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'MIMI NI MSANII, KIOO CHA JAMII'[1] URBAN YOUTH CULTURE IN TANZANIA AS SEEN THROUGH *BONGO FLEVA* AND HIP-HOP[2]

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1. Introduction

This article addresses the question how *Bongo Fleva* (or *Flava*, from the word 'flavour') - also defined as *muziki wa kizazi kipya* ('music of a new generation') - and Hip-Hop in Swahili, reflect Tanzanian urban youth culture, with its changing identities, life-styles, aspirations, constraints, and language. As far as young people residing in small centres and semi-rural areas are concerned, I had the impression that they have the same aspirations as their urban counterparts, especially those in Dar es Salaam.[3] They keep well up to date on urban practices through performances, radio and local tabloids, even if they lack the same job and leisure opportunities as their city brothers. Although I do not take 'youth' as a fixed and homogeneous category, the 'young generation' has been assuming a central, though frequently ambiguous, position in many places in Africa (for this issue, see Burgess 2005). Here, however, I have chosen to focus on two urban contexts, namely Dar es Salaam and Mwanza, the sites of my one-and-a-half-year fieldwork between 2004 and the end of 2005.

Bongo (the augmentative form of *ubongo*, brain) was used as the nickname of Dar es Salaam in the 1980s.[4] But at least since the mid 1990s it has come to refer to the whole of Tanzania, with the obvious allusion to the 'big brain' or cunningness necessary if you are to survive in the country.[5] Without dwelling on the origins of this music movement, I will merely say that it spread in the 1990s thanks to the free market and the privatisation of the media. This allowed Tanzanian youths all over the country to come into an ever closer contact with

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[1] "I am an artist, a mirror of society". From the chorus of *Darubini Kali* (potent binoculars/telescope), by Afande Sele.

[2] Paper presented at the 19th Swahili Kolloquium, Universität Bayreuth, Bayreuth, 26-27 May 2005.

[3] Besides performances and *mashindano* (competitions) in different areas of Dar es Salaam (from Chuo Kikuu to Mbagala), I watched Bongo Fleva concerts in Kampala (Uganda), Mwanza, Bagamoyo, Zanzibar, Tanga, Morogoro, Songea, and Mbinga. Since 2004, I have collated articles from Swahili tabloids and magazines, namely *Alasiri, Amani, Baab Kubwa, Bang, Dimba, Championi, Deiwaka, Femina, Ijumaa, Kasheshe, Kitangoma, Kiu, Komesha, Lete Raha, Maisha, Majira, Risasi, Sani, Tausi, Uwazi, Zeze* (issues May 2004-November 2005). During 2005, I conducted interviews and had informal conversations with a few artists, their fans, radio DJs, music journalists and producers. Although I had also discussions with girls form different backgrounds, the information presented in this article was gained mainly from young men.

[4] In the past, the very word *ubongo*, now accepted as a part of standard Swahili, was not considered as proper Swahili, as a reader of *Mambo Leo* (Current Affairs) - an educational monthly magazine that began in January 1923 - complained in 1940. See the poem by D.V. Perrot, *Kiswahili sahihi siku hizi?* (Is Swahili spoken correctly nowadays?), *Mambo Leo*, August 1940.

[5] Interview with Innocent Nganyagwa, 30 October 2005. Interview with Sugu, 22 March 2005. Sugu (Joseph Mbilinyi) is more popularly known as 'Mr II', his second nickname, after having dropped the first one, 'II Proud'.

different musical genres, especially those from the US.[6] Rather, in this paper I will concentrate on the ongoing discussion in Tanzania of whether or not young artists and their audiences are *wahuni* ('idlers' or 'hooligans'), as some consider them. I will also discuss the question of whether they are just imitating foreign cultures and music styles, or represent a part of contemporary Tanzanian society - especially urban and male - expressing its own ideas and ideals, together with its sometimes contradictory aspirations. I will argue that these artists do reflect society, as a *kioo cha jamii*. Although the audience is both male and female, we should not forget that most artists are men. Women *kwenye gemu* ('in the game'), especially rappers, are few, for reasons which I intend to explore in another project.

