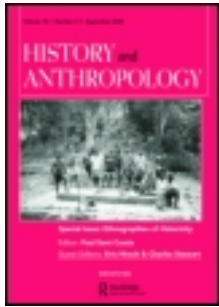


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“We Will Leave Signs!”: The Inter-textual Song Praxis of Elephant Hunters (*Bayege*), Within the Greater Sukuma Region of Western Tanzania

Frank Gunderson

In the Sukuma region of Western Tanzania, rural life relies upon cooperative social networks which allocate labor in ways which include hunting, farming, and healing. An important nineteenth-century Sukuma association was the bayege (elephant hunters). Bayege songs were humorous and celebratory songs which commended hunters for work well done, boasted of the bravery required for the hunt, encouraged initiates to follow in their footsteps after they have left the world, or poked fun at rival hunting groups with whom they had contact. This article examines the music-related practices of this association, unpacks the inter-textual musical influence of this association on subsequent and current labor associations active in this region, and considers the inter-temporal interpretation of bayege song by contemporary practitioners.

Keywords: Music; Elephant-hunters; Prophecy; Sukuma; Inter-textual

In the Sukuma region of Western Tanzania, as in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, rural life has long relied on cooperative social networks that include and extend beyond kinship affiliation. These specialized networks have included indemnity associations that allocate labour tasks in various ways, to include hunting, farming and healing. These associations have also had a seasonal recreational component, which highlights dance and dance competitions, thus, for this reason, they have also been called “dance” associations or “dance” societies (Gunderson 2001, 2009; see also Ranger 1975). An important and fascinating Sukuma indemnity association, which was active primarily

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in the nineteenth century, was the elephant hunters' association, popularly known as the *bayege*, literally translated as those who diagnose, or predict.¹ Elephant hunting was a popular and prestigious occupation, considered to this day as having been a heroic endeavour. This association is recognized today as an important and influential source of varied music-related practices, and their expressive culture is remembered in several current ritual and labour-related contexts.

This research examines evidence gleaned from oral histories, European explorers' travelogues, song texts and interview testimony concerning song texts and song-related practice, as well as the observation of current revivalist performance, in order to situate this association's music-related practice historically as a particular mode of discourse.² At the end of the nineteenth century, the contextual *raison d'être* for this musical discourse shifted from being the diagnosis and prediction of the migratory patterns of elephants to one of diagnosis and prediction about human physiological and psychological ills, as well as prediction pertaining to possible future human social upheavals. Within this cultural and historical tableau, elephant hunters' song texts have been interchanged between multiple functional contexts, their tropes and images have been transmitted and re-embedded within multiple songs, and they have been read and interpreted in multiple and creative ways.

Today there are only a handful of *bayege* groups remaining. Those that do perform play primarily for village entertainment, tourists or when called upon for political functions. Much of this research is based on fieldwork interaction with Kisunun'ha Nyumbani, a *nyege* healer from Ntulya village (born in 1923), who passed away in 1999. Kisunun'ha Nyumbani was introduced to the healing arts by his grandmother, who, in a classic shamanic scenario, took him to be schooled by his ancestors who live beneath a lake, probably Lake Victoria-Nyanza, for seven years sometime during or after the Second World War. To reach there, he travelled to the south lake region, where the water parted for him and he began a three-day journey to reach a particular large rock, where he headed "downward". Kisunun'ha was a *nyege* dance leader as a young man, but he was never a hunter. He gave up the dance when he became a healer, and had recently taken it up again until his death. Kinunun'ha's followers and assistants in day-to-day chores were patients Kisunun'ha had cured. It was common for those cured of life-threatening diseases or spiritual problems to attach themselves to the community of a healer; the amount of followers living at the compound of a healer symbolized to others his strength and record of success. Under Kisunun'ha's direction, they were one of the few groups who have kept the *buyege* recreational dance alive.

Historical Background

To provide a quick historical synopsis, elephant hunting had always been a popular occupation, even for nominal agro-pastoralists like the Sukuma, as elephants roamed freely in herds throughout the lake Victoria Nyanza region, and were a handy source of food. Elephant hunting formed one of several travel-related occupational groups. Other Sokhumi inter-regional travellers' societies at this time included the porcupine hunters (*banunguli*), the snake hunters (*bayege*), the salt caravaners (*baja nyaraja*), and



Figure 1 Kisunun'ha Nyumbani Wearing Full Diagnostic and Performative Regalia, Ntulya Village, 11 December 1994.

Source: Photograph by Author.

the porters' association (*bapagati*). Membership in these groups was seasonal, and thus their membership was potentially interchangeable (See also Baumann 1894: 68; Blohm 1933: 171; Gunderson 2001, 2009; Williams n.d.). By the mid-nineteenth century, Arab traders had begun to secure a stronghold in the region, where towns like Tabora and Mwanza, and chiefdoms like Kageye and Unyanyembe became important slave, portering and elephant tusk trade centres.

The international ivory boom of the 1850s–1890s contributed to the expansion of the elephant-hunting frontier (Rockel 2006: 36). *Bayege* elephant hunters were



Figure 2 Northwest Tanzania Regional Map.

implicated in this regional trade, and were instrumental in opening up the region to the growing international ivory trade. Under the control of the chiefs, this society spread north to the southern Sukuma region by hunters following game (Itandala 1983: 230; Little 1987: 53), reaching as far north as the island-peninsula of Ukerewe in Lake Nyanza-Victoria (Hartwig 1969: 43).³

Music and Mimetic Practice on the Nineteenth-century Elephant Hunt

Elephant hunting, being profitable and requiring exceptional hunting skills and courage, as well as extensive diagnostic knowledge about the elephants' seasonal migratory habits, afforded its practitioners an especially high status. Members of the society underwent lengthy and rigorous apprenticeships with medicinal specialists and divinational seers (Werther 1898: 68), with whom they learned as much as possible about the elephant, and from whom they acquired powerful hunting medicine. Medicinal amulets of a sympathetic variety were prepared before journeys, rubbed into cuts made on the forearm or the chest to insure success and luck on the hunt (Reichard 1892: 426). These included ingredients such as the marrow of an elephant's leg bone, its front footpad, its heart, or its toenails (Cory n.d.).

