

SOUND FRAGMENTS

From Field Recording to African Electronic Stories

Noel Lobley

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Wesleyan University Press Middletown, Connecticut

Wesleyan University Press

Middletown CT 06459

www.wesleyan.edu/wespress

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Designed by Mindy Basinger Hill

Typeset in Minion Pro

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

available at <https://catalog.loc.gov/>

cloth ISBN 978-0-8195-8076-4

paper ISBN 978-0-8195-8077-1

e-book ISBN 978-0-8195-8078-8

5 4 3 2 1

FOR NOMI, ZAKIR, AND KIERAN

MUM AND BOB

DAD, NAN, AND GRANDAD

whose love, energy, and laughter

always sound so warm, strong, and bright

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INTRODUCTION

This book is an ethnographic study of sound archives and the processes of creative decolonization that form alternative modes of archiving in the twenty-first century. It explores the histories and afterlives of sound collections and practices at the International Library of African Music (ILAM), recorded by Hugh Tracey beginning in the early twentieth century.¹ ILAM is the world's largest archive in Africa of field recordings of sub-Saharan African music, located in the Eastern Cape of South Africa but virtually unknown to most of the province's inhabitants. *Sound Fragments* explores what happens when a colonial sound archive is repurposed and reimagined by local artists in post-apartheid South Africa. I analyze Tracey's ideologies and methods for conducting his work and then examine the creative and political processes activated when contemporary South Africans make archives their own.

In 1929, Tracey, an Englishman, set out on his unprecedented and ambitious mission to map the musical memory of half a continent. Over the next five decades, he collected recordings across East, Central, and Southern Africa, seeking out "genuine" local folk music while also capturing audio snapshots of myriad forms of musical and social transformation. Through detailed analysis of a wealth of unpublished archival documents—based on more than a decade of fieldwork through ILAM and alongside local artists—I examine Tracey's recording and collecting ethos and methods, as well as critiques both from his peers and from contemporary South African artists and researchers. My aim is neither to demonize nor romanticize Tracey. I explore his contradictions—his progressive ear and his racist beliefs, his humanistic vision and his patriarchal mindset—and consider the possibilities and limits of his approach. Unlike many field recordists of his era, Tracey was not just interested in preserving and analyzing recorded sound; rather, he hoped it would benefit future generations of African musi-

cians, whom he recognized would eventually make the archive their own. At the same time, he cooperated with White-owned mining companies, directed his outreach mainly toward White or foreign consumers and institutions, and omitted and ignored the identities, subjectivities, and direct voices of many of the people and communities whom he recorded. What is the legacy of this work to some of these communities? What is captured in these recorded sounds, and what is neglected? And how do contemporary artists and community members reimagine an old archive, as well as the concept of an archive, in new and radical ways, modes, and spaces?

In the light of growing calls to decolonize knowledge, especially in South Africa, I here foreground the perspectives and creative practices of local, Xhosa artists and researchers in South Africa's Eastern Cape, as they work through and around, inside and outside *ILAM* today.² Historian Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni distills his concept of "epistemic freedom" as the "liberation of reason itself from coloniality," which is "fundamentally about the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop [one's] own methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism."³ Independent artistry is seen and heard as a creative, political, and economic move made to explore self-possessed ownership, especially when the institution of the South African university is heavily implicated in violent processes of land loss, and, as Pedro Mzilane and Nomalanga Mhize argue, "racially segregated universities, built for spatially divided populations, formed an essential epistemic engine in buttressing segregation and sustaining the knowledge base of the white economy."⁴

While the independent artists featured in this book all draw at times from *ILAM* to interpret the archival record, much of their work also commits to the building of an independent arts education space for the producing, documenting, framing, and archiving of their own stories, named *The Black Power Station* (*TBPS*). Communally conceived, designed, and developed, *The Black Power Station* draws from institutional archiving when necessary, while also suggesting and sharing new models for inclusion in older archives. *TBPS* serves as a counterpoint to *ILAM*, both in the structure of this book and in reframing the story of Xhosa sound fragments from one about Hugh Tracey to one about X and his colleagues. Tracey's ethnographic sound fragments are amplified inside and outside the spaces of *TBPS*, resounding across more than half a century as unearthed archival moments. No longer bound on cold storage shelves or lost inside compression software, they grow within a range of interconnected

expressive art forms and communities that speak from yesterday for today and into tomorrow.

Through avant-garde performance, art activism, and community-based interventions, the work of these present-day actors differs from Tracey's in at least three key ways. First, they emphasize human relationships over recorded sounds, redirecting the work of ILAM toward ethical and sustained collaborations with communities. Secondly, they reframe the work from "capturing sound" to reactivating it,⁵ focusing on living social spaces of creative environments designed beyond an institutional library. And thirdly, they create their own, independent archives and institutions, mixing traditional practices and knowledge with soaring praise poetry and original conscious hip hop, African electronic music, and African sound art, in radical new spaces for art.

As an ethnographically trained sound curator and sound artist, I describe my own involvement and collaborations in this work, beginning with a method of "sound elicitation" that was codeveloped in 2008 to take recordings out of the archive and into local, social spaces. I show how Xhosa friends and collaborators are building their own methods of community curation, transforming ethnographic documents that often lie dormant into living experiences that channel and transmit memory and knowledge through new public performance. These methods and practices are often far removed from what Hugh Tracey imagined, and show the possibilities of reconnecting recorded fragments of history and knowledge to the larger stories and struggles of which they are a part. In these pages I seek to amplify the creative practice of independent Xhosa artists as the ultimate curators of their own sounds and expressive culture. Sometimes the artists will choose to taste and sample colonial sound fragments, decentering dominant colonial practices, collections, and stories; at other times, they choose to overlook the colonial archive altogether, but remain vigilantly aware of the history it represents, as they continually renew the call and case for independent, locally owned, and globally resonant storytelling.

Sound Fragments imagines, hears, and helps build the sound archive as something less centralized and prescriptive, something more than a preserving container for audio formats—a space with fluid ideas flowing in and out that are responsive to locally grounded modes for collecting, performing, and amplifying stories told differently. "The creative products of collaboration in the field," argue Willemien Fronemen and Stephanus Muller, "are increasingly presented under the banner of artistic or practice-based research."⁶ Products from ethnographic

encounters and exchanges have long emerged from historical minefields, and productive processes today try to balance experimental artistic approaches infused with a full sensitivity of what it means to find inspiration in the creative work of others. When Cara Stacey and Natalie Mason advocate “reflective openness and collaboration in knowledge creation within the academy and outside of it,”⁷⁷ they are attending to the value in creative praxis that meets both artistic and academic expectations, but remains unready and unfinished, and, as they call it, “ethically incomplete.”

