Hoe imagery is a prominent and historically recurring trope in Sukuma song texts. Besides the fact that the hoe symbolizes the essence of hard work, the hoe has associations with the origins of the royal clans that first brought iron making into northwest Tanzania, thus linking it with the desire for ancestral continuity and congruence. A part of this immigrant collective was the Balongo iron smelting clan, who first introduced iron and hoe making technology to Northwest Tanzania. Upon settling, this clan, whose emblem was the iron hoe, emerged as the dominant political and economic power. According to several oral testimonies that I collected, one migrant from this period proclaimed that he was the leader of the area by sounding the local king’s drums, and by planting his clan hoe upright, firmly in the ground. This association with drums, hoes, and power is a historic trope found throughout the interlacustrine area. Further, the first hoes made from each smelt were presented to the chief as a tribute. In some areas, the chief rang out a rhythm on an old worn-out hoe, initiating the cultivating season, and signifying the chief’s relationship to the fertility of the land. The residence of the chief’s first wife, whose official title translated as ‘queen of the hoe’, contained at the apex of the roof of their residence a small earthen pot containing soil, and an iron hoe standing erect in its middle, symbolizing the hoe breaking and entering the earth.

An important interregional caravan in the nineteenth century, were the trips to Geita to trade with the Balongo-Sinza iron forgers for hoes and nghinda bells. Hoes very quickly became a major unit of trade,
and thus became the reason for interregional travel to the Balongo iron forger settlements, to procure hoes. This journey, known as *kujila mageembe* or (‘to go and get hoes’), would depart under the chiefs’ directives to trade grain and livestock for hoes (Makanga*), and later bring them back to sell in their communities. Iron implements led to an increase in production in all spheres of the economy, and soon ebony hoes were replaced. Hoes were used as currency, as was salt (Burton 1860: 397). A hoe was worth two goats, and vice versa. Worn-out hoes were also important for trade. The local iron forgers made artifacts such as spearheads, arrowheads, knife blades and metal fish hooks from the shafts of the worn-out hoes. Iron implements led to an increase in production in all spheres of the economy (Magoti 1984: 37). While in Geita, the Sukuma hoe caravaners had a chance to view their clan brethren engaged in a kind of musical labor specific to making iron. Bellows operators all over Sub-Saharan Africa accompanied their labor with music, and believed that music was critical for making good iron (cf. Herbert 1993: 67). This musical labor process was documented in an eyewitness account of Balongo smiths operating in Kahama in the 1940s:

One bellows man would look at another with a challenging expression and start doing energetic variations of the rhythm on his engine. One half of the bellows would thump four or five times faster than the other, then both would give a few more simultaneous heavy thumps followed by a staccato beat and one or two more variations after which the engine would resume its normal rhythm (Rosemond 1943: 15).

Contemporary composers are hired by local and national political leaders to compose songs with hoe-praise motifs, with the exhortation to ‘grab the hoe’ lest one finds oneself in economic ruin, a common example. Farmers who compose and perform music, introduce themselves in public discourse as farmers first, *Mimi ni mkulima, nashika majembe* (‘I am a farmer, I carry a hoe’), and as musicians second, *Mimi ni mchezaji, na viringisha magembe* (‘I am a dancer, I twirl a hoe’). A compilation of some of the more salient hoe-related sayings and aphorisms that make their way into songs follow: ‘Let us grab the hoes now’, ‘The hoe is wealth, grab it’, ‘Try the hoe, my child, it won’t let you down’, ‘God will bless you if you grab the hoe’, ‘Do not be a

the doorway for good luck and fertility are known as *gungulu, bungulu* (i), *ibungulu*, or *nghulyungu* (Ntusu).