

**Mafia Island Fieldwork audio-tapes 1965-1967**  
**collected by Pat Caplan, Goldsmiths College University of London**

***Background to the material***

I went to carry out fieldwork for my Ph.D. on Mafia Island, southern Tanzania, in September 1965, and spent most of the following 18 months there. I lived for a year in Kanga village in the north of the island, with visits to the neighbouring villages of Bweni and Banja (where I also stayed for a few weeks), followed by several months in Baleni village in central Mafia.

My research interests were varied, and included kinship, land tenure and ritual, both Islamic and customary, especially spirit possession *ngoma* such as *kitanga* and *mwingo* (both land spirit rituals) and *mkobero* (sea spirit ritual). It was primarily in terms of the last that I made recordings, but there are also examples of wedding, puberty and circumcision ceremonies and their associated songs (*kalewa*, *taarabu*, *mashairi*, *mkwaju*), of Islamic rituals such as *hitima* and *maulid* readings. People had not encountered tape recorders before, but were happy to have their public events recorded, and I agreed to hold several ‘parties’ during which most of the village would assemble to hear the recordings.

Towards the end of my stay, many people came with farewell gifts in the form of songs and information which I had up to then found difficult to obtain, especially around ‘secret’ matters such as the boys’ circumcision ritual. Many of the more customary rituals like *unyago* and *jando* are not held today in the form in which they were practiced in the 1960s – puberty for girls and circumcision for boys now tends to be accompanied by more ‘Islamic’ forms of ritual, but weddings are still occasions for great exuberance and the singing of often bawdy songs, especially by women.

I used a Telefunken reel to reel tape recorder, which was very heavy and also used many batteries. As there was no electricity in northern Mafia, it was impossible to recharge, and I had to rely on obtaining torch batteries. Some of this material has been transcribed, some of it not, but most of the transcriptions were done long ago on a very rickety type-writer and do not scan well. The tapes were mostly ‘triple play’ which gave 3 hours recording time for each tape, but did not produce a high quality sound.

A bibliography of published material on Mafia appears at the end of this paper.

***The language of the material***

Northern Mafia has a distinctive dialect which is particularly heard in the speech of older people, and during rituals and ceremonies (see Kipacha 20??). In addition, spirit possession rituals use a distinctive vocabulary: *mkwavi* – cow, *mkongwe* – old person, *kengeja* – child, *shami* - money. In the rituals for boys’ circumcision, there is some use of vocabulary derived from mainland groups such as Wazaramo (probably via slaves brought to the island in the early twentieth century). Many rituals and songs use forms of double entendre (*Kiswahili cha ndani* – lit. ‘Swahili of inside’), often with sexual innuendoes, for example both ‘hoeing’ and ‘cooking’ are used to refer to sexual activities.

**Notes on tapes:**

- Tapes 1-8 are 5” and triple play, 1800 feet; tapes I-IV are much shorter
- The shorter tapes were actually used near the beginning of my stay, and chronologically fall between long tapes 1 and 2.
- Dates are written as 310565 = 31<sup>st</sup> May 1965
- Other numerals refer to tape counter numbers and are in feet; these are not recorded for all tapes
- Each listing of what is on the side of a tape is followed by explanatory notes
- The notebook references are to the 28 fieldwork notebooks, from the 18 month period of fieldwork on Mafia from September 1965 to March 1967. Each notebook is numbered and paginated, so the references re given as e.g. 1:22-24 (notebook 1, pages 22-24).

**Long tape 1. side 1**

1. Kalewa dance in Kilindoni (district capital of Mafia) 311065. 1: 1-96
2. Mwingo (spirit possession) ngoma in Kanga village, north Mafia 131165. 1. 96-9
3. Hitima (Koranic reading for deceased) Kirongwe village, central Mafia 141165. 100-4.
4. Kitanga (spirit possession) ngoma in Bweni village, northern Mafia 011265 2. 95-106
5. Kitanga ngoma, Bweni village northern Mafia, 051265, 2: 137-43
6. Wedding, Kanga village. 071265, 2, 153
7. Wedding, Kanga village. 081208, 2. 12-14, 17-21

