INTRODUCTION

Scope of the Project

This volume is an interpretive analysis of a collection of 335 song texts treated as primary historical sources. The collection highlights the recurring cultural practices that link music with labor in Sukuma communities in northwestern Tanzania. These linkages are evident in the specialized music of the elephant, snake, and porcupine hunting associations that flourished in the precolonial epoch, in the nineteenth-century regional and long-distance porter associations, and in the farmer associations that have proliferated since the beginning of the twentieth century.¹

Acting primarily as collector, translator, and interpretive editor, I have spent several years conducting research in Tanzania, where I collaborated with Tanzanian scholars, musicians, cultural commentators, and translators. In 1988–1989, 1993–1995, 1999, 2004 and 2006, I conducted interviews and recorded several hundred songs from prominent Sukuma singers and composers, many collected in this volume. Other song texts in this volume come from a variety of sources, including recordings and manuscript materials from collections housed in public and personal archives, as well as published materials found in the public domain. The collection is significant because it makes available in print the depth and breadth of a particular culture group's song heritage. With Mwanza becoming the fastest growing urban area in all of East Africa (Bessire 1997: 10), and with the attraction and rapid spread of mechanized farming, many labor-specific traditions documented in this collection are in a state of uncertain transformation.

This is a polyvocal ethnography featuring song texts and discourse about song texts, with no one interpreter, no one meaning, no complete or 'correct' version.² These are the songs themselves, and stories

¹ All Sukuma labor associations have had a seasonal recreational component that highlights dance and dance competitions. Thus, these 'labor' associations have also been called 'dance' associations or 'dance' societies (Ranger 1975).

² My influence for this approach is Stephen Tyler's evocative article 'Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult, to Occult Document', found in James

about songs. The treatment accorded these songs has been both quantitative and qualitative: quantitative in that nearly an entire collection is being treated, and qualitative in that they been classified, translated, interpreted, and contextualized historically. After recording³ or collecting these songs, I approached musicians and other specialists for further comment. These individuals read or listened to the songs, and then responded in immediate reflection. This process had much to reveal both about the person and about the song itself. Further, I discovered that a song could make a kind of sense to one person, and an entirely different kind of sense to another, and that both could illuminate aspects of deeper meaning. Prior to the interview, I told the collaborators that their discourse about the songs would be published, verbatim. To finalize this part of the process, I compared, analyzed, and rendered the commentaries for each song further for clarity into an interpretive essay.

I further contextualized the song texts, narratives about the songs, and interpretive renderings with supplementary materials collected from extensive archival collections in Tanzania, which included in their holdings local newspapers, film archives, and personal collections. These mission, colonial and travel accounts were assessed for clues concerning musical practice from the late nineteenth century to the present. I matched interview data and songs with historical references with written records for historical dates. Descriptive and evaluative terms were collected and fed back to subsequent interview sources, with the aim of developing a two-way inter-subjective research process that reflected not only the aims of the researcher, but the aims of all parties involved. Historical periodicity was determined on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes, the singer whom I interviewed was the composer of the song, and more exact dating was relatively easy. Usually, however, the singer transmitted texts that the composer had taught to them, or they passed along and transformed texts whose original author was unknown. In other cases, the text or genre itself provided clues to the time of the song's composition.

For example, I used texts found in the Hans Cory Papers housed in the University of Dar es Salaam's East African Collection in feedback

Clifford and George E. Marcus's edited volume *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

³ I recorded songs in a variety of environments, to include performances during musical labor, dance competitions, as well as in musicians' homes.

interviews to ascertain whether living musicians could remember the melody and form of songs documented in text form some eighty years ago. The songs texts were from several important Sukuma genres associated with labor, a rich testimony to how much accommodation and resistance to colonial farming requirements of the time were remembered, and ‘performed to life’. Often, this was a fascinating and emotional experience in memory retrieval for those involved. For instance, when I asked Sukuma elders if they knew any *baja nyalaja* songs (a salt caravan music genre from the nineteenth and early twentieth century), I was confronted with polite but blank stares. When I cued them with the Cory texts, however, the floods of memory (amid much laughter and tears) would bring forth the melodies of the texts that Cory collected, together with extra verses not documented by Cory, as well as further songs associated with the Cory texts.⁴ This was evidence that Sukuma musicians often do not remember songs of older origin as particular to any work-related genre. I then discussed resulting performances and song interpretations with other farmer musicians and composers, whose commentary provided further insights.

This project foregrounds two types of translations: those of the song texts and those of the narratives. I present the song texts in their original Kisukuma, translated into English. Each song has a particular narrative structure, the translation of which requires a critical and in depth approach. I display the song texts according to the inner logic of the song, with special attention paid to pauses, breaths, repeats, and clauses, with lines arranged according to the strength of the image. In the cases where they exist, I provide multiple versions of the same song, with multiple interpretations by the commentators. In several cases, I provide a published text, together with the sung version of the same text still extant in oral tradition. In cases such as these, I give primacy in the narrative to the sung text (the previously published text and its translation are in the footnotes). The song texts have accompanying explanatory and contextual commentary provided, either by the singers of the songs themselves, or by people who have demonstrated an intimate knowledge about the texts and the traditions from which

⁴ Slobin proposes music’s tripartite strata in memory consciousness, of ‘(...) current, recent, and long term, all of which occur simultaneously in the present. The current is always at the forefront of attention, claiming primacy through policy or persuasion (...) the recent is the seedbed of the current (...) the long term operates at another level of memory in this archeology of music cultures’ (Slobin 1996: 11).

they come. These commentaries are signified by an asterisk (*), and their oral source reference can be found in Appendix IV.

This research project has had the benefit of several translators from different dialect areas within the Sukuma region, each lending their particular regional understanding and nuance. In the case where the meanings of words or phrases in the songs have shifted or changed over time, were disputed or in the end, were lost or unknown, I consulted these language experts, sometimes together with old Sukuma mission dictionaries and wordlists,⁵ and usually succeeded in finding a reasonable working translation. In cases where I have failed, the translation is thus marked with a (?).

