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## Transatlantic Folk Exchanges in 1959 – the Revival Year

### **America Over the Water**

In 1959, the most important folk collector of British, US and ‘world music’ of the twentieth century, the American Alan Lomax, took his 23-year-old lover, the English folk singer from Sussex, Shirley Collins, as his assistant on a two-month collecting tour of the South. For Lomax this was a physical trip through geographic places in which he crossed and recrossed the Atlantic as the emissary of transatlantic folk exchanges and revisited some of the southern singers whom he had met on an earlier tour with his father. Collins, a singer steeped in her native English tradition, was for the first time exposed to the equivalent song traditions of America in their ‘native’ locations. This expedition has had lasting significance in terms of the extraordinary wealth of material that Lomax and Collins collected, for example, ballads, blues, and spirituals, which amounted to 88 hours of recorded material. Whilst Lomax worked tirelessly as folk collector/ethnographer, he also had a very public and influential face as a performer, writer, and broadcaster. In contrast, Shirley Collins was a young working-class woman from Sussex who had not travelled but who had a desire to become a ‘traditional’ folk singer and this chimed with the revivalist trends of the time.<sup>1</sup> The account of Collins’ experience with Lomax travelling throughout the deep South in 1959, and of the singers they recorded, is documented in her book, *America Over the Water* (2005). It is surprising that although the 1959 southern collections provided a potential source for a large new repertoire of songs for Shirley Collins she made a determined decision on her return to the UK “to focus on English songs and a more appropriate way of accompanying them” (Collins 182). She had previously included in her repertoire some songs from earlier US collections. Collins developed her professional folk singing career as a traditional, specifically Eng-

lish, folk singer at the heart of the British folk revival and determined to discard the American banjo which had been her accompanying instrument in favour of British instruments such as the concertina. This decision seems paradoxical for Collins' role as partner to Lomax in his 1959 southern expedition had given her access to potentially lucrative material to broaden her repertoire. The explanation lies in the social climate from which the second folk revival in 1959 was springing. Lomax and Collins were key figures in the transatlantic revival scene and their southern journey is an important window onto what was nonetheless a paradoxical resistance to transatlantic folk exchange.

Of course 1959 was also a time of great significance in the history of the South as it hesitated on the eve of the Civil Rights Movement. Lomax and Collins toured through what was a racially divided South from Virginia and the Mississippi Delta to the Ozarks and back to the Georgia Sea Islands. They sought out singers and musicians from both sides of the colour line and recorded everything from black chain gangs to white shape note singers, and also documented interchanges between black and white music which incontrovertibly existed in this period. The importance of this work cannot be overestimated, not only because of the previously unrecorded music and instruments that were discovered, but also for the meticulous records of the contexts for the recordings which are available to us through the Library of Congress Lomax Archives and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> These collections provide extremely rich documentary evidence of the lives of Southerners in this period; they demonstrate both early European and African oral origins as well as the contemporary developments of southern cultural traditions at that time. The trip was partially sponsored by Atlantic Records whose selection of specific recordings for release on vinyl albums led to the widespread acclaim for the previously unknown and probably first recorded blues singer and guitarist, 'Mississippi' Fred McDowell (subsequently to be imitated by the Rolling Stones). Other discoveries of the 1959 recordings, who are now familiar voices, were James Carter whose singing at Mississippi State Penitentiary was sampled for the Coen Brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack, and the Alabama washerwoman Vera Ward Hall whose singing is the sample heard on Moby's *Trouble So Hard* from the 1999 *Natural Blues* album. This trip resulted in the release of seven albums for Atlantic Records' Southern Folk Heritage series in 1961.<sup>3</sup>

### The First British Folk Revival

The Folk Revival in England actually came in two waves. The first wave began at the turn of the century. Marked by the founding of the Folk Song Society in 1898, it continued to the end of the 1930s. The significance of discourses of national identity and authenticity were clearly stamped upon this revival. As Georgina Boyes describes it: “Morris dancers, maypoles on the village green and orchestrated folk-songs have been used to represent – and sell – ‘Englishness’ throughout the world” (Boyes 3). Intrinsic to the Revival project then, as in 1959, was the belief that the values and characteristics enshrined in representations of the past should be retained and maintained to function as a cultural cure to industrial capitalism, war and modernity, and to provide a national art which could be retained/revived (or even invented) through “reperformance” (Boyes 18). In 1906 the Board of Education officially sanctioned the teaching of folk songs because they expressed “in the idioms of the people . . . their unaffected patriotism” (Brocken 6).

