

MUSIC PERFORMANCE ON 19TH-CENTURY SUKUMA-NYAMWEZI CARAVANS TO THE SWAHILI COAST

by

FRANK GUNDERSON

But now listen, what is the meaning of that full-voiced, sonorous song which wells forth from the depths of the forest and echoes through the trees in ever increasing volume? (Scottish explorer Joseph Thomson¹)

This article examines the utility and significance of music performed on 19th-century caravans journeying between the inland East African Sukuma-Nyamwezi and interlacustrine regions, and the Swahili coast. This research will show that through music and “soundscape production”,² Sukuma-Nyamwezi porters or *bapagati*³ maintained their identity and dignity albeit intermittently, in spite of the rigors sustained on the long march. I have created a composite of musical practices, using primary sources both from European travelogues from the caravan journeys that hired Sukuma-Nyamwezi porters in Zanzibar and Bagamoyo, as well as oral narratives collected in Tanzania in 1994–6, 1999, 2004, and 2006.⁴ This includes literature from scientific, geographic, ethnographic, missionary, and rescue expeditions. A handful of the reports from these expeditions demonstrate keen observation skills on the part of the author when it came to the everyday workings of the caravan (see especially Baumann 1894; Burton 1860; Grant 1864; Hohnel 1894; Speke 1863; Thomson 1962; and Weule 1909). Unfortunately, the preservation of song texts suffers in this regard. Most of the texts in these travelogue narratives are in English or German only, without the original indigenous text provided. In a few instances, simple Swahili songs are provided in full, reflecting the level of language competency of the narrative’s author. I will examine the time period that began with John Speke and Richard Burton’s first journeys, and ended with the outbreak of World War I, when the building of the two major East African railroads as well as inland roads for vehicles, overcame the necessity for human portage on a massive scale (Akeley 1929:89).⁵

¹ Thomson, Joseph. 1962. *Through Masailand*. Chicago: Northwestern University Press. p. 67.

² By “soundscape production”, I mean the realm of humanly produced music and noises that occurred on caravans, which included all-night drumming and dance, gunshots, reveilles and fanfares, hummed tunes and marching rhythms, and the general clatter of bells, horns, shouts, and whistles.

³ Kisukuma. *Wapagazi* in Kiswahili.

⁴ The author wishes to thank the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities for support while accomplishing this research. The author wishes to thank Gage Averill, John Hanson, Jan Jansen, Peter Hoelsing, Jason McCoy, and Mark Slobin, who have all offered helpful comments regarding this work.

⁵ I also use as source material the autobiography of Tippu Tipp (El Murjebi) and a collection of narratives elicited

Porterage constituted one of the most ancient and massive forms of labor migration in African history (Coquery-Vidrovitch and Lovejoy 1978:11). Kisukuma and Kinyamwezi-speaking men, coming from the region now known as central and northwestern Tanzania,⁶ were sought above all others as porters of choice for caravan travel. This was due to their experience as traders, their knowledge of their home region – which was the destination of so many ivory and slave traders, missionaries and explorers, as well as the pride they took in their work (Stanley 1899:41). The Scottish explorer Burton preferred to employ them because they were willing to hire themselves out on the return journey (Burton 1860:144), but he complained that on their own turf they would not carry loads any further except for extra pay.

Porterage was thought by the Sukuma-Nyamwezi to be a test of supreme manliness (Burton 1860:35), and indeed even the sons of kings were found taking part in this rite of passage. The first Sukuma-Nyamwezi trading expeditions were controlled by chiefs, who oversaw the redistribution of trade goods such as iron hoes, ivory, salt, and disc shells (Gray and Birmingham 1970:25; Hartwig 1976:71–74). Sukuma-Nyamwezi traditions suggest that pioneer trading princes traveling east to sell iron and replenish their seed supplies in Ugogo had heard of the existence of the Indian Ocean, and thus ventured to the coast in search of conus-shaped disc shells to be used as ritual items for chiefs (Koponen 1988:108). Regular caravans to the coast were organized soon after, in journeys called *kuja kukwaba ng`wani*, or “to go and get property from the coast”. Caravan organizers employed local connections and wage incentives to attract and maintain the production and labor personnel required by the expanded regional trade (Cummings 1975:195).

The expansion of local trade to long-distance trade was exacerbated further with the rise of the Zanzibar-based trade system (Koponen 1988:107), which introduced the slave trade, the ivory trade, and the European expeditions. The primary trade routes using Sukuma-Nyamwezi porters were the “central route” from Bagamoyo to Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika, and from Tabora northwards toward Buganda and Bunyoro. Arab merchants began using these established African routes in the 1820s and 1830s (Simpson 1975:3). Major centers of trade sprang up along these routes. At the beginning of the colonial period it was estimated that over 100,000 porters covered the caravan routes yearly (Stuhlman 1894:16) and that up to 30,000 porters could be found in Bagamoyo waiting for a load at the beginning of the caravan season in September. Caravans could be as large as three or four thousand men (Krapf 1860:421).

from 19th-century porters (Velten 1901b). As there is so little in the way of direct African testimony on this subject, these are valuable reports. I was however lucky to be able to collect about half a dozen porter songs from this period, remembered by several elderly men who learned the songs while in their youth, in the context of cotton farm labor. I have discussed elsewhere how these songs from a 19th-century context found their way into new labor contexts in the 20th and 21st centuries (Gundersen 2001; 2008 forthcoming).

⁶ In the literature from this time period, all porters from the Sukuma-Nyamwezi area were called “Nyamwezi”, regardless of what part of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi diasporan region they were from (Bosch 1930:8).

When traveling to the coast porters carried not just hired loads but their own provisions and personal trade goods such as chickens, goats, hippo's teeth, and ostrich feathers as well, which they traded on the coast for a profit (Cummings 1975:198). Many young men used their porter's wages to begin trading on their own, in many cases combining with others to form caravans of their own (Roberts 1968:128). Thus employment in trade provided the occasion for the youngest and the most adventuresome to acquire the means to liberate themselves from the control of the group and launch themselves into individual enterprise (Coquery-Vidrovitch and Lovejoy 1978:18). A young Sukuma man could earn cloth up to the value of fifteen cows and three bulls on a single trip to the coast (Itandala 1983:229).