The narratives about the songs are usually in Kiswahili, and I have translated them into English. These narrative interpretations are an important part of the collection, since indigenous interpretive readings may tell particular kinds of stories about poetic expression, or provide details about oblique references in the song that would elude someone not born of the tradition. Whenever possible, these translations capture the fluid colloquial flow and personality of each individual speaker's narrative style. However, I have rendered them for clarity and for grammatical and temporal consistency.

Organization and Nature of the Collection

I have organized the songs in this volume into fifteen chapters, falling under four loosely defined rubrics. In Chapters I and II, I treat hunters' songs. In Chapters III–VI, I discuss the songs of carriers (porters) and soldiers. In Chapters VII–X, I feature the songs of farmers, and in Chapters XI–XV, I document songs of political discourse related to *Uhuru* (independence) and *Ujamaa* (socialism). I have not organized the individual songs in this volume in strict chronology. The labor genres assigned to each chapter are in chronological sequence.

⁵ The following dictionaries and word lists were consulted. These terms were then used in feedback interviews with Sukuma musicians for further evaluation and verification, elucidation, related terms, and contextual and historical meaning. 1) Dahl, E. *Nyamwezi Wörterbuch* (Hamburg: L. Friederichsen & Co., 1915); 2) *English-Kisukuma Dictionary* (Mwanza: African Inland Mission (n.d.)); 3) Julian, B. 'Kisukuma-English Dictionary' (n.p., n.d.); 4) Maganga, C., and T. Schadenberg. *Kinyamwezi: Grammar, Texts, and Vocabulary*. Köln: Koppe Verlag, 1992); 5) Scheven, Albert. *Kisukuma-English Dictionary* (n.p., n.d.) Scheven Collection.

For instance, we know that porcupine-hunting songs, as a labor genre, were one of the earliest types of Sukuma music (preceding farming songs), so they are arranged accordingly here (in the first chapter). Contemporary porcupine hunting songs, which succeed many farm labor-related songs in chronology, are for continuity sake in this first chapter. With Sukuma music, there are many instances where a particular song may share several genre classifications. A song may originate with one labor genre, and then later be identified with other labor genres. In cases such as this, I classify the song according to its earliest known genre distinction. To help with issues such as these, I have provided an assortment of indexes that will assist the researcher to find songs according to song title, singer, composer, topic, genre, period, region collected, and collector.

Most of the songs in this volume come from my personal ethnographic collection, spanning nearly twenty years of active research and recording in the Sukuma region (1988–2006). I accomplished these interviews and collections with the permission of the Tanzanian government. Archival permission was not an issue, and performers granted oral and written permissions based on human subject guidelines at the time of recording. Most of these recordings are at the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music (IUATM), in the Gunderson Sukuma Collection.

This volume represents as well all the known Kisukuma language song texts, published or in archives, having to do with labor.⁶ These include recordings from collections housed in archives, manuscript materials housed in archives, and published materials found in the public domain. The most important collections found in this volume outside my own are as follows:

- Bischoff, Mads, and Lone Lee, editors. *Afrikanske Sange Fra Sukumaland Og Omegn* (n.p., 1996).

This is a collection of labor songs compiled by an organization that sponsors exchanges between musicians in the Sukuma region and

⁶ A second volume, currently planned, is a collection of the sung poetry known as *wigaashe*, and will include examples of all of its various manifestations. *Wigaashe* arose in the late nineteenth century as a public debate between two competing healing societies called the *bagiika* and the *bagaalu*, and has become the most artful means of public discourse about everyday life in Sukuma society. This volume will also include songs of ancestral veneration, initiation, and specialized spiritual healing.

Denmark (*Shirika ya Daraja la Wakulima na Utamaduni Yao*). Bischoff translated the songs from Kisukuma into Danish.

- Cory, Hans. Hans Cory Collection, University of Dar es Salaam, East Africa Collection, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

This is a research archive housing the song collection of a Tanganyikan government anthropologist who was active from the 1920s to the 1950s. This source is important because the majority of the texts were collected from elderly male and female singers during the 1930s, when the British colonial government was implementing monocrop agricultural policies that have had long-term effects on labor to the present. Cory's work as an anthropologist and collector served the aims of the colonial power: to prevent social unrest and promote the shift from subsistence production to the production of cheap export crops for European markets and a money economy in general. Though Cory published English versions of these texts (Koritchoner 1937; he changed his name to Cory after World War II), the English translations are poor (Songoyi 1990). I assessed and cited the original materials from the Hans Cory Papers in this collection, because they contain the original language transcriptions, as well as the musician's names.

- Gibbe. Untitled (n.p., n.d.). Author's personal collection.
This is a notebook of Kisukuma songs collected by an unknown researcher in the late 1970s, identified in the manuscript only as 'Gibbe'. Dr. Elias Songoyi at the University of Dodoma owns the original collection.

- Makoye, Herbert Francis. 'The Dance Culture of the Sukuma of Tanzania' (University of Ghana, PhD, 2000).

A PhD dissertation by Herbert Makoye (now a professor of arts at the University of Dar es Salaam). Makoye's translations from Kisukuma into English are excellent, and for the most part remain intact here.

- Mkongola, N. E. *Mabadaliko ya Dhamira na Sanaa Katika ya Wigaashe* (n.p., Department of Kiswahili, University of Dar es Salaam, 1983).

An undergraduate thesis from the University of Dar es Salaam, which explores Sukuma *wigaashe* song. The translations from Kisukuma into Kiswahili are excellent.

- Molitor P. H. 'La Musique chez les Negres du Tanganika'. *Anthropos* (VIII, 1913) 714–735.

This is a collection of song choruses collected by a French White Father missionary working in the Tabora region in the early twentieth century. Most of the songs are in Kinyamwezi, but a handful of them are in Kisukuma. Most of the Kisukuma songs have been translated from into French.