THINKING IN SOUND FRAGMENTS

“Throughout much of the twentieth century,” writes composer and soundscape ecologist Bernie Krause, “those of us in the field were charged with carefully abstracting brief individual sound sources from within the whole acoustic fabric.”⁷⁸ For Krause, sound fragmentation has been the dominant field-recording model that has endured for eight decades since the dawn of a craft, when ornithologists first focused on isolating and framing single bird calls. This perspective, he argues, favoring figure over ground, foreground over background, has led us to ignore almost entirely the interrelatedness of the human and nonhuman aural worlds. There are latent and urgent silences lurking here, and Krause has been sustaining his three-dimensional sonic mapping of environments for decades, building bigger data to show that listening to soundscapes can reveal evidence for the effects of climate change and the health of ecosystems. When listening to environments intimately we can often hear the destruction that we mostly cannot even see.

What does it mean to think of sound as fragmented, whether at the level of granular composition, the archive, or the broader cultural bedding of the soundscape? I hear, conceive of, and process sound as a fragment in at least three related ways. There is sound as a micro part that is broken—the scattered material fragments—split from, and separated off from something, detached often in readiness for inspection, analysis, preservation, and consumption. Sound that is isolated, unfinished, incomplete, the clippings loosely pasted in a scrapbook placeholder. Then there is the intransitive fragment, the sound that has no direct object, where something falls to pieces, the sound that is fragmented, collapsing under the weight of forces acting upon it. And there is the transitive, the sound that has a direct object and breaks something up or causes it to disintegrate into fragments. These are some of the properties and functions of sound—ephem-

eral, unpredictable, incomplete—that allow the exploratory listener “to engage through doubt in a temporary and sensorial knowing.”⁹ It is while listening, argues artist and writer Salomé Voegelin, that we “experience the possible slices of this world, what might be and what else there is, behind and beyond the façade of a visual reality that trades in complete images, absolutes and certainties,” and that we can begin to reimagine political possibilities for effecting the truth of a community.¹⁰ Reimagination embraces the fragments of listening as splinters or seeds from which to craft new structures of awareness.

Treating sound as a fragment of an object can clearly be traced back to Pierre Schaeffer’s research and compositional experiments in 1948, as he dissected recorded audio of clappers and klaxons, hissing steam engines and clacking metal train wheels. Inventing, defining and refining a *musique concrète*, Schaeffer—“the godfather of sampling”—offered us the twin concepts of acousmatic listening and the *objets sonores* or sound objects.¹¹ While focusing on listening without visual access to sound sources, and on the material rather than abstract qualities of sound, Schaeffer later replaced *musique concrète* with *musique expérimentale*. He rejected the simple binary between concrete and abstract sound, when sufficient technological manipulation means “the concrete can readily be transformed into its opposite: deracinated sonic matter for composition.”¹² The sound object should be thought of neither as found nor captured, but more accurately as something that was “in part machine-made; in part, a construct of iterative perception.”¹³ Schaeffer the composer wanted to focus on sounds standing independently of their sources and causes, “as discrete and multifaceted phenomena rather than as carriers of meaning or as effects.”¹⁴ To the listening subject his *objet sonore* fluctuates between the identifiably bounded and the imaginatively reconstructed, “balanced as it is between event-like flow and object-like individuation.”¹⁵ Schaeffer also identified the concept of the sound fragment, a recorded part that was distinct from the physical-material sound object, and referred rather to the “effect” emitted from the object and cut into a recording. In his book-length study of Schaeffer’s work, Brian Kane foregrounds this crucial insight, since “the recorded fragment, not the physical source, acquired the plasticity of compositional material.”¹⁶

In tracing here the creation, freezing, and recirculation of fragments I consider both the plasticity of the form, and also the “detachment” in attitudes that fragmentation might promote at its core. For scholar and museum professional Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the creation of ethnographic objects is a somewhat surgical exercise informed by a “poetics of detachment,” and she wonders where

the object begins and where it might end. “Detachment,” she explains, “refers not only to the physical act of producing fragments but also to the detached attitude that makes fragmentation and its appreciation possible.”¹⁷ Unable to carry away “the intangible, ephemeral, immovable, and animate,” ethnographers choose instead to inscribe in this place of impossibility and create documents that are true to what she calls “the fetish-of-the-true-cross approach.” These inscribed material fragments that we can carry away “are accorded a higher quotient of realness.”¹⁸ And the hyperreality afforded the excised fragments is seemingly often enabled by, and can reproduce, attitudes and sensibilities that detach and float free from contextual production.

This concept of the fragment allows us to think about and listen to sound archives—spaces in which sound has fragmented from its social world. As I show in this book, this fragmentation is intentional and has longstanding social, political, and economic effects. But the plasticity of the fragment also means that it can be repurposed, listened to, and experimented with in multiple ways and in other spaces across time. And it is through the malleability of the fragment that we can hear some archival practices changing since, as Carol Muller argues, we are now no longer bound to locate the archive in cultures that own technologies of repetition. Muller suggests that certain kinds of music composition should already be considered as archival practices, as “valued sites for the deposit and retrieval of historical styles and practices in both literate and pre-literate contexts.”¹⁹ When comparing “the human mind as both memory and archive” with the more conventional understanding of archives as museum-like places in which detached objects often serving political power are collected, controlled, and sometimes concealed, Muller finds a fluid, diasporic concept of the archive, and one “more suited to cultural analysis in the twenty-first century.”²⁰ Contemporary institutional archives can be transformed into spaces that embrace and support the living archives of humanly performed memory, collecting artistic responses that repurpose and add to existing deposits.

RECORDING AND LISTENING IN THE FIELD

Field recording, once a bounded collecting procedure pinned firmly inside Victorian collect-and-classify cabinets, has long since evolved “from a description of a non-studio recording to an uneven and hazily defined subgenre.” Formerly used to describe recordings made in the field by ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, linguists, and ornithologists, the practice now embraces “the

recording of everything from rural soundscapes to contact-mic'd domestic appliances, industrial machinery to the sounds of pondweed, prawns or herring, distant thunderstorms detected with a VLF (very low frequency) recorder to the footsteps of ants."²¹ Any field recording can be analyzed for the politics of its production, and, since it will always contain audible traces of the environment from which it was extracted, can also be used to stand in creative relationships to the environment over time.

What stories, removals, and personal pathways can be found, heard, and imagined when listening to archival ethnographic recordings? How can curators excavate around field recordings to understand their creation and composition, while also tracing active responses to recordings over years and decades, across generations and even centuries? Any sound recording exists as a rupture in time, a bounded vessel ripped from a flowing stream for inspection and audition, by a recordist often uncertain of its future audience. "The phonographer-as-listener imagines herself" writes Roshanak Kheshti, "as a placeholder for the future listener that the recording anticipates."²² And future listeners now might just as likely arrive from noninstitutional and nonacademic backgrounds, bringing alternative ideas for creative engagement.