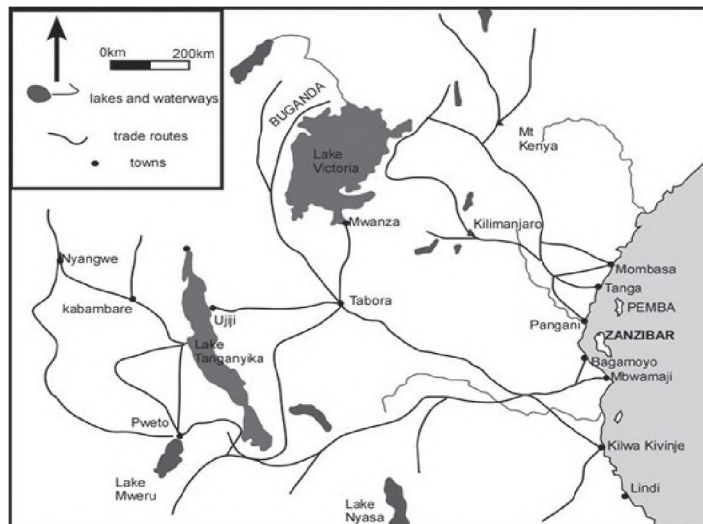


Figure 1. Major 19th-century caravan routes in East Africa. After Sheriff, Abdul. 1987. *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

A Sukuma-Nyamwezi caravan (*kabita ka bashimiinzi*) marching on the road in single file a mile or more in length must have been a most remarkable thing to see:

At the head of a caravan was a *kirangozi* (caravan guide); next came the aristocracy of the caravan, the ivory carriers with tusks poised upon shoulders; then carriers of clothes, beads, copper wire, and in the rear a rabble rout of slaves corded or chained in file; children in separate parties, idlers and invalids, carriers of lighter goods with rhinoceros tusks, hoes, salt and tobacco, baskets, boxes, beds, tents, calabashes, water gourds, bags, pots, mats and private stores...a *mganga* (healer) almost invariably accompanies the caravan blankets. (Burton 1860:157–158)

Music accompanied nearly every imaginable activity on the caravan, but never more so than while on the road and upon the occasion of arrivals and departures.⁷ The following caravan journal excerpts give sequential insight into the caravan departure routine:



Figure 2. Sukuma *bapagati* (porters) taking a break while on the road. From Goetzen, Graf. 1899. *Durch Afrika von Ost Nach West*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer. p. 204.

At 4:30 there is a drumbeat which rouses the cooks, and preparations are made for breakfast. In the meantime, packing goes on, and at 5:00 breakfast is supposed to be ready, more often it was not. Then follows a short service, hymns, and prayers. At a quarter to six, everyone begins to move off. (Tucker 1911:28)

Announcements to get ready to march were followed by a tremendous uproar, screaming, yelling, shouting, singing, banging of guns, followed by a dance and fearful scramble around the camp. (Thomson 1962:60)

After the bulk of the loads had been taken up I sounded my whistle, and Ludi announced that any man who did not come forward before the next whistle sounded would forfeit half his week's *posho*. (Hore 1971:47)

When all is ready, the *kirangozi*, or Nyamwezi guide, rises and shoulders his load, which is ever one of the lightest. He deliberately raises his furled flag, a plain blood red, the sign of a caravan from Zanzibar, much tattered by the thorns, and he is followed by a privileged *pagazi*, tom-tomming upon a kettle drum much resembling a European hourglass. (Burton 1860:37)

At the word of command arises an uproar which baffles description. All the pent up energy of their throats rings out into the silent forest; stout sticks rattle in a wild, irregular rhythm on

⁷ In fact, there is so much mention of music in connection with this aspect of the road that, along with the depiction of the evening drum circle, it should be considered both a common occurrence and a common literary trope of European expedition literature from this time period, therefore prone to exaggeration for effect.

the wooden cases, and alas! also on the tin boxes, which furnish only too good a resonator. The noise is infernal, but it is a manifestation of joy and pleasure. We are off! and, once on the march, the Wanyamwezi are in their element. Before long the chaos of noise is reduced to some order; these men have an infinitely delicate sense of rhythm, and so the din gradually resolves itself into a kind of march sung to a drum accompaniment. (Weule 1919:81)

And then with flags flying and songs sung by the carriers, accompanied for a time by the rhythmical beating of sticks against the cases, the huge caravan set out on the march. (Frederick 1910:16)

Upon setting out, louder voices turn to cries of “*Kwecha! Kwecha! Pakia! Pakia! Hopa! Hopa!*” “Collect! Pack! Set out!” “*Safari! Safari leo!*” “A Journey! a Journey today!” and some peculiarly African boasts: “*P’hunda! Ngami!*” “I am an ass! A camel!” accompanied by a roar of bawling voices, drumming, whistling, piping and the braying of *barghuni*, or horns. (Burton 1860:36)

There is hope, noise and laughter among the ranks, and a hum of gay voices murmuring through the fields...motion has restored all of us to a sense of satisfaction. (Stanley 1899:66)

I was followed for a quarter of a mile by about 150 women of all sizes and shapes making the most terrible din and screeching, yelling and singing at me and dancing and running and flinging themselves about in a strange style. I was completely mobbed. (Hore 1971:50)

Several authors, including Baumann (1894:8) and the legendary slave marauder Tippu Tip (El Murjebi 1971:14), spoke of a special rhythm or motif called the *ngoma ya safari* that was used to signal to the caravan that it was indeed time to go.⁸ Also called the *mganda ya safari*,⁹ because the style was reportedly used as a kind of military drill in Uganda (Baumann 1894:8; Werther 1894:195; Decle 1900:455), it was customary according to Burton (1860), never to return once this style of marching rhythm accompanied by *barghun* or antelope horn had begun.

While on the road, there was evidently a lot of calling back and forth between the fore and aft groups that made up the caravan, to make sure that there were no ambushes or desertions. Since larger caravans were divided into sections based on clan, utility, or gender, with the Sukuma-Nyamwezi carriers found towards the front, and the servants, free slaves, and women toward the rear, competitions in noise and song between the groups emerged (Smith 1978:151). Caravans were so noisy, hunting could rarely be done while on the march as animals, “...scared by the interminable singing, shouting,

⁸ A proto-Bantu institution and term found throughout central, eastern, and southern Africa, *ngoma* is, “...at once the term for drum, as well as drumming or other musical instrumentation, singing, dancing, and the complex of constituent behavior and concepts” (Janzen 1992:290). In Kisukuma, an apostrophe is added after the consonant “g”, thus (*ng’oma*), making the “ng’-” soft as in the “-ng” in “song”.