- Velten, Carl. 1901. *Lieder und Sangesweisen und Geschichten der Wanyamwezi, Von Einem Früheren Schüler des Orientalischen Seminars in Berlin. Mittheilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin*. Dritte Abteilung, Afrikanische Studien, Redigirt von Dr. C Velten und Dr. J. Lippert, Berlin und Stuttgart: Commissionsverlag von W. Speman.

This collection of seventy song text fragments comes from Semboja Kalungwa ng'wana Likisemmewuyaga, a female Sukuma singer kidnapped in a war raid by the well-known Nyamwezi chief Mirambo in the 1880s. In 1901, Carl Velten interviewed Semboja in Berlin, and collected these remarkable song texts. The themes that emerge from these songs are those that praise Mirambo, his kin, and his allies; *barugaruga* soldier praise; sexual instruction for the wedding night and boasting of sexual exploits;⁷ songs to accompany millet grinding; and repeated humorous pleas for gifts of clothing. Unfortunately, the translations into German of many of these songs are either woefully inaccurate, or their meanings as glossed and published by Velten have changed considerably. The original transcriptions however provided in this publication are true gems of historical consciousness. The press, *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen an der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin*, operated from 1898–1934/5, and no longer exists.

From Work Song to Musical Labor

For little more than two months, just after the onset of the first rains that routinely fall from late November to early February, the

⁷ This is a song genre known as *winga*, or wedding music (literally, 'departure', as the bride departs her parent's compound to join that of her husband). These songs tease the bride during her ritual seclusion before her wedding night, and they are sung to her when she is accompanied to the home of the groom to negotiate the bride price.

everyday rural soundscape of the Sukuma region of northwest Tanzania is transformed from a state of tranquility, to one of cacophony. This is a result of the intense competing drums found in neighboring farms, and heard for as far as the ear can hear, the rambunctious shouts and song of farmers, and the thud and clang of hoes striking the earth in rhythmic unison. Occasionally, the farmers act on cue, one by one or in groups of twos and threes, to abandon their work all together, and to throw their hoes into the air and catch them, or to twirl them to the beat at lightning speed, in choreographed and rehearsed unison over their heads, through their legs, and around their chests and waists. It would be difficult to avoid the engrossing soundscape and field performance art produced by these cotton-planting farmers' associations, who begin their treks to the fields as early as five-in-the-morning, to get an early advantage on the heat of the midday sun. It is the totality of these experiences of music at the labor site, the reflective reception, and compelling production of songs laden with creative metaphors and evocative allusions to local realities past and present, that gives the participants such a rewarding aesthetic experience. When bound with the intense physicality and bodily knowledge derived from labor 'performed' for long durations, together with their lived community that is at the same time synchronized to, and constantly surrounded by call-and-response choruses and repetitive-cycle drum rhythms enhanced with some variation, the participants experience euphoria and joy.

The concept of work song has captured the imagination of many scholars. Several earlier studies situated more within the politics of human labor history than within the study of music have had significant influence on subsequent scholarship. Early discussions contained Romantic musings about the role of work song in the evolution of human consciousness. The nineteenth century German musicologist Karl Bücher, for instance, argued that speech evolved from the reflex actions of the vocal organs incidental to the muscular efforts involved in the use of tools. He believed that as the hands became more finely articulated, so did the vocal organs, until the awakening consciousness seized on these reflexes, and elaborated them into a socially recognized system of communication. Labor cries evolved into 'variable' poetic improvisation and 'constant' labor chorus (Bücher 1896: 60). Though deemed important in the role of the developing human consciousness, work-song was typically characterized by nineteenth century scholarship by its '(...) lack of individuality, the homogenous state

of the primitive throng, the absence of deliberation and thought, the immediate relation of emotion to expression, and the accompanying leap or step of the dance under conditions of communal exhilaration' (Gunmere 1897: 27).

Anthropologists working in Sub-Saharan Africa began to investigate work song and work song texts in more detail during the twentieth century, and read them in a functionalist light, declaring their use-value as secondary to the labor rhythm itself. Evans-Pritchard in his research on the Dinka found that the '(...) freedom to chant obscenities made manual labor appealing to men, and hence, the relaxation of restrictions helped get laborious tasks done' (Evans-Pritchard 1929: 312)). Finnegan called work-song text in Africa a '(...) fixed formulaic utterance of a non-innovatory genre' (1970: 207), '(...) simple with many nonsense words to fill up the rhythm effectively' (1970: 231–232), where there is an '(...) alternation and repetition of two different phrases, sometimes with variation' (Finnegan 1970: 236).

In labor folklore scholarship, classificatory terminologies of genre and subgenre have been a predominant concern. The category 'occupational song' has been used to denote a musical piece in which descriptions of work, work conditions, or attitudes toward work form an important textual element. 'Labor song' serves as a subcategory of 'occupational song', geared toward trade unionism. The rubric 'work song', identifies an item sung only during the work process, implying that it established whether a particular song accompanies work (Cohen 1993: 332). Cohen breaks work-song down further, into domestic work-songs, agricultural and pastoral work-songs, sea shanties, songs and chants of direction for the coordination of work, and gang work-songs, '(...) tending toward greater melodic and lyrical complexity' (Cohen 1993: 334).

I have found that this approach to song classification has been helpful to a point. When applied however to Sukuma music culture and history, it risks being oblivious to the creative origins, multiple labor sites, music and labor relational processes, and historical trajectories within and beyond labor use to include leisure contexts, that a single song can have. The concept of 'musical labor'⁸ is more useful, to avoid

⁸ My concept of 'musical labor' was inspired by Don Donham's use of the term 'festive labor' (1985), though Donham refers not to the nature of labor in-process, but to what happens after labor, in situations where farmers are lured to work on a neighbor's field with the promise of post-labor beer and festivities.

the overly deterministic underpinnings of 'work-song', and to draw attention to the context and processes of those activities surrounding labor activity where music is present, which include composition, performance, transmission, as well as the song and song text itself. Whenever possible, I underscore how a particular song has been used at multiple labor sites throughout history, and emphasize the Sukuma worldview which understands musical labor as a kind of human experience that is both related to and different from labor, a performative behavior that is neither strict music performance nor strict labor, neither work nor play but somehow both.