**Notes on side 1:**

1. The **kalewa** is a women’s dance which is performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, circumcisions and ear piercings. Women make up songs on the spot, often referring obliquely to events in the village
2. The **mwingo** is a ritual (ngoma) connected with the land spirits of northern Mafia who possess people. It differs from the other form of ritual (kitanga) in using only hand-clapping for the songs, no instruments. This mwingo was the first I had observed and notebook ref is 1:96-99. It lasted all night.
3. **Hitima** is a complete reading of the Koran, usually by a group of men, each of whom takes a section of the holy book which is read simultaneously by all. It usually includes a few prayers, and mention of the reason for which it is held. This particular hitima was held in Kirongwe village for the deceased relative of my cook Salum Ali and it included a feast (karamu) for many people with rice and beef, which was cooked by both men and women. Notebook reference: 1: 100-104.
4. **Kitanga** is a ritual (ngoma) connected with the land spirits of northern Mafia which possess people. It involves dancing, singing and the use of drums. Offerings are either a cow or a wooden tray of sweetmeats (chano). This kitanga was in Bweni village, lasted all night and involved the slaughter of a cow. The recording was made after 5 am. Notebook reference 2: 95-106..
5. As above. This particular kitanga took place in Bweni village, lasted all night and involved the slaughter of a cow. Recording made after 6 am. Notebook reference: 2: 137-143
6. **Wedding**. Weddings include both the formal ceremony, which is a brief contract, and much celebration (sherehe) with dancing and singing, especially by women, who may sing taarabu or kalewa songs. This was the first wedding of a young woman, and the big wedding I had observed in detail. Notebook ref. 2: 153-157, and 3: 7-11
7. As above. This was part of the same wedding and involved the formal moving of the bride to her new home. Notebook ref. 3: 15-21.

***Long tape 1, Side 2.***

1. Wedding continued
2. Jamhuri (Republic Day) dances and songs, Kilindoni, 091265
3. Maulid (sung poem about the birth of the Prophet Mohamed) Kanga village, 221265

***Notes on side 2:***

1. Wedding – as above see notes on side 1.
2. Jamhuri Day: this is celebrated annually in the District Capital Kilindoni with songs, dancing, marching and speeches. No notebook references.
3. **Maulid:** there are several versions of the Maulid, which celebrates the birth of the Prophet. The one most commonly used in Mafia is the Maulid ya Barzanji. This was held in the southern ward Karibuni of Kanga village. Notebook ref. 3: 92.

***Long tape 2. Side 1.***

1. Songs to welcome visit of President Nyerere to Kanga village, 040266. 1-20
2. Mkobero (sea spirit possession ngoma), Kitotoni ward, Kanga village. 100266
3. Kitanga (land spirit possession ngoma) Mchekeche ward, Kanga village, 160266

***Notes on side 1***

1. President Julius Nyerere, commonly known as Mwalimu (teacher) visited Mafia briefly in February 1966. He came to Kanga village and was given a meal. People greeted him with songs and dancing, and killed a cow and cooked rice (men only). The President ate inside the TANU office and did not mingle with villagers. The dances included mkwaju (women and men) and tingi (men only). Notebook ref. 5: 2-3.
2. **Mkobero** is a possessory ritual to placate sea spirits. It utilises many features of the rituals of the Sufi orders (ziara). Offerings include a goat or a metal tray of sweetmeats (sinia). Notebook ref. 5:58-65.
3. Kitanga: see notes on tape 1. This was held at the house of Ali Juma, the chief shaman in Kanga village where I was living and was the first I had been able to observe from start to finish. Notebook ref. 5: 81-88.

***Long Tape 2 Side 2.***

1. Kitanga, Kichuni ward, Kanga village, 22-23/02/66
2. Mkobero (spirit possession ritual) at house of Waziri Hamis (mganga – shaman) in Kanga 230266
3. Hitana (another term for jando – circumcision) children of Mwichande Ahmed, Kanga village 19-20/3/66

