

RECLAIMING THE PAST: THE VALUE OF RECORDINGS TO A NATIONAL CULTURAL HERITAGE

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In the latter half of the 19th century, European countries scrambled to claim lands around the world as part of their colonial empires. In particular, Great Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Italy established colonies in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Americas. By the end of the 19th century, Europeans had political control over two-thirds of the globe. Colonialism from non-European countries, e.g. the United States and Japan, also impacted these regions. Everywhere, colonialism often violently transformed the cultures encountered. Today, most former colonies are independent nations and global empires are no longer the domain of nationalistic concerns but of transnational companies.

The dismantling of empires and the establishment of independent countries was peaceful in some areas, horribly bloody in others. Correspondingly, relations today between these new countries and their former colonizers also run a wide gamut of emotions. Roughly coinciding with this colonial expansion was the development of various technologies of concern to this paper: the ability to record visual images through photography and film and to record sound. While the equipment needed was tremendously bulky and heavy by today's standards, it *was* portable and fairly readily available.

Many visitors to colonies at that time came equipped with new 'hi-tech' gear to document their travels for those back in the motherland. In addition to taking photos, making films and recording music and speech, the more scientifically inclined visitors also collected such

things as artefacts, animals, human skeletal remains, insects, plants and minerals. Such fragile collections had to endure long sea voyages back to the host country where they were usually finally placed in museums, archives or kept in private collections. Many of these sound recordings still exist in Europe and most also survived the two World Wars.

Today, many of the things collected are regarded as the invaluable cultural property of the groups from which they were obtained. There have been many heated debates over the repatriation of artefacts and, particularly, human remains. Ethical and scientific concerns continue to collide over such issues.

While audiovisual recordings are certainly also considered invaluable cultural property, their repatriation raises fewer conflicts. As the original media of such recordings would often be of absolutely no use to the former colony, *copies* of such media onto tape, video or compact disc are of much greater value to people today.

Over the past 20 years, the Music Department of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies has made continuing efforts to obtain copies of such historic recordings. I will now present an overview of this work, its strategies and goals which will, I hope, be relevant to other industrializing nations in their efforts to repatriate such material. While I often speak specifically about sound recordings, similar comments can be made in regard to still photographs and films.

Recording in Papua New Guinea

At the end of the 19th century, Papua New Guinea was colonized by Germany and Britain (the western half of the island of New Guinea, now the Irian Jaya province of Indonesia, was colonized by the Netherlands). Subsequently, control was transferred to Australia but, during World War II, Papua New Guinea was invaded by Japan which occupied parts of the country for upto two-and-a-half years. Self-government (1973) and then independence (1975) were peacefully achieved from Australia and today Papua New Guinea is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.

During the nine decades of colonization (1884–1975), the colonial powers differed greatly in their recording activities. By far the most

recording and other scientific work was undertaken by Germans, although German New Guinea had ceased to exist during World War I. German researchers came as individuals and, significantly, as part of large well-equipped expeditions. Often they carried recording equipment supplied by institutions and individuals interested in the music and language of 'exotic' or 'primitive' peoples.

In contrast, British and Australian research was much more limited and, consequently, few recordings of any kind were made in parts of the country under their control—although, ironically, the first sound recordings ever made in Papua New Guinea resulted from a British expedition researching in the Torres Strait, between Papua New Guinea and Australia, in 1898. Contrasting the two styles of research and administration (German vs. British/Australian), Firth (1986:161) notes: 'Unlike British and Australian explorers in Papua, the Germans in New Guinea waded through sago swamps or hacked their way through scrub, mainly for the sake of science and in the hope of finding valuable resources. They did not do so in order to bring knowledge of the government to the people after the manner of the British New Guinea's governor . . . The German exploratory enterprise was different from its British counterpart: scientific and economic rather than administrative in purpose, less adventurous but more meticulous and far more significant as a contribution to scholarly knowledge. The Germans walked less but recorded more.'

The extent of the German domination of recording activity prior to World War I is shown in the following table listing the countries of origin of collectors before and after World War I.

Those who made recordings came from a full gamut of professions: natural scientists, explorers, medical doctors, missionaries, geographers, adventurers and anthropologists. Some of the collections were even made of Papua New Guineans overseas: those who had been brought to Europe by missionaries and teachers in 1907 and 1914 or who were sent to present-day Tanzania to help re-establish law and order in 1906. Of course, it was not only nationals of colonial powers who visited Papua New Guinea and made recordings; other scientists did so as well. For example, an Austrian medical doctor and

ethnologist, who made three separate groups of recordings from 1904 to 1906.