Music and dance performed before and during the hunt had a sympathetic and mimetic dimension as well. Numerous descriptions from nineteenth-century travelogue accounts attest to a pre-hunt drummers' *ng'oma*⁴ where individual *buyege* ensemble drummers took inspired turns lumbering into the circle to take an improvisational break, crouching and waddling with their drums held firmly with their lower calves, in a manner emulating the gait of an elephant:

The hunting party, consisting of fifteen to twenty individuals, proceeds before departure to sing and dance, to drink and drum for a consecutive week. The women form line and perambulate the village, each striking an iron *jembe* or hoe with a large stone, which forms and appropriate accompaniment to the howl and *vigelegele*, "lullilooing", or trills of joy. At each step the dancer sways herself elephant-like from side to side.... The line, led by a woman ... who holds two *jembe* in one hand, but does not drum, stops facing every Arab house where beads may be expected, and performs the most hideous contortions ... imitating the actions of various animals. (Burton 1860: 473),

Other early European observers remarked that the drummers' dance movement resembled that of a wounded elephant lumbering through the bush (Hall n.d.; Blohm 1933: Vol II), or that of an elephant's playful dance. As evidence that Africans felt that certain movements of an elephant constituted their dancing, the German explorer Werther (1898: 22), mentions a remark that one of his porters made regarding elephants seen on their caravan journey: "Sir, those are elephants, they play and dance now".⁵ Cory felt that the emulation of the elephant in public dancing was a carry-over from initiation into the society, where initiates were expected to learn as much as possible about the elephant through mimicry of its movements (Cory Papers #192). Wilhelm Blohm described a funeral for an elephant hunter that he had observed, where the drums played for three days, and dancers emulated an elephant clearing obstacles in the brush (1933: 109).

Komangaga Bug'hunda, a *buyege* piece of unknown origin performed by the followers of Kisunun'ha Nyumbani,⁶ was originally performed in a pre-hunt "good luck" performance context. Most of the musicians play this recurring drum motif based on a 10-pulse cycle, marked by a stronger pulse played on "1" and "7". The motif is a mnemonic referent, corresponding to the spoken command, *Komangaga bug'hunda* ("Pound the *bug'hunda* rhythm"). *Bug'hunda* was a *buyege* style of *ng'oma* performed by healers, used either to give the doctor and patient strength, or to give thanks after a patient has been cured.⁷

Some musicians break up the pattern between them as a two-part call-and-response, and others improvise over the pattern. Consistent with descriptions from the nineteenth century, when inspired to do so, drummers may also slowly move into the semi-circle performance space while continuing to play, individually or in pairs, crouching over their drum with their drum held firmly with their lower calves, and making slow waddling steps to the stronger pulse. When asked about this movement into the circle, performers were unaware of its special significance, explaining that, "it is what we have always done, because it is fun".⁸

According to an early European traveller's account, *buyege* pre-hunting divinations were accompanied by a large bow and gourd instrument known as *ndonon* (Decle 1900: 357). This was a six-foot braced monochord musical bow with a permanently attached gourd and tension noose.⁹ The *ndonon* is played to this day in some regions of western Tanzania. The healer Kisunun'ha Nyumbani used the *ndonon* in order to facilitate his

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Primary pattern	●	○		○		●	○		●	
Variation 1	●	○		○						
Variation 2						●	●		○	
Mnemonic:	<i>Ko man - ga (ga)! Bu-g'huun - da</i>									
Translation:	Pound! <i>Bug'hunda!</i>									
	● = bass stroke ○ = open stroke									

Figure 3 *Bug'hunda* Drum Pattern and Mnemonic Referent.

diagnosis of patients, whereby he received inspirational instructions from his clan ancestors for the appropriate cure to use for his patient. The string was divided into two sections of unequal length, and therefore plays two different tones. The musician vibrated the opening of the resonator against the musicians' chest for varying timbral effects, and held a seed shell idiophone in the same hand that he used to strike either of the two string sections of the *ndono* with a plectrum crafted from a small stick.

On the road, the hunters used the same portable, hand-held drum used by other Sukuma inter-regional travellers' indemnity associations. This drum, known as *kitumba*, had a skin made from elephant ears, which required a special medicinal coating in order to make its sound brighter (Reichard 1892: 432).

A special branch of the *bayege* known as the *baswagi* ("Ruckus Makers"), used drumming together with controlled burning in order to scare the elephants into wooded



Figure 4 Kang'wiina ng'wana Mihumo with *Kitumba* Drum, Isangidjo Village, 23 August 1999.

Source: Photograph by Author.

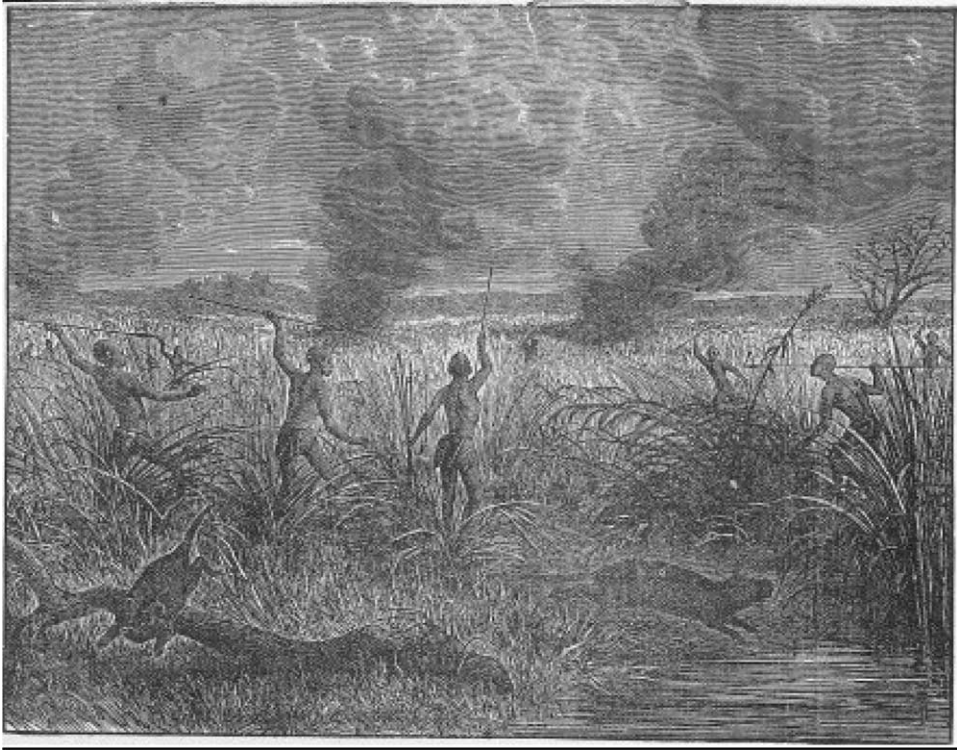


Figure 5 Hunters Build Controlled Fires in Order to Corral Game.

