importance of giving the recordings back to those they came from.

When I chanced to meet the highly respected Kiswahili poet, political activist, scholar, Abdilatif Abdalla (b.1946 in Mombasa) over dinner,⁵ I asked him if he was interested in copies of Hugh Tracey's Mombasa recordings and told him about doing this Project supported by IASA, back in February 2016. He immediately remembered the Jawhara Orchestra as one of two taarab orchestras performing in Mombasa during his youth. I sent him a PDF of the metadata booklet via email and the 2 CDs of Mombasa recordings via courier when I got back to South Africa. Later I sent him Tracey's images of the Jawhara Orchestra and two portraits of an unidentified man, photographed while reading from the Koran, via e-mail. The email messages I received from Abdilatif Abdalla in response to receiving first the metadata notebook, then the recordings and finally the photographs read as follows:

Once again, many thanks for your generosity in making these songs available to me. I very much appreciate it. When going through the Mombasa list I found the names of two people whom I knew personally. The first is Ahmad Basheikh Al-Ustadh (see CD 2, numbers 10 and 11). This was my great uncle. He is the one who brought me up since I was three years old till when he died in 1962 after collapsing in Sauti ya Mvita studios while recording his poems. He had a weekly programme there. He is also the one who introduced me to Kiswahili poetry ...

Unfortunately, all his recordings could not be found when the radio station closed after Kenya gained its Independence. So these two recordings herein are a treasure to me.

The second is Sheikh Mbaruku (see CD 1, numbers 19 and 20). He was a close friend of my great uncle. Sometimes, when he came to visit us at home in Mombasa, he used to come with his musical instrument (oud) and the two would sing together. What a pleasure it was!! Sheikh Mbaruku was blind in both eyes. This great uncle of mine used to be a singer as well in his young days. (22 October 2017)

After receiving the photographs of Jawhara orchestra:

I am also thankful for the photos. I told you that one of our relatives, Nassoro wa Chaka, was a singer in Jawhara Orchestra. He is the one on the left of the photo, with his right hand in the pocket. Amazing!

5 While imprisoned in Kenya (1969-72) for sedition for publishing *Kenya Twendapi*, (tr. Kenya where are we going?), a pamphlet in support of the Kenyan People's Union and critical of Jomo Kenyatta's post-independence regime, Abdalla wrote his famous collection of poems *Sauti ya Dhiki* while in solitary confinement. It was published upon his release in 1972 and ironically awarded the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature that same year. He has lived in exile since 1972 in Tanzania, Britain and Germany. Much additional information about Abdilatif Abdalla's work, such as articles, interview transcriptions and youtube videos, is available via the Internet. He was in Berlin to assist my colleague and friend also attending the IASA conference, Professor Kelly Askew, with translations of Kiswahili poetry for her forthcoming book.

If I am not mistaken, the one near the microphone is called Hussein. I have forgotten his surname. If he is the one, then he is still alive and living in Mombasa. I will ask my elder brothers and other people to help us identify the rest. This is history!

Then, in response to viewing the 2 portraits of the muezzin who Tracey recorded after I sent them as email attachments with a message saying, "Do you know this person? The photos aren't identified." Abdilatif Abdalla responded, "I just can't believe this, Diane!!! This is the great uncle of mine, Al-Ustadh Ahmad Basheikh. I hug you so tightly!! Thank you so very much!" (27 October 2017).

Clearly this gesture of reciprocity to Abdilatif Abdalla has not only touched him deeply, it has brought additional information, including the possibility of locating a musician still alive who performed for Hugh Tracey in 1952. In Kenya in August 2014, three men well up in their 80s were located who were recorded by Tracey in 1950. They were all amazed at the reciprocal gesture and thrilled to receive the recordings. Two of them have since passed on. It can only be hoped that Hussein is located still alive in Mombasa so the gesture can be made yet again—as an ethical act that, despite all the difficulties involved, is an offer of reciprocity that needs to be integrated into 21st century archival practice.