At the moment, across the whole African continent, Tanzanian Hip-Hop is second only to that of Senegal. According to one of the pioneers of the Hip-Hop movement in Tanzania, nicknamed 'Sugu' ('stubborn'), Tanzania is to Hip-Hop what the Vatican is to Rome (interview with Sugu, 22 March 2005). Sugu, together with the rapper Kalapina,[7] and Master Kif, who writes about Hip-Hop for the tabloid *Sani*, argue that Hip-Hop (as well as Reggae) should be deemed a separate genre because it is based on long traditions, while Bongo Fleva is in fact a 'new' genre, and a new music culture ('music of a new generation').[8] Lyrics are always in Swahili, and artists usually make use of backup tracks prepared by producers. There are many versions of how the creation of the term *Bongo Fleva* actually took place. According to the reggae singer and music journalist Innocent Nganyagwa, the term indicated Rap and Reggae between the late 1980s and the early 1990s (interview with Innocent Nganyagwa, 30 October 2005). At that time Reggae artists, being criticised for playing 'foreign' music, in order to defend themselves called their genre *fleva ya nyumbani* ('flavour of home, i.e. Tanzania'), or *ladha ya hapa* ('flavour from here'). Sharing with early rappers the common discrimination suffered, and the lack of approval of their music by a wide audience, Reggae singers used to invite rappers to their shows (interview with Innocent Nganyagwa, 30 October 2005).

However, Nganyagwa argues that the term *Bongo Fleva* has taken on three different meanings over the years. In the early phase, this genre was deemed

> "*mkusanyiko wa mitindo ya muziki ya kimataifa inayopigwa nyumbani (Bongo) kwa ladha (Fleva) za kitanzania.*"
>
> "a combination of different musical styles from abroad that are played in the

[6] However, foreign styles were already listened to, not on radio, which usually did not broadcast them, but through smuggled cassettes.

[7] Kalapina (or Kalla Pina) belongs to the crew *Kikosi cha Mizinga* (slang for 'money squad'), based in Kinondoni block 41, Dar es Salaam.

[8] Kalapina and Master Kif, informal conversation, 5 August 2005. See also anonymous author, "Kalapina: Bongo Fleva siyo hip-hop" (Kalapina: Bongo Fleva is not Hip-Hop), *Baab Kubwa*, 8-21 September 2005, p. 5. By affirming that Hip-Hop is not part of the 'music of the new generation', these people aren't referring to Hip-Hop artists or their audiences (who usually belong to the 'new generation'), but to the time in which these genres were created. That is to say, Bongo Fleva was born recently, in contrast to Hip-Hop, which is considered an older and well established style, also based on local traditions. Ratch (from the crew *Kikosi cha Mizinga*), informal conversation, 8 July 2005.

country (Bongo) with a taste (flavour) of Tanzania." (Nganyagwa 2005b: 10)

This notion is still utilised by part of the audience to describe this genre: "*Bongo Fleva* encompasses many other styles, such as Zouk, Hip-Hop, R&B, Reggae, Ragga, Takeu, Bongo Bhangra."[9] But this definition would appear to have become outdated, since Hip-Hop and Reggae no longer seem to be a part of *Bongo Fleva*. It is true that in the early days, the word *Bongo Fleva* was utilised as 'Tanzanian Hip-Hop', but that has not been the case for a long time. Not only has it lost this meaning, but moreover, those scholars who use the term *Bongo Fleva* as Tanzanian Rap in Swahili, "have missed the point".[10] In the second phase, Nganyagwa continues, *Bongo Fleva* came to be seen as

> "*muziki wa kizazi kipya (hasa baada ya Reggae na Hip Hop kuwa zimeshajitoa katika mkusanyiko huo), unaowahusu zaidi vijana kuanzia wapigaji na wapenzi wenyewe wa mtindo huo.*"
>
> "the music of a new generation (especially after Reggae and Hip-Hop were no longer considered part of this 'combination'), which is more related to young people, from the musicians to the very fans of this genre."(Nganyagwa 2005b: 10).