***Notes on side 2***

1. Kitanga: see notes for tape 1. This was held at the house of Hatibu Mbwera, Kanga village. Notebook ref. 5: 119-126.
2. Mkobero: see notes for tape 2. This was held over an afternoon and the offering was a tray of sweetmeats (sinia). Notebook ref. 5: 127-
3. **Hitana** (circumcision or jando): **Jando** refers both to the hut in which boys are secluded after they have been circumcised and to the ritual itself. In the 1960s, virtually all boys were ritually circumcised, secluded and spent their time learning songs and riddles, before ‘coming out’ ceremonially several weeks later in new clothes and with a new status. This was the first big jando I had been able to observe and was hosted by a neighbour who was a prosperous trader. This section relates to the first part of the jando: the preparations for the feast, the vigil, the circumcision in the early morning, and the seclusion of the boys. Today most boys are circumcised at the clinic or hospital and the occasion is marked in a more Islamic fashion with a hitima or maulid reading. Notebook ref: 6: 50, 53-8, 99-100, 105, 110-112, 114, 116-7,

**Long Tape 3. side 1.**

1. a few feet of misc.
2. night before children brought out of the jando (circumcision hut) 198-235
3. the celebrations and songs for 'kutoka jando' (coming out)
4. Ziara (Sufi ritual) Karibuni ward Kanga village, 040566, 235-612
5. Ziara Kitotoni ward, Kanga village 612-1052, 1052-1186
6. Taarabu recorded from radio
7. 'Atasha' talking about wanga (a kind of witch) and the mizimu (ancestral spirit) of waganga.

**Notes on side 1**

1. Not relevant
2. **kutoka jando**- the night before children are brought out of seclusion, people gather for food and a vigil, which is often spent in the reading of a maulid, a hitima or in singing and dancing. This is a continuation of the jando of the children of Mwichande Ahmed. Notebook refs: 6:133-4 (kuumba mtama), 138-144 (coming out), 15: 55 (comments on)
3. as above
4. **Ziara**: (literally 'visit') this is the annual ritual of each Sufi orders, of which there were two in northern Mafia – Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya – both of which practiced dhikiri – rhythmic chanting, breathing and movements. The Sheikh of this ziara lived in Kanga village. Notebook refs, 11: 37-9, 50-2,54-66
5. Ziara – as above. Notebook ref: 11: 95-114.
6. **Taarabu** - this is a song and dance form widespread on the East African coast and islands. In northern Mafia it is usually performed by women, who sing well-known songs but also sometimes improvise, and the lead singer uses a small drum to keep the rhythm. Men, especially younger ones, also sometimes sing taarabu, and a version of it is often heard on the radio.
7. 'Atasha' was the nickname of the chief kitanga ritual singer in northern Mafia. This interview was one of very few recorded during my first trip in 1965-7, since very few people were willing to be recorded individually (although they had no objection to my recording rituals and ceremonies). There is a transcription of this interview attached.

**Long Tape 3 Side 2. (NB tape counters not recorded)**

1. Mkobero in Kichuni ward, Kanga village 160666. (NB there are some faulty parts here)
2. Kitanga, Mchekeche ward, Kanga village, 180666 (more faulty parts)
3. Maulid ya Jamwiya, Kanga village, Mafia Island.

**Notes on side 2**

1. Mkobero – see notes on tape 2. This was a lengthy overnight ritual for a number of women and involved the slaughter of a goat. Notebook reference 13: 1-14.
2. Kitanga – see notes on tape 1. Notebook ref. 13: 15-28.
3. **Maulid ya Jamwiya** – this is another version of the Maulid which is sometimes used on Mafia. I was told that 'jamwiya' means 'all the people together'. Notebook ref. 13: 29, 40, 92-5, 108-11, 146.

**Long Tape 4. side 1.**

1. Maulid ya Jamwiya (continued from previous tape)
2. Children singing songs in jando at house of Ali Manzi, Kanga village 290806
3. 'Kuumba mtama' (Asking for millet) (part of jando ceremony) of Ali Manzi's children
4. Kalewa women's dance during the coming out of the circumcision (jando) of Muhunzi Seleman's grandchildren, Kanga village 141066
- 5.

### ***Notes on side 1***

1. Maulid ya Jamwiya – see above
2. Private conversation: **MUST BE DELETED**
3. Jando – see notes for tape 3. Notebook refs. 15: 4, 40, 105-7 (utwanzi with songs),
4. **'Kuomba mtama'** (Asking for millet); this is part of the customary ritual of the jando, and signaled the time when the boys' wounds had healed and they were almost ready to come out of their seclusion. It also includes the 'coming out' ritual and its accompanying feast and celebrations. Notebook ref 15: 111 (kuomba mtama), 132, 134 (kutoa watoto), 134, 142-3.
5. At the vigil for the jando of the grandchildren of Muhunzi Seleman the women sang kalewa songs and again the next morning when the sisters of the boys had their ears pierced and the boys came out of seclusion. Notebook ref. 18: 140-44.