⁹ Whether there is any connection between this rhythm and the style of dance known as *mganda* found today throughout southern Tanzania and northern Malawi is unclear. One might be led to believe that there is a connection, because the Malawian *mganda* is said to have originated as a competitive march-like dance inspired by the military drills of the Germans, which predated *beni* (see also Ranger 1975:117–122).

bell-jingling,¹⁰ horn blowing, and other such many noises of the moving caravan, could be seen disappearing into the distance” (Speke 1863:30).



Figure 3. Sukuma 19th-century *bapagati* (porter's) drum. From Bohrenz, Wolfgang. 1940. *Beiträge Zur Materiellen Kultur der Nyamwezi*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Hanzichen Universität. p. 47.

Another important dimension on the caravan soundscape was that of gunfire. The widespread distribution of guns in 19th-century East Africa via the slave trade changed many aspects of the caravan soundscape. On many caravans the firing of blank cartridges quickly supplanted horn blowing or drumming as the preferred mode of communication between the caravan and nearby villages (Thomson 1962:71), as it seems shots could be heard for longer distances and signified a position of power. Gun usage was so widespread by mid-century that Burton wrote that gunshots were the only credible precursors to a caravan (Burton 1863:66). When traveling inland, *bapagati* were rounded up, and hired via the sound of gunfire (New 1971:74), and upon meeting other

caravans, gunshot salutes of welcome would be fired (Grant 1864:76). Guns were fired on the occasion of the new moon, which Grant proclaimed was “...very dangerous, as the men never looked in what direction their rifles were pointing, but sent their bullets whizzing about the camp” (Cameron 1877:104).

An important figure on the caravan was that of the Sukuma-Nyamwezi *mfumu* or diviner-healer.¹¹ Sukuma-Nyamwezi caravans consulted diviner-healers regarding the proper day and hour to start or stop a journey, or for the right path to choose at the arrival of a crossroads (Roberts 1968:129; Declé 1900:346).¹² *Bafumu* cured or prevented disease or spirit possession along the road (Grant 1864:259) through the distribution of preventive charms and medicines, and through the construction of various shrines to *mizimu*, or land and water spirits:

Some of them go on ahead in the early morning for about a hundred yards along the path on which they are about to travel. They then place a hand on the ground and throw flour over it in such a manner as to leave the impression of a hand on the soil, at the same time they “wish” hard that the journey will go off well. On the march from time to time each of them will deposit in the same spot a twig of wood or stone in such a way that a great heap gets collected. (Declé 1900:345)

¹⁰ *Bapagati* strapped small bells called *ng'hiinda* to their legs, which emphasized the beat of the march (Hore 1971:63). Larger bells (like Swiss cowbells) were strapped to the ivory (Speke 1863:20).

¹¹ In Kiswahili, this is *mganga*.

¹² Crossroads had special significance to the Sukuma-Nyamwezi traveler, and many travelogues testify that it symbolized “death on a journey”. Prayers were said and offerings given at such places: “Near the villages where two roads met are often found whole piles of old pots, gourds, and pieces of iron” (Declé 1900:346).



Figure 4. A drawing of the Sukuma caravan leader Pesa Mbili, portrayed with a bughle. From Götzen, Graf. 1899. *Durch Africa von Ost nach West*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer. p. 205.

Another important figure on the caravan was that of the *kirangozi* (Kiswahili), or *ntongeji* (Kisukuma), the caravan leader. He commonly was the more experienced caravan member who knew the route well, who was often involved with hiring *bapagati*, and who set and altered the pace on the road through blowing a *barghum* or antelope horn (Hohnel 1894:38), or through leading topical marching songs. The *kirangozi* led the singing, and inspired the rank and file. Next came the aristocracy of the caravan, the ivory carriers, with tusks poised upon their shoulders (Koponen 1988:112; Cory Papers #153).

The song “*Ndashige*” (“When I Arrive”),¹³ was collected by the German traveler Karl Weule in the early years of the 20th century (Weule 1909:292), and was sung by the well-traveled Sukuma caravan leader known as “*Pesa Mbili*” (“Two Cents”), on the occasion of reaching an area in the Makonde region believed to be haunted.¹⁴

Kisukuma

*Ndashige mu numba bwana
mkubwa
“Usigawe”, naomba
Chakula ni mali
“Sirikali”, naomba
Wakuhoju ni nani?
Ndashige
Nimupelekage, mu peleka jumba na
bwana
mkubwa, “simba”
Milima godoka, bwana mkubwa*

English¹⁵

When I arrive at the home (of the)
headman
“Don’t separate”, I plead
Food is wealth
“The government”, I plead
Who is there to fear?
When I arrive
I should be taken, taken to the big
house of
the headman, the “lion”
Mountains flatten, the headman

The singer pleads in a mix of Kiswahili and Kisukuma for his comrades to stick together in the face of the unknown, and to stay behind and eat at the home of a local administrator, someone for whom “mountains flatten” (all obstacles can be leveled).

¹³ Sukuma singers generally reference individual songs by the first sung line of the text.

¹⁴ See also Goetzen (1899:19).

¹⁵ Weule’s published English translation: “We shall arrive with the great master, We stand in a row and have nothing to fear about getting our food and our money from the government, We are not afraid, We are going along with the great master, The lion, We are going down to the coast and back.”

Just prior to arrival at known village resting places, spirits on the caravan would pick up, and songs would start up once again, led by the *ntongeji* (Cameron 1877:102). Short choruses were sung about what awaited them, for instance “*Kesho samaki, kesho ugali*” (“Tomorrow Fish, Tomorrow Porridge”),¹⁶ or “*Kuma Nyanza*” (“The Vaginas are in Mwanza”).¹⁷ In the carriers’ chorus “*Aho Nyanza*” (Werther 1894:79), the singers pine after the comforts of home.

Kisukuma
Aho Nyanza
Kwa mayu!