Nowadays (phase three), Hip-Hop and *Bongo Fleva* "*ni mitindo miwili tofauti yenye kujitegemea*" ('are two different styles independent from each other'), and *Bongo Fleva* can be defined as "*muziki unaojitegemea kimirindimo kama mtindo kamili wenye kujitofautisha na midundo mingine*" ('a music whose rhythm is completely different from other styles') (Nganyagwa 2005b: 10). In fact there are "*nyimbo za Hip Hop zenye vipande vya Bongo Fleva na nyimbo za Bongo Fleva zenye vipande vya Hip Hop*" ('Hip-Hop songs with parts in a *Bongo Fleva* style, and *Bongo Fleva* songs with parts in a Hip-Hop style') (Nganyagwa 2005b: 10).

Thus, although I should say that the borders between the two genres are 'fluid', due to these ongoing changes, here I have chosen to treat the two styles as separate.[11] However, the issue of which styles *Bongo Fleva* exactly encompasses at the moment, is still an unresolved debate in Tanzania.[12]

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9 Simon Clement, informal conversation, 2 February 2005. Takeu, which means "Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda", is a sort of dancehall ('danso', according to the Swahili spelling) which was initiated by Mr. Nice. Bongo Bhangra is based on an Indian melody (Bhangra, a genre popularised by 'Bollywood' movies) mixed with Bongo Fleva rhythms.

10 Interview with Sugu, 22 March 2005; interview with Inspekta (or Inspector) Haroun, a former member of Gangwe Mobb who now works as a solo artist, 10 April 2005. When I showed Inspekta a compact disc released in Germany in 2004, entitled Bongo Flava. Swahili Rap from Tanzania, he said quite decidedly that it is a "wrong interpretation" of the term (*walitafsiri vibaya*).

11 See Suriano 2006. In this article, I used the term Bongo Flavour to include Hip-Hop too.

12 For example, according to Mr. Nice, Takeu is an independent genre and is not part of Bongo Fleva (Mr. Nice, informal conversation, 13 February 2005). In July 2005, in Dar es Salaam, I saw a boy wearing a t-shirt with "Zote Kali ('all cool'). Bongo Flava & R&B" written on it. According to this interpretation, even R&B is a separate genre. The risk is that in separating each style, eventually Bongo Fleva – which is a rapidly changing phenomenon - will end up simply as a 'container' without 'contents'. For this reason, the music journalist Aggrey Manzi still argues that Hip-Hop, Takeu, Zouk and R&B are part of Bongo Fleva. For example, Mr. Paul, who "sings in a Zouk-Hip-Hop style", is a Bongo Fleva artist.(Aggrey Manzi, informal conversation, 17 August 2005). Other scholars, such as Perullo (2005) treat Hip-Hop as part of Bongo Fleva.

2. The impact of this music and urban slang on media and politics

During my fieldwork, I collected about three hundred terms which belong to the *lugha ya vijana* ('youth language') or *kiswahili cha mitaani* ('street Swahili') or - according to some, to the *kiswahili cha kihuni* ('hooligan Swahili').[13] The purpose was to understand which influenced which: are the songs street language or vice versa?[14] We might say that young artists often contribute to the spread of new slang terms, and 'Swanglish' words (a mix of Swahili and English), while on the other hand they adopt street language in their hits (especially the variety of Dar es Salaam), and in this way contribute to its 'institutionalisation' and its spreading upcountry.[15] Popular tracks contribute to change even the language of street magazines and tabloids (*magazeti ya mitaani*, also called *magazeti ya udaku*), as demonstrated by columns such as *Darubini Kali*, inspired by Afande Sele's rap with the same title. The language of street tabloids and magazines is affected by titles of popular hits, and every week these newspapers carry letters and comments from fans (most of the time in slang), such as '*siliba na fagilia*' ('criticise and support'), or '*osha, pakaza*' ('support, criticise'), in *Ijumaa* and *Maisha*, respectively. Just an example: "*Nakuoshea sana Profesa Jay kwa kibao chako Nitakusaidiaje, endelea kukamua*" ('I really support you, Professor Jay, for your piece *Nitakusaidiaje*, keep it up').[16]