Source: Buel (1890).

areas or canyon entrapments, where a specially prepared “elephant-nip” type of medicine was placed, in order to further attract and confuse them¹⁰.

Here, other hunters waited, perched in trees with arrows and spears, ready to attempt to insert a plain, un-poisoned spear at the vulnerable point on the elephant’s head where the trunk meets the skull. Njile Nyumbani, a *buyege* drummer who worked together with the previously mentioned healer Kisunun’ha, related this fascinating account about the use of *ng’oma* in this hunting process:

They followed them, bringing *ng’oma*, and bringing their spears. In order to kill them, one of them would climb up into a tree. After he had climbed it, he would prepare his *ng’oma*. The *ng’oma* would call them and they would be able to trap them, and then they would kill them with spears. They were called by it and they would just come on their own.¹¹

Upon completing the kill, and journeying home with the meat, the hunters would sing boastful songs of celebration. Arriving at the chief’s compound, the hero-hunters would divide the meat, whereupon they were received with raucous extended celebrations and songs of praise. In a public gesture recognized as a moment of equality with the chief, the chief would allow the leader of the *bayege* group to sit on his throne for the evening (Noble 1970: 178; Reichard 1892: 433).

Inter-Textual Transmission in the *Buyege* Song Tradition

Buyege songs performed on the road were humorous and celebratory songs, which commended hunters for work well done, and boasted of the bravery, strength and resilience required for the hunt. The songs encouraged initiates to follow their leaders' footsteps after leaving this world,¹² bragged that the work of hunting elephants was more compelling than spending time with their wives¹³ or family,¹⁴ or poked fun at rival hunting groups with whom they had contact.¹⁵

The majority of *buyege* songs, however, praised the elephant. The image of the elephant shows up often as a common inter-textual trope (Bakhtin 1986: 162), evoked as a symbol for something which frightens, something which is dangerous, something which is well known, or something (or someone), that leaves a big mark. The "elephant" is a metaphor for the head of the household, for a worry which one might have, or, often, for dance competition medicines, which would have a deadly impact on one's dance enemy.

This trope is evident in the song *Nashifate I-m'huli* ("Let Me Follow the Elephants"), performed by contemporary followers of Kisunun'ha Nyumbani.¹⁶ They attributed the source of this song to *ng'wana* Lutelemba,¹⁷ a well-known *buyege* singer especially active during the British colonial epoch just prior to the Second World War.¹⁸

Kisukuma

Nashifate i-m'huli
Shakuba mapanda, hii!
O-ng'wa Nyansolo
Yaching'wa m'handi na Lubasha!
Nashifate, nashifate
Bise tulaleka ngemelo

English

Let me follow the elephants
 It has trodden the paths, hii!
 Of (that of), Nyansolo¹⁹
 Pierced with a spear by Lubasha!
 Let me follow, let me follow
 We will leave signs

In this song, the singer praises the elephant hunt and the elephant hunters. The song is directed towards the followers and initiates of the *buyege* hunting association, one of whom is mentioned by name here, *ng'wana* Kahabi. The song may also be interpreted as praise for those who follow their leaders, metaphorically veiled here as "elephants". According to the traditional healer Hezron Masuka Manyanga, the elephant here is a metaphor for something which frightens: "It is not to say that he follows the actual elephants, he follows the path of something which frightens, something that is well known, which leaves a big mark."²⁰ The composer thus urges his followers to consider the meaning of being followers, and encourages them to follow not only the elephants, but his own footsteps even after his death. The singer George Nyumbani had this comment about the nature of legacy, which is implied in the song: "After leaving this earth, the singer will leave history here behind, so that those that come in the future days, they will know that here, there were *buyege* in this place."²¹

Another fascinating inter-textual example using the elephant metaphor has been attributed to *n'wana* Malundi, a famous elephant hunter who has attained the status of a trickster figure in Sukuma folklore. Of all the near-mythical figures in Sukuma history, *ng'wana* Malundi was the most awe-inspiring and infamous. According to legend, *ng'wana* Malundi could point at a forest and turn it into firewood, or, with the

flick of his flywhisk, he could traverse Lake Victoria-Nyanza with one leap. In 1904, he was imprisoned by the German government on a small island near Dar Es Salaam as a result of a series of insubordinate altercations over several years involving the German cotton farmer Julius Wiegand, coupled with power struggles with the young Sukuma chief Masanja of Nera (Turnbull 1926).²² He remained in prison until after the First World War and retired in Seke near Shinyanga where he died in 1936.

Kisukuma	English
<i>M'huli</i>	The elephant
<i>M'huli mkaya iyi</i>	The elephant in this house
<i>Tubusinze wa nkonola</i>	Let us "slaughter" a branch of a <i>nkonola</i> tree
<i>Bufumu, baba</i>	The work of medicines, father
<i>Ng'ombe, baba</i>	Cattle, father
<i>Jamala migongwa</i>	They have finished the <i>migongwa</i> tree
<i>Lingi lilibinza masaka</i>	Another one is piercing holes in the brush
<i>Lingi lilichibula mayila</i>	Another one is paving ways
<i>Ilipuli ili maligende, baba</i>	This elephant with swaggering walk, father
<i>Hukondiwa buganga</i>	Thinned by the work of medicine