The collectors of folk music such as Cecil Sharp and later Lomax, were chiefly concerned with saving folk music from extinction and they worked in and for established institutions where collections were housed. In contrast (although they were sometimes the same people), the motivators of the folk revival were the performers who utilised these collected materials, as well as adapting the traditional materials to be relevant to contemporary social struggles. Cecil Sharp, collector or ‘song catcher,’ led a group of collectors into rural England to collect from ‘the source’ songs and dances in ‘the field’ for publication in the Society’s journal. ‘Rural’ is significant here because urban folk culture, for example the songs and dances of northern mill workers, was pointedly excluded at this time and would not be registered until the work of communist singer, A. L. (Bert) Lloyd.<sup>4</sup> As Director of the English Folk Song (and, later, Dance) Society, Sharp exerted control over the permissible forms of performance of collected dance and song. He advocated folksongs as “racial products” and took the view that “the only musical source of cultural improvement was pure folksong” (Boyes 66). In a trip that prefigured the tour of Lomax and Collins, Sharp carried out ‘colonial’ collecting expeditions in the Appalachian Mountains in 1916 where he found evidence to prove his thesis of the relationship between folksong and the remains of British organic culture as represented by the Child Ballads.<sup>5</sup> He published several collec-

tions such as *Folk-Songs of English Origin, Collected in the Appalachian Mountains*; this title clearly demonstrates his thesis.<sup>6</sup> The mountain schools were encouraged to adopt the songs just as in England at the same time folk song was being promoted amongst school teachers for their pupils. Sharp's work also attracted the attention of literary scholar F.R. Leavis who represented it in his journal, *Scrutiny*, in the following terms:

Hearing that the English folk-song still persisted in the remoter valleys of those mountains Sharp, during the last war, went over to investigate, and brought back a fabulous haul. More than that, he discovered that the tradition of song and dance . . . had persisted so vigorously because the whole context to which folk-song and folk-dance belong was there too: he discovered, in fact, a civilisation or 'way of life' . . . that was truly an art of social living. (*Scrutiny* XII.1 1943, cited in Boyes 126)

Sharp's kind of reverence for rural culture and its perceived rural values is very similar to the notions of Englishness espoused by F. R. Leavis's own work in the 1930s and his influence was later to be seen within both the English Folk Dance and Song Society and the Workers' Music Association.<sup>7</sup>

The success of the first revival is demonstrated by the fact that folk music topped the BBC's lists of recorded programmes in the 1930s, bringing it to mass attention. It was intrinsic to post-war constructions of Englishness based on the revival collectors' work with the 'common people.' As Alan Lomax was later to recall,

In the days before the hostility of the tabloid press and the Conservative party had combined to denature the BBC's Third Programme, it was probably the freest and most influential cultural forum in the Western World. If you had something interesting to say, if the music you had composed or discovered was fresh and original, you got a hearing on the 'Third.'<sup>8</sup>

### **The First American Folk Revival**

In 1914 the US administration was troubled by the potential for social division with a diverse population whose loyalties were split as far as the war in Europe was concerned. To highlight and establish the 'native' culture of the country, the Department of Education declared a 'rescue mission' for folk songs and ballads in the belief that they were an endangered species. In 1928 the Archive of American Folk Song was founded at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC and Alan's father, John Lomax, began collecting for them. Alan, then 18 years

old went along as assistant. The Lomaxes began by focusing their attention on African American music which was insulated from white traditions, visiting southern penitentiaries and prison camps which was where they famously discovered Leadbelly. Alan Lomax chose to revisit some of the same locations in 1959 with Shirley Collins and they found that some of the previously recorded singers and musicians were still alive.

By the 1930s Alan Lomax was working alone as a full-time collector and he was convinced he was working on behalf of true American patriotism. In 1937 he became the director of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress and played an important role in organising concerts and recordings. He staged the 'Grapes of Wrath' concert in 1940 featuring Woody Guthrie whose repertoire and singing style was celebrated by revival musicians as a model of authenticity.