Farm labor and post harvest competition are inherently dependent on the yearly rhythm of the agricultural cycle, '(...) a macro level rhythmic activity that defines agriculture as a kind of performance' (Agawu 1995: 25). During the rainy season, farm labor goes on from dawn until late afternoon, thus the time for art or recreation is found within the working hours. When farmer composers are not planting or harvesting, they are relaxing, composing songs, and competing. Musical performance at labor sites lightens the workload and transforms work into something more playful, as well as creates an environment where everyday village discourse and political commentary are encouraged, enjoyed, and reflected upon. Working together with music becomes more than only a technical means of finishing agricultural tasks; it plays a critical role in establishing closeness, mutual support, and community solidarity. Through song, workers argue, negotiate, and challenge, in order to persuade others and effect changes in their roles and behaviors. Labor practice and song culture extend into the leisure time forum of post-harvest dance competitions, where the farmers' labor groups compete for prizes of cattle as well as for prestige. The pageantry, spectacle, and scandalous behavior of singers in these dance competitions draw potential recruits and future employers toward the side of the winning group. Musical labor and post harvest song competitions are activities that serve as models for how one should think and act about local historical events, creativity and cosmological understanding, heroism, individuality, and the development and maintenance of a work ethic. The realm of musical labor is thus an expressive domain that articulates the ground rules about power, status, honor, glory, and what it means to be Sukuma. Labor songs in the rural Sukuma area create shared 'maps of experience' (Vail and White 1991: 40), which open the intellectual, emotional, and moral life of the region more clearly and dramatically than any other source.

Musical labor mediates between disparate social realities and provides for symbolic spaces, which can reconstruct disjointed social relations. At the farm site, farmers may argue, negotiate, and challenge through sung discourse to persuade others and effect changes in their roles and structures. Song topics range thus from scolding lazy farmers and praising local and national leaders to taking on the bigger world socio-economic system.

In the Sukuma musical labor environment, coordinated, repetitive rhythmic labor movements are less tiring than movements in which exertion and release of effort do not form an ordered sequence. The simplest form of such coordinated farm labor activity, namely hoeing, is two-phased, with one phase in the exertion and the second phase in the brief few seconds of recuperation from the effort (Bartenieff and Lewis 1980: 73–74). Coordinated timing of muscle movement contributes to group solidarity, avoids accidents, and accomplishes the work in a timely manner (McNeill 1995: viii). This said, there is always a range of uncoordinated hoeing that is not synchronized with the rest of the group, which, together with drumming and raucous singing, contributes to making the labor seem informal, festive, and fun.

In the various Sukuma labor associations, the primary function of music is to make the work easier, or as one *bagobogobo* musical labor group member put it (Misuga*): ‘*kurahisisha kazi*’ (to cause the work to be easier, or to ‘easify’ the work). Music accomplishes this task in the several ways that I have outlined here, as the following testimonies bear out.

- Music at the labor site creates a desire to work, and to work together with others, thus creating good values in impressionable youth. *Muziki huu unasaidia vijana kufanya kazi, ile hatakaa tu. Kila mmoja atapata hamu ya kulima, kufanyia upande wake.* (This music helps youth to work, so they are not just hanging around. Every individual gets the desire to farm, to do his part – Masayi*.)
- Music at the labor site provides one with the ability to work more hours without being tired. *Kama muziki upo, mtu anaweza kumaliza hectare nne, lakini kama ng’oma hazipo, sitaweza kulima hata kidogo.* (When the music is there, one can finish 4 hectares, but if there is no *ng’oma*, I will not farm, hardly at all – Kihamuja*.) *Bila muziki, unaanza kuchoka, ni kama unateswa.* (Without the music you just get tired, it is as if you are being tortured – Chiila*.) *Tunafanya kazi kutoka saa kumi na moja asubuhi mpaka saa sita,*

mara tatu kila wiki. Kama kawaidia, tunafanya kazi zaidi na saa nzima bila kupumzika, ni muziki ambazo inasababisha kuzoea kazi ngumu. (We work from six in the morning till noon, three times a week. We work for more than an hour at a time without resting, and it is music that helps us get used to the work – Munegela*.) *Baada ya kufanya kazi muda kiasi, mtu hataweza kuhisi uzito wa jembe lake au kama ardhi ni vigumu. Akaendelea kufanya kazi tu, mpaka wimbo umechoka. Pale pale atahisi uchovu, mpaka wimbo wingine umeanzishwa, halafu ataendelea kufanya kazi!* (After working to music for some time, the person will not feel the weight of his hoe, nor will he feel how hard the earth is. He will just continue working, until the song is worn out. He will feel tired then, until another song is there for him, then the work will continue! – Misuga*.)

- Music at the labor site calms its listeners and focuses their mental energies and organizational skills. *Muziki unatuliza mawazo kama mvua. Unatuliza mawazo ya vijana ambao wanazo vitendo vingi shambani, vitendo ambavyo havina matumizi.* (Music lulls the farmer's consciousness like rainwater. It calms the thoughts of young people who have a lot of wild energy at the farm site, more than is needed for the labor itself – Chiila*.) *Wakati tunacheza muziki huu shambani, hatuna mawazo mengi vichwani. Mawazo yote yanasimamia pale pale, na tunafikiria kazi tu na jinsi ambavyo muziki unachezwa.* (When we are playing this music in the fields, we do not have a lot of other thoughts running through our heads. All our thoughts stop right there, and we are concerned with the work at hand, and the manner in which the music is playing – Kifaru*.) Another testimony, however, finds that rather than focusing thought, the music spurs many productive thoughts (for instance, on plans for the day): *Una mawazo kama, 'Leo nitaenda na fulani, na nitakutana na fulani, na nitafanya hivi na hivyo'.* (You have thoughts such as, 'Today I will go with so-and-so and meet so-and-so, I will do this and that' – Chiila*.)
- Music at the labor site creates joy in the worker, casting off worry and suffering. *Muziki ni lazima kwenye maisha ya mkulima, sawa na vyakula. Muziki inakusanya raha na inatusaidia sana.* (Music is as necessary to the Sukuma farmer as eating. Music gathers and focuses our joy and greatly benefits us – Kifaru*.) *Tukisikia kilio cha ng'oma, moyo inahisi raha tu, unaendelea kulima, unasahau matatizo, na unaimba bila shaka.* (When you hear the crying of the drums, the heart knows only joy, you just go on farming, forgetting