English
 There at Nyanza
 With mother!

Nyanza in Kisukuma refers to any large body of water, however it most often refers to lake Victoria-Nyanza, considered the home region of the Basukuma. Michael Masalu*¹⁸ had this fascinating comment about returning porters waiting for the end of the rainy season: “These porters were returning from a long journey, and when they reached the water, they had to wait for the rainy season to end, because the water was too much for them to cross. They prayed for the water to decrease, so they could reach home to be with their *madames*”).¹⁹

Upon arrival at a long-awaited destination, odes composed along the way were revealed and performed. Caravan leaders would change into their best finery just prior to arrival (Beidelman 1982:619). It was a prerequisite for the *ntongeji* to dance in the streets of a town while a caravan was closing up. Crowds of people might begin to form along the way a few miles before the caravan was to halt, singing welcomes and shouting for beads (Hore 1971:50). Upon their arrival in villages, caravans met everything from stilt-walking and somersaulting in Unyamwezi (Cameron 1877:184), to the more common reports of drumming and singing:

About 8 a.m., we halted for stragglers at a little village, and when the line of porters becoming compact began to wriggle, snake-like, its long length over the plain, with floating flags, booming horns, muskets ringing like saluting mortars, and an uproar of voice which nearly drowned the other noises, we made a truly splendid and majestic first appearance. (Burton 1860:32)

Members to the rear of the column were alerted to the caravan’s arrival through gunfire,²⁰ shouts and song (Hore 1971:62). In parts of Unyamwezi, villagers expected a sung chorus response from the caravan (Cameron 1877:239), upon which they would

¹⁶ Hohmel (1894:433).

¹⁷ Werther (1894:207).

¹⁸ All interviews conducted by the author are signified here with an asterisk (*) and referenced at the end of this article under Oral Sources.

¹⁹ From an interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Hawa Bapagati walikuwa walirudi na safari ndefu, wanafika kwenye bahari, wanasubiri kama bahari ikame, kwa sababu maji yalikuwa mengi na walishindwa. Waliomba kwamba bahari ikiisha, watafika nyumbani yao kwa mama yao.*”

²⁰ On occasion the firing of guns caused the villagers to flee and desert their villages, a clue to the ever-present danger of slave traders (Beidelman 1982:620).

lavish the caravan with gifts of food. In Maasai territory, Morani warriors would wait patiently for gifts immediately after singing songs of welcome (Hoemel 1894:131). In the interlacustrine area where kings controlled huge populations, thousands of people could be mustered, and welcome *ng'omas* would go on all night: “We found that they had put out the big drums, they had put them in the courtyard to play for us, the *siwa* and the *zomari*. They rejoiced greatly over us” (Selemani 1965:120).²¹

While on the coast, Sukuma-Nyamwezi porters would wait for a period of up to six months for caravans making the return trip inland. In many cases, their labor contracts were negotiated by urban-dwelling Muslim converts known as *waungwana* (Glassman 1995:62).²² *Waungwana* were the subject of complaint and derision in several *bapagati* songs documented by Velten (1903b):

Kisukuma

Mayu wane, mayu wane, nahuu!
Waungwana kutukongola!
Wamaweta!

English

My mother, my mother, *nahuu!*
 The *waungwana* swindle/pamper us!
 Our mother!

Kisukuma

Indweka, mwazona!
Indweka (2x)

English²³

On the shoulder, you see!
 On the shoulder (2x)

Kutawanya

To spread (the loads)

Kutawanya, ni maungwana

To spread (the loads), it is the *waungwana*

Mwazona, indjeko

You see, on the shoulder

In “*Mayu Wane*”, a song collected by Velten (1903b:248–250) from the singer Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, the narrator discusses the treatment given the carriers by the *waungwana*.²⁴ In “*Indweka*”, collected by Molitor (1913:#39), the singer discusses the work of the *waungwana*, distributing loads to the porters before they leave for up country. William Lubimbi* had this point to make about the *waungwana*: “Long ago, the Arabs came to the coast. They were looking for people to carry loads to go to a certain place. Now, these people they would give them a little something, and they would be chosen in order to carry these loads, but it would be far to go by foot.”²⁵

²¹ Published in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Tukakuta kametoa ngoma kuu, wamweka uwanjani kutupigia, siwa na zomari. Wakatufurahi sana.*”

²² In contemporary Kiswahili usage, *waungwana* refers to “gentlemen”.

²³ Molitor’s published French translation: “*Les sauterelles envahissent le pays.*”

²⁴ The verb *-kongola*, depending on the tonal emphasis, could either mean “to trim” or “to steal” (*-kongolā*), or “pampering” (*-kongolā*). The original translator (Velten) chose the latter. The meaning of “*Wamaweta!*” is unknown, it is most likely a bad original transliteration of the Kiswahili phrase “*mama wetu*” (“our mother”), which is indeed how Velten translates it.

²⁵ From an interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Zamani, Waarabu walipokuja walikuwa wanakuja pwani. Walitafuta watu wa kubeba mizigo kuenda mahala fulani. Sasa, watu watalipa posho kidogo, sasa watachaguliwa watu watabeba hiyo mizigo, lakini ni safari ndefu kwa miguu.*”

Prior to the brutal colonial consolidation of power in the area that became Tanganyika, it was necessary for caravans traveling inland to carry massive amounts of what was known as *hongo*, loosely translated as road toll or gift payment, to give to the numerous political authorities who demanded it. *Hongo* was usually in the form of beads, wire, and *merikani*, a kind of undyed American-made muslin cloth. Music boxes and accordions (Johnston 1886:44–46), guitar strings (Burton 1860:49), and musical clocks were very popular gifts. The payment of *hongo* was an elaborate bargaining ritual that would sometimes take days or even weeks to complete. Wanyamwezi chiefs would demand exorbitant sums from the European caravans, or extort work from ivory caravans,²⁶ making them stay sometimes up to two months during harvest time (Selemani 1965:257). Once the chief’s “drums of satisfaction” were beaten, the tax was settled. “They could not be extorted for anything more” (Speke 1863:122). The bargain was usually further sealed with an all-night *ng’oma*.

