

Initial Report

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Principle Investigator (PI) Name: (first name, last name and title i.e. Sally Smith, Assoc. Professor)

Text Response

Kwasi Ampene, Associate Professor

1. Describe your research project and the anticipated stages of work. (500 Words Maximum)

Text Response

With this proposed project on “Audio-Visual Africa,” we seek to pursue a comparative analysis of African audio and visual products through a transdisciplinary collaboration involving an ethnomusicologist, a literary scholar, an archival scientist, and an anthropologist. The objectives for the overall project are: (1) to interrogate audiovisual resources for inherent significance and meaning; (2) to employ digital technologies of preservation and facilitating access to enlarge the distribution and use of these materials by broader audiences; and (3) to realize the potential they contain for rethinking the humanities above and beyond the centrality of text. This larger project will necessarily combine assembling audiovisual content, digitizing and cataloging appropriate portions of the combined collections, and creating a shared access system (utilizing the technology platforms available through the University’s ITS program and the University Library). Our team proposes to pool access to three audio-visual collections of African materials. Kwasi Ampene works on the audio and visual holdings of Manhyia Palace, seat of the Ashanti king in Ghana. The Ashanti are famous for their royal guilds of musicians organized by instrument (e.g., the “Ivory Trumpet Guild”). Ampene has documented the musical and artistic heritage preserved within the palace, from repertoires to musical instruments, and the vast archive of photographs, video and audio recordings that document ceremonies and court rituals past and present. Frieda Ekotto is archiving African photographic and cinematic creativity and cultural heritage, especially as produced by female artists in Cameroon, Algeria, and Ghana. Ekotto labors alongside female image producers whose work has not been valued nor collected let alone celebrated. Kelly Askew and Paul Conway have worked for years to acquire, organize, and digitize portions of the extensive Leo Sarkisian African Music Collection, which encompasses live audio field recordings from ~40 African countries and musical genres from traditional to popular, high-art classical to jazz; recognized for its value within a small circle of academic ethnomusicologists, yet largely unknown beyond. A planning process in spring 2016 is vitally important to the realization of our aspirations for the larger research endeavor. These larger aspirations include: (1) digitizing collections (Ampene’s and Ekotto’s) for preservation and archiving purposes; (2) developing digital catalogues of these materials (all); (3) enabling online access to some portions of the collections via website delivery; and (4) offering user-friendly access through the development of smartphone-optimized applications (Askew/Conway). This larger effort is but a means to a more significant end; namely, rethinking the theory of the audiovisual archive and its relationship to community memory, particularly in the context of the diversity of African post-colonial nationhood.

2. What original contribution(s) will the project make to the humanities field(s) in which it intervenes, and to the humanities more broadly. Why is collaborative research appropriate to the project? (500 word maximum)

Text Response

Semper aliquid novi Africa adfert ‘Africa is always bringing forth something new’ — Pliny the Elder, Natural History 8.42 (77 A.D.) At least as early as the 7th century BCE with the Assyrian Royal Library of Ashurbanipal, libraries have preserved and provided access to documents. In the 17th century, museums emerged to fulfill the same purpose for objects—artistic and scientific, ordinary and extraordinary. Thanks to these institutions, new scholarly disciplines developed that would have been impossible without them—fields like Indo-European Linguistics, which requires examination of multiple texts to discern patterns and differences, or the history of science, which traces the development of scientific thought and method. Yet although visual and audio technologies were invented in the 19th century with Daguerre’s photograph (1839), Edison’s phonograph (1877), and the Lumière brothers’ cinematograph

