

A Response to Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Andrew N. Weintraub's "The Audible Future: Reimagining the Role of Sound Archives and Sound Repatriation in Uganda"

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In the article "The Audible Future: Reimagining the Role of Sound Archives and Sound Repatriation in Uganda," (*Ethnomusicology* 56/2) Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Andrew Weintraub appear to be taking Klaus Wachsmann to task for the apparent cavalier treatment of one of his first informants and moreover for a lack of consideration of the needs and rights of the people of Uganda in relation to the 1500+ sound recordings he made during his many years of work there.

It is unfortunate that the quotation used to set the tone for the discussion was taken from a summary transcript of Lucy Duran's interview with Klaus Wachsmann, rather than from the audio recording. Lucy Duran's informal and wide ranging discussion with Wachsmann took place at his home on December 1, 1983, a year before his death, and the content was not subsequently edited or vetted by him. When re-calling his experience of recording a lullaby from a woman, what Wachsmann actually said was:

[In]1948 the first equipment came out and I began recording. . . . One of my earliest experiences was that I wanted to record a lullaby or simply a woman singing to a little child and . . . she was egged on by the villagers to do it: and I recorded—and when I played it back—obviously—she broke out into tears and . . . er . . . of course, I . . . we didn't just leave it at that . . . and she said 'Well you have taken the voice of my child away.' And I then said 'Look, this comes to Makerere, to the University, and maybe your child goes to the university when he's grown up.' So all went well—but this was the only time. . . . Generally people liked it. But you see I was well known

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partly because I had been around for ten years—I had sat through endless parent’s committees, communities who wanted schools and . . . at the same time I was the Director of the Museum. (*Taken from my own transcript of the interview.*)

The article (not the interview) continued with a discussion of the trauma the singer was assumed to have experienced and included the following footnote: “We do not know the conditions of this recording (Where and when did it take place? Who was this woman? What language did the woman speak? Was there a translator?). We can infer from Wachsmann’s anecdote that the recording of the woman singing the lullaby represented the child’s voice” (fn. 4, p.229).

Answers to these questions would hardly have been considered necessary during the discussion even if they had been put to Wachsmann. However, it is highly likely that the recording in question was one of those made made at Kichwamba in Bunyaruguru, western Uganda, among Bakunta villagers, on January 8 1950. A search of his indexes shows that the only earlier recordings he made were of royal musicians in Hoima district (Bunyoro kingdom) and Baganda *akadinda* (xylophone) musicians in Kampala. The Bakunta community had migrated to Kichwamba from Buganda in the late eighteenth century and by the mid-twentieth century were said to be speaking a hybrid language, a mixture of Luganda and dialects of what is today commonly called Runyakitara. It is highly probable that Wachsmann was able to hold a discussion with the woman for he was at least fluent in Luganda, having received instruction in it as well as Swahili even before he began work in Uganda.

It is a minor detail but the inference mentioned in fn.4, above, is almost certainly wrong. On the earliest recording of a lullaby (at Kichwamba), you can hear the sounds of the child coughing and responding to the mother’s singing. If this was the recording in question it seems that she was concerned that her child’s voice, not her’s, might have been “stolen.” Furthermore, that she then sang another two lullabies, with her child continuing to respond vocally, strongly suggests that any “trauma” was short-lived (Wachsmann’s items nos. 1950.003–1950.005: they can be heard at *BL Sounds* online). Later the same month Wachsmann visited northern Uganda and recorded lullabies from two named women singers, one at Zeu in Acoli (50.065–066) and the other at Moyo in Madi (50.149–150). If either of these were the women whose response he recalled, they also each recorded more than one lullaby for Wachsmann.