The singer from whom this song was collected, Pius Ngasa Jishosha²³, is the grandson of the composer. The singer discusses the work of elephant hunting, as well as the work of manipulating medicines. The singer refers to himself as an elephant, as well as to a herder and controller of cattle, implying that he has the strength and largesse to either become or to control these animals. *Nkonola* refers to a common dance medicine taken from the root of a kind of thorny tree known as pod mahogany (*afzelia quanzinsis*). The Mwanza-based visual artist Simoni Ndokeji had this point to make about the meaning of the song: "This song is specifically just about the business of medicine. For example, the elephant, this is a big animal that scares, in order to take him out you had better use weapons with more strength than it has, for instance a branch of a special tree from medicine specialists, called *nkonola*."²⁴ Several commentators made the point that "the elephant" itself, in its usage here, could also be seen as a metaphor for "medicines": The traditional healer Stephen Mbuni had this interesting point to make about the term *m'huli*: "*M'huli* here, what he means is just his medicine, it prepares for him the way if he wants to go someplace, he places his medicines before him, and he will arrive without problems. Even the cattle that he has, it works for him, it gets more for him, he should get that which will lead him in life, through medicines."²⁵ The Kisukuma language instructor Sylvester Kema concurs: "Here, this song discusses "the elephant" as if it is a problem inside the home. She/he wants to say, 'Let us look for medicine which will be able to finish this problem'. I think that when you have cattle, if you have cattle you can finish your problems, but to tell the truth you also have further problems. Problems such as breaking fences."²⁶ Kema's colleague, Magdalena Lubimbi, agreed with these previous assessments:

"The elephant" is a worry or problem that is there, and this singer is trying to find a reconciliation. The Wasukuma know that when you get problems, it is best that you should go to the medical specialist. Then the singer narrates that if he should have cattle, or if he should have money, well he would be able to finish this problem. Now there are different

kinds of problems; it is possible perhaps this is a problem with children, a problem with the wife, or a problem with his/her clan. Now, the nature of these problems can change; today if she/he resolves this problem, tomorrow another will arise. If she/he finishes this, another will come up, so as a result she/he gets thin, because if she/he finishes this, another comes up.²⁷

The Inter-Textual and Inter-temporal Interpretive Reception of *Buyege* Prophetic Song

As mentioned, the *buyege* hunters were known for their ability to predict (*kuhanga*), the location of game. These predictive skills were used in other life situations as well, especially in the face of the cataclysmic social upheavals wrought by colonialism. *Buyege* predictions of the coming of the Europeans were prevalent in the late nineteenth century. Specifically, predictions of the coming of a “snake” (the railroad), or giant “birds” (airplanes), carrying white-skinned people with “fire in their pockets” (guns), inspired the imaginations of many (for several other similar accounts found throughout East Africa, see also Anderson & Johnson 1995). According to widespread oral tradition, Siita, a *buyege* prophet, foresaw the coming of the Europeans in the 1850s, as well as the eventual destruction of Sukuma traditional life, claiming that, “people who are half human and half birds would come” (Itandala 1983: 191). Another Sukuma prophet, Sugilo, was believed to be the premier prophet in all of German East Africa. He earned his fame in part by accurately predicting the coming of the Europeans, as well as the specific devastation caused by several late nineteenth-century famines.²⁸

Sukuma *buyege* prophets had powerful, revolutionary visions that could sway public opinion. A prophet in Mwagala who had predicted that all of the Europeans would leave caused a riotous disturbance, which spread to Sengerema, Nunho and Nera (Bukumbi Diary 1879). In reaction to this power, the Germans were brusque in their dealings with perceived troublemakers. After the *Majimaji* crisis of 1906–1908 in southeast Tanganyika,²⁹ they began indiscriminately jailing and hanging “*Zauberer*”³⁰ as troublemakers throughout the colony. The *buyege* song *Ng’wana Kaliyaya* (“Child of Kaliyaya”), performed by Jige Malehe³¹ and documented in Lupande (1995: 39), and *Imani za Jadi* (1988: 222), discusses the hanging of the *buyege* prophet Kaliyaya by the Germans, for allegedly practising witchcraft.

Kisukuma

Ng’wana Kaliyaya
Mayu, ng’wajima, eeh!
Kileka mihambo igana
Chanila, ng’wajima
U-Babaye, tunile
Mayu eeh, nanile
Nfumu ng’wichane, nanile
Gawacha lwa kanungejiwa
M’huli yatigulwa ipembe

English

Ng’wana Kaliyaya
 Madame, you are snubbed out, eeh!
 Left medicine containers in hundreds
 Chaniila, you are snubbed out
 O father, let us weep for her
 Mother eeh, let me cry for her
 My fellow healer, let me cry for her
 He has died by hanging
 The elephant has been de-tusked

Kaliyaya had apparently made the diagnosis that a certain man had killed the brother of those who had consulted her, thus she was hanged in front of the houses of the

regional commissioner as a lesson to those who would make false claims of supernatural power (Kamati ya Utafiti ya Utamaduni 1988: 222). According to J. M. Kalunde, an officer at the Mwanza branch of the government cultural affairs office, this song is remembered to this day on multiple occasions: “It is used for remembering ancestors, to heal and ask for help on behalf of another, or to ask for forgiveness for those actions for which we have fallen short”.³²

The last line of this song, “The elephant has been de-tusked”, references another well-known *buyege* song, *Tigu, Tigu* (“Move, Move”). This song was collected on two occasions in 1995.³³ The song exemplifies not only inter-textuality, but inter-contextual utility as well. It is a chorus of unknown, older origin which is used to this day for any kind of labour or ritual labour, especially labour having to do with digging (roots, graves, minerals), or preparing medicines. According to the musician and local historian Michael Masalu, it is also sung when people are working together carrying heavy materials over long distances: “When people say ‘*Tigu, Tigu*’, they want to carry something heavy, that is to say something which is heavy, that is, something which is the same weight as an elephant.”³⁴ The healer George Nyumbani mentioned that this association with carrying heavy loads is linked in many singers’ minds with the *buyege* genre, where the labour is one of hunting, or carrying tusks and meat: “Now, this song is of *buyege* really. However, it is also used as a ritual song in all contexts, especially at the time when you are removing, offering or sacrificing something. Or it is sung at the time before people go into a performance.”³⁵ This association with performance is elaborated on further by Fita *ng’wana* Liaku, who links the song to victory at dance competitions: “In the event of competition, the one who wins now, who takes the victory, she/he can sing this song. It has the sense of royalty about it, they have received the kingdom.”³⁶

Buyege prophetic song has been interpreted in multiple ways, especially with regard to the understanding of the specific time-frame of the events depicted in the prediction. The text of the song *I-m’huli Shafumilila* (“An Elephant is Coming”), was collected by the Tanganyikan colonial government anthropologist Hans Cory in the early 1930s, found in the Hans Cory Archive.³⁷

Kisukuma

I-m’huli shafumilila mu Lubumbo
Kwinda Ng’wadii shukila mu Seke
Shiiza, shogasanja amabala
Chalo shikucha shikubi
Mapolu baba, makungu duhu

English

An “elephant” is coming from Lubumbo
 From Mwadui passing Seke
 When it comes, it spreads everywhere
 Village(s), will die out and become bush
 Wilderness father, just scrubland

The well-known *buyege* prophet Mugongo Muhekela composed the song in the early years of the twentieth century. The song exemplifies a common signifier associated with the *buyege*, that of the ability to predict the future. News of this short sung narrative spread quickly throughout the Sukuma region, to the point where today it is a well-known and oft-cited song among elder members of the community. The song supplies a kind of Rorschach-like image that has been interpreted in multivalent ways over the past 90 years.