Sound Recording in Papua New Guinea, until 1945

<i>Country of collector</i>	<i>Pre-WWI</i>	<i>Post-WWI</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Germany	15	3	
Britain	6		includes four collections made by foreigners from Finland, New Zealand, and Poland, but trained in Britain as anthropologists
Austria	1		
Australia	1	3	
Switzerland		2	
USA		2	
Hungary		1	
France		1	

(Further details on the collectors and collections can be found in Niles 1992.)

After World War I, Papua New Guinea became a region of research for an increasingly international group of scientists. And, as sound recording equipment, still cameras and movie cameras became much more portable, inexpensive and robust, such equipment became standard for researchers. Until World War II, most recordings were made on cylinders and some on discs. After World War II, of course, tape recorders, cassettes, DAT and video have enabled almost anyone to make recordings.

My prime interest here, however, concerns pre-World War II recordings when such technology was more limited in its availability.

Locating Recordings

Many of these early recordings still exist in archives in Europe, often located in the archives of the former colonial power. Consequently, it is essential for any archivist interested in obtaining

such recordings to become very well acquainted with the early research done in their country.

Only rarely did researchers write ethnographies which make explicit use of sound recordings. More often, such recordings were made as part of other collection activities and the collector may have felt technically inadequate to do anything with such specialized materials. Therefore, recordings were frequently given to a musicologist who it was hoped would analyse them and write an academic paper. As much of the early comparative musicology in Europe centred around Berlin and Erich von Hornbostel, it is very likely that early recordings may be deposited there. Recently, much new research has been done on the cylinder recordings housed in the present-day Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin and a valuable listing of its collections has been published (Ziegler 1995). Gillis (1984) is also a very useful starting point for research on early collections.

Publications which analyse a large number of recordings in an attempt to trace the supposed development of certain musical features, such as Schneider's work on polyphony (1934; 1969), should also be consulted. It is also possible, however, that recordings may only be written about well after their collection. For example, Graf (1950) writes about recordings made in 1904 while Christensen (1957; 1970) considers cylinders recorded in 1908–10. All of such sources are essential in beginning research into the early cultural history in sound recordings of any country.

Note, however, that while there are numerous musicological studies of the cylinders deposited in Berlin, by no means have all of them been written about. Consequently, there may be no published analyses of any of the recordings and the only lead an archivist may have is a sentence or two in a linguistic, ethnographic or other scientific work by the collector which briefly mentions the use of a phonograph. Or, there may simply be no published reference at all.

While the collection of more than 15,000 cylinders in Berlin is a likely place to begin, there are many other smaller archives throughout the world which may have such materials. Early Papua New Guinea recordings have been located not only in the archives of its

former colonial rulers (i.e., Germany, Britain and Australia), but also in countries such as Austria, France, Finland, Hungary, the United States and Sweden. Such archives may be attached to such varied institutions as museums, academies of science, national libraries, war archives and universities. Archives may be devoted to music, language, folklore, broadcasting, natural history, etc., or combine any or all such categories. The possible combinations are wide indeed.

Hence, it is important to know what archives exist, particularly those which contain substantial collections of early recordings. Membership in organizations like the International Association for Sound and Audiovisual Archives and the International Council for Traditional Music is essential for gaining such knowledge and establishing essential contacts. Some publications on important collections, archiving, or membership lists include: Briegleb (1968), Chaudhuri (1992), Christensen and Christensen (1997), Clark and Jones (1998), Harrison (1984), Koch (1982), Lance (1983), Seeger (1986) and Ward (1990). In spite of such sources, however, the search for early recordings is a never-ending process. For example, although I have been engaged in research on early recordings for over 20 years, collections previously unknown to me appear in unexpected places. Just a few months ago, I learned of possible Papua New Guinea recordings made by a Swedish traveller in the early part of the 20th century.

Repatriation of Recordings

Once the essential initial work has been done in locating early recordings, attempts can be made to repatriate copies of them. While the repatriation of other items such as skeletal remains or artefacts can be extremely difficult because the original items collected are sought for return, with recordings or photographs or films the original items would be of little use because of the antiquated technology needed for their playback. As the overseas archives probably has the equipment and technical expertise required for reproduction, they are in the best position to make high quality copies for repatriation.