your worries, you sing without doubt or fear – Misuga*.) *Mtu akiimba kazini, hana mawazo uzito, anafikiria mawazo mazuri tu.* (The person who sings during work, has no heavy thoughts, he thinks only good and pleasant ones – Mihumo*.) *Ng'oma zinaingia kichwani kama bhangi, zinaingia na zinachanganya na zinasababisha kilimo kinaendelea vizuri na kwa raha, kusikiliza midundo yake, Piga! Piga! Piga!, unaendelea kufanya kazi na raha.* (Ng'oma gets into your head like marijuana does, it gets in there and mixes up and just makes you farm quickly and with joy, just to listen to its beat, *Piga! Piga! Piga!*, you go along working with joy – Ntamanwa*.) *Bugobogobo unaathirika wakulima kama jinsi ambavyo hela zinaathirika wafanyakazi ofisini, unaathirika ubongo hivyo sawa, unarahisisha uzito, na unatuliza mawazo.* (Bugobogobo music effects farmers the way a raise in pay effects office workers; it effects the mind in the same way, lightens the load, eases the mind – Mihumo*.)

- Songs at the work site contain important life testimonies and teachings. *Wimbo wa bugobogobo zinasifa wafanyakazi, na watu wanahisi vizuri na wanafanya kazi na bidhii zaidi.* (Bugobogobo songs praise the hard workers, people feel proud to be subjects of these songs, and work even harder – Massesa*.) *Kama ukisikia vibaya, au unakosa mke wako, unaweza kuimba kuhusu mambo haya. Kuimba kuhusu vitu kama hivyo unahisi vizuri moyoni.* (If you are feeling pain, if you are missing a wife, you can sing about that. Singing about these things can lift your heart – Mihumo*.)

Sukuma Song Texts as Sources for History

Music and performance can illuminate aspects of culture that fall outside conventional sources for political or economic history. Song texts can elucidate many historical questions, including questions about power relations. Songs, besides presenting events, are also points of views about events, reflections of both the past and the present in a single breathe. The performer uses history as an argument, as a proof, as a legitimizing force concerning current events. Songs retain much more of their form and content in transmission over many generations, compared to other verbal utterances. Topical and political songs that commemorate events of lasting interest have persisted in some traditions for generations. Vansina informs us that ritual institutions in Africa that are associated with kingship are more likely to

be settings where 'song as history' remains relatively intact (Vansina 1985: 35). As I will show in this volume, in the Sukuma region, traditions that encode historical events, albeit those of common farmers, have been safeguarded and transmitted across musical labor genres, from porcupine and elephant hunters, to porters, to medicine healers, and to farmers. Sukuma songs thus have had a way of taking on a life of their own, finding themselves transmitted in varying contexts beyond their original intent. A nineteenth-century porter song sung in the first-person telling us about the hardships of life on the road, is performed today by teenage Sukuma farmers at work in their fields, and is used by farmers' dance societies as a 'warmup' before going into competition. This may be because Sukuma labor song exists in a context that ritualizes the labor event, enabling the transmission of the song, even across the constructed boundaries of different types of labor.

What is difficult to assess about historical materials concerning song are the 'social facts' and beliefs about particular songs, song genre, dance, and long-gone producers of song. A Sukuma farmer might be too quick to attribute a song they know to be 'old', to a well-known singer of long ago, or, they might remember music-related history in the Sukuma area as 'who started what, what dance begat what'. This allows the recaller to view all music genre history as a series of 'break-away' groups. Asking questions about pre-colonial dance history in particular was frustrating in this sense, as what had been passed on in transmission was not information about the dance step itself as much as the long-codified knowledge of 'which dance/dance personality begat what dance style'. These particular ways of codifying Sukuma history are useful to the researcher to get at approximate dates. Dance genres, for example can be contextualized, by becoming familiar with the genealogies of significant performers. Lineages and associated historical occurrences (like famines, floods, and reigns of kings) are more likely to be remembered than 'when a dance was popular' or 'how a dance was done', which leads to the methodological dilemma of differentiating between who started a dance in general, and who spread it in a local area. Memories about song lore, however, are valuable in their own right. What and how people think and know about the origins of a dance idiom, as expressions of local history, knowledge and philosophy, are just as important as the dance's actual origins. How we remember shapes and replicates culture. The Sukuma believe that all song and dance originated in work-related music. This belief reinforces attitudes about music and work in general, and shapes practice.

The History of Sukuma Nganda (Clans)

Sukuma music practice is the result of interactions of multiple ethnic streams over several centuries. Precolonial music history in the Sukuma region is about the movements and interactions of a variety of social units in the area, to include the clan, the extended family, the royal family, and the voluntary association. Chiefdoms created an environment where these different musical streams could take root, grow, and interact. Interlacustrine chiefdoms⁹ acted as musical magnets, drawing talented musicians, musical styles, and musical instruments under the royal sphere of influence. Chiefdoms gave those musical resources more exposure, and codified them as legitimate traditions worthy of support. The adoption of a common regional dialect made transmission and exchange of ideas concerning music quicker and easier.