(1895), few research institutions have positioned themselves both to preserve and to provide access to audio-visual materials. Our project on “Audio-Visual Africa” will challenge text-centric and Eurocentric biases in the humanities by exploring the scholarly potential latent in a local-community based orientation toward African audio-visual archives. Why Africa? Because Africa, the source of all humanity—and, by extension, the humanities—is a continent always defined by change and innovation. Moreover, by the year 2100, Africans will constitute 40% of the world’s population. This makes it absolutely critical to reverse the relegation of African perspectives to the margins and resituate them as central to the humanities enterprise. Why audio-visual materials? Because while Africa produced great libraries like those of Alexandria and Timbuktu, visual and audio media are equally privileged in Africa for translating experience, contesting inequity, and seeking inspiration. That said, African audio-visual collections are rare, are lacking in material resources and technological support, and have attracted little academic research. Attending to the “audio-visualization” of Africa, our interdisciplinary collaborative envisions interrogating the ways in which communities have and continue to express and document their heritage and identities through the vast array of tangible and intangible forms and formats that make up the archive. Not just a repository of records, the archive can never be seized and fixed in its entirety; and yet the archive governs that which can be uttered in the present. Traces of buried, discontinued, or untold stories about the past can also be discerned at the margin of the archive by the eager eye who reaches for them. As powerful and affective mnemonics, the audiovisual archive thus draws the contours of the politics of historiographic representation.

3. Identify the research team members (name, department, position) and explain what the faculty/staff collaborators bring to the team. (200 word maximum)

Text Response

Kwasi Ampene (PI): DAAS/SMDT, Assoc Prof/Director, CWPS. Ethnomusicologist specializing in the musical traditions of the Akan of Ghana; extensive field research in the court music, verbal art forms, and the heritage of tangible and intangible stool regalia in Manhyia Palace. Kelly Askew, Anthropology/DAAS, Prof/Director, African Studies Center. Anthropologist with decades of research on music and politics in East Africa (Tanzania, Kenya), including the Sarkisian archive; expertise in ethnomusicology; documentary filmmaker; successful collaborator on interdisciplinary research on archiving sound recordings. Paul Conway: UMSI, Assoc Prof. Archival Scientist; pioneer in digitization, digital archiving/access, and the management of archives. Extensive experience leading and participating in collaborative research, including the highly successful MCubed project on ethical access to live music recordings with Kelly Askew. Frieda Ekotto, DAAS (Chair/Professor)/Comp Lit and Francophone Studies, with depth in African Women filmmakers and their audiovisual archival legacies; research on how images shape the substance of our personal/collective memories, as they locate visions of the past, and project scenes of the future.

4. What is the anticipated role of graduate student collaborators? (200 word maximum) **Note, you do not need to identify specific graduate student collaborators at this point in the process.

Text Response

We will utilize funds for a spring 2016 GSRA position to recruit one of three available doctoral students in the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies (DAAS). As a full partner in the planning project, the GSRA will contribute significant domain knowledge in African audio-visual culture and will take the lead in organizing the larger project proposal, including completing background research on the conditions of musical/visual culture in the targeted African nations. The GSRA will also draft substantial portions of a second proposal to the Mellon Foundation that we anticipate will support creative fieldwork with communities in the African countries with the largest stake in the audiovisual archives assembled as part of the larger research project. Two master’s level graduate students from UMSI will work half-time for the spring 2016 term on technical development; one creating a unified finding aid to the materials; the other helping specify Internet and smartphone access options.

5. What is the anticipated role of undergraduate students (if any)? (100 word maximum)

Text Response

None anticipated in the spring 2016 planning phase.

6. Describe the anticipated outcomes and products of the project. How do you anticipate results be communicated and to what audiences? (200 word maximum)

Text Response

The spring term planning project will produce five deliverables: 1. One team-authored article submitted to Ethnomusicology and/or African Studies Review. The article will describe the research framework around which the project is built. 2. One funding proposal to the Humanities Collaboratory for a two-year research project that implements the collection building and analytical framework envisioned in the planning phase 3. One proposal to Mellon Foundation for selected aspects of the research project not covered by the Humanities Collaboratory proposal, particularly Internet and smartphone interaction with communities of interest in four African nations, along with appropriate field work required to evaluate the impact of legacy audiovisual archives on community memory. 4. A sustainable collaborative relationship among scholars at Michigan whose research in Africa or on African resources is oriented toward audiovisual archives. 5. Accessible documentation (website) on the resources and on the "network" of scholars committed to preserving and providing access to African audiovisual archives.