According to Cory’s handwritten notes, the song predicted the building of the railroad between Mwanza and Tabora (which came to be built in 1927), and cited the

major stations that would be built along the way. This interpretation was verified by the testimony of several elder witnesses whom I interviewed. Edward Shing'oma,³⁸ the singer of this particular version of the song, had this general comment, which is worth quoting in full:

This song is about prophesy. These things really came to happen in the bush region of Shinyanga. We would see that in certain areas, entire villages, in places, would become wasteland. Now this guy, the method in which he predicted, was through dreaming, meaning that in his dream, he saw other villages which would become brush, where there would no longer be any people, and the chiefs themselves would no longer be there. This song is referring to colonialism. Now, he explains that in the days ahead, it is possible that these Europeans will leave, they will leave us with Independence. This "elephant" here, it means that they will leave, we will receive joy, this slavery will end. So really, it is not just a song, this person is predicting that in the days to come, the Europeans will leave us to lead ourselves".

(In his narrative about the text, the singer switches to a first-person account, assuming the voice of the original prophet):

One should consider my dream as the truth, soon now you will see. Now, all of these things I have said I am certain they will take place. All of these things you will see in the days ahead.³⁹

Another interpretation, from someone of the same generation as Shing'oma (the musician and historian Michael Masalu), agrees that the "elephant" here refers to the end of colonialism, with a focus however more specifically on the newly independent African state:

This singer predicts something which will come from the east. He predicts that leadership from the east will come here in our country to bring changes, and as a result, chiefdoms will be broken apart. President Julius Nyerere came from the east, and he was the one who broke up the chiefdoms in the areas that are mentioned.⁴⁰

Younger generations concur with the interpretation that this song is about Julius Nyerere, but differ in their understanding of the exact events that took place which were predicted. Two gentlemen that I interviewed, the musician Paulo Lusana and the cultural affairs officer M. J. Kalunde,⁴¹ in their thirties and forties respectively, insisted that the song describes the chaos that was a result of Nyerere's forced villagization programme of the 1970s.⁴² These commentators ascertain that farmers who were resistant to Nyerere's policies adopted this old song for their own secret rallies. Yet these interpretations do not end here. The healer Petro Nyumbani mentions that the song predicts famines that will take place: "People will leave behind their towns, they will go some place else, and they will leave their families. A big famine will occur. After this prediction there was a famine, it was called "Masanzo" (1949). Indeed this famine spread from the east."⁴³

After the First World War, the new British-led government enforced strict licensing requirements to hunt elephants, and abolished all hunting in the reserves soon thereafter. Legal hunting thus tapered off and came to a stop by the mid-1930s (Hall n.d.). Songs were composed to express dissatisfaction with this unpopular move.

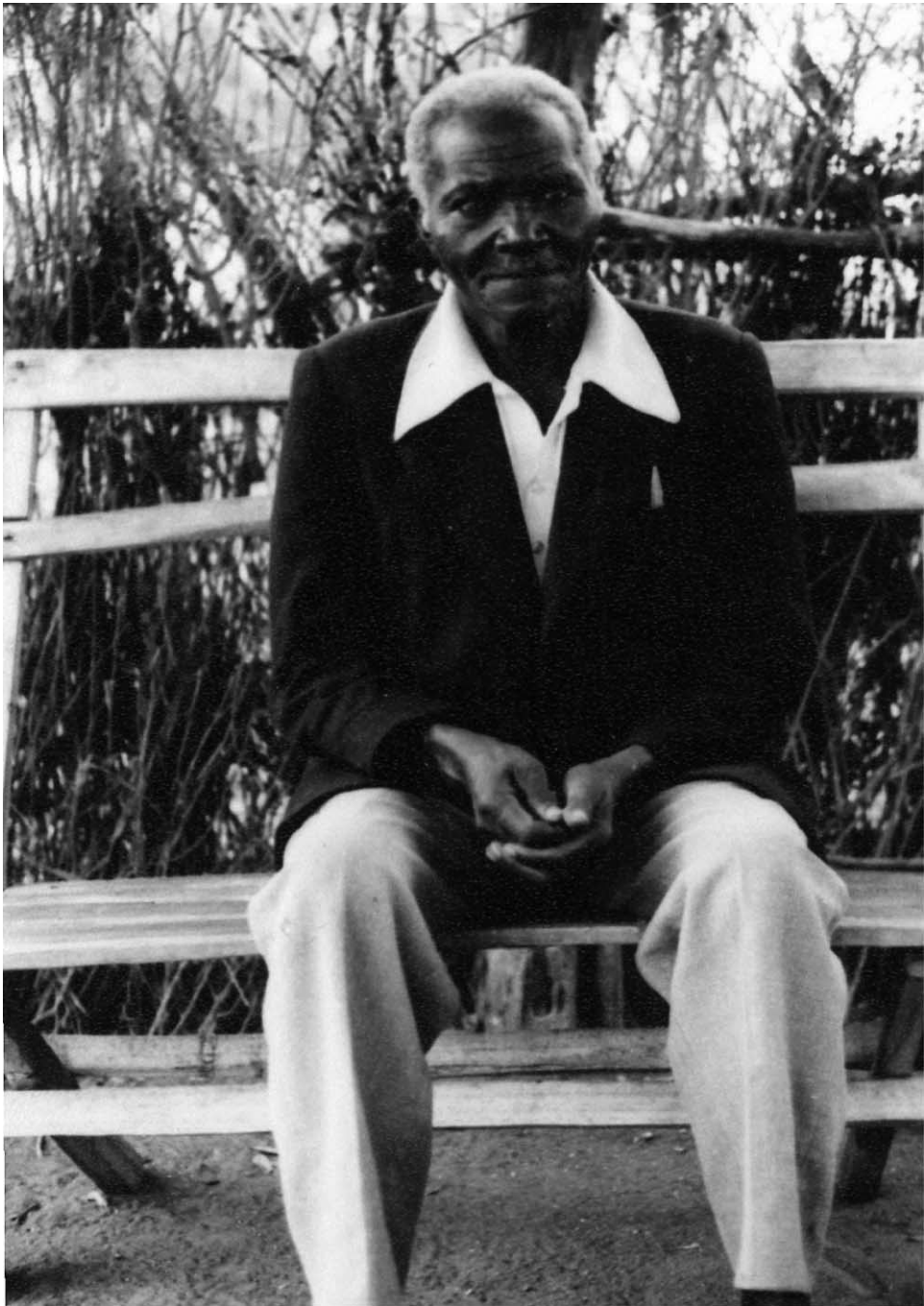


Figure 6 Edward 'Mzee Kijana' Shing'oma, Gambos Village, 12 September 1994.
Source: Photograph by Author.