More generally, in the Swahili press, young artists and their fans occupy a central place, whereas, particularly in western media, and even in the local press in English, African youths are often seen just as victims, child-soldiers, or petty thieves. In *magazeti ya mitaani* there is also a lot of gossip about artists' romances, clothes, expensive new cars (as well as, unfortunately, their frequent car accidents). Young people have been expressing themselves in slang for a long time. There are sources which document the presence of slang in Tanganyika as early as the 1940s, with words such as *chapaa* ('one shilling'), or *-vaa shoo* ('to dress well').[17]

If the boom of this popular 'youth music' came about thanks to mass media, performances and festivals (some of them international, such as the *Sauti za Busara* and the ZIFF in Zanzibar), it also grows day by day through group name t-shirts and gadgets - a fashion launched by crews such as *Wanaume* from TMK (Temeke) - popular paintings (most of the time on the

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[13] Although there seems to be a difference between *kiswahili* '*cha kihuni*' and '*cha mitaani*', when common people (even youths) talk about street language, they tend to use both terms interchangeably.

[14] Some friends of the same age group but from various social and religious backgrounds helped me to compile lists of slang terms. I wish to thank Aisha, Simon, Ras Inno, No P and Daz, Mbaraka and his two friends.

[15] Also the *makonda* - in Sheng people who "receive fare in passenger vehicles", derived from the English "conductor" (Mbaabu & Nzuga, 2003: 15) - and *madereva* (drivers) of *dala dala* (minibuses) are very creative. They can be considered as a kind of 'Bongo Fleva culture brokers', and contribute both to the spread of new slang words and to the diffusion of this music, thanks to radios which are always being played on buses.

[16] *Maisha*, 14-20 September 2005.

[17] Interview with *mzee* Mustafa Ally, 7 September 2005. See also R. H. Gower. 1958. Swahili slang. *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 51, 250-254; R. H. Gower. 1958. Swahili Borrowings from English, *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 50, 118-120; and P. H. C. Clarke. 1962. A Note on School Slang. *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 59, 205-206.

wall of hair salons, in order to attract young clients, photo 1) and even taxi-bike saddle covers and attachments for bicycle mudguards with the title of popular hits written on them (photo 2).



Photo 1

(All photos by the author.)



Photo 2

Given the amazing success of this music, in the pre-electoral period local politicians and even international agencies tried to 'engage' artists to further their political interests, and spread their messages. During the last *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) general electoral campaign,

Jakaya Kikwete - the current President - was accompanied by some of these artists in order to entertain, attract, and deliver the new party slogan to the crowd more effectively (*Ari Mpya, Nguvu Mpya, Kasi Mpya*: 'New Spirit, New Strength, New Force'). At the beginning of August 2005, I saw the singer Bushoke wearing a baseball cap with the symbol of the CCM. And he did so shortly after releasing the reggae-like song entitled *Msela Jela* ('Friend in prison'), in favour of the release of his friend, the musician Papii Kocha, son of Nguza M. Viking.[18] In this song, Bushoke asks: "*Rais mtoe P., watu wanampenda mno*" ('President, let 'P.' out of prison, people love him very much'). It seems as if he wanted to ensure that despite his 'bold' request, he guaranteed his support to the ruling party and to the predicted 'next President', thus increasing his chances of having a respected voice to be heard in his appeal for the release of his friend.[19] For the occasion of the campaign, he remade his famous song *Mume Bwege* ('The good-for-nothing husband'), changing the words of the chorus in "CCM *namba* 1", while in Mwanza the rapper Juma Nature was displaying CCM colours and symbols in everything he wore (photo 3). [20]



Photo 3

[18] The legendary solo guitarist Nguza M. Viking was the leader of the Maquis orchestra in the 1970s. Subsequently he was part of the International Orchestra Safari Sound (IOSS) and later of the Achigo Stars.

[19] Lack of space prevents me from recounting the rumours about the alleged 'true' reasons for the arrest and life imprisonment of Papii Kocha, together with his father Nguza Viking, and his two brothers. However, in Dar es Salaam it is said that they are innocent. At the time of writing (after the general elections) they were already out of prison.