### **The Second Folk Revival: 1959**

In 1959, as at other key moments such as Britain's preparation for World War I and the New Deal in the U.S.A, the latent idea of traditional folk culture was being mobilised on both sides of the Atlantic for the purpose of the delineation of nationalistic group identities. 1959 was a watershed year for the emerging folk scene on both sides of the Atlantic, witnessed in the explosive popularity of folk clubs in Britain and events such as the first Newport Folk Festival in the US. Newport was described by Robert Shelton in the *New York Times* as "perhaps the most ambitious attempt ever made at delineating a cross-section of the nation's folk music."<sup>9</sup> By 'cross-section' Shelton refers to the two driving forces on the folk stage at this time. One trajectory comprised the traditional 'root' or survivalist singers whose songs and singing style had clear provenance in the oral tradition. They had either inherited songs, or they performed songs which had been collected in 'the field' and circulated via song books and field recordings. The other trajectory comprised revivalist professionals who drew on recorded materials for their repertoire and wrote their own songs in a 'folksy' style. These singers were creative and innovative in composing new songs, or adapting old ones, but kept to a recognisable traditional folk style or 'folk idiom.'<sup>10</sup> Despite these differences, what was intrinsic to the folk revival of the late 50s on both sides of the Atlantic was what Robert Cantwell describes as a nostalgic "generational longing"; a longing for a sense of connection with an enduring past

and a rooted sense of belonging to an imagined community (Cantwell 36). Folk offered a form through which people could enact rituals essential to group identity and solidarity and the movement was accelerated by post war expansion in consumer purchasing power and commercialised leisure. The folk revival at this time conforms to George Lipsitz's view of post-war popular culture as "one of the main vehicles for the expression of loss and the projection of hopes for reconnection to the past" (Lipsitz 12). This motivation for the 1959 folk revival is inseparable from the proselytising about authentic roots which gained momentum in the post-war hegemonic reproduction of 'Englishness' in England and 'Americanness' in the US Cold War climate.

It is evident that the nationalist ideology promoted by Sharp was durable and served as a precedent for the exacting criteria applied to 'folk' in the second revival. These are summarised by Michael Brocken:

That a 'tradition' must be preserved at all costs; that specialists are 'qualified' in this respect; that performers are middle men carrying the tradition; that folk music is a universal language. (Brocken 2)

What is clear is that this involves the selective collecting of cultural resources, or, as Raymond Williams puts it, "an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification" (Williams 115).

As post-war American revival culture began to be disseminated in Britain, first through skiffle and then blues and hillbilly music, so factions of the English Folk Dance and Song Society became more entrenched in the protection, and promotion, of the English folk music 'tradition' and its leaders firmly aligned themselves with left-wing politics groups such as the Communist Party of Great Britain.<sup>11</sup> Always important to the EFDSS project was the support of the Workers' Music Association and their recording arm, Topic Records.<sup>12</sup> However, this second revival is distinct from the first because it came to be synonymous with protest. This alignment was manifest through the identification of folk music with anti-nuclear activism and the expansion of the tradition to include and revive mining and millworkers' songs. The influence of A. L. Lloyd was important in this respect, as were MacColl's own Radio Ballads through which he developed his own folk idiom, mixing documentary recordings with his own songs. By the time of the second revival a distinction could be drawn between

‘survivalist’ singers, who were the last and much celebrated survivors of the oral tradition, and ‘revivalist’ singers such as MacColl and Lloyd, who attempted to reproduce the characteristics of the traditional singers many of whom were brought to Cecil Sharp House, the headquarters of EFDSS, to offer exemplary models to the new singers. Shirley Collins was one such young revival singer who attended to learn from the old masters. She is applauded by Alan Lomax in the original sleeve notes to her album *False True Lovers* as singing songs which “though based on Sharp’s arranged versions, are clear cut folk variants, with the style reapplied and the song coming alive again and beginning to grow in the folk manner, that is, within the emotional and musical canons of the Sussex style . . . vocalising her identity with Southern English countryside and its culture.”<sup>13</sup> The repertoires were now extensive and included Scottish and Irish songs but a major influence came also from the burgeoning US folk revival and the songs of Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger. This revival was characterised by protest songs of struggle across the colour line. Seeger had co-edited *The People’s Song Book* with Lomax; its roots were in the American Communist Party and its contents exclusively protest songs such as “Joe Hill,” “Talking Union,” “Strange Fruit” and these were happily accepted into the repertoire of British folk singers who commonly identified as left-wing and affiliated to the WMA.