A key theme in Sukuma oral literature is the 'breakaway' origin story. It also establishes a model for the Sukuma ideal for a composer's career. A young man or woman interested in learning the musical arts, with all of its attendant lore, skills, and medicines, goes in search of a respected teacher. In most versions of this narrative, they go to find a teacher who lived the distance of a several days' journey to 'the south', in the Nyamwezi region, where it is said they can find the best medicines and teachers. After several years of training, the novice returns to their home village and becomes a much-respected singer and dance leader with many followers. In time, one of the better pupils challenges the teacher, usually over a dispute about musical innovation or use of dance medicines, and subsequently breaks away from the group to form his or her own. This story mirrors the economic and immigrant history of the Sukuma region. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, breakaway clans from the Buganda and Bunyoro kingdoms in Uganda migrated to settle in uninhabited parts of what is now western Tanzania (Itandala 1983: 67). After several generations in one settled area, the regenerative cycle of breaking up and moving on to set up new homesteads (*kayas*) continued because of finite land resources. In many celebrated cases, these clan schisms were antagonistic in nature, and led to armed conflict.

⁹ The interlacustrine area spans from west of lake Turkana in northern Kenya to south of lake Victoria-Nyanza in western Tanzania, and northeast of lake Tanganyika, to include Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and the northeastern Republic of Congo.

The Kisukuma term *luganda* (pl., *nganda*), roughly translated as ‘clan’, is an important cover term signifying a variety of social groupings that needs to be outlined in brief, to further understand the texts published in this project. First, is its use concerning one’s lineage or ancestral heritage. Second, is its use concerning labor associations, since all labor associations, whether having music, are *nganda*. As in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, Sukuma culture aligns around cooperative social networks that include and extend beyond kinship and age-grade systems (Little 1965; Lloyd 1966; Meillassoux 1968). Ordinarily every person past puberty belonged to one or several such groups outside his family to which he owed allegiance. These ‘voluntary associations’ created new community contexts concerned with survival, success, and reputation of members, acting as welfare societies, as sources of prestige, and as suppliers of skills.

Throughout known Sukuma history the clan, extended family, *luganda*, or voluntary association has been its primary cohesive unit. Traditions in East Africa thus belong to migrating clans and voluntary associations, not to stretches of country. Precolonial ethnicity in north-western Tanzania was amorphous and fluid, nothing like the discreet, compact, and identifiable boundaries drawn up by the German and British authorities early in the twentieth century. Incoming ethnicities adopted the growing local Nyamwezi-Sukuma dialect, and those who had already settled regarded them as *nganda*. An essential reason for strong clan identity was territorial mobility, or the need to move from overpopulated and exhausted areas to less congested or uninhabited areas. Sukuma chiefdoms began in the bush after a man picked out an area. ‘There wasn’t anyone who could dispute his ownership. This was his land, and his clan was his blood’ (Makanga*).

The Sukuma region was a crossroads and host to wave after wave of migrating communities, both because of its strategic location as a gateway to Uganda on its northwestern side and to the Swahili coast to its farther eastern border, and because it has been historically rich in game and arable land. Historians agree that several waves of immigrant groups moved into and around the Sukuma region between the fifteenth and eighteenth century, from kingdoms in what are now Uganda and Rwanda. These immigrants, known as Bahima, were the likely descendants of Nilotic and Afro-Asiatic cattle herders from ancient Ethiopia who had colonized the interlacustrine area. This early immigrant group, which came to call themselves Sukuma, now claims

about seventeen generations. In time the new leader-immigrant clans adopted the proto-Sukuma-Nyamwezi language of those Bantu pastoralist immigrants who preceded them, and went on to lead these groups, following the dream of building a centralized polity that they had initiated elsewhere (Holmes and Austen 1972: 24). For almost a century, independent *nganda* colonized the region with their followers until population growth and movement brought them into more frequent and hostile contact. Eventually, seven major *nganda* coalesced. From them came thirty-seven Sukuma kingdoms, of which the Babinza *luganda* remained the largest and most prominent, controlling fifteen kingdoms (Itandala 1983: 59).

Chiefs, or *batemi*¹⁰ (s., *ntemi*), became the ideological leaders of *luganda*. Their primary functions were to safeguard emblems and royal drums¹¹ (which symbolized the power and strength of the *luganda*), to keep the peace among them (*mhola*),¹² to protect against longtime enemies like the nearby Maasai, to provide the means for the long-term storage of grain, and to control natural resources, like making rain. *Batemi* either were rainmakers themselves, or kept in their employ ritual rainmakers. Ritual became part of the political because political institutions required the collaboration of otherworldly forces that could communicate with natural forces (Koponen 1988: 193). The *batemi* introduced the *bafumu* (s., *nfumu*), a kind of general practitioner of medicinal arts. *Bafumu* provided *batemi* with ritual medicines

¹⁰ Literally, 'those who cleared the brush away'. From the Sukuma verb *kutema*, to cut, or clear out.

¹¹ It is clear that the majority of royal drums found preserved in the Sukuma region today conform to the conical 'Uganda style' of laced double-headed cylindro-conical drums with tapered bottoms that are documented by Wachsmann (1971) and Thiel (1977) throughout Uganda. These should however be seen in practical terms as single-headed drums, because only the skin stretched across the top of the frame is used for playing. The second skin at its base does not actually count as a membrane but only forms a part of the lacing device. Royal drums came in several shapes and sizes. Smaller drums were made of hollowed tree trunks from the *nkola* tree (*afzelia quanzensis*), and the larger six-foot 'Muansa' drums documented by Richard Burton (1872) such as those on display at the Sukuma Museum of Bujora were made from *mihama* trees (*borassus flabellifer*). Other smaller drums found in the royal court were hand drums covered with lizard skins (Kollmann 1899: 164).

¹² Literally, 'the cool state', or the state of peace and good relations among men and women, between clans, between the living and the dead, and between humans and their earthly environment.

and blessings for crop planting and harvests,¹³ technologies for creating rain, and rituals for maintaining wealth in cattle.