Of course, funding is usually necessary for such copying. It is often possible to approach embassies or high commissions for this purpose. It has been our experience that while it may often be next to impossible

to secure funding for other cultural projects, embassy money for the copying of historical documents from an archives for repatriation frequently presents no problem whatsoever: the project is rightly seen as beneficial to both countries. Successful return of such items can and should be celebrated as public events and given media coverage. Again, such public relations exercises are invaluable to both the giving and receiving countries.

Use of Repatriated Materials

It must be established at the outset what rights the receiving archives has over any repatriated recordings. Can copies be made for the groups among whom the recordings were made? Can they be used in radio broadcasts? Can copies be made for researchers? Can they be used in publications? The Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies has made use of all such avenues. In Papua New Guinea, wherever possible, we have attempted to return copies of early recordings to areas in which they were originally made. It may be best to give copies to a local cultural centre and/or to village leaders. Visits to areas in which the recordings were made often provide opportunities to further document them.

The original recordings usually have some sort of documentation, but the extent of this can vary considerably. Sometimes only a geographical area may be given. Or songtexts, translations, performers' names and detailed information about performance occasions may be found. In any case, further documentation of recordings is, of course, of tremendous value both to the source and to the recipient archives. It can be expected that the original documentation will contain names of places or groups which are archaic or no longer in common use. Hence, the receiving archives must initially do everything possible to find modern meaningful equivalents for such terminology. This often requires obtaining literature and mapping the contemporary with the period in which the recordings were made.

Sometimes names may require only minor orthographic changes. More often though, entirely new designations are required, e.g. early recordings from Papua New Guinea were made in places such as the Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss, Saint Joseph River, Herbertshöhe and Neu Mecklenburg, known today as the Sepik River, Angabanga River,

Kokopo and New Ireland, respectively. The identification of the old names of 'tribes' or 'villages' can be much more complicated as modern names may not be directly equivalent to the older designations. For example, while 'Oian' can be quite easily identified as the Oyan dialect of the Arifama-Miniafia language and 'Panome' is today's 'Banoni', 'Kai' was a general term used by coastal dwellers to refer to people living in the mountains, speaking a variety of languages. Because of such complexities, an archivist's acquaintance with the history of linguistic research is also essential.

Early recordings may document genres which are no longer performed or provide evidence of changes in performance practices in comparison with modern versions. They may provide materials for the revival of certain cultural traditions (Ammann 1996) or be invaluable in legal decisions concerning previously neglected indigenous rights (Koch 1995).

Regardless of what use is made of such materials, it is of tremendous importance that copies are available *in* the country in which they were recorded. Such materials should not be scattered over the earth in various archives. Sound recordings provide important historical documents of cultural traditions which must be accessible in the country which values them most.

Bringing together the cultural heritage in recorded materials benefits all researchers. It will also bring greater awareness of what has been recorded and what further research needs to be done. All too often, music researchers are very conscientious in locating all early printed references to music in the area of their research but are relatively ignorant of what has been recorded previously. They tend to concentrate only on their own recordings. Often, however, there may be ample historical materials which could provide new insights into the researcher's own collection or provide considerable historical depth to ethnomusicological studies: e.g. Niles (1980) considers recordings made over a 70-year period, 1907 to 1979, in one cultural area. The neglect of historical recordings is partly a result of the difficulty in locating such materials in overseas archives but it also reflects a different attitude towards audiovisual materials in comparison with printed ones.

Hence, a collection of sound recordings available in the country in which they are made encourages consideration of the historical dimensions of research and brings needed legitimacy to the use of such materials in academic works.

In Papua New Guinea, we have also used early recordings in a publication prepared for schools concerning the musical diversity of the country (Niles and Webb 1987) and promoted awareness of such recordings in radio programmes. The mere fact that traditional music has been recorded for such a long period of time may promote pride in such traditions.

Conclusion

I have attempted to outline some of the strategies we have used in locating and repatriating early recordings made in Papua New Guinea which I believe may be useful to those in other countries. Emphasis has been put on the practical aspects of this procedure. The value of early recordings is increasingly being recognized as an essential part of the cultural heritage of particular groups and newly-independent nations. I have argued that such recordings need to be discovered by these nations and efforts made to repatriate them—an activity that benefits all involved: the archives in which the original recordings are located, the archives receiving them, the donor and recipient nations and the groups among whom the recordings were made. The archives receiving such documents should then determine the best way to make use of the recordings in consultation with all involved.

These voices of the past, often of ancestors long dead, can be made to resonate with great relevance to life today. We owe this responsibility to the people recorded, their descendants and to the collectors themselves who often made their recordings under almost unimaginably trying conditions.

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