### ***Long Tape 4 Side 2.***

1. Coming out of the jando continued from previous side, including mkwaju (mixed sex) and kalewa dances
2. Kitanga at house of shaman Ali Juma 15-16/10/66
3. Taarabu and chorus 241066 (I have written the following names: Juma Malim Hamis, Mridi Seleman, Ahmed Mwatanda Hamisi Hatibu Seleman)

### ***Notes on side 2***

1. 'Coming out' on this occasion the boys receive new clothes and are welcomed by a feast; **mkwaju** is a dance performed with a large drum by men and women together – the male singer often uses sexual innuendo; kalewa – see notes on tape 1
2. Kitanga – see notes for tape 1. Notebook ref. 18: 145-150, 1-23 (includes Ahmed's explanations)
3. Taarabu – see notes for Tape 2. These taarabu songs were sung for me by a group of young men who wanted to be recorded. No notebook refs.

### ***Long Tape 5, side 1***

1. Ngweshani Hatibu (shaman) talking about agriculture and spirits
2. Yusuf Zuberi (an ex-slave) telling a story, and singing jando songs and taarabu
3. Atasha telling a story
4. Youths in Kanga singing taarabu
5. Atasha singing odd songs
6. Mwingo ngoma, Kanga village 261066

### ***Notes on side 1***

NB By this time I had been resident in Kanga village for a year and was leaving to live in a village in central Mafia. People came to give me information, some of it 'secret', such as songs and material on spirits, which they had been reluctant to do earlier.

1. This man was a well-known shaman of a land spirit. Not only do such spirits both cause and cure illness, but they also have territories and can protect agricultural fields. There is a transcription of this interview.
2. Yusuf Zuberi was a very old man at this time who had been a slave in his youth ('I was sold for a sack of millet') and brought to Mafia from the mainland. He was an expert on the jando ritual and would be called upon to teach the children in their seclusion huts.
3. 'Atasha' was the nickname of a famous singer in spirit possession rituals (see tape 3 side one for another interview with him)
4. taarabu – see tape 2
5. Atasha – see note 3 above
6. Mwingo – see notes on tape 2

### **Side 2.**

1. Mwingo ngoma continued
2. Atasha sings me a farewell song
3. Mushibe Silima and Yusuf Zuberi sing me some secret jando songs and also sing some mashairi

### **Notes on side 2**

1. Mwingo – see tape 2
2. Atasha – see notes for side 1. I was leaving Kanga village after a year's residence and many people give me gifts of various kinds including songs
3. Mushibe Silima was an old man who was my next-door neighbour and we had become good friends. He too was an expert on the jando. The jando songs were highly secret and it was a privilege to be 'given' them. Mashairi are poems in Swahili

### **Long Tape 6. Side 1**

1. Mushibe Silima and Yusufu Zuberi sing more jando songs and mashairi as a farewell gift. We have a discussion about 'old Swahili'. Kanga village
2. Maulid ya homu, Baleni village
3. Maulid ya dufu, Baleni village (same place and time as previous), November 1966.
4. Unyago (girl's puberty ritual), Kanga village 17-18/11/66, remainder of side one and whole of Side 2. (continued on tape 7)

### **Notes on side 1:**

1. continuation of previous tape. 'Old' Swahili probably refers to the northern Mafia dialect later studied by Ahmed Kipacha. Notebook ref.20: 77-84 (words of songs)
2. **Maulid ya homu:** this was a form of maulid which I had not encountered in any of the northern villages, but heard in Baleni village in central Mafia
3. **Maulid ya dufu:** a form of maulid sung with tambourines and drums. Again, not a form which was used in northern Mafia, but commoner in the southern part of the island. In Kanga village the Sheikhs had forbidden its use because it involved the use of instruments which they said was unIslamic. Here it was performed by the Mchangami group (chama) from outside Baleni (although this village had 3 groups of its own). This performance also involved a reading of the Maulid Ya Barzanji and was attended by groups from all over the south of the island, who also performed. The groups met up regularly, some weekly, to perform. Notebook ref. 21: 38-41.
4. **Unyago:** this was a puberty ritual held for a girl on the occasion of her first menstruation. Like the jando for boys, it involved seclusion and teaching of songs and other lessons about what it meant to be an adult woman. I returned to Kanga village for this ceremony, which was held for the daughter of a good friend and informant Mwaharusi binti Nyihij and lasted for several days. This ceremony is no longer widespread, but instead girls are ritually 'washed' on first menstruation and some more Islamic form of ritual (e.g. maulid) is held. Notebook refs 26-33, 52-66, 76, 121-34, including songs.