### Rejection of transatlantic folk exchange

Despite this British/US collaboration and the popularity of American music by Woody Guthrie and skiffle groups in the 50s, by 1959 this transatlantic folk alliance had become deeply problematic and the folk scene became divided. As Boyes explains:

[O]utside this supportive mutuality, America represented a new imperialism – ‘send the Yanks back home again’ wrote MacColl in 1955 in a song hymning international friendship and berating the American atomic bomb. More seriously, as the influence of the Cold War and Joseph McCarthy, its witchfinder general, grew ever more persuasive, the United States became a source of government sponsored repression and blackmail. (Boyes 222)

Lomax had been evading McCarthyist witch hunts by working in Europe for 8 years up until his return to the US at the end of 1958 and his southern journey with Collins. During his time in London, Lomax was instrumental in providing a model and an impetus for the folk revival that was taking place there and which was in parallel to the

burgeoning movement in the States. In *The People's Songbook*, MacColl acknowledged Lomax as his inspiration to 'start' the second folk revival in the UK and he notes in his autobiography that conversations with Lomax developed an "open-ended discussion on how a theoretical British folk-music revival can become a reality" (MacColl 272). The political climate which brought Alan Lomax to England in 1951 had a very deep effect on the folk revival scene in the US sending it largely underground. Pete Seeger, one of its leading performers, was imprisoned for contempt of Congress. As the leading theoretician of the folk revival in Britain, Ewan MacColl's response to US imperialism was a concerted effort to delete all American influences from the history of the British folk revival:

we were intent on proving that we had an indigenous folk-music that was as muscular, as varied and as beautiful as any music anywhere in the world. We felt it was necessary to explore our own music first, to distance ourselves from skiffle with its legion of quasi-Americans. (MacColl 272)

MacColl's stance is reinforced by his claim that the "main objective" of his hugely successful radio series, *Ballads and Blues*, was "to demonstrate that Britain possessed a body of songs that were just as vigorous, as tough and as down-to-earth as anything that could be found in the United States" (MacColl 299).

### **The Policy of Authenticity**

By the time of Shirley Collins' return from her Southern journey in 1959 there was already vehement public debate about which song and performance styles were appropriate to the English Revival. Collins was to find herself performing in a climate where the new folk club scene was operating strict rules about what could be sung, by whom, and in what style. The strictest of these became known as 'policy clubs' where performers could only sing songs which reflected the place where they had grown up. The policy of such as the MacColl led Singers' Club was that "if the singer was American, the song also had to be American" (Brocken 35). MacColl's edict was extremely influential in the new folk club scene and the need to conform to the demand for traditional authenticity caused singers to abandon the American model. Performers were required to be able to claim a real sense of identity with the songs by virtue of personally having the correct national and regional identity; there was an associated mistrust of commercial popular culture, specifically American popular culture.



Brocken notes that the phrase ‘pseudo Americans’ was used to describe American influences in a large minority of folkclubs for the “undesirables inspired by the USA” (Brocken 78). In 1960, the American singer (half sister of Pete and later to become MacColl’s wife) Peggy Seeger, criticised British singers in the following terms:

To me, as an American, the fact that the Americans have built up a culture, which is American, which is absolutely unique, is valuable to me. And that’s why I sing American songs. Because they represent to me the particular struggle of a particular people at a particular point in time. But when I hear a British person singing a folk song from America I feel that there’s an anachronism, a spiritual anachronism, if you want to put it that way, there’s something which is not quite right. (cited in Brocken 79)

The tension between a British understanding of folk tradition, one which speaks of continuity and which would elide difference, and an American understanding of the function of folk song to represent the particular and the specific in terms of struggle emerges here. Peggy Seeger’s influence on MacColl was strong and as Shirley Collins says in an interview, “if you wanted to get into that music, you did need to be approved of by Ewan MacColl” (Kugelberg 2).