The occasion of the evening *ng’oma* is another well-documented event of the caravan. These were either smaller, *bapagati*-organized evening affairs that took place en-route after setting up camp and eating dinner, or they were large village-sponsored bashes that took place either on the night of arrival, upon payment of *hongo*, or on the evening prior to departure. *Ng’oma* dances on the road could become quite raucous all-night events, where *pombe* or millet beer flowed, and where time was kept by striking spears or rifles loudly on the ground:

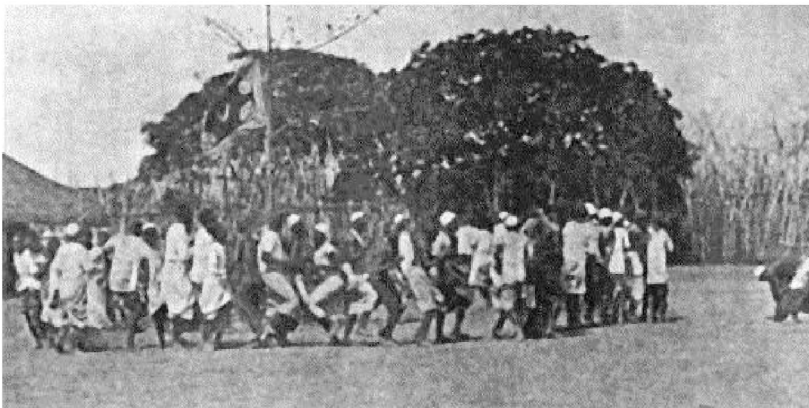


Figure 5. Sukuma *bapagati* (porters) performing circle dance while on the road. From Weule, Karl. 1909. *Native Life in East Africa*. New York: Appleton. p. 19.

Slowly the circle of dancers moved round, while single performers, generally six at a time, hopped into the center and, swinging their weapons to the time of the measure, sprang at regular intervals into the air...the guns, loaded almost to bursting with powder, going off every now and then. The dancers stepped out of the circle to fire, pointing their weapons to

²⁶ Returning caravans were most vulnerable to labor demands, as they would have nothing left to barter (Hohnel II:30).

the ground, stretched out as far as possible in front of them, springing into the air as they pulled the triggers. Then they resumed their places in the circle, with as proud an air as if they had performed some feat of valor with making all that noise. (Hohner 1894:181)

Caravan leaders sponsored the feasts, in order to show their gratitude for *bapagati* loyalty (Stanley 1899:117). Although accepted by most caravan leaders as a sleepless but necessary inconvenience, Sir Major Barttelot's obsessive intolerance for late-night *ng'oma* activities finally led to his murder at the hands of a group of disgruntled porters who had been lent to him by the slave marauder Tippu Tip (Barttelot 1890:352).²⁷

Sukuma-Nyamwezi *bapagati* sang on the road to encourage each other, and to break the monotony of the road (Roscoe 1921:67). The porters even choreographed the nature of their marching, when they would "...at a given verbal signal at the end of a chorus of a song, simultaneously change their loads from the left to the right shoulder by ... simply ducking the head downwards and then, with a sideways swoop, upwards" (Jackson 1930:79). The Sukuma-Nyamwezi were famed for their endurance, both in marching and singing (Weule 1909:390), and their songs were considered by their employers as "unsurpassed" (Lambert 1963:18–21).²⁸ Songs were sung in a mixture of Kisukuma or Kinyamwezi, Kiswahili, and corrupt Arabic, and their songs included the imitation of bird and animal calls (Simpson 1975:14):

The normal recreations of a march are whistling, singing, shouting, hooting, homing, drumming, imitating the cries of birds and beasts, repeating words which are never used except on journeys...a cough's language, gabble enough and good enough...and abundant squabbling; in fact perpetual noise which the ear however, soon learns to distinguish for the hubbub of a halt. (Burton 1860:350)

It is undoubtedly the case that Sukuma-Nyamwezi porters carried their own *ng'oma* style and repertoire from their home areas on the road with them, influencing village festivities along the way. Substantial evidence exists that Sokhumi-Nyamwezi traders were influential in the inland spread of specialized dance society competitions (see also Gunderson 2001; Hartwig 1976; Ranger 1975; Iliffe 1979). Sukuma-Nyamwezi porters developed joking relationships with the ethnic groups along the way whom they met. Sukuma-Nyamwezi travelers introduced drums to Usandawe, and spread their specialized snake and porcupine hunting associations throughout western and central Tanganyika (Iliffe 1979:80). *Ng'omas* would take place at important centers of trade along the route such as Tabora,²⁹ where crews from up to three or more caravans

²⁷ Tippu asked a local chief why his men killed the major, and was told, "They said it was because the dances are really the great joy of caravan life; are we to be mournful as though bereaved?" (El Murjebi 1971:126). Original: "*Akasema, sababu anawakataza kupiga ngoma. Na wale wanyampara wanasema, hii ngoma ndio furaha ya safari. Tufanye huzuni kama tuli ofiwa?*"

²⁸ One homesick caravan leader felt that his porters' singing reminded him of the finale of the first act of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, "...as the swan-knight becomes visible in the distance and the Brabanter knights and women express their amazement" (Trotha 1897:43).

²⁹ Other important centers included Ujiji, Bagamoyo, Taveta and Arusha.

might be present (Thomson 1962:57). *Bapagati* from various caravans would "...make up all kinds of grotesque costumes, imitating the songs and dances they learned from the natives" (Hohnel 1894:167). *Bapagati*, were likewise influenced by the diverse communities through which they passed. They seemed for instance to be quite infatuated with Maasai dances.³⁰ Inspiration for the large lammelophones found in the Nyamwezi region came from 19th-century *bapagati* having contacts with Congolese musicians (Kubik 1997:317).