Kisukuma

Habutongi, habutongi
Hamo jikulekelwa imhuli
Tubi tuchima Mazengo
Bazungu batushitilija
Hamo jikulekelwa imhuli
Tubi tuchima Mazengo

English

In the future, in the future
 Maybe the elephants shall be freed
 So that we can spear them, Mazengo
 Whites have encroached us
 Maybe the elephants shall be left
 So that we can spear them, Mazengo

The song *Habutongi* (“In the Future”), attributed to *ng’wana* Kazwenge and performed by Pius *ng’wana* Jishosha (Makoye 2000: 152), documents the sentiment of hunters during this era. Several commentators read this song as a prediction song, with “the elephant” seen being the commonly used metaphor for something unusual or dangerous. The visual artist Simoni Ndokeji sees the act of hunting the elephant in this song as a metaphor for *Uhuru* (Independence): “The singer says that the Europeans have pressed upon us, and now we are unable to do the things we want. But there in the days ahead, as this person sees it, there will remain those people who will lead us, other than the Europeans.”⁴⁴ William Lubimbi expanded this idea with his point of view about the song:

This song is referring to colonialism. Now, he is explaining that in the days ahead, it is possible that these Europeans will leave, they will leave us with *Uhuru*. This “elephant”, what that means is that they will leave, these Europeans, we will receive joy, this slavery will end. So really, half of this song is a prediction, it is not just a song, this person is predicting that in the days to come, the Europeans will leave us to lead ourselves.⁴⁵

Conclusions

Buyege songs have had a distinctive inter-textual dimension, in that verses and poetic images from songs of previous generations have been appropriated and creatively re-applied in novel ways. This is most evident in “the elephant” metaphor, clearly a hallmark of the genre. *Buyege* songs have also had an inter-functional dimension, in that it is possible for one song to serve several different functions over time (exemplified best in the *Tigu, Tigu* example).

Finally, *buyege* songs have had an inter-temporal dimension, a simultaneous presence of different historic layers of signification mediating between synchronic and diachronic perspectives, as when ancestral voices visit and give testimony to certain gifted seers in dreams about events that will occur in the future. These predictions are revealed to and received by future generations, who subsequently understand and interpret them in creative, multivalent (and inter-temporal), ways.

Being an elephant hunter meant that one had the skills and licence to make predictions. Because of colonial prohibition and crisis, this music discourse shifted from a tracking diagnosis of animal migratory patterns, to a tracking diagnosis of human ailments and, in some cases, a tracking diagnosis of future events, or future possible histories. The way that this shifting discourse has been interpreted, however, has been consistent. It continues to be evaluated based on its success or failure, resulting in gaining or losing prestige and power. Success in the diagnosis resulted in a successful hunt. Success in the diagnosis of a patient, or success in predictive ability, meant one’s

name would live on in future generations as a source of pride and debate to those who heard them.

Notes

- [1] From the Kisukuma verb, *kulagua*. In Kisukuma, people and ethnicities are signified by the ba- prefix (singular, prefix n-, as in *nyege*). Music and dance genres are signified by the bu- prefix. This accounts for “*bayege*”, referring to the elephant hunters, and “*buyege*”, the elephant hunters’ dance.
- [2] Field and archival work for this research took place in Tanzania in 1993–1996, 1999, 2004, and 2006. The author collaborated with Tanzanian scholars, musicians, cultural commentators and translators, and personally recorded several hundred songs from prominent Sukuma singers and composers. After collecting these materials, musicians and cultural commentators were approached for further comment. This process had much to reveal both about the individual and the song itself. Further, it became clear that a song could make a certain kind of sense to one individual, and an entirely different kind of sense to another, and that both could illuminate aspects of deeper meaning. This article comes from a draft presented in 2007 at the national Society for Ethnomusicology conference in Columbus, Ohio, 25–28 October. The author wishes to thank Gage Averill, Trevor Harvey, Joseph Hellweg, Peter Hoelsing, Jan Jansen, and Mark Slobin for helpful suggestions made during various stages of this research. Further, the author wishes to thank the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities (USA), and the Florida State University Committee for Faculty Research Support.
- [3] Hartwig asserts that the inhabitants of Ukerewe Island treated the *buyege* songs that they learned from Sukuma hunters as an indispensable part of hunting elephants, and that the songs were not to be translated into Kikerewe, for fear of disturbing their inherent magic.
- [4] 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” (*ng’oma*), thus making the “ng”- prefix soft, similar to the “-ng” found in “song”.
- [5] “*Herr, das sind Elefanten, sie spielen und tanzen gerade!*”
- [6] *Komangaga Bug’hunda*, performed by members of the *Banam’hala* council of Kisunun’ha Nyumbani. Recorded by author, personal collection. Ntulya village, 19–21 October 2006.
- [7] The actual origins of the *bug’hunda* medicinal association are obscure. It is possible that the term has some connection with the nineteenth-century chiefdom of Ug’hunda, which was located in southern Unyamwezi.
- [8] Members of the *Banam’hala* (elders’ council), of Kisunun’ha Nyumbani. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Ntulya village, Tanzania, 19–21 October 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*ni kitu ambacho tumefanya kutoka zamani, maana inaleta raha.*”
- [9] This is the same monochord zither found throughout southern and central Africa, discussed by Kubik (1999: 17).
- [10] Paulo Lusana. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Chicago, Illinois, 16 May 1998.
- [11] Njile Nyumbani. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Ntulya village, Tanzania, 17–21 March 1995. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Waliwafuata, walileta ng’oma, na mikuki yao. Kuwaua, mmoja angepanda juu ya mti, Baada ya kupanda juu, alitengeneza ng’oma yake. Ng’oma iliwaita, na wangeweza kuwatega, halafu wangewaua na mikuki yao. Waliitwa, halafu walikuja wenyeye.*”