[20] Other Bongo Fleva artists who supported the campaign were Mangwea (or Ngwea), with *Mtoto wa Jakaya* ('Son of Jakaya [Kikwete]'), and MwanaFa (Mwana Falsafa), with *Kijani na Njano* ('Green and Yellow'). In Mwanza Vicky Kamata also performed, with her song *Ari Mpya, Nguvu Mpya*, as well as the *taarab* star Hadija Kopa. On the other hand, Inspekta Haroun, whose song *Pongezi* ('Congratulations') had been broadcasted particularly in the month of April 2005, did not follow Kikwete in his tour throughout the country. For *Pongezi*, see Suriano 2006).

In Tanzania, and perhaps in the whole of East Africa, a song can play a more important role than a politician's speech in promoting or confirming social and political change, or in encouraging the maintainance of the status quo. The role played by the song *Unbwogable* by Gidi Gidi Maji Maji during Kenya's December 2002 electoral campaign neatly exemplifies the importance (see Nyairo & Ogude 2005). This happens either because musicians are somehow 'forced' to respect the will of the party in power, or because they are of their own will, 'embedded' in the party ideology. During electoral campaigns, rappers and singers can be more influential than politicians, who are aware of this. More generally speaking, perhaps this popular music - as well as *taarab* and *dansi* for other generations of Tanzanians - constitutes the most influential 'oral literature', especially in urban contexts.

3. Accommodation of the foreign aesthetic principles

With their mannerisms, their extra large sport shirts and trousers, necklaces (fake gold 'Hip-Hop style'), shades, etc., young artists seem to uncritically appropriate a mixture of Hip-Hop and R&B influences, together with other genres from the US. At the same time there is a strong blend of Rastafarian clothes, accessories, and dreadlock hair styles, at least as a kind of reinterpretation of this Jamaican culture.[21] It shouldn't be forgotten that as the history of *dansi* and *taarab* demonstrates, foreign styles "are ultimately subject to local aesthetic principles" (Askew 2002: 287), and that the continual accommodation of foreign elements is a key characteristic of Swahili culture (*Ibid*. 66). *Bongo Fleva* and Hip-Hop music can be seen as an example of how foreign aesthetics are "Swahilised" and "Africanised". With their *mavazi* ('clothes') and *mapozi* ('poses'), these artists give us clues as to how Tanzanian youth conceptualises modernity and globalisation. Meanwhile, their audience is keeping a critical eye on those who try to imitate, instead of somewhat creatively adapting foreign styles to the local situation. For instance, in some videos, there are cars inserted by montage, but they are generally disapproved of. In *Deiwaka*,[22] a magazine no longer printed which was produced by Sugu, there was a polemic about precisely this subject:

> "*Yametokea wapi tena mambo ya kuweka back ground za picha za magari ya kifahari kwenye video zetu? Inatia kichefuchefu, ingekuwa poa kama magari hayo yangekuwa halisi. Kwani hata ikitokea video hizo zionekane kwa wageni nchi za watu, ujumbe ingekuwa ni kuwa wasanii wa Bongo nasi mambo yametulia. Lakini kwa staili ya kuweka picha, huku tukilazimisha ionekane kama ni magari halisi ni ujinga. Hata wenzetu wa Congo (Wazaire) hawakuwa hivyo walipoanza, hatukuona ndoto za kijinga kwenye video zao mpaka sasa wamefanikiwa.*"
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> "Where on earth did we get these things from like images of big cars mounted onto our videos? It's sick. It would be cool if the cars were real. Because if these videos are seen in other countries, the message would be that we too, Tanzanian artists have loads of cash. But [if we carry on] this style of putting images [of false cars], even if we make them look like real cars, it's really stupid. Not even

[21] For the reasons - "intensely local" - which make (especially poor and disenfranchised) youths fascinated with Bob Marley and Rastafarian culture, see Moyer (2005).

[22] Deiwaka had the sub-heading "We are the streetz".