On the other side of the Atlantic striking parallels are evident between the influential views of Ewan MacColl in Britain and those of Pete Seeger who also maintained exclusive views about the maintenance of ‘authentic’ folk song. Again the year 1959 is noteworthy, for this is when the Second Annual Folk Music Festival at Berkeley took place with performances by Alan Lomax and Pete Seeger. Its organiser, Barry Olivier, wrote:

We were concerned about a product of the folk music process – the finished, traditional, pure, real, good, old folk songs. With popularizers about . . . we had almost a religious fervour about laying out what we considered to be real folk music, so it would be fully appreciated and so that people wouldn’t waste their time and energy with the watered-down, ‘impure’ stuff. (Cohen 128)

The competition between ‘traditional’ survivalist styled folk and the commercial revival groups was rife in the US and ironically led to the desire of some traditional folk singers to modify their performances in order to achieve a more commercial sound attractive to recording company agents. Alan Lomax, returning to the US at the end of 1958, attacked the ‘city-billies’ or ‘folkniks’ for mastering the musical style without absorbing the music’s emotional content (Cohen 136). However, the folk scene in the US had an additional and very important complexity – that of race. Again the year 1959 is significant for it was

then that Lomax staged a concert at Carnegie Hall on his return which was a turning point because it presented a mixture of performers from across the colour line including the Arkansas singer Jimmy Driftwood, the gospel Selah Jubilee, blues singers Muddy Waters and Memphis Slim, and the Bluegrass Stony Mountain boys. The Seegers performed and Lomax presented prison work songs. The patriotic pedigree of this music is encapsulated in Lomax's 1959 *Esquire* article where he celebrates the newly exposed Bluegrass music as "a sort of mountain Dixieland combo in which the five-string banjo, America's only indigenous folk instrument, carries the lead . . ." (Cohen 140). The folk revival in the US had become socially significant and represented something which was not constrained by the function of signifying authentic roots except in antithesis to popular culture; its multi-ethnicity allowed more scope for the oppositional than there was room for on the British scene.

Nevertheless, in the US folk revival the same tensions were evident, and they prompted similar debates as seen in the UK. Local performers presented authenticity in traditional song and style whilst commercially produced performers and bands developed 'revived' interpretations, often of material which had been collected by the Lomaxes. At the Newport Festival both elements were present, leading Robert Shelton in his *New York Times* review to question, "How do you transplant the 'root' singers and put them on side by side with the large-voiced, polished and earnest professionals?"<sup>14</sup> The revival was big business as folk recordings sales soared, including Alan Lomax's *Southern Folk Heritage Series* for Atlanta.

In the US, Pete Seeger echoed MacColl's proselytising on authenticity, constantly begging his audiences to listen to one or another traditional musician whose music he was playing in his concerts. Dick Weissman gives this account of how authenticity was demonstrated by the US revivalist performers:

a premium was placed on spontaneity and maintaining an 'honest' approach to the music. It was never clear exactly what this meant, but it included such things as always mentioning the original sources of the songs that you performed; not using 'modern' chords, but rather sticking to the sort of chord progressions that traditional blues or country musicians played; and a certain nondramatic dryness of performance styles. (Weissman 79)

Thus the revival climates in both the USA and in Britain focused on the authentic tradition and this was the context of Lomax and Collins' venture in 1959. The artificiality of notions of tradition is made trans-

parent by the following anecdote. Collins had been criticised in Britain by Ewan MacColl for painting her nails (according to him folk singers didn't) but she was to discover 86 year old banjo player Ada Cooms living in a cabin in Kentucky in Rattlesnake Creek with "brilliantly varnished finger and toe nails" (Collins 94). This did not alter the views of Lomax and Collins who were in many ways replicating Cecil Sharp in their protective and preservationist attitude towards what they considered to be authentic folk and they placed the emphasis on tradition rather than innovation. Sharp's collection was virtually identifiable with the British canon and rooted in the ballads of rural villages, whereas many of the American folk songs collected by Lomax and Collins were derived from late nineteenth century experiences of survival on cattle ranches, on railroads, in penitentiaries, as well as those of immigrant groups and religious traditions. Collins writes that she feels the music is "the voice of those who for generations have been despised, abused and neglected, and for their part in keeping the music alive, I feel they should be honoured and their music shouldn't be appropriated by people who don't understand this" (Collins 58). Alan Lomax gave the music an academic appeal and provided the recordings which would prove the pivotal influences on Pete Seeger and others, including Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan. Seeger described Lomax as "more responsible than any other single individual for the whole revival of interest in American folk music" (Cohen 187).