- [12] *Mhindi Yii*, performed by the members of the *Banam'hala* (elders' council), of Kisunun'ha Nyumbani. Recorded by author. Ntulya village, 10 December 1994. Archives of Traditional Music, Gunderson collection, song #187, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- [13] *Nyalali One*, performed by members of the *Banam'hala* (elders' council), of Kisunun'ha Nyumbani. Recorded by author. Ntulya village, 10 December 1994. Archives of Traditional Music, Gunderson collection, song #190, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- [14] *I-Ngoma Iyi Ikulila*, performed by members of the *Banam'hala* (elders' council), of Kisunun'ha Nyumbani. Recorded by author. Ntulya village, 10 December 1994. Archives of Traditional Music, Gunderson collection, song #188, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- [15] *Iliho Inzala Ushashi*, performed by members of the *Banam'hala* (elders' council), of Kisunun'ha Nyumbani. Recorded by author. Ntulya village, 10 December 1994. Archives of Traditional Music, Gunderson collection, song #193, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- [16] *Nashifate I-mhuli*, performed by the members of the *Banam'hala* (elders' council), of Kisunun'ha Nyumbani. Recorded by author. Ntulya village, 10 December 1994. Archives of Traditional Music, Gunderson collection, song #189, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- [17] Sukuma personal names represent an intricate sense of personal identity, and generally consist of a first name given at birth, a family or clan name, and the name of the individual's father (signified by “*ng'wana*”, or child-of). Some individuals may have Christian or Muslim names that they prefer to go by as well. Further, Sukuma musicians have “dance” names given to them by their teachers, as well as names of derision that are used by their dance opponents.
- [18] Where *ng'wana* Lutelemba came from is unknown.
- [19] *Wa ng'wa*: Literally, “of that of so-and-so”, or “of those belonging to so-and-so”. An expression used primarily in relation to students and their leaders, thus, *Nang'wa, wa ng'wa Mhogota, akabatinda bose* (“Nang'wa, of those of belonging to Mhogota, defeated them all”).
- [20] Hezron Masuka Manyanga. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Magu town, 1 August 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Siyo kusema anafuata tembo mwenye, anafuata njia ya kitu ambacho kinatisha, kitu ambacho ni maarufu, anaacha alama kubwa.*”
- [21] George Nyumbani. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Ntulya village, Tanzania, 19–21 October 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Baada ya kuondoka duniani, mwimbaji huyu ataacha historia hapa nyuma, kwa watu ambao watakuja siku za mbele, watajua kwamba hapa, walikuwa bayege kwenye sehemu hii.*”
- [22] According to popular myth, however, he was imprisoned because he had murdered so many people in his dance competitions. While imprisoned he was reported to have been seen on several occasions on the mainland, which led to the legend that he could walk on water.
- [23] *Mhuli Mkaya Iyi*, performed by Pius Ngasa Jishosha. Recorded by author, personal collection. Dar es Salaam, 23 August 1999.
- [24] Simon Ndokeji. Interview recorded by author, personal collection. Kisesa town, 23 August 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*ni kitu ambacho tumefanya kutoka zamani, maana inaleta raha.*”
- [25] Stephen Mbuni. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Magu town, 27 July 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*M'huli hapa, anacho maanisha tu ni zile bugota zake, zinamtegemeza njia akitaka kwenda mahala, bugota zake anaziweka mbele atafika bila matatizo. Hata ng'ombe zake alizo nazo, zinamfanya, kumfanikisha zaidi, apate yale ambayo za kuongeza zile bugota zake.*”
- [26] Sylvester Kema. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Magu town, 23 September 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Hapa, inazungumzia mhuli kama shida ambalo iko ndani ya nyumba hiyo. Anataka anasema kwamba tutafute bugota ambalo litaweza kumalizia shida hiyo. Nadhani kwamba ukiwa na ng'ombe, kama una ng'ombe unaweza ukamalizia shida, lakini kusema kweli una shida lingine zaidi. Shida hilo kama linavunja machaka.*”

- [27] Magdalena Lubimbi. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Magu town, 7 September 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*M’huli’ ni shida hiyo au matatizo yaliopo, na huyu mwimbaji anajaribu kutafuta suluhisho. Na kwa kuwa Wasukuma tunajua unapokuwa na shida basi inakubidi uende kwa mfumu au kwa mganga. Bado anasema kuwa angekuwa na ng’ombe au angekuwa na pesa, basi angeweza kumaliza shida hii. Na ni shida ni mbali mbali; inawezekana labda ni shida kwa watoto, shida kwa mke, shida katika ukoo wake. Sasa matatizo haya yanakuwa yanabadilika badilika, leo akisuluhisha hili, kesho jingine linajitokeza. Akimaliza hili, jingine linajitokeza, na matokeo yake anakonda, sababu akimaliza hili anapata hili.*”
- [28] Other noteworthy Sukuma prophets from this time-period documented in travel narrative literature and recalled in oral history were Balang’hani, Bakalwinzi, Bamazoya, Shinana, Ngarangayi, Nyaluhinda, Ng’omamabele, Ngasa Ilebe, Ng’omangilondito, and Sungwa Nyangeka.
- [29] *Maji-Maji* was a faith-based rebellion, which took place in south-central German East Africa (1905–1907). The adherents believed that magic water (*maji*), could make them immune to bullets. German settlers, missionaries and traders were murdered, and the towns of Liwale and Kilosa sacked. The Germans reacted with a scorched-earth policy, which according to some accounts was directly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people (Iliffe 1979: 168–202). These actions ended the rebellion but greatly retarded economic development.
- [30] German. A derogatory term for “sorcerers”.
- [31] *Ng’wana Kaliyaya*, performed by Jige Malehe. Recorded by author. Isangidjo village, 20 December 1994. Archives of Traditional Music, Gunderson collection, song #225, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- [32] J. M. Kalunde. Recorded interview with author. Mwanza, Tanzania, 13 March 1995. From an interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Hutumika kwa kuwakumbuka wahenga, kwa kutibu na kuwaomba msaada wasaidie au kusamehe yale tuliyokosea.*”
- [33] *Tigu, Tigu*, performed by Salu Kadelya and Paulo Lusana. Recorded by author, Isangidjo village, 23 April 1995. Archives of Traditional Music, Gunderson Collection, song #612; Indiana University, Bloomington. Performed by Jiyoja Hamala *ng’wana* Chila. Recorded by author, Ng’wanjiginya village, 9 August 1995. Archives of Traditional Music, song #346, Gunderson Collection, Indiana University, Bloomington. There has been some interesting variation in the transmission of this text. Paulo Lusana learned this as *Tiku tiku, mhuli yatigula itende*, or “Carry, carry, the elephant carries dates”. Magdalena Lubimbi learned this with the verb *-tigula* in the passive tense, as *Tigu, tigu, mhuli yatigulwa ipembe*, or “Move, move, the elephant has been detusked”.
- [34] Michael Masalu. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Nyamadoke village. 23 July 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Kusema ‘Tigu, tigu’, watu wanataka kuchukua kitu kizito, na kitu kizito ni sawa sawa na uzito wa tembo.*”
- [35] George Nyumbani. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Ntulya village, Tanzania, 19–21 October 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Sasa wimbo huu, ni wa buyege kweli. Lakini pia unatumia kama wimbo wa mitambiko sehemu zote. Hasa wakati unatoa kitu fulani. Au unaimbwa wakati watu wanaingia kwenye michezo.*”
- [36] Fitta *ng’wana* Liaku. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Magu town, Tanzania. 16 September 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: “*Kama walikuwa walishindana, huyu aliposhinda sasa, amechukua ushindi, anaweza kuimba wimbo huu. Ni kama wa ufalme kidogo, wamepata ufalme sasa.*”
- [37] This is a research archive in the East African Collection at the University of Dar Es Salaam, housing the song collection of a Tanganyikan government anthropologist who was active