### **Long Tape 7, side 1**

remainder of unyago in Kanga village from tape 6, 181 166 (but NB there is a long gap in the middle)

### **Side 2.**

1. End of unyago (note there was a speed problem with last part of recording)
2. Wedding songs and kalewa, Baleni 241 166
3. Ziara (dhikiri of both Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya Sufi orders) 291 106

4. Mwakasia spirit possession ngoma, Baleni, 05-061266.
5. Kalewa songs as part of bringing children out of jando, Baleni village, 150167

**Notes on side 2**

1. Unyago – see tape 6 notes
2. Wedding songs and kalewa – see tape 1 notes. This was the wedding of binti Darwesh. Notebook ref. 21:126-9. (including songs)
3. see notes on tape. At this ziara, which was that of Sheikh Ahmed of Chole Mjini (and island off southern Mafia), both Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya groups did dhikiri, sometimes at the same time. Unlike the situation in the north, relations between the two orders were good. There was also a maulid ya dufu performance. Notebook ref. 22: 12-16.
4. **Mwakasia**: this was a form of spirit possession ritual which I only encountered in central Mafia. The participants sat on the ground and pulled rhythmically on ropes while singing. Note book ref. 22: 34-, 53-63 (including songs)
5. Kalewa – see notes on tape 1. There was a total of 11 boys in this jando and they had been officially secluded for 3 weeks, although most had gone home after 9 days. Notebook ref. 22: 67-8, 24: 19-20.

**Long Tape 8. side 1.**

1. Ahmed Mwatanda talking about a quarrel with Mushibe Silima (tape not finished), Kanga village.

**Notes side 1**

1. Ahmed was one of my most important informants. Here he is talking about a quarrel with my neighbour, to whom he was also related.

**Short Tape I**

1. Side 1. Funeral in Bweni 181165. continued on side 2.
2. Short sequence of Miraji (reading re ascension of Prophet into heaven), Kanga village 201165

**Notes on short tape I**

1. Funeral: this was the first funeral I had a chance to observe, and resulted from the death of an important man in the neighbouring village of Bweni. Notebook refs. 1: 121-132, 2: 1-9
2. **Miraji**: this is a reading which relates the ascension of the Prophet Mohammed into heaven. This was held at the house of my elderly neighbour Mushibe Silima, who for the previous ten years had hosted this reading with food. It started at 9 p.m. and went on until 12.30 when food was served – not a cow, as in previous years, but chicken, fish and rice. The reader of the Miraji, who is also heard explaining it, was Mwalim Seleman Kombo. Notebook ref. 2: 10.

**Short Tape II. side 1**

1. Miraji continued next day 211165
- Side 2.  
Wedding at house of Seleman Hatibu, Kanga 221165

**Notes on short tape II**

1. Miraji - See notes for short tape I
2. Wedding: this was the daughter of Hatibu Seleman in Kichuni ward of Kanga village. Notebook ref. 2: 26-34, 36.

**Short Tape III**

1. Kanga wedding continued 221165 (see notes for short tape I above)
2. Taarabu 241165 sung by Mridi Seleman, Hamis Hatibu Seleman and Ahmed Mwatanda, Kanga village

***Notes on short tape III***

Taarabu on this occasion is sung by a group of young men

***Short Tape IV***

1. Mkwaju dance (very indistinct) at end of same wedding as on short tapes II and III, Kanga village
2. Wedding ceremony conducted by Shehe Abdi, Kanga village
3. More mkwaju for same wedding

***Short Tape V.***

Maulid Debea (probably Kanga village) 221265?

***Notes on tape V***

Another form of Maulid. Notebook ref. 3: 92 (?)



## **Bibliography of published work on Mafia Island**

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