The musical influence of the Swahili coastal musics on porters via exposure to Islam and long internment on the coast was substantial (Kubik 1980).³¹ *Bapagati* counted off their marches in Arabic (Baumann 1894:8). Arabic influence of wind instruments like the *barghuni* antelope horn and *zomari* horns originating from North Africa were evident. Smaller percussive instruments like *upato*, a tin can beaten by a stick, or *kayamba*, a common bamboo rattle from the Swahili coast, were also described (Stigand 1913:200). *Sadakas* (blessings) were given by permanently established Muslim traders on the occasion of Islamic holidays, or for sending off caravans. These were for the most part feasts, where departure times were decided, amidst ritual and prayer (Hohnel 1894:204), and subsequently celebrated in the performance of music (Thomson 1962:147). In these contexts, Sukuma-Nyamwezi porters converted to Islam during their long stays on the coast or their visits to Tabora, where curious porters "...were kept up at night by the Arabs with their prayers" (Wolf 1976:58):

About two hours after sunset, through the noise and the merriment of the camp, a voice each night rose with impressive effect. As the sonorous and musical sound gathered volume, voices were hushed, conversation ceased, and a striking reverence reigned throughout the camp. The sound that thus reechoed was the sacred call to prayer. Every word was articulated with great distinctness and sung out as far as breath would last, and as it filled the reverberating woods with its thrilling power, even we infidels felt inclined to lift our hats in respect. (Thomson 1962:66)

On those evenings on the road when no major festivities took place, small groups sung rounds in melancholy "well-trained bass and tenor voices" (Roscoe 1921:55). Lone porters accompanied themselves on one-stringed spiked fiddles, or *kadete*, while others told stories or played *bau* (Stigand 1913:138).³² There are several reports of *bapagati* singing European tunes such as "The Bay of Biscay", "Home Sweet Home", and "God Save the Queen", tunes which they had picked up while serving on British ships in

³⁰ Hohnel (of the Count Teleki expedition) describes numerous encounters with Maasai on their expedition through Kenya, including the fear with which Maasai warrior dances were received (Hohnel:74), and the excitement surrounding subsequent performances of Maasai dances by porters upon arrival at lake Stephanie (Hohnel II:188).

³¹ Though *bapagati* most likely adopted the melisma and the heptatonic scales that characterize musics of the Arabic music diaspora that Kubik describes as existing in the Nyamwezi region in the 1960s, this influence is felt today only in the wealthy Nyamwezi-Arab households in the urban center of Tabora.

³² This is a game resembling checkers, played throughout the Islamic African diaspora. In the Sukuma region it is known as *isolo* or *busumbi*.

the Indian Ocean (Burton 1860:249; Roscoe 1921:249; Thomson 1962:166). *Bapagati* composed songs in the evenings in order to muster courage in the face of hostile territory, or to express concerns for being left behind in the wilderness (Hore 1971:31). They would specifically address amazing places they had seen,³³ or adventures or misfortunes they were witness to, as in this sung description of a first time at sea:

Kisukuma

Tukukeyula paka kweupe

Tukukeyula mu meli

Waa waa!

Tukutia na nanga

Uluke, uwone tabu

Waa waa!

Tabu yafuma kweli

Yakuwulaga yukufulu Mungu

Bismillahi wa kibarau

English³⁴

We will stay up till morning light

We will stay up on the ship

Waa waa!

We put down an anchor

Should you throw up, you will see trouble

Waa waa!

Trouble has really come

To kill is to blaspheme God

In the name of Allah the great

According to the collector Weule (1909), this song, also performed by *Pesa Mbili*, was performed around his porters' camp at night. Simoni Ndokeji* had this insight about the experience of these *bapagati* based on his reading of this text:

This singer tells what is on his heart about his companions who accompanied him on a journey on a ship. It is evident there were travelers who had never been on a ship on the ocean before. All the time on the ocean there are giant waves. Now he tells them, "If we get into trouble, we will drop anchor, to drop anchor is indeed as if we are resting. If we are to go any further there, there are those among us who will vomit, because of the waves."³⁵

According to many of the song texts reported by the European writers in their accounts, *bapagati* songs acknowledge the power or generosity of the *mzungu* or white man. However, the song "*Mwaleta Lunanda*" ("You've Brought Friction"), collected by Molitor (1913:#37) and sung in a mixture of Kisukuma and Kiswahili, expressed a common sentiment that was felt about the behavior of the Europeans:³⁶

³³ Weule describes a tune that celebrates the spacious "zentrale magazin" at Dar es Salaam, the site where they were hired (Weule 1909:83).

³⁴ Weule's published English translation: "We were on board day and night, till the day dawned, and then cast anchor, The Baharia (sailors) on board said, 'You Washenzi (pagans, bush people) from the interior, you will vomit yourselves to death.' But we came safe to Lindi after all, and said (to the sailors): 'You mocked at God (by saying that we should die), but we came safe to land.'"

³⁵ From an interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: "*Huyu mwimbaji anawatia moyo wa safiri wenzake wa kwenye meli. Nadhani kulikuwa na wasafiri ambao hawajaenda kwa meli na baharini. Na kila mara bahari ina mawimbi mengi makubwa. Sasa anawaambia kwamba, 'Tukupata shida na meli tutatia nanga, na kwa kutia nanga hapo ni kama kupumzika. Tukiendelea zaidi, wengine wanaweza kutapika kwa sababu ya mawimbi.'*"

³⁶ An interesting point here is that the collector translates the Kiswahili phrase "*Wazungu masambazi*" as "the Europeans are spreading". This would be correct if the phrase were rendered as "*Wazungu wasambazi*".

Kisukuma

Mwaleta lunanda

Mwaleta lunanda

Wazungu masambazi! (2x)

English³⁷

You've brought friction

You've brought friction

Europeans are thugs! (2x)

The song exemplifies the sentiment also shared by Speke, which was that his *bapagati* mimicked and parodied him in song at every available opportunity (Speke 1863:60).

However rosy a picture the European traveler might have painted of merry Sukuma-Nyamwezi life on the road, it was without a doubt a difficult and brutal life, as the bones of porters used as landmarks on the route to lake Nyanza could attest (Thurston n.d.:94). As one porter put it, “a journey inland has many troubles; like sleeping on an empty stomach, or spending a day thirsty. There is no comfort, not even once” (Selemani 1965:121). Besides being subject to long work days and months away from home, porters were compelled to obey a leader whose orders, whims, outbursts of temper, and standards of judgment would be inexplicable (Simpson 1975:2).