The *batemi* brought to the musical mix elaborate drum ensembles and drum lore, as well as chief-praising song traditions. The religious *luganda* brought egalitarian female-centered deities, ritual learning institutions, and subversive musical ideas, which empowered the dispossessed. Migrating warriors from the south brought self-praising competitive traditions, which mixed with the chief-praising traditions of the Uganda immigrants. Competition between *bafumu* for favors from the *batemi* spread to the singers and composers of songs, the *baliingi*. To praise the chief was to praise the clan. The near-mythological institution of the chief as the self-made 'clearer of brushes' and head of clans staking out claims to territory, inspired the *baliingi* to not only compose odes to the chief, but also to anyone of individual power and means, including themselves.

Sukuma Competitive Performance, Music Aesthetics, and Form

At the onset of the colonial era, a new competitive music aesthetic emerged, where singers began to praise their deeds, and to see themselves as regal conveyors of knowledge, medicines, and power. The Sukuma music soundscape under the aegis of the chiefs began to change for a number of reasons. Because of the new realities of the colonial power structure, *baliingi* began to disassociate from *batemi* patronage, and realign not with the colonial powers, but with the emerging powerful voluntary medicinal and labor associations, where powerful alliances and affinities developed through the sharing of labor, medicinal knowledge, new political ideas, and song. The banning of *nganda* skirmishes and witchcraft by the Germans sent the energies of these particular modes of social conflict into the competitive performative realm of the labor associations.

¹³ Sukuma chiefdoms had elaborate rituals involving crop planting and harvests. Though the chiefdoms differed in their terminologies and practices, they were variations played on a cultural theme. Seeds were blessed before planting, by mixing them with special substances. Then, they were distributed throughout the chiefdom, by the chief's council. Families blessed their hoes before using them for planting. Finally, before the harvest, special beers were brewed, livestock were sacrificed, and the *ntemi* was ritually shaved. See also Itandala (1983: 169–170); Pambe (1978: 228–251); and especially Cory (1951: 171–174).

Post harvest village music competitions thus became the primary forum of public music performance and popular entertainment in the Sukuma region. During the German colonial era in Tanganyika (1884–1914), a fierce competitive relation between two shamanistic healing societies developed, when Gumha ng'wana Misinzo, a student of Igulu ng'wana Wandela (otherwise known as Ngika), broke away from his teacher's medicinal organization the *bagiika* in a split over medicinal differences. Gumha formed his own powerful medicinal society, the *bagaalu*.¹⁴ Today, all musical labor associations proudly align with one side or the other of the *bagiika-bagaalu* competitive complex, and draw their ritual, medicinal, and esoteric musical knowledge from these groups.

Bagiika-bagaalu-affiliated dance competitions are led by *baliingi* (s., *niingi*), the dance leaders, and organizers of the musical labor associations or dance societies. The term *baliingi* also has supernatural implications, as an important aspect of the *baliingi*'s work is their communication with ancestors (*masamva*), considered by many to be the assumed source of new musical compositions. As the living relatives of ancestors, *baliingi* have the power to invoke, transform, manipulate, and destroy through their words and deeds, a power held in awe and fear by ordinary people. *Masamva* whose names and deeds are still remembered by their families, transmit songs to *baliingi* through ritual dreams, signifying the critical first step of the creative process. The Sukuma believe that their *masamva* are neutral forces, who occasionally favor living entities with whom, they have special interests. Ancestors have a 'multivalent pervasiveness' in everyday life (McCall 1995: 258) and are most felt present in the compound early in the morning before dawn (Millroth 1965: 115). All Sukuma theoretically have access to their ancestors via dreams, but some are better at negotiating such contacts than others. It is thought that those rich with cows get rich because they have strong *masamva*. The Sukuma public feel that it is particularly the musically inclined who receive these special favors: 'You are always meeting people who, since their childhood, they just want to dance. The *masamva* are indeed helping that one' (Ng'wana Njile*).

¹⁴ This important event in Sukuma music history coincided with the spread of the competitive *beni* dance phenomenon throughout East Africa, a case documented in Ranger's *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa* (1975).

Baliingi and their song culture are an indispensable aspect of Sukuma intellectual life. They are important culture creators, transmitters, and entertainers. Ideas about creative musical processes are discussed openly, freely and often among *baliingi* and their initiates. What is secret, are only the specifics of medicine preparation, the open knowledge of which would be harmful if placed in the hands of competitors. Public knowledge about compositional and transmission processes from dream inception to competitive performance is essential to teaching initiates, and is important because it enhances the status of the composer. *Baliingi* understand that demystifying their creative processes is beneficial. By making known the artistry involved in song composition, they demonstrate that the *masamva* favor them. Though *baliingi* agree about the components required so to be favored to compose a song (clan affiliation, ancestral dreams, willful desire, belief, medicines), there are philosophical discussions about the role each component plays. This variance depends on the composer's personal experience and clan affiliation, educational background, or dance specialty. The well-known *niingi* Idili ng'wana Dukiila*, who comes from a clan recognized for its powerful composers, prepares medicines to receive his *masamva*, but claims that the songs only come as faint impressions that are barely remembered, and that it is his willful labors and artistic ability that enables him to craft the melody and text upon waking. Ng'wana Hilya* believes, however, that with composition, there is not really any work or agency involved on the part of the composer, except learning about and preparing medicines. This debate over 'inspiration or perspiration' is a central tenet of Sukuma composer discussions. Though ancestors require respect and represent 'the collective past', the Sukuma believe that their presence encourages competitive individuation. In *masamva*-inspired songs, will power and stylistic differentiation are encouraged. As ng'wana Hilya* put it, *Masamva wanataka watu wao washinde, sababu ni sawa na kuwasifia. Kutunga wimbo nzuri ni sawa na kushinda kwenye maisha* ('The *masamva* want their people to do well in competition, because doing well glorifies them. To compose a good song is the same as making it in life). Though the Sukuma believe that their songs have supernatural sources, Sukuma composers lay authorial claims to their music work. The performer of a composition whose author is unknown, will be asked who the composer is, because the musical experience would be incomplete without that knowledge.