Scholars theorizing how or what sound writes detect in the medium the possibility for more equitable relationships. "*Listening*," argues Deborah Kapchan, "is the first step not only in translating sound into words, but in compassionate scholarship."²³ Listening links slower-burning ethnographic processes to action and activism. Engaged listening releases stories and histories, which accrue around archival fragments. In order to listen through such processes, Martin Daughtry coins the term "acoustic palimpsest" as a way of thinking about the woven layers of inscription and removals that result when sound confronts us from multiple sources. A palimpsest of layered sounds combines "the multiple acts of erasure, effacement, occupation, displacement, collaboration, and reinscription that are embedded in music composition, performance, and recording." Daughtry argues that these are all "acts that can be recovered . . . by critical listening, research, and occasional leaps of the imagination."²⁴

Ethnomusicological analyses have become increasingly attentive to the negotiated—or nonnegotiated—processes inherent within recording, given that "phenomena studied in the field have also often been considered much more multivariate, uncontrollable, and unrepeatable than those enculturated in the laboratory."²⁵ Recording devices are no longer considered neutral mechanical objects, but are acknowledged rather to play "an agentive role in what is often a

hierarchical encounter between researcher and subject.”²⁶ Hugh Tracey standing among them, “many prominent twentieth-century sound collectors were white scholars in positions of power making a living off of performances by rural, indigenous, and black and brown musicians.”²⁷

Conversely, recordings have also been able to empower marginalized communities at the level of government. Examining an era closer to the dawn of recording, museum curator John Troutman has explored the relationship between Native American musical practice, phonography, and federal Indian policy in the United States between 1879 and 1934. He finds that “through access to modern technologies such as the phonograph and radio, and through music education in the boarding schools, American Indian musicians engaged not only the catalog of American popular music but also . . . the expectations of Indianness that permeated popular culture in the early twentieth century.”²⁸ Musical performance becomes linked to a citizenship agenda, as well as the allotment and liquidation of tribal lands for Native peoples, and extant recordings provide evidence of multiple responses to ideas of Indianness, including both the embracing and shunning of Indianness in performance, as individuals and groups sought to secure their livelihoods where there were usually only limited opportunities on reservations.

Attention paid to both the processes and artifacts of recording often seems to open up a space where interpretations of recorded content can freely detach from any definitive or dominant claims. In his dual roles as both ethnomusicologist and record producer, Christopher Scales explores the intersections of live and recorded Northern powwow social worlds, “attempting to map a particular, historically specific kind of ‘indigenous modernity.’”²⁹ He traces some of the ways that many Native Americans struggle to make sense of the relationships between powwows and powwow recording practice, and illustrates the multiple links between themes of money, reputation, and prestige and how they relate to the preservation of culture and history, the importance of new songs and originality of style, the naming and ownership of songs, and the aesthetics of sound effects. “The ‘meaning’ of recordings,” writes Scales, and “their articulation in the flux of social life, can sometimes exist quite apart from the conditions of their production.”³⁰

Detachment in listening is also explored by artist John Kannenburg, director and chief curator of the Museum of Portable Sound, a “nomadic museum of sounds that exist solely as digital files that have been curated into galleries installed on our Museum Director’s mobile phone.”³¹ Kannenburg is interested

in the real conversations made possible through encounters with individual listeners, and he creates a practical dialogue between the disciplines of sound studies and museology by designing ways to prioritize listening over looking in museum contexts. When developing his idea of a museological sound object, defined for the benefit of museum practice as “a listenable sonic event generated by a physical object, animal, human, or force of nature, *independent of its source*,”³² Kannenburg designs and explores ways for people to share their responses to sound objects by focusing on sound’s portability and the personal interactions this makes possible. Developing dialogues about sound as museum practice is ultimately, for Kannenburg, intended to make museological practices less misrepresentative, and more inclusive of diverse responses, through an attentive listening process located in personal, and often individual and intimate, engagements with sound objects.

Hugh Tracey’s ethnographic recordings have long been circulating as mined, reframed, and remixed sound fragments increasingly detached from their source, but arguably without the diverse, personalized, and observed interactions that practices such as Kannenburg’s promote. Yawning across more than half a century, a chasm of time and space has already opened up between most of the recordings and their originating communities. The silences and omissions stilled for decades inside these recesses can be imagined and reached through creative contemporary artists operating to tell their own stories that build around archival sound. Vinyl, cassette tape, and digital files that formerly compressed and flattened dimensions of animated performance can be made available and accessible in other public spaces, studios, and independent local arts and public heritage initiatives that look different, sound different, and engage audiences differently. Recordings and their cabinet-catalogued classifications are being unlocked and challenged by lived and performed responses to archivally owned fragments. If hegemonic stories are to become decentered, challenges to the dominant account must become part of the record.

ARCHIVES GONE ROGUE, GOING RITUAL

In the age before digital proliferation and explosions of access to often unverifiable online information, historians and archivists were already questioning the objectivity of archival records, trying to understand the ways that such knowledge was produced. Where deposited documents were once treated as nuggets of truth to be unearthed, scholars now draw attention to omissions, silences, and

erasures, and the ways in which records alter over time. Research pays much greater attention to “the particular processes by which the record was produced and subsequently shaped, both before its entry into the archive, and increasingly as part of the archival record.”³³ For Jacques Derrida, archiving always remains a work in both memory and mourning, because “the archive—the good one—produces memory, but produces forgetting at the same time.”³⁴ There has also been an increasing movement from the forgotten to read colonial archives “against the grain,” where students of colonialism have been schooled to write more “popular histories ‘from the bottom up,’ histories of resistance that might locate human agency in small gestures of refusal and silence among the colonized.”³⁵

However, institutions usually move slowly, and a general unwillingness to expand access to archives can easily persist. Archivist Verne Harris—who worked in the apartheid-era State Archives Service and then at the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory in South Africa—calls for the entry of deconstructive voices to dislodge the “continued dominance in archival discourse of white voices and Western modes of knowledge construction.”³⁶ Archivists must, argues Harris, resist textual dominance “in order to open up our archives to other forms of representing in other descriptive architectures.”³⁷ For Harris, the defining issue in transformation discourse is not merely the creation of equal access to the holdings in public archives, but rather that “they must become *creators* of users; or, in the words of the popular slogan, they must ‘take the archives to the people.’”³⁸ Although it remains uncertain whether they can ultimately resist the commodification of knowledge, Harris categorically insists that public archives “should be transformed from a domain of the elite into a community resource.”³⁹ Toyin Falola takes this further in his advocacy for the honoring of ritual archives—polyvalent conglomerations containing “tremendous amounts of data on both natural and super-natural agents, ancestors, gods, good and bad witches, life, death, festivals, and the interactions between the spiritual realms and earth-based human beings.”⁴⁰ For Falola, the ritual archive is the only archive that keeps the invisible alongside the visible, and he recognizes that indigenous researchers are connected with knowledge-bearing locales as particular social agents “in ways that academically trained scholars lack the full capacity to become.”⁴¹