Some evidence suggests that Sukuma-Nyamwezi caravan workers did engage to a limited degree in collective bargaining and other forms of worker resistance, and that music played a limited role in this. For instance, Sukuma-Nyamwezi *bapagati* were able to exercise some control over their wages by bargaining. Desertion, pilfering, sabotage, and feigning of accidents or disease were other means of resistance (Cameron 1877:23). *Bapagati* bargained whether to be paid by the journey or by the month (Beidelman 1982:611) or for higher wages because of scarcity of food in areas affected by drought (Beidelman 1982:616). *Bapagati* were paid extra upon their arrival in villages, in order to keep them from deserting (Stigand 1913:266). Porters learned further how to bargain by watching the actions of chiefs along the journey. In more than one case, upon hearing the “drums of satisfaction”, the porters would scatter claiming they had heard war drums, and then come back demanding cloth themselves because they were being required to move around in such dangerous territory (Grant 1864:121; El Murjebi 1971:98). Music figured in other examples of control when porters refused to camp in certain areas where Maasai were singing war songs nearby (Thomson 1962:74) or where “demons” were heard playing drums in the distance (Hohnel 1894:204).

There are a handful of songs originating with the *bapagati* that are remembered and performed to this day.

³⁷ Molitor's published French translation: “*Vous nous creez des ennuis en nous amenant les Europeens, ce sont des promeneurs.*”

Kisukuma	English
<i>Aliselema, alija</i> (4x)	He is flowing, he is going (4x)
<i>Lelo twashika</i>	Today we have arrived
<i>Alisema, alija</i> (4x)	He is flowing he is going (4x)
<i>Mpaka tushike</i>	Until we reach there
<i>Alisema alija</i> (4x)	He is flowing he is going (4x)

The well-known song “*Aliselema Alija*” (“He is Flowing, He is Going”)³⁸ is said in popular discourse to have originated with *bapagati* carrying chiefs from place to place (Kezilihabu 1981:130), thus the phrase, “he is flowing, he is going”. This metaphor expanded to include the presence of any dignitary or charismatic leader on the caravan. It was used by late 19th-century caravan porters on the road, by soldiers during World War II, and is still used today by the compulsory youth service *Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa* (“Soldiers for Building the Country”). Budaka and Makoye* made these fascinating points about the song:

This is used whenever there is the case of many people pulling something very heavy. Something which is heavy, for example something like a rock. Or, they use it while carrying someone else, to go from here to there. Long ago, the Sukuma people did not have anything like machines for grinding. They would go to the mountains, and they would call these young men. The women would go first, they would go to the mountain, they would prepare a stone, one that was good enough for grinding food with, and then these young men would be told to tie it with ropes in order to move it. Now the elders there, they would explain to them, “Tie it like this, tie it like this”. So they would tie it, and perhaps they would pull it away from the mountain in order to bring it back to the village. If it were a heavy rock, it would be good to have on hand many people, perhaps five or more. And indeed they would have this song, they would carry it, indeed, slowly, slowly, with strength together.³⁹

Summary

Although in certain aspects the caravan soundscape, especially while on the road, was raucous and riotous, if not surreal, it was too much in the realm of work-related activity to be considered “carnavalesque”. The caravan soundscape functioned more as a unique kind of worksite pressure release where the European was praised in song, rather than as a Bakhtinian inversion of the social order (Abrams and Bauman 1972).

³⁸ “*Aliselema Alija*”, performed by Kang’wina ng’wana Mihumo, recorded by author, Bujora center, 20 September 1995. Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music, Gunderson Collection, song #240.

³⁹ From an interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Huu unatumika kama ni watu wengi wanavuta kitu kizito. Kitu kizito, kwa mfano kitu kama jiwe. Au, wanabeba pengine, kutoka hapa kwenda pale. Zamani, Wasukuma hawakuwa na mashine za kusaga. Walikuwa wanaenda mlimani. Wanaalikwa vijana. Akina mama kwanza, wanaenda mlimani, wanalitayarisha jiwe, hili anaona kwamba linatosha kusagja, basi sasa wale vijana ndio wanambiwa kufunga kamba. Na wazee wapo, wakuwaelekeza kwamba ‘fungeni hivi fungeni hivi’. Wanafunga kamba sasa, labda wanatoa mlimani huko kuleta kijijini kama huko. Kama ni jiwe zito, ni vizuri kuwa wengi, watano au zaidi. Itakuwa ni rahisi kulipeleka mahali wanakotaka kulipeleka. Ndio wakawa na wimbo, wakuchukua, ndio wanapeleka polepole kwa nguvu ya pamoja.”*

Ng'oma performances, however, were often very real critiques of work, where purposeful mockery, noise, disruption, and sexual license were central.

Song practice was about pacing the group in regular steps over long distances. Music served to establish enthusiastic camaraderie and courage among strangers not necessarily affiliated by clan. Performance contexts associated with the departure and arrival of these groups became commonplace. Music styles and paraphernalia associated with these inter-regional groups spread quickly. Portable instruments like the *kitumba* drum and *ng'hinda* bells, were adopted by *bapagati*, as was some variant of the work-signaling horn. The adornment of cowrie shells from the coast became a social marker of travel to faraway places, as did the adoption of Swahili melismatic singing styles from the coast. Besides being used both to coordinate work and to critique it, music performance on Sukuma-Nyamwezi caravans functioned to allay fears on the trail, as a social lubricant between widely divergent and potentially hostile ethnic groups, and to regenerate lagging spirits and help recreate aspects of lost self-respect. It gave the Sukuma-Nyamwezi man courage to face another day of life on the road, and provided a means by which he could better understand the chaotic and amazing worlds he helped to shape in 19th-century East Africa.

Oral Sources

Budaka, Mashauri

60 years, farmer, fisherman, town of Magu. Interviewed by author 22 August 2006.

Lubimbi, William

65 years, retired school teacher, Mary Knoll Language School, village of Makoko. Interviewed on several occasions, September–October, 2006.

Makanga, Gembe Ng'honela

48 years, farmer, *nfumu* (traditional healer) and *pubha* singer, village of Sayusayu. Discussions with author on several occasions, August 1995.

Makoye, Mkina

55 years, farmer, *nfumu* (traditional healer), town of Magu. Interviewed by author 22 August 2006.

Masalu, Michael

73 years, farmer, *bucheyeeki* singer and founder of *Shirika ya Daraja la Wakulima na Utamaduni Wao*, village of Nyamadoke. Interviewed by author on several occasions, 23 September 1995; July–October 2006.