What one reads next in the article is certainly mistaken: “The woman, in fact, never had a chance to reunite with her child’s voice because the recordings were not available at Makerere University.” In 1950 the Museum had its home on the Makerere College campus and it was logical that Wachsmann would deposit the recordings there. In the same interview with Lucy Duran, Wachsmann himself remarked : “Well she [Margaret Trowell] set up a museum in the old laboratory block at Makerere.” Makerere was home to the museum from c1941–2

until 1954 when the new Uganda Museum at Kira Road opened. In footnote 12 Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Weintraub acknowledged that Trowell was curator from 1941 until 1946 but perhaps they did not know that this museum was at Makerere where Trowell taught, nor that Wachsmann took over as curator there before the building of the new museum. Nannyonga and Weintraub continue:

The recording of the lullaby would reside for over forty years at the British Library Sound Archive (hereafter BLSA) in London, along with over 1500 items recorded by Wachsmann in Uganda in 1949, 1950, and 1954. In 1958, Wachsmann began depositing his Uganda field recordings at the British Institute of Recorded Sound . . . and depositing was completed by the early 1960s. In the late 1960s, the British Institute of Recorded Sound sent tape copies of Wachsmann's recordings to the Uganda Museum in Kampala, where he served as curator from 1948 to 1957. However, the Museum has never had the equipment to play back these recordings, and therefore they have been inaccessible to the people of Uganda.

This paragraph also needs some correction and clarification. When Wachsmann left Uganda in 1957 to rejoin his wife and children who had left for the UK earlier, he needed to find employment as well as to set up house. Wachsmann's intent was always to obtain funds and equipment so that he could make good quality copies for permanent archival preservation of the recordings in more than one location as well as for shipping back to Uganda, but at that time funds were non-existent. In the 1960s I visited the British Institute of Recorded Sound where he had lodged them. I recall that it occupied just part of a terraced house with a one-room office and a listening room; the recordings were stored in the basement. The institute operated as a charity on a shoe-string budget and it received no official funding until some time later. This may be when it became possible to copy and send recordings back to Uganda. It is not known if playback equipment was also sent nor if there was not suitable playback equipment already available at the Uganda Museum. This part of the story needs further research.

However, when visiting the Uganda Museum in 1966 I learned that it did have a collection of Wachsmann's recordings, and I was readily permitted to dub a few of them (using the Museum's playback equipment) onto my Butoba reel-to-reel tape recorder, for use at the National Teachers' College where I then worked. I copied some *akadinda* music that he had recorded at the Lubiri palace and some recordings of Alur *agwara* trumpets. They could have been either the originals or copies of some of his 1950s disc recordings. I made no examination of the entire collection but the lullaby recordings could well have been among them.

In 1988 after Museveni brought peace to southern Uganda following the chaotic years of misrule by Idi Amin and later by Milton Obote, I revisited the Uganda Museum. There I was shown a large set of tapes of Wachsmann's

recordings lying in wooden boxes on the basement floor of the Museum covered with a layer of murrum dust. The staff told me that the playback equipment had been looted during the Amin era (along with virtually every tool the Museum owned for basic maintenance of the Museum). The following year I brought a Nagra portable recorder (on loan from the University of Edinburgh) and donated an audio-cassette recorder so that the Museum staff could make copies of the tapes and then use the cassettes for public listening and study. The fact that the staff made a poor job of the copying, by ignoring detailed advice on cleaning tapes and machinery before and after each copy was made, was unfortunate. It was no fault of Wachsmann, if for some of the years that followed his departure to the UK and later to the USA, some or all of his recordings were not available for consultation in Uganda.

It is all too easy in 2012 to critique fieldwork carried out some six decades earlier. Wachsmann's son Philipp wrote to me: "Shortly before his death in 1984, Klaus in a discussion with me said that he had been acutely aware that his work was of its time and that—as is the nature of documentation—many new questions and matters would subsequently become important" (email: Philipp Wachsmann to Cooke, 16 January 2015).

It was not until the 1970s that ethical issues concerning fieldwork began to be seriously and extensively discussed in print by ethnomusicologists (Slobin: 1992:329–336) but it would be unwise to suggest that earlier scholars, Wachsmann especially, did not concern themselves with ethical behavior in their work.