In our information age of perpetually tracked big data, lossy compression and instantaneous file transfer, the ideas and processes constituting an archive are expanding rapidly—often nebulously, experimentally, and independently—especially when community-driven archives pop up, and then speak back to the perceived authority of institutional repositories. Performance and new media

theorist Gabrielle Giannachi traces the ways in which archives evolve to absorb and activate new technologies and media, becoming a way to map everyday information. She scans their multiple platforms and sees them as a constellation of “documents (or objects, artifacts), sites, ordering systems (and administration strategies), but also as installations, cabinets of curiosity, databanks, interfaces, artworks, environments, game-spaces, network platforms, mixed reality trails, musical instruments, and motors for the economy.”⁴² As some archives evolve into communication strategies, many are no longer even associated with specific locations, and increasingly resemble exhibition spaces, social media, tools for re-writing history, and even artworks. Archives have gone diasporic, gone rogue. No longer just ordering systems, archives must now be open to diasporic inclusions and interpretations, creating room for “what was left out, what was destroyed or hybridized as a consequence of adverse political contexts, and . . . what has, as yet, to be found.”⁴³ Something more than regressive tide-stemming repositories, archives can become open, porous, and futuristic. “In spite of what would appear to be the case,” writes literary and aesthetic theorist Horea Poenar, “the archive is always for the future.”⁴⁴ Like art, archives “function through contamination, inter-sections, re-enactments, debts and returns.”⁴⁵

Examining ways in which new digital cultural memory, generated mostly by nonprofessional archivists, differs from print-era archiving, media and performance theorist Abigail De Kosnik detects a proliferation of “rogue archives,” defined by “24/7 availability; zero barriers to entry for all who can connect to the Internet; content that can be streamed or downloaded in full, with no required payment, and no regard for copyright restrictions . . . and content that has never been, and would likely never be, contained in any traditional memory institution.”⁴⁶ Whereas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century public collective memory was the domain of the state, this memory has since flowed out and “fallen into female hands, into immigrant and diasporic and transnational hands, into nonwhite hands, into the hands of the masses.”⁴⁷ Drawing her evidence centrally from Internet fan fiction archives, De Kosnik shows how the majority of community archives are “politically opposed to the concept of ‘canonicity,’ as they typically refuse traditional notions of hierarchy, status, and privilege, and regimes organized according to vertical logics under which their members have suffered, or from which they have been systematically excluded.”⁴⁸

In common with archival and curatorial studies, sound studies is also increasingly attentive to the incomplete, the unfamiliar, and the unheard, especially when attempting to reorient away from dominant Western centers and toward

the Global South. Ethnomusicologists Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes argue that sound studies itself is not even necessarily a useful disciplinary idea because it somewhat shapelessly attempts to link all literature relating to sound. Sound studies has seemingly begun to calcify around a narrow set of concerns, most notably “the historical development in the West of ‘sound’ as a concept and phenomenon separable from the other senses” — itself made possible by particular recording technologies — and “the increasingly sharp division between public and private space.”⁴⁹

If a prior limitation of sound studies was its pattern of reliance on voices about the technology of sound and recording, there has been a more recent movement toward imagining and feeling sound as experiences connecting bodies and spaces. Philosopher and curator Christopher Cox — who characterizes sound as “a nonlinear flow of matter and energy on a par with other natural flows” — argues that it makes more sense to proceed from sound as a system of flow that is both temporal and spatial, rendering us less inclined “to draw distinctions between culture and nature, human and nonhuman, mind and matter, the symbolic and the real, the textual and the physical, the meaningful and the meaningless.”⁵⁰ He prefers to treat artistic productions as complexes of forces, rather than of signs or representations. Sound’s dual temporal and spatial properties seem to offer the potential to outstrip written memories, somehow demarcating, describing, and then vacating spaces. “As any squirrel, whale, or architect knows,” says Cox, “sound is spatially affective, interacting uniquely with the materials, shapes, and configurations of the space in and through which it moves.”⁵¹ The elusive, invasive, and evasive flows and patterns of sound and vibration compose and amplify a “discontinuous archive” allowing for spatial and temporal deterritorialization.⁵² As vibrations interact, invade, and evade through spaces, artists and actors can also use sound to reterritorialize public sites and memories that extend through and beyond the stalled resonance of archival shelves.

Slivers and samples of sound can often seed newly imagined worlds for archived fragments that cannot always be reduced down into the convenience of articulated or translated language. For Salomé Voegelin, sound is generative of world making and listening is always an exploratory, physical, and continuous effort seeking to understand how to sense — and then live among and in between — things. Fragments of sound that are accessible through listening should not, she argues, be translated into visual signs, but rather remain invisible, “not to make sense according to language; to make sonic non-sense.”⁵³ When listening to sound, Voegelin detects nothing less than the possibility of the generation of

a new language and the expansion of the possibility of thinking, hearing “new connections, fabrications, fantastical things that appear impossible but which can materialize between fragments of text as unthinkable thought.”⁵⁴ Scholars and artists are increasingly experiencing sounds as flowing forces that elude translation or any direct equivalence in meaning. This experiential approach necessarily takes us outside of the institutional archive, into places where sound fragments are allowed to recirculate in newly connected ways.

CURATING SOUND FRAGMENTS

The practice of curation has been simultaneously proliferating and splintering, revealing positive and negative practices, associations, and responses. Careful stewardship can just as equally lead to a reinforcement of hierarchies through rigid processes, hence the argument for a “curatorial willingness to break down traditional power hierarchies, to engage in respectful collaboration and sharing of expertise.”⁵⁵ Now that we are all archivists, now that curation no longer signifies exclusive authority, and pocket algorithms can automate multiple lifetimes for an individual’s listening, what place will twenty-first century sound archives occupy? What will they contain, connect, and do? When ethnomusicologists refuse to deposit recordings and other fieldwork material in institutional archives they are often resisting the associations of colonial exploitation. However, in an age of proactive archiving, increasingly driven by the postcolonial agency of people recording themselves, Janet Topp Fargion and Carolyn Landau argue that the people and places involved in expanding archival practice are changing rapidly, as are the ways in which people choose to activate archives.⁵⁶ If every music researcher is now an archivist and curator, how are these practices extending to the noninstitutional world, and how are more grassroots approaches influencing professional modes?

Curatorial discourse is marked by an awareness that as exhibition and display modes rapidly evolve, the ability to document and represent the activities and records has not kept pace. “Archive the achievements,” exhorts art historian Terry Smith, because “the history of exhibitions, of museum displays, and of institutional programming is not adequately served by taking a few uninformative panoramic photographs of each room, collecting the press clippings, adding catalogues to the library, and filing the announcements among administrative records.”⁵⁷ Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist agrees, noting that although curating inevitably produces “ephemeral constellations with their own limited career

spans,” there persists “an extraordinary amnesia about exhibition history.”⁵⁸ He affirms that much curatorial history hangs as oral history, and “it’s very much a story that can only be *told* because it’s not yet been *written*.”⁵⁹