Mihumo, Kang'wiina

80 years, farmer and retired *banuunguli* (porcupine hunter) dance leader, town of Kisesa. Interviewed by author 20 and 22 December 1994; 23 February 1995; October 1995.

Ndokeji, Simoni

47 years, visual artist, town of Kisesa. Discussions with author on several occasions, 1988–1996, 1999, 2003, 2006.

Shing'oma, Edward 'Mzee Kijana'

78 years, cotton farmer and retired school teacher, village of Gambos. Interviewed by author 26 August; 12 September 1994.

References

Abrams, Roger and Richard Bauman

1972 "Ranges of Festival Behavior", *The Reversible World*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Akeley, Mary

1929 *Carl Akeley's Africa*, New York: Dodd Mead and Co.

Barttelot, Major

1890 *Major Barttelot's Diary and Letters*, London: Bentley and Son

Baumann, Oskar

1894 *Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer

Beidelman, T.O.

1982 "The Organization and Maintenance of Caravans by the Church Missionary Society in Tanzania in the 19th Century", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15:4

Bosch, Fr.

1930 *Les Banyamwezi, Peuple de L' Afr Centr Orientale*

Burton, Richard

1860 *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, New York: Dover Publications

Cameron, Verney Lovett

1877 *Across Africa*, New York: Harper and Brothers

Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine and Paul Lovejoy (eds)

1978 *The Workers of African Trade*, London: Sage Publications

Cory, Hans

n.d. "Porters in East Africa", #153, Hans Cory Papers, EAF Z6601 E3, Hans Cory Papers, East African Collection, University of Dar Es Salaam

Cummings, R.

1975 *Aspects of Human Portage with Special Reference to the Akamba of Kenya: Towards an Economic History, 1820–1920*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California

Decle, Lionel

1900 [1974] *Three Years in Savage Africa*, Bulawayo: Books of Rhodesia

El Murjebi, Hamed Bin Muhammed

1971 *Maisha ya Hamed Bin Muhammed El Murjebi, Yaani Tippu Tip, kwa Maneno Yake Mwenywe*, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau

Frederick, Adolphus, Duke of Mecklenburg

1910 *In the Heart of Africa*, London: Cassell and Co.

Glassman, Jonathon

1995 *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888*, Portsmouth: Heinemann

Goetzen, Graf

1899 *Durch Afrika von Ost Nach West*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer

Grant, James

1864 *A Walk Across Africa*, London: William Blackwood and Sons

Gray, Richard, and Birmingham, David (eds)

1970 *Pre-Colonial African Trade*, London: Oxford University Press

Gunderson, Frank

2001 “From ‘Dancing with Porcupines’ to ‘Twirling a Hoe’: Musical Labor Transformed in Sukumaland, Tanzania”, *Africa Today*, 48(4):3–26

Hartwig, Gerald

1976 *The Art of Survival in East Africa*, New York: Holmes and Meir

Hohnel Von, Ludwig

1894 [1968] *Discovery by Count Teleki of Lakes Rudolf and Stefanie*, London: Frank Cass and Co.

Hore, Edward

1971 *Missionary to Tanganyika, 1877–1888*, London: Frank Cass and Co.

Illiffe, John

1979 *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, London: Cambridge University Press

Itandala, Buluda

1983 *A History of the Babinza of the Wasukuma, Tanzania to 1890*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Dalhousie University

Janzen, John

1992 *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa*. Los Angeles: University of California Press

Johnston, Harry Hamilton

1886 *The Kilima-Njaro Expedition*, London

Kezilihabi, Euphrase

1981 “*Ushairi na Nyimbo Katika Utamaduni Wetu*”, *Urithi wa Utamaduni Wetu*, Wahariri C.K. Omari and M. Mvungi, Dar Es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House

Koponen, Juhani

1988 *People and Production in Late Pre-Colonial Tanzania*, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies

Krapf, J.C.

1860 *Travels and Researches in Eastern Africa*, Boston: Ticknor and Fields

Kubik, Gerhard

1997 “Tanzania”, in Sadie, Stanley (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London: Macmillan Press, Vol. 18. pp. 567–571

Lambert, H. E.

1963 “The Beni Dance Songs”, *Swahili*, 33(1):18–21

Molitor P. H.

1913 *La Musique Chez les Negres du Tanganika. Anthropos VIII*

New, C.

1971 *Life, Wanderings, and Labor in East Africa*, London: Frank Cass

Ranger, T.O.

1975 *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890–1970*, Los Angeles: University of California Press

Roberts, Andrew

1968 *Tanzania Before 1900*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House

Roscoe, John

1921 *Twenty Five Years in East Africa*, New York: Negro University Press

Selemani, bin Mwenye Chande

1965 “Safari Yangu ya Bara Africa”, Harries, Linden (ed.), *Swahili Prose Texts: A Selection of the Material Collected By Carl Velten from 1893 to 1896*, London: Oxford University Press

Simpson, Donald

1975 *Dark Companions: The Contribution to the European Exploration of East Africa*, London: Paul Elek

Smith, Susan Newson (ed.)

1978 *Quest: The Story of Stanley and Livingstone Told in Their Own Words*,
London: Arlington Books

Speke, John Hanning

1863 *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, London: Greenwood
Press

Stanley, Henry M.

1899 *Through the Dark Continent*, Volume II, London: George Newnes Ltd.

Stigand, C.H.

1913 *The Land of Zinj*, London: Constable and Co.

Thomson, Joseph

1962 [1885] *Through Masailand*, Chicago: Northwestern University Press

Thurston, A. B.

n.d. *African Incidents*, London: J. Murray

Trotha, Von

1897 *Meine Bereisung von Deutsch-OstAfrika*, Berlin: B. Brill

Tucker, Alfred

1911 *Eighteen Years in Uganda and East Africa*, London: Arnold

Velten, Carl (ed.)

1901b *Safari za Waswahili*, Goettingen: Vandenhoe and Ruprecht

Werther, C. Waldemar

1898 *Die Mittleren Hochländer des Nördlichen Deutsch-Ost-Afrika*, Berlin:
Verlag von Hermann Paetel

Weule, Karl

1909 *Native Life in East Africa*, New York: Appleton and Co.

Wolf, James B. (ed.)

1976 *The Central African Diaries of Walter Hutley*. Boston: African Studies
Center, Boston University