The article also raises the question of who should have charge of the "original" recordings; presumably this means the discs and tapes in whatever condition they may now be. In the light of Uganda's troubled history during the 1970s and 1980s we should be relieved that Wachsmann took the originals with him when he left Uganda. He made his recordings with the help of grants from British and American institutions using machinery and recording media of British and American origin. So if repatriation of the aged originals is an issue, where indeed should they go? It was certainly sensible for at least three sets of high-quality copies to be made before the originals began to decay and that they should be available in Uganda, the UK, and the USA. But one wonders what use the originals might now be made of in Uganda: would they be simply be artifacts to be put on display in a glass case? When working in 2002–03 with early recordings in the Gambian national archives, I immediately learned how difficult it is to conserve disk and tape recordings in tropical regions without adequate facilities. The extreme humidity, heat, and dust in Gambia had caused much of its huge collection to fall into especially poor condition with the "vinegar syndrome" strongly in evidence, with mould growing on spools and discs, and the magnetic backing on many tapes falling away. The labour of preparing each for digitization to archival standards was going to prove a costly task taking many years.

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Later in the article Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Weintraub provided some very interesting examples of how the music is now being made accessible to the community and of some of the ethical issues involved. They concerned visits to rural communities in Madi and Bugisu when recordings were played over to villagers. However, it does *seem* that Wachsmann's recordings are not yet permanently and readily available for local listening and study if one discounts the online facility (*BL Sounds*) provided by the British Library Sound Archive. Indeed, even in Kampala it is no easy task for anyone who is not a member of Makerere University to gain listening access to the materials. A Ugandan informant emailed me recently with the following account (abbreviated in places):

A non student would need to search for the music first on internet [i.e. at the *BL Sounds* website] from their home and know the catalog details first. If you cannot do this then it becomes difficult to access the archive. . . . Secondly, you get Monica's number from the library and call her [the archivist] to make appointment. Thus the archive is accessible only to an individual that has completed the process, which you only learn about at the reception. Then you have to pay the money for library use, then get the services. With this in place, it is likely that nobody from outside Makerere, and a villager at that, has ever accessed the archive.

I also learned that the fees payable are as follows: 1 month use: Uganda shillings 10,000 (approximately \$3.61); 3 months: Uganda shillings 25,000. This is hardly the kind of availability I had hoped for when I also arranged for the deposit of 1500 of my own field recordings at Makerere.

The writers themselves recognized that:

Repatriating to an archive in the country of origin, as described in the previous section, is clearly different from bringing the music back to the communities of origin. While the establishment of an archive of repatriated recordings at Makerere University allows greater access to the music than ever before, there are obstacles for people living in remote areas of Uganda who have limited access to transportation or resources to travel to Kampala.

The stated mission of the Makerere archive is: "To build an accessible and sustainable music archive that links Uganda's musical heritage of the past with the present," and "To support and strengthen educational and research activities on all aspects of music and dance." Given that over 90% of these recordings are of village music and that there are no good reasons why much of it need not be made freely available for public listening, can we hope that the children of the singer of that lullaby, or their children, may soon be enabled easy access to the recording?

References

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A Response to Peter Cooke's Response

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In the spirit of scholarly dialogue about issues of common concern, we would like to respond to Peter Cooke's critique of our article "The Audible Future: Reimagining the Role of Sound Archives and Sound Repatriation in Uganda" (*Ethnomusicology* 56:2). His comments appear to be based on misunderstandings of our statements and on personal interpretations with which we take issue.

We did not state in the article that Wachsmann mistreated or infringed on the rights of the people of Uganda. We highly respect and continue to honor the contributions of Klaus Wachsmann as a scholar, collector, and curator of Ugandan music. Indeed, it is because of the great respect for Wachsmann, and the hard work he did to preserve the great wealth of Uganda's musical culture, that the Makerere University Klaus Wachsmann Music Archive (MAKWMA) was named after him. Our goal was for readers to reflect on the theoretical premises, ethnographic practices, and ethical standards that informed Wachsmann's field recordings. How can Wachsmann's "motivations, preferences, and limitations" help us to understand those premises, practices, and standards (p. 208)? Wachsmann's work in Uganda raises issues about a particular time and place in the history of ethnomusicology, and it is in the spirit of historical and cultural critique that we wrote the article.¹

The anecdote that begins the article was intended to illustrate the relationship between the singer and the recordist. How did the singer in Uganda think about the recording of her voice (and her child's voice)? How did she express those thoughts to Wachsmann? How did he respond? We related this cultural encounter to three key issues: a) the notion of disembodied voices and recording technology; b) the preservation of the voice in recordings; and c) the idea that the voice could be reunited with the sound-producing body in some future time. Recordings were often regarded as cultural technologies that could capture (or "steal") and preserve human voices. Further, the idea that one could re-unite with a disembodied voice by listening to a recording of it was a very common notion among ethnomusicologists of the twentieth century. We are not blaming the singer or recordist for the way things were done. Rather, we are trying to put those ideas into historical and cultural context.