Artist and curator Paul O’Neill identifies a growing emergence since the 1990s of the curator as artist, from a behind-the-scenes organizer and facilitator to a more collaborative, experimental, and transformative creator. He draws attention to the web of metaphors deployed to reconcile diverse modes of practice, “ranging from medium or ‘middleman’ via ‘midwife’ to the ‘curator as’ phenomenon — from curator as editor, DJ, technician, agent, manager, platform provider, promoter, and scout, to the more absurd diviner, fairy godmother, and even god.”⁶⁰ As curated exhibitions and outputs diversify and become more open-ended, cumulative, and durational, they no longer “prioritize the exhibition-event as the one-off moment of display.”⁶¹ Hans Ulrich Obrist scrutinizes whether a Eurocentric perspective is inevitably limiting our openness to experience. “Perhaps,” he predicts, “display in the twenty-first century will come from other cultures, and will tend toward a holistic condition.”⁶²

Once recorded, sound is already curated and filtered by sets of framing decisions. But can sound — a flow of constant vibrational motion — really be curated? It has been argued that mixing curation with music and sound is like working with oil and water. Hearing the reduction of the phonographic recording as “something of a philosophical scandal in that it takes a moment and makes it perpetual,” popular music chronicler Simon Reynolds objects to the museumification of music, especially pop music, for its dry chiseling of viscerally alive energies down into stone monuments. “My gut feeling,” he ventures as he recoils from underwhelming pop exhibitions, “is that pop and the museum just don’t go together.”⁶³ However, “museums preserve art and artifact,” curator Steven Lubar reminds us, “by keeping it secure, keeping track of it, and taking care of it, thus making it accessible and useful.”⁶⁴ In which case, can museums and archives still become essential places or placeholders for the production of stories about sound? Any sound archivist could reel off the details of collections that would have vanished without curation, but preserving sound files is not in and of itself any guarantee of respect for human beings, living or deceased.

Moreover, the use of desirable recorded fragments can splinter opinions, especially now that ready access means increased vulnerability to theft and exploitation. In our open-source era some scholars and artists argue against overly stringent copyright laws and the dangers of starving a publicly fed collaborative commons, and it is also evident that fair use of ethnographic samples can

generate respect, pride, and sometimes wealth for communities. Tracey's ILAM recordings have been circulating far away from their places of origin for half a century in academic spheres, through republishing and, increasingly, through sampling. The Beating Heart Project, a London-based label, has been licensing selected ILAM recordings and mobilizing a roster of international electronic artists and producers to work up remixes aimed firstly at the international club and festival circuits.⁶⁵ This approach has attracted both praise and criticism. I have witnessed Beating Heart's work with Malawian artists and radio producers, as well as some of their investments in community projects. I am viscerally thrilled hearing and seeing a fan video of hypercool London street choreography to Coen's slamming production around a South African sample from ILAM.⁶⁶ At the same time, sampling without critically engaging with context is problematic, especially when, as Tracey's were, the original field recordings were constructed against the backdrop of an apartheid system promoting violent racism. What stakes are at play, asks Harry Edwards, when high-profile artists sample without acknowledgment, or even awareness, of the dangerously embedded links to retribalization, and when remixes circulate with the best intentions while doing "little to engage with the full history of the ILAM" and its foundation based on the inequality of racialized power relations?⁶⁷ How can sampling avoid reproducing the extractive force of neocolonial luxury feathering metropolitan careers? At the very least, it has now become imperative to analyze and document at source all negotiations taking place, especially as local artists and community members take their rightful lead in decision-making processes.

BEYOND SOUND REPATRIATION

My training and work as a DJ-turned-ethnographer and later, as a gallery-based sound curator, has immersed me over the past twenty years in conversations and projects around the ethics and politics of using archival sound recordings. After the collecting boom of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholars and practitioners increasingly came to recognize that recordings cannot sit out their lives hidden on inert shelves. One response has been to conduct sound repatriation. Inspired by the method of repatriating museum objects—notably including human remains—a growing body of researchers has been trying to return sound recordings to their sources of origin.⁶⁸ Work is being undertaken across the globe, redirecting metropolitan and sometimes smaller and personal archives back toward the communities from which they extracted their content.

Museum information specialist Robert Lancefield was one of the first scholars to identify the ethical significance of this developing method. He writes that “repatriation constitutes a tiny—but disproportionately significant—part of the global flow of recorded sound, a flow that in turn is a key component of the encompassing transnational movement of made objects and traces of intangible cultural practices.” Linking past and present across time, place, and power differentials, he argues, “repatriation’s enactment is complex, its effects unpredictable, its ethical grounding often dauntingly conflicted.”⁶⁹ Nowadays, the process is deemed an ethical necessity, combining redress with the establishment of more enlightened models for contemporary and future practice. “The politics of Indigenous repatriation—whether it involves human remains, objects, or songs,” writes Robin Gray, “requires that it be restorative so that the source community can find a sense of resolution from historical injustices.”⁷⁰

In Australia, ongoing collaborative work is linking communities in Northern Kimberley with universities and cultural centers, discovering that repatriation “may be both a means to support the revitalization of song traditions and to collaboratively redress—or at least critically reflect on—colonial research legacies.”⁷¹ Researchers and community members, with some people ideally operating as both, together attend to the living memories of the relationships that formed the recordings, considering “the extent to which, for cultural heritage communities, the cultural contracts entered into by past researchers and singers sit with recordings as metadata, unwritten but encoded in the relational performance event.”⁷²

Reporting on the work of repatriating sound contained in the Klaus Wachsmann collection from the British Library Sound Archive to the newly established Makerere University Klaus Wachsmann Music Archive in Uganda,⁷³ Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Andrew Weintraub begin with the clear premise that communities of origin have the right to access, own, and use recordings originating from their communities. We, as music scholars and researchers, are obliged to “mobilize resources in order to repatriate cultural property to the communities of origin,” initiating and engaging in repatriation as “a critical and reflexive discourse about the social relations of power in cultural representations, and a model for dissembling and potentially undoing those relations.”⁷⁴

Repatriation models can, however, still appear limited, sometimes struggling to move beyond the fetishized sound object and the point of reconnection with its source, especially at a time when some scholars are developing more ambitious activist and developmental projects. A generation ago, the polymath

writer and composer Francis Bebey argued that “as far as music is concerned, the preservation of ancestral forms is meaningless unless it is part of a genuine development programme.”⁷⁵ For Bebey, development was itself a goal and ethic that both preserves and “keeps abreast of the times and, in the long run, gains time.”⁷⁶ Many of Bebey’s proposals for development—such as the formation of companies to promote folk music, and the establishment of African instrument-making centers—have been attainable and realized among communities. But vast inequities endure and collaborative, creative, and present-day activist projects based on longstanding relationships of trust with local artists and community members reveal how to act beyond the return of a sound fragment or object.

A number of contemporary ethnomusicologists work within development- and social justice-oriented interdisciplines such as environmental humanities to explore and build tangible benefits that reside with, and are valuable to, the communities with whom they research. In her mapping of women’s borderland spatialities through songs in western Maputaland, in northern KwaZulu Natal, Angela Impey explores questions of development, land claims, environmental justice, and gender. The women in western Maputaland, Impey observes, sing and act “to make visible and consequential their experiences of land, livelihoods, and conservation expansion within a discourse that is dominated by patriarchal and exogenous authority-conferring bodies, and to thus challenge their status as marginalized players.”⁷⁷ She walks and listens attentively for the ways women see, hear, and experience their roles in relation to their landscape, in order to engage with post-apartheid rights-based notions of democracy. Impey provides intimate witness by walking alongside as histories are sung telling devastating losses of local land and rights wrought by the agricultural and conservation policies of a European settler economy.