### Conclusion

Whilst Collins' discomfort about appropriating American folk music is important, her decision to build her folk singing career on the basis of her native songs is clearly explained by changing assumptions about what kinds of folksong were appropriate for the English revival at the time of her return, and the construction of 'authentic' to privilege English music at a time when the orchestrators of the English folk scene felt extremely threatened by American cultural imperialism. At the heart of the English revival was an association between the Workers' Music Association and the Topic record company who recorded Shirley and Dolly Collins. Their 'Blue Label' series had a specific policy to promote "folk music and music which owes its development to oral tradition" (Boyes 234-35). Further, the number of 'policy clubs' which insisted on 'traditional' singing of an 'authentic' repertoire created a specifically controlled stage for performers.

In the US, Lomax's work continued and had significance for both Civil Rights and Peace campaigning movements, particularly when folk music was able to fully emerge into the public sphere after McCarthy's death. There is not the space here to discuss the great importance of the folk revival to the mobilisation of these social movements, except perhaps to note one example, that of the modernised spiritual "We Shall Overcome" which first became a labour song and then a Civil Rights anthem. For both the folk revival and the Civil Rights Movement, 1959 was a significant year and the director of the Highlander Folk School describes the dawn of the interaction between the two which produced this anthem:

In 1959, when I came down here [to Tennessee], I knew about the old labor-movement tradition of changing an old song into something new, with words for the moment . . . but the songs that everyone in the South knew, the spirituals and the hymns, weren't really being used in that way . . . I suggested adapting some of the spirituals and hymns. (cited in Eyerman and Jamison 101)

Traditions are both real and imagined; they are serious business helping to create a collective sense of identity and without the preservationist collectors like Lomax there would not be the resources for the remaking of tradition.<sup>15</sup> But traditions are remade and are constantly evolving. The personal decisions of performers to reject the overwhelming first hand evidence of transatlantic exchanges of folk culture had to do with the contemporary political and social climate. In Britain the revival was developed within closely conservative and rather insular boundaries which did not so easily admit new political compositions; its primary identification with a singular national communal history rooted in nostalgia and its reactionary defence against US incursion prevented it from becoming a cultural force for change. As MacColl recalled, "a Revival that was based on . . . the indigenous culture" had become "necessary" (Boyes 230). Moreover, despite its left-wing leaders, its Puritanism prevented the forging of links with broader social movements. In contrast, the blossoming of the US revival into protest movements for Civil Rights and Peace is perhaps a consequence of the multifaceted/multiracial nature of the folk tradition there which had grown out of the varieties and hybridities of ethnicities embraced by Lomax. This is made richly apparent in the range of music recorded by Lomax and Collins during just two months in the southern States.

It is evident then that this examination of transatlantic exchanges of folk revival movements at a key moment reveals, on the one hand

the fluid processes by which folk culture travels across continents and across the colour lines but, on the other, it exposes the resistance to acknowledgement of these exchanges. There is a contradiction residing in the popular mythology that folk music is democratic and for and of the people who retain a deep seated and romanticised desire for their cultural roots, and the fact that the ideology of collectors and selectors of folk music has governed the very idea of what a national folk heritage is. It is ironic, but not surprising, that Cecil Sharp relegated the American roots and contexts for songs discovered on his Appalachian tour because he was there to 'prove' the persistence of an English tradition; to collect the "heritage . . . of the Aryan race" and to promote opposition to "our system of education [which] is, at present, too cosmopolitan" (Brocken 8). However, the 'pure' English tradition he believed to be evident in the 1600 Appalachian songs he collected would certainly have suffered erosion by his time. These very same songs would turn out to be claimed for the purposes of American folk authenticity in the US folk revival – a revival which, in great measure due to Lomax's influence, acknowledged the heritage of both black and white music and its interrelationships. It is clear then that transatlantic exchange does not necessarily resolve differences or allow them to co-exist but may exaggerate and entrench them.