Baliingi routinely cite *mimbo ga pointi*, or ‘songs with points’¹⁵ as an important organizing principle in Sukuma song culture. These, are songs that stick in the mind of the spectators who come to see the *baliingi* and their groups. Ng’wana Chiila* mentions that: *Mimbo bila maana na wasikilizaji wake zitapotea. Kama unazo mimbo ga pointi watu wataziimba na wengine watazisikiliza. Kwa hivyo nyimbo zinahitaji utamu na maana, ile watu ambao wanasikiliza watazichukua nyumbai kwao* (Songs without relevant meaning to its listener will be lost easily. So if you have *mimbo ga pointi*, people will sing them and others will pick them up. For this to happen the song needs to have sweetness and meaning so that those who listen will take it home with them.)

Songs are considered teachings, as evident in the Sukuma proverb *mukulanga gashi amimbo gakulagaga*, or ‘there are a school of teachings in ten songs’ (for further Sukuma music and labor-related proverbs, see Appendix II). Dance associations have been called schools by those who could not afford schooling, or who were on the periphery of the reach of government and private schools. The extent to which dance associations have been considered ‘alternative’ or traditional educative institutions is evident also in the well-known aphorism, *shikome sha malika* or, ‘the hearth teaching of the dance society’. This refers to how the teachings that happen at *malika* (older term for dance associations) are similar to the traditional evening fires of Sukuma homesteads (*shikome*), where youth were taught via storytelling, riddling, and song.

At the labor site, the *niingi* assesses the temporal flow of the labor, the nature of the specific task being accomplished, as well as the mood, vitality, and verbal and unspoken cues provided by the group, in making decisions about song performance and song repertoire. The *niingi* determines whether song phrases are expanded or contracted, and the ordering of verses and choruses within the song; whether they are repeated once, twice, or innumerable times over several hours. The *niingi* determines whether the song remains constant in speed, or is sped up or slowed down, whether a song’s performance is random, fixed, or makes intertextual references to other songs, and whether

¹⁵ Though the term *pointi* is clearly of foreign origin, its use in describing exceptional songs is common throughout Sukuma society.

a song contain a limited or wide range of improvisational play. Furthermore, the *niingi* determines whether the songs sung are trivial, frivolous, topical, personal, contemporary, ancient, political, deeply profound, or all of the above.

Though individual Sukuma composers are known for their unique styles especially in their employment of song content and overall arrangement, there is an aggregate of commonalities which most Sukuma sung compositions share regardless of genre. Compositions are in flexible meters conducive to farm labor or walking, with rhythms bounded by the sung phrase. Longer sung narratives such as *wigaashe* are just that: half-sung, half-recited choruses, sung in unison. The *niingi* is freer to sing variants of the melody while the chorus repeats the primary melodic motif without variation. The most common structural forms are binary units such as AABB, AABA, ABA, and ABB. Stanza divisions are marked with a falling tone, together with a clap or marked visual cue. Vocal counterpoint is achieved by overlapping the end of the solo with the beginning of chorus parts. Choruses are contractions of the melodic phrases elaborated by the *niingi*. All songs are in the major mode. Melodic intervals of thirds and sixths are most common. A common song trait is alternating quarter and eighth notes, or eighth and sixteenth notes, with the longer pulse corresponding to the natural stress of the language. Final cadences and ends of phrases tend to be held longer. Verses do not rhyme, but do alliterate. Longer narrative styles normally begin with the singing style known as *kusukila*. This style is one of contrasts, sung either in a high, loud and explosive voice that descends in register, or in a very soft and meditative bass voice that slowly ascends. In this section, the *niingi* tells who he/she is, for instance 'It is I, son of so-and-so'. This section is sung freely, without attention to meter, and slowly develops into a metered narrative that will define the song.

The competitive dance form that most expresses the public side of *baliingi* is the sung poetic discourse with group initiate chorus response called *wigaashe*. *Wigaashe*, or 'sitting dance', has, for the last seventy-five years, been the dance genre of choice at the *bagiika-bagaalu* competitions, and is considered the most respected and revered of all Sukuma musical art forms. In sung narratives that can go on for hours, *wigaashe* singers expound upon their personal exploits, while degrading their singing opponents. Singers insult their opponent's eating habits, drunkenness, lack of sexual vigor, or incompetence in medicinal ability, while bragging about their compositional and singing skills,

birth lineage, witchcraft knowledge, farming ability, and undefeated competitive record (real or imagined). *Wigaashe* composers are full of hyperbolic self-praise concerning their authenticity and possession of the right medicine coming from the hands of the right master initiator. Their songs contain the same sort of informational content as a letter to the editor of a daily local newspaper, testimonials laden with local and historical sociopolitical context. They are also full of obscure innuendos or multivalent local references understood to only a few, giving them a powerful and abstract charm. Much *wigaashe* song imagery consists of taming the wild, taming an audience, and taming what is potentially controllable, such as clearing the bush or planting seeds, all images consistent with the territorial expansion that the Sukuma have been doing for centuries. Though technically a competitive genre, nearly all *wigaashe* narratives will also refer to farmers or farm labor, either as praise, or as a complaint about lazy people (directed of course at the opponent). It is common to weave epithets such as *Natalalaga niganika ilima* ('I never sleep, I dream of farming') or *Tudimagi igembe chiiza* ('Let us grab the hoe properly') into the *wigaashe* narratives. Other common tropic images found in *wigaashe* relate to fire, such as *Jipembele makwii* ('I shall burn the big fire') or *Nasen'ha ng'wii* ('I gather firewood'), both referring to burning medicines, burning the opponent, or carrying on the tradition of the ancestors by keeping the hearth warm at night.

Though *wigaashe* is not a musical labor song genre, many songs found in this volume were labor association adaptations from well-known *wigaashe* verses and choruses, which contained hunting, farming, or political discourse. However, just as many of the musical labor songs contained herein were adapted by *baliingi* into *wigaashe* choruses, where they became more widely distributed, well known, and remembered. When known, I will address the nature of this chicken-egg question in the song's interpretive treatment.

Illus. 1. Author Frank Gunderson with singer and village oral historian Michael Masalu. Village of Nyamadoke, 13 October 2006.