Chérie Rivers Ndaliko provides insight into arts activism through film and music in the east of Congo. Her study of the radical arts space *Yole!Africa* shows how researchers can work alongside community-based artists and activists to help tell their stories and support their work.⁷⁸ Her approach to socially engaged scholarship stresses the importance of understanding local context and firstly giving a platform to local voices. The work of Impey, Ndaliko and others looks beyond sound objects and their return to focus instead on the broader possibilities of creative ethnography as an activist practice that is intimately aware of the possibilities of owning space.

SOUND ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

Decolonizing impulses search in varied directions, drawing strength from many precolonial values and behaviors that became erasures,⁷⁹ and imagine new forms of knowledge that refuse to enable the dominance of colonizing texts and languages. Decolonized knowledge systems must often appreciate and recognize issues as being both theoretical and practical. When Achille Mbembe calls out the “destructive and mendacious” ways that Africa has been described, imagined, and represented by others, he knows that the oscillation between what is real and what is imagined is not confined to text, because the “interweaving also takes place in life.”⁸⁰

Scholars from South Africa have contributed to vital ongoing work about decolonization and contemporary realities by exploring different ways in which music relates to politics in the post-apartheid era, recognizing that music and sound operate as forces that extend well beyond functional political messaging and protest. In her book written with the singer Sathima Bea Benjamin about South African women jazz musicians, Carol Muller blends living memory with jazz archives to explore narratives of dispersal and displacement across continents. In the course of the research, she began to think “more about the relationships between beauty or deeply felt emotion and social justice,” searching for other fundamental musical motivations. “In a postapartheid era,” she argues, “the ability to frame the artistic output of South African musicians is no longer dependent on the same kind of political message or politicized interpretation of the work with the kind of pressing urgency sensed during the apartheid regime.”⁸¹ Intimate personal conversations grown through decades of friendship are woven inside evoked soundscapes and jazz history lived for a lifetime. Working intergenerationally with musicians, Muller has continued to trace the fully human expressive dimension in South African jazz. She locates the genre’s contemporary relevance since the development of the nation state in the 1990s in its power to embrace both individual and collective freedom, and “to restore narratives previously suppressed, to celebrate place, to sound local, and perhaps also to connect musically to other genres.”⁸²

Ethnomusicologists have also felt, traced, and witnessed whole sensory worlds in other performance styles in South Africa, detailing forms that are often difficult to convey through any singular medium. In her analysis of post-apartheid Zulu *ngoma* song and dance aesthetics performed in Keates Drift in the magisterial district of Msinga in KwaZulu Natal, Louise Meintjes evokes a remarkable force

that, although born of violence and the harsh penury of wage labor, manages to enact a newly self-claimed mode of being that balances anger and praise, loss, and declarations of love. But Meintjes also detects other motivations as she watches, listens to, and analyzes the public display of the male body being pushed to its limits, observing that “most of the time, singing and dancing is more than a political act or a representation of cultural identity, even in the moments in which it plays out in the world in these terms.” Such a complex expressive mode will often elude any singular translation, because, as Meintjes realizes, “ngoma does not always say something. Sometimes it is a way of being in the world that exceeds explanation. Sometimes it is just playing.”⁸³

The heavy electronic beats-driven studio sound of kwaito—the distinctive South African hip hop and house hybrid—has been felt as a complex form that resonates beyond recordings and nightclubs while it spins up some of its own dust. Gavin Steingo traces the aesthetics of this genre, which may not even be a genre, over the first twenty years of democracy in South Africa, and finds much to admire in the intellectual and sensory modes created by artists using music that “has been variously described as immature, apolitical, disconnected from social issues, and lacking any meaning or purpose.”⁸⁴ Rather than dismissing the escapism, Steingo listens, plays, and finds an alternative multiplying of sensory realities—one that often integrates the sounds of broken hardware, cracked software, and the smell and dusty screech of public car-spinning—amounting to “a declaration of sensory and intellectual equality” by previously marginalized township artists.⁸⁵ Ethnographers of the contemporary South African soundscapes are palpably sensing deeper creative and politically expressive layers in public performance, exploring ways to adapt their modes of ethnographic representation in relation to the musical forms that so often seem to elude even the very latest documentary recording methods. Closer listening reveals more of the relationships between aesthetic structures and power structures embedded in recording and ethnographic practices, inviting curators to start imagining platforms that address, amplify, and begin to redress the inequities embedded in many prior and ongoing cultural encounters.

METHODOLOGY, ETHICS, AND OUTLINE

Every ethnographer has one or more stories to tell of how they got here. Mine traces back to a lifetime of working with recorded music, from—as my nan delighted in recounting at my and my wife’s wedding—repeatedly crawling



FIGURE I-1 Man Playing *Lesiba* mouth bow, Southern Lesotho. Photo © ILAM.

to hug tape players when I was but a few months old, through working as a professional DJ in venues, at festivals, and on radio, and, later, as a sound artist and sound curator, designing experimental modes for experiencing sound in a full range of spaces across the globe.⁸⁶ Over time I was slowly and subconsciously drawn away from studio productions toward the ambience, environments, and textures I could hear in field recordings. I was soon searching everywhere for ethnographic sound: in archives, online, and on labels. After a period spent using ethnographic recordings in DJ sets and for sound installations, utilizing sounds ripped out of context began to me to feel uncertain, and I started to question the ethical foundations of this creative practice. I remain transfixed by the sounds—the *lesiba* friction bow from Lesotho (see figure I-1) with its scorched overtones still astonishes me more with every repeated listen—but became increasingly aware of how little I knew about them, their relevance, and their importance to the originators. Listening to any fragment I could find recorded by Hugh Tracey and many other song collectors, I quit a job at an independent classical music label in order to train as both an ethnomusicologist and a curator, focusing my

work on the possible uses of sound archives. On occasions I still vividly recall the green-room conversation I had backstage at a festival in Ireland with my trusted friend and manager at the time, who advised me to enroll in an ethnographic study program while continuing my artistic practice.

In 2007 I moved to Grahamstown in South Africa, where I would be based, initially for a year, at the International Library of African Music, and I was graciously welcomed by the director, Dr. Diane Thram. This extended field research afforded me the great opportunity to listen to every fragment of sound in ILAM, and to pore over every scrap of writing from Tracey's archive containing his multiple correspondents, drafts of lectures, and myriad business machinations. It took several months being knee-deep in the archives before I was made aware that I should get outside of the archive. For this I owe so much to Vuyo Boozi, the founder of Sakhuluntu Cultural Group,⁸⁷ and Dr. Lee Watkins, now the director of ILAM. I was realizing through my reading that Hugh Tracey, as expressed in much of his publicizing rhetoric, had ambitiously hoped his archive would be used by future generations of African artists, but it was Vuyo Boozi and Lee Watkins who invited and urged me into the local townships to see how people might—or might not—relate to an archival collection. So began a journey that has endured for more than a decade, looking for points of connection and dissonance between ILAM and local communities who are mostly working beyond the boundaries of the academy.