### Coda

The activity of 'folk collecting,' as with ethnography generally, is now subject to censure because of the exploitation and commodification of people and their cultures which it involves. Early revival collectors would often reward the singer with the price of a pint of beer, whilst the collected song had the potential for earning the collector sizeable copyright royalties. The collectors, such as Sharp, expropriated folk materials and circulated them to promote a particular version of national identity. When survivalist singers were discovered and favoured for their authentic performance they were treated as commodities. But because the music was deemed to be part of an authentic collective tradition and not the preserve of the singer, it could be viewed as anonymous in terms of its authorship. It was also to be preserved from the taint of commerce – a justification for the withholding of royalties or payment to singers.

The practice of collecting in the US South by Alan Lomax (and his father John) and others who were able to produce numerous publica-

tions and recordings, has certainly elicited criticism.<sup>16</sup> The Lomax estate has recently been involved in attempts to trace and compensate surviving singers. Assembling music for their film *O Brother Where Art Thou*, the Coen Brothers used the 1959 Parchman Farm recording of Po Lazarus, on which one of the prisoners, James Carter, sang lead while the rest of the chain gang ensemble chanted as they hit the ground with their picks. A reward was forthcoming for James Carter; he was tracked down aged 76 and presented with substantial royalties. However, although Vera Hall's voice has echoed over the airwaves recently her name will not compete with that of American dance music producer Moby who made use of her voice recorded 40 years earlier on the Georgia Sea Islands, nor did she receive royalties. Thankfully we can still hear these original field recordings of these voices collected on the Lomax/Collins southern tour by listening to *Sounds of the South* which I recommend to you.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Shirley Collins learned the songs collected and published by Cecil Sharp as well as imbibing the musical heritage of her family.
- <sup>2</sup> Lomax Archives, the Lomax family collection in the Center for American History at the University of Texas, and the collections of the Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. See also Alan Lomax's recording logs of the 1959 field trip in Appendix to Collins, *America Over the Water*, SAF 2005.
- <sup>3</sup> Southern Folk Heritage, HS-1 and SCHS-1, 1960 was released as *Sounds of the South* 4 CD Box Set, 1993, Atlantic Records, #82496 and *Southern Journey – The Alan Lomax Collection* Rounder Records 1997.
- <sup>4</sup> Although not discussed here, A. L. Lloyd, and especially his book *The Singing Englishman* (London: Workers' Music Association, 1944), championed the democratising of 'folk' to include the industrial north.
- <sup>5</sup> Between 1882 and 1898, Harvard English Professor Francis J. Child published *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Five volumes of ballad lyrics which are believed to pre-date the printing press.
- <sup>6</sup> 2 vols; London: Novello & Co., 1921, 1923.
- <sup>7</sup> Raymond Williams famously exposed the fiction of the 'organic community' in *The Country and The City*, 1975.
- <sup>8</sup> Alan Lomax, "Saga of a Folksong Hunter – A Twenty-Year Odyssey with Cylinder, Disc and Tape," *HFI Stereo Review*, May 1960 available at <[www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/saga.html](http://www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/saga.html)>.
- <sup>9</sup> Robert Shelton, "Folk Joins Jazz at Newport," *New York Times* 19 July 1959.
- <sup>10</sup> This is Ewan MacColl's term for his own method of composition: "new songs must pay homage to the old ones by accepting some of the old disciplines." *Journeyman* 276.

- <sup>11</sup> For extended discussion see David Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong' 1700 to the Present Day*.
- <sup>12</sup> See Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival: 1944-2002*, 55-60 for a fuller account.
- <sup>13</sup> Sleeve notes by Alan Lomax, 1959, 'False True Lovers,' Folkways, 1960; Fledgling, 2001.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert Shelton, "Folk Joins Jazz at Newport."
- <sup>15</sup> In his introduction to the 'Southern Folk Heritage Series' (Atlantic Records) Alan Lomax notes "Some of the songs date back to European and African origins. Others were created in the pioneer period. Still others were born yesterday. The whole collection is a testament to the folk tradition of the Southern states where the country folk – Negro and white – continue to sing the deep songs of our country."
- <sup>16</sup> For example see Dave Marsh's critique "Mr. Bigg Stuff – Alan Lomax: Great White Hunter or Thief, Plagiarist and Bigot?" written in response to celebratory obituaries on Lomax' death in 2002. Available at *Counterpunch* 21 July 2002, 27 Sept. 2006 <<http://www.counterpunch.org/marsh0721.html>>.

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