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It was informative to learn that Cooke had privileged access to data that are not in the public domain. Information about the woman singer comes from British Library Sound Archive reference C4/66–67, which was part of the official documentation and metadata repatriated by the British Library Sound Archive to Uganda in 2009. Document C4/66–67 is Carolyn Landau’s summary transcript of an interview with Klaus Wachsmann conducted by Lucy Durán that took place on December 1, 1983. We made reference to it in our article (fn 1, p. 228). The summary transcript was authorized by the British Library, and it was (presumably) meant to represent Wachsmann’s ideas. The recounting of Wachsmann’s experience on the summary transcript does not differ in essence from Cooke’s transcript of the recorded interview, and the latter does not appear to add anything to Cooke’s critique.

One important point that Cooke raises is that of data appraisal and the role of archivists in creating archival documentation that faithfully represents present cultures for future generations, a study that has been handled in detail elsewhere (see Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2015). Cooke also raises the issue of relations between the individual “repatriator” and the receiving institution. Should the repatriator monitor the activities of the receiving institution regarding his or her collection? How much control does the repatriator have over the collections he/she has repatriated? As a case in point, Cooke cites a collection of his own field recordings that he deposited at MAKWMA. In order to find out whether his collection was accessible to users, he sent an email query to one of the staff members. The staff member informed him that his collection was accessible, but not as accessible as he had hoped it would be. Unfortunately, Cooke did not share his concerns about access with the director of MAKWMA.

Cooke takes issue with MAKWMA for charging a fee to access the archives. It is important to note that MAKWMA is housed in the Makerere University library. Anyone who accesses the archive must pay a library fee, including students, who are only allowed access to the library after paying their tuition fees. A visiting scholar or researcher normally pays a fee to access not only the archive, but the entire library. Cooke makes reference to the “free” resources of the British Library Sound Archive. Unfortunately, “free” access constitutes a privileged status not open to scholars in Uganda: one has to pay to access these materials on the Internet.

We emphatically maintain that in our article, we did not suggest that the original recordings should be repatriated to Uganda. In fact, we mentioned that Makerere does not have the facilities to maintain the originals (p. 215). It is standard practice for an archive to have backup copies in other archives for safety; having such copies outside of Uganda is a necessity.

We believe that all scholars, including those from Africa, have the same right to critique history as Peter Cooke invokes to critique our 2012 article.

Klaus Wachsmann, given his interest in returning the recordings to Uganda and his celebration as a humanist—we are sure—would welcome any healthy intellectual critique to emerge from this community of “informants” that now includes its own scholars (KPW Festschrift Committee 1977).

We consider Peter Cooke’s interpretation of our article as an attack on historical and cultural critique. In footnote 4, p. 229, we inquire about the conditions surrounding the aforementioned recording by Wachsmann, which would be helpful to know *for us now*. It is significant, as Cooke states, that “[a]nswers to these questions would hardly have been considered necessary during the discussion even if they had been put to Wachsmann.” It is not surprising that the kinds of questions we are asking today are different from those that were asked in the past. Indeed, our view does not differ from Klaus Wachsmann’s, which Cooke cites in his response: “Wachsmann confessed to his son that: ‘He had been acutely aware that his work was of its time and that there were so many questions and matters (retrospectively) that subsequently would be important’” (email: Philipp Wachsmann to Cooke, 29 July 2014, cited above).

We are not faulting Wachsmann for not asking those questions. But in the post-colonial present, we are not turning away from them either. Knowledge is dynamic and to ignore the context of writing culture is to ignore the meaning and power of ethnographic representation and authority (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Further, we have not claimed to close the book on the recordings. In fact, we hope that the book is never closed, as future generations re-read and re-interpret our work, as well as the work of our respected forebears.

Notes

1. Further examples of historical and cultural critique can be found in Nettle and Bohlman 1991.

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