My initial fieldwork based at ILAM was divided between deep archival analysis—often emerging in the very small hours to walk home to my rented garden flat beautifully situated behind fragrant frangipani—and time spent travelling with portable archival selections in the local townships, meeting an extraordinary group of local artists and their friends and families. Working side by side with the remarkable Nyakonzima “Nyaki” Tsana, together we devised, refined, and adapted a creative method to take the archive directly to people for sharing in their own homes, on their streets, and in their public spaces. This method—“sound elicitation”—was designed to share and clarify the history and long-term purpose of Tracey's archive, while witnessing and documenting a whole range of lived responses to the public experience of archival fragments. It also amplified a range of local demands for further access to, and use of, archival content, including many creative ideas for ways to make the content locally meaningful. Tracey recorded tens of thousands of songs across sub-Saharan Africa during half a decade of touring, and Nyaki and I shared dozens of songs with many artists during a year of heavy walking, but I chose to focus much of my analysis

on one extremely resonant local Xhosa song—“Somagwaza”—learning a range of local responses that bring polyphonic dimensions resisting a terse label in a colonial catalogue.

It was in this process that I first met Xolile “X” Madinda, with whom I began this book and the person who has become my main collaborator, guide, and a brother to me in the years since. X and I have continued to work together since 2007 on a range of projects, both in the Eastern Cape and in Virginia (in the United States), where I am now based. X has helped me to become increasingly embedded in a number of local independent artistic initiatives that are all, in different ways, related to, supported by, or drawing from and speaking to ILAM. As our research evolved, it became less about focusing on responses to existing content in archival sound collections, and much more about considering a range of ways to perform and document Xhosa culture, tracing a radial creative network with multiple pathways and taking many shapes in and out of ILAM. I spend time with individual artists such as the radical performance artist Sikhumbuzo Makandula,⁸⁸ as well as with independent grassroots cultural organizations that intersect with ILAM, including Ntinga Ntaba kaNdoda, and The Black Power Station. This book only represents part of my work with X and others over the past decade. Alongside this research and written text, X and I have collaborated on recordings, videos, festivals, curricula, and helping to build arts spaces, as well as working together on a number of performance and sound installations in South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. As the book develops, I spend time considering how some of my individual and institutional relationships have evolved, enabling ongoing modes of collaborative curation working between communities in Virginia and the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

As a White Englishman myself, I first arrived in the Eastern Cape of South Africa almost a century after Hugh Tracey moved to Southern Africa, and I was able to move freely through some of the same pathways and regions that he had previously covered. Although the oppressive apartheid regime had come and gone since his arrival, I recognized early on the pervasive and enduring inequities that have continued, and the privilege that I hold as a White man from Europe. These privileges have allowed me easy access to institutions and individuals, housing and transportation, meals and people’s homes. For the most part, I have been able to go where I want and do what I want with little hesitation, and this is the very definition of White male privilege. But perhaps what distinguishes me from Hugh Tracey is a context and a moment in which this privilege is—and must be—deconstructed and increasingly refused. “In

visible mode,” writes Paulette Coetzee, “whiteness performs itself, displaying its own culture as symbols of superiority, while in invisible mode it acquires—or creates—knowledge of others to affirm and maintain its rule.”⁸⁹ It has been my obligation and imperative to try to learn from the countless mistakes, assumptions, and wrongs of Tracey’s time and to try to avoid repeating the self-same inequities in a new era. In this process, countless friends in the Eastern Cape have shown by example what it means to be antiracist and antisexist. Their trust, friendship, and the conditions for collaboration had to be earned, slowly and with genuine care, and I am extremely grateful for, and inspired each and every day by, the times and spaces we share together both in South Africa and the United States. I am also humbled to know that real relationships have developed and that our work together has taken on a shape that must be as much, if not more, theirs as it is mine.

My approach in this book starts with a colonial archive but shifts to people and their lives, putting the field recordist in counterpoint with a number of individuals working in, around, and close to ILAM today. The outline of the book closely follows my own changing interests and preoccupations, as I shifted from a focus on the recordings and the archive to an ongoing, longer-term focus on relationships, stories, experiences, and collaborations with Xhosa artists and activists in Grahamstown-Makhanda. The narrative unfolds as follows.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter 1, “Hugh Tracey Records the *Sound of Africa*,” is an ethnographic history of the *Sound of Africa* collection at the International Library of African Music, and of Hugh Tracey, the Englishman who first collected the recordings. I analyze Tracey’s influences and motivations in embarking on his recording project, as well as the colonialist origins of the project and its role within apartheid-era South Africa. Much of my discussion focuses on the aims and ethics of Tracey’s surveying, recording, and cataloguing practices, and the ways in which his work both conformed with—and clashed against—colonial and apartheid-era political projects. Analysis of extensive, and mostly unpublished, writings and correspondence helps build a picture of a hugely ambitious mission riddled with contradictory impulses and motives, simultaneously humanistic and progressive, patriarchal and retrograde. I analyze Tracey’s identities as both collector and institution director, illustrating his romanticized quests for African theories of music and African audiences for his recordings. I then consider the value and

impact of his ultimate aim to collect enough data to codify the entire range of music making in sub-Saharan Africa, which led to the establishment of the African Music Research Unit followed by the International Library of African Music, a controversial archive and research institute that is now owned by Rhodes University in Grahamstown-Makhanda in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

In chapter 2, “Listening Behind Field Recordings,” I focus closely on the sound collections, examining Tracey’s methods and motivations as a field recordist, tracing the influences on his techniques and his beliefs about what could, and should, be captured in recordings. I examine the key corporate relationships that shaped his recordings, including a gentlemen’s agreement with Gallo Records (Africa), and his reciprocal working alliances with mining companies, and more personal exchanges with Africanist and—rarely—African researchers and educators. I show how Tracey developed a professional standard of constructed performances of African folk music, hosted and staged on mining compounds and in villages, designed to capture examples of the finest musicianship as part of a continent-wide survey. As Tracey’s ear and microphone focused on capturing short items of high-quality musicianship, I analyze his ambivalent relationship with anthropology and his aversion to immersive and sustained fieldwork. I explore the competing theories of a musicology versus an anthropology of recording by analyzing Tracey’s correspondence, and increasingly strained relationship, with John Blacking, ILAM’s first appointed musicologist. Examination of Tracey’s motivations and recording techniques reveals through the cracks the contexts and communities that were rapidly left behind by his recording truck, small entourage, and microphone. The pitfalls of preserving African culture inside brief recordings of musical items and short catalogued descriptions are made apparent, contributing to the ultimate difficulties Tracey would face when marketing his recordings to African audiences.