7. Briefly describe each faculty member's experience in mentoring graduate students. (300 word maximum)

Text Response

Kwasi Ampene. In addition to convening graduate seminars, he has served as chair of a dissertation committee and been a member of 45 Doctoral and Master's dissertation/thesis committees. Kelly Askew. She has chaired or co-chaired the dissertation committees of six PhDs and served as a committee member on an additional of 32 completed PhDs (22 women, 16 men, 14 underrepresented minorities), and their degrees spanned anthropology, history, ethnomusicology, social work, music, Near Eastern studies, architecture, and SNRE. With only one or two exceptions, all her students have landed jobs in academia or related fields. She is currently advising 18 doctoral students in various stages of their programs. Paul Conway. He is the coordinator of two master's degree specializations, has served as chair of 2 completed dissertations, and has served or is serving on 10 dissertation committed. Additionally, he has a strong track record for mentoring graduate student independent study projects. Frieda Ekotto. She has directed 12 completed dissertations, is supervising 4 active dissertations and has served or is serving as a member of another 12 dissertation committees. She was the Director of Graduate Studies in Comparative Literature.

8. Describe the collaborative process and the work that you anticipate accomplishing during Spring Term. (300 word maximum)

Text Response

The four members of the faculty collaborative team, the doctoral student GSRA, and two UMSI graduate students will be resident in Ann Arbor for the entire spring term planning period. The team will hold full afternoon planning sessions once per week and work independently in between meetings. Two research team members (Askew and Conway) have collaborated on prior research and so are in a position to forge a productive working relationship on the project. First, our team will read/discuss the research literature from our disciplines and explore competing theories of meaning associated with the audiovisual archive, as they manifest themselves in the diverse collections pooled for the project. Our team will share, document, and discuss the similarities and differences among each other's humanities orientations, the tools and approaches we employ in our research of these materials, and the 'digital humanities' interventions we hope to make with the larger project. Second, we will scope our research on the pooled audiovisual collections, with the compelling goal of crossing media, crossing collections, and crossing national and continental borders to bring our team toward a common understanding of the sociocultural determinants of audio-visual heritage ownership and use. This is the basis for our sustainable humanities research collaboration across disciplinary lines. Third, our planning process will produce one internal and one external grant proposal to advance a collaborative approach to the study and digital development of these materials. Fourth, the planning project will establish the technical design specifications for the digital databases, metadata, websites, and cellphone applications required to

move the project to implementation with future funding.

9. What role will each team member play in the proposal development work? (300 word maximum)

Text Response

All four members of the team will devote equal effort to the planning process and will work collectively to engage the GSRA as a full contributor to the work of the group. Kwasi Ampene convenes team meetings in addition to working closely with our GSRAs as we develop our internal and external grant proposals. He will write a detailed description of the Audio-Visual Archive at Manhya Palace including the approximate number of VHS tapes, Mini Digital Video Cassettes and the contents, Still Photographs, and the system of archiving in place. Kelly Askew contributes fundamental theory on how audiovisual resources offer viewers and listeners a means to experience ethnographic complexity, richness and depth and convey forms of knowledge that writing cannot. She will specify analytical methods that go beyond literary techniques and identify the differences as well as the similarities these materials have to texts, and so that we can develop protocols for analysis. This is a critical step in the development of a multimedia humanities. Paul Conway focuses the team on the evolving theory of the "surrogate archive" as it pertains to audiovisual heritage. He will lead the technical aspects of project development, will recruit and train two UMSI graduate students, and will engage the University Library in discussions of digital content management. Frieda Ekotto brings a keen understanding of theories of the post-modern archive, particularly that of African women filmmakers. She will contribute a critical perspective on the interplay of word-text and audiovisual text. Her research is concerned with how the audiovisual shapes the substance of our personal and collective memories, at the same time as they locate visions of the past, and project scenes of the future.

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