- from the 1920s to the 1950s. This source is significant because the majority of the texts were collected during the 1930s, when the British colonial government was implementing monocrop agricultural policies that have had long-term effects on labour to the present.
- [38] *I-m'huli Shafumilila*, performed by Edward "Mzee Kijana" Shing'oma. Recorded by author. Gambos village, 12 September 1994. Archives of Traditional Music, Gunderson collection, song #60, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- [39] Edward "Mzee Kijana" Shing'oma. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Gambos village, Magu town, 12 September 1994. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: "*Wimbo huu ni kuhusu utabiri. Mambo haya zilitokea kweli msituni Shinyanga. Tungeziona kwenye mahali fulani, vijiji vyote, sehemu, zilikuwa msituni. Sasa huyu, kwenye jinzi ambayo ametabiri, kwenye ndoto, maana kwenye ndoto yake, alizona vijiji vingine vimekuwa msitu, na watu hawakuwepo, na wafalme wenyewe hawakuwepo. Wimbo huu ni kuhusu ukoloni. Sasa, anaeleza kwenye siku za mbele, inawezekana wale Wazungu watatoka, watatuacha na Uhuru. Hii 'm'huli' hapa, maana yake ni watatoka, tutapata raha, utumwa wetu utamalizia. Kwa hiyo kweli, siyo wimbo tu, anatabiri kwamba Wazungu watatuachia kujitawala wenyewe.*" (In his narrative about the text, the singer switches to a first-person account, assuming the voice of the original prophet); "*Afadhali mtu akiona ndoto yangu kama ukweli, hivi karibuni utaziona. Sasa, mambo yote nimekuambia nimehakika utaziona. Mambo zote utaziona siku za mbele.*"
- [40] Michael Masalu. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Nyamadoke village. 23 July 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: "*Mwimbaji alitabiri kitu ambacho itakuja kutoka sehemu za mashariki, alitabiri uongozi kutoka mashariki utafika hapa nchi yetu kuletea ubadilisho, halafu butemi utavunjika sehemu sehemu. Rais Nyerere alitoka sehemu za mashariki. Halafu ndiyo yeye alivunjavunja butemi kwenye sehemu hizo zilitajwa.*"
- [41] Paulo Lusana. Informal conversation with author. Chicago, IL, 16 May 1998. J. M. Kalunde. Informal conversation with author. Mwanza, Tanzania, 13 March 1995.
- [42] On 6 November 1973, Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere decreed that, "To live in a village is an order". The government implemented this policy, by rounding up millions of peasants and moving them to *Ujamaa* communal villages. During these resettlement operations, the authorities destroyed much private property and used force against peasants who wanted to remain on their own farms. By 1977, 13,506,044 people, or about 80% of the population, had been resettled into 7373 registered *Ujamaa* villages, all of which supposedly contained schools, dispensaries and clean water (Ofcansky & Yeager 1997: 188). More often, however, peasants had to contend with extremely harsh living conditions, which, because of excessive population densities and insufficient agricultural technologies, also led to extensive resource depletion and soil erosion. The *Ujamaa* experiment became a rural policy disaster that crippled the agricultural sector and seriously compromised Nyerere's political standing throughout Tanzania.
- [43] Petro Nyumbani. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Ntulya village, Tanzania, 19–21 October 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: "*Watu wataacha mijini yao, wataenda mahali pengine, na wataacha familia yao. Njaa kubwa itatoka. Baada ya utabiri huu, kulikuwa njaa, iliitwa 'Masanso,' mwaka 1949. Ndiyo njaa hii ilisambaza kutoka mashariki.*"
- [44] Simoni Ndokeji. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Kisesa town, 15 July 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: "*Anasema Wazungu wametubana, tumeshindwa kufanya mambo yetu. Lakini kule mbele, alivyokuwa akiona yeye, mbele kule kutabaki watu wa kutuongoza sisi, badala ya Wazungu.*"
- [45] William Lubimbi. Recorded interview with author, personal collection. Magu town, 27 October 2006. Interview conducted in Kiswahili, translation by author. Original transcript: "*Hii maana yake ni kwamba enzi za ukoloni tu. Sasa, yeye alikuwa anaelezea kwamba mbeleni wanaweza wakatoka Wazungu, tukaachiwa Uhuru. Hii 'm'huli', ilikuwa na maana kwamba watatoka*

Wazungu, tutapata raha, ule utumwa utaisha. Kwa maana kwamba huyu nusu ni kama mtabiri, sio kama wimbo tu, yeye alikuwa anatabiri huko mbeleni uko uwezekana Wazungu wanaweza wakatuachia tukajitawala.”

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