In chapter 3, “Donkey Cart Curation, Xhosa Anthems, and Township Terms,” I turn to focus on ILAM today, situating the archive in post-apartheid Grahamstown and Grahamstown-Makhanda. I describe the development of the method coined as “sound elicitation.” As I spent increasing amounts of time away from Rhodes University and in the local townships, I developed a close collaboration with a network of Xhosa artists, in particular Nyakonzima (“Nyaki”) Tsana, a professional contemporary dancer, and Xolile (“X”) Madinda, a professional hip-hop artist and community arts activist. Working together, we explored ways to share a handful of Tracey’s Xhosa recordings to catalyze and mobilize memory, local storytelling, and other performed responses. I show how ethnographic sounds were taken

“out of the fridge” (to quote Koketso [“κκ”] Potsane, a South African friend) of archival storage and resocialized in community spaces, from schools to taxis, arts spaces to old peoples’ centers, from street corners to local shebeens, yards, and homes. As I discuss, the rapidly urbanizing townships of Southern Africa were key sites in which Tracey hoped and assumed his recordings would prove popular and useful. Sound elicitation emerged from the realization that local residents of the townships in Grahamstown-Makhanda had little to no knowledge of ILAM, nor did they feel that they could access its collections, despite the fact that much of the region’s musical heritage was held among their communities, but had since been largely erased or forgotten. By reactivating the recordings through local social mechanisms—the spaces and media through which music and sound transmit in more recognizably sustainable and everyday ways—I show how it is possible to document and analyze contemporary reactions to archival sounds. Moving beyond practices of object repatriation, sound elicitation works by decentering, reimagining, and retelling stories about the colonial archive so that recordings are reinterpreted and repurposed by local artists and community activists within their own social spaces through their own methods of musical transmission. The chapter focuses closely on two of Tracey’s Xhosa recordings, showing how oral culture and contemporary art intersect with recorded fragments to activate a web of responses that challenge the authority of institutional archival knowledge, while suggesting new and creative ways to curate and build relationships with local communities using ethnographic sound.

In chapter 4, “Art and Community Activism Around the Archive,” I consider new methods for publicly performed ethnographic interventions inside and outside ILAM’s archive. I present a number of individuals and initiatives affiliated with ILAM, all centered on Xhosa reclamation of the past and working to empower local artists and communities in the Eastern Cape. These groups and people include ILAM’s current work with Ntinga Ntaba kaNdoda community development group; the reactivation sound projects of producer and ILAM’s studio manager, Elijah “Bra” Madiba; the music and praise poetry of young artist Bhodl’ingqaka; the public history performances of artist and scholar Masixole Heshu; and the radical public performances of Sikhumbuzo Makandula, another artist and scholar. The first section builds on more than a decade of ongoing conversations and collaborations with ILAM’s current director, ethnomusicologist Lee Watkins. I examine ILAM’s recent partnership with Ntinga Ntaba kaNdoda, a communally owned development center pursuing sustainable local heritage initiatives linking a suite of villages nestled in the mountainous rural areas of the

Keiskammahoek region, several hours northeast of Grahamstown-Makhanda. I show how through this collaboration, ILAM's contemporary role is becoming redefined as one of community training and advice, an active developer of satellite archives to support Xhosa ethnography documented by Xhosa fieldworkers in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape. I then explore possibilities for connecting ILAM's ethnographic sound recordings more actively with the urban worlds of hip hop, sound art, and African electronic music. I present and analyze artistic work by Elijah Madiba in collaboration with a range of local poets and beatmakers who engage Tracey's Xhosa recordings as material for creative inspiration to reimagine their own productions. This work draws on, and recomposes, archival sounds and messages to create new art that speaks to pressing contemporary issues, including responsible masculinity, respect for self and environment, and education for young children. I also illustrate and discuss the bold performance modes of artists Masixole Heshu and Sikhumbuzo Makandula, both of whom deploy archival fragments within performed installations, sound art, and mobile tours in diverse spaces occupying the town center, townships, and the local physical landscapes closer to "the bush."

In chapter 5, "The Black Power Station," I focus on the work of the visionary Xhosa hip-hop artist and community arts activist Xolile ("X") Madinda, founder of Fingo Festival and Aroundhiphop Live Café, and CEO of a grassroots pan-African community arts space, The Black Power Station in Grahamstown-Makhanda. The Black Power Station is a Xhosa-owned, -conceived, and -designed initiative that produces, presents, and archives its own artworks, performances, events, and narratives, offering a community-centered alternative to the institutional ownership of knowledge represented by ILAM, Rhodes University, and the National Arts Festival in Makhanda. In this chapter I show how X's activist work evolved from local hip-hop street cyphers and festivals in the townships, to developing a community arts space with its own emerging economy for artists. In conversation with X and other Xhosa artists, I describe and contextualize X's radicalization as a hip-hop artist influenced by Steve Biko, and the development of a range of Xhosa-curated events in Grahamstown-Makhanda. I then turn my discussion to a recent artistic event addressing the contested renaming of Grahamstown to its new Xhosa name, Makhanda. I show how the process of decentering colonial heritage while honoring Xhosa warrior legends plays out live in performance, through a particular moment of original curation in which Western knowledge inscribed in textbooks is challenged by live Xhosa praise poetry. I conclude the chapter by profiling the art and stories of young Xhosa

hip-hop artists, beatmakers, producers, and poets at The Black Power Station, whose curated work oscillates powerfully between deep Xhosa tradition and cutting-edge Afrofuturistic art. These artists directly and indirectly compose counterpoint to Tracey and ILAM, share overlapping concerns with cultural memory and tradition, but use radical community curation to move past the colonial project and claim, project, and assert ownership over their own stories.

In the conclusion, “Curating Sound Stories,” I draw some of these dispersed stories together, discussing why it is important to critically analyze and then repurpose a twentieth-century colonial archive—rather than simply ignore or erase it—alongside a parallel focus on the creation of newly independent and locally driven archives. I consider how this narrative speaks to larger issues in sound studies, curatorial practices, and the reciprocity and ethics of listening, discussing ways that institutional archiving can partner more radical and publicly demonstrative and performed curatorial modes that support local arts scenes, enhance livelihoods, and help develop decolonized spaces, artworks, and curricula. As highlighted throughout the book, I also here suggest how collaborations between local artists and ILAM and its collections, and the ongoing curation, archiving, and amplifying of artistic responses to archival fragments, speak to the urgent issues of today, in South Africa and elsewhere: racism; gender equality; xenophobia; the reclamation of memory, history and identity; sustainable economies for the land, arts, and heritage; and the need and right to own one’s own stories. In moving along the arc of changing ownership from field recording to libraries and back out into independent and public spaces, I show how Xhosa arts activism contributes to an expanding notion of what a sound or cultural archive is, where it is, and where it may resonate in the future. In an era when archives and museums are notably scrambling to collect and curate in more responsive and contemporaneous modes, while aiming to attract younger and more diverse audiences, continued sharpness and relevance can often be found speaking in the ritual archives and networks that work alongside, within, and against historical methods, collections, and intentions.

PART I

Colonial Microphones