> our Congolese [artist] friends did anything like that when they started, we didn't see stupid dreams in their videos, and yet they are still very successful."[23]

Often there are arguments, in slang *mabifu* (from the American slang word 'beef' for 'fight'), between artists, even those having very different styles. Rivalries are not 'imported' from those between East Coast and West Coast rappers in the US, but they are deeply-rooted in Swahili culture, songs and performances. More generally, 'ordinary' urban youth, not only artists, both in Dar es Salaam and in Mwanza, are divided in *majita*, or *machizi*, or *masela* on one side, and *mabrazameni*, *mabitozi*, *maboblish* or *machekbob* on the other.[24] *Maboblish* and *machekbob* are people who are 'full of arrogance/pride (*watu wenye maringo*). The terms refer to *watanashati* ('elegant people'), who live or aspire to live in a posh area ('*ushuani*', or '*uzunguni*').[25] On the contrary, *mjita* and *mchizi* can be used both for a man and a woman, and could be translated as 'friend' (closer than *mshkaji*, which is an acquaintance), 'a person who is within everybody's reach', especially from *uswahilini*, a poor area. One of the meanings of *msela* (from 'sailor') is 'young boy', '*mtu wa kila mtu*' (Daz Baba, personal communication). For instance, the artists O Ten and TID ('Top in Dar'), are seen and made fun of by *majita* as "*watoto wa mama*" or "*wa kishua*" ('mummy's boys' or 'posh boys'), while Daz Baba became both a model and a mouthpiece for every *mjita* who lives in the *geto*. This slang word does not mean a poor area, but *chumba cha masela*, a rented room - often in a Swahili house - used by single youths. Lyrics must also express something about the living conditions of young urban youths, following the popular motto: "*huwezi kusema mimi nina benzi wakati hata baiskeli huna!*" ('you cannot say: 'I have a big car' while you do not even have a bicycle!'). In *Darubini Kali*, Afande Sele raps:

> "*Nasema rap ni ukweli mtupu, rap kiasili, rap si kwimba uongo, kama siasa za Bongo, useme kwenu una benz, wakati jumba la udongo … Lugha ngeni za nini kwenye muziki wa nyumbani, wakati Bongo Fleva inapendwa zaidi uswahilini?*"
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> "I say: rap is truth, rap is tradition, rap isn't telling lies unlike Tanzanian politics, where you say you have a big car, when you live in a house of clay … What's the point of foreign languages in local music when *Bongo Fleva* is best liked in poor areas?"[26]

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[23] Anonymous author, *Video zetu na ujio wa MTV* ('Our videos and the coming of MTV'), p. 2, 24-30 March 2005. In *Maoni ya Deiwaka*'s column (Deiwaka's point of view).

[24] The female version is *masista du*, which can no longer be applied to a girl as soon as she has a child (Daz Baba, personal communication).

[25] According to Remes (1998: 158-162), who reports information provided by his friends in the second half of the 1990s in Mwanza, there is a difference between a *brazameni*, who is elegant thanks to his social position ("*mtanashati kwa shughuli zake*"), who not only dresses well, but behaves well ("*mstaarabu*"), and a *chekbob*, who is *msafi*, but maybe lives at home with his parents and doesn't work. However, both of them wear good and trendy clothes. According to the singer Daz Baba, there is no difference between the two terms (Informal conversation with Daz Baba, 20 November 2005).

[26] It is worth noting that here the term Bongo Fleva is used in a way which includes rap, the music Afande Sele does.

In other words, songs are a means of expressing social, economic, and political issues, felt at a local level, such as unemployment, poverty, life in the *geto*, HIV/Aids,[27] corruption (in slang *chai*, literally 'tea'), as well as love interests, such as infidelity, arguments between married couples, and youth expectations about marriage and family life - most of the time depicted from a male point of view.

Bongo Flavour and Hip-Hop are criticised by *dansi* musicians and older audiences as *muziki wa fujo* ('the music of chaos'). However, in Mwanza and Dar es Salaam I was told by elders who were in their twenties and thirties during the 1950s, that back then even *dansi* music ('urban jazz'), which is now widely accepted as part of *Utamaduni* ('Tanzanian culture'), was considered by elders as the '*muziki wa kizazi kipya*', a music which *unaharibu vijana* ('ruins youths').[28]

4. Values expressed

Saleh Jaber, who became popular in 1991 with the album 'King of Swahili rap' – the first rap album in Swahili - has declared that in the early 1990s "Hip-Hop in Tanzania was seen as '*uhuni*', associated with crime and drugs" (Gesthuizen 2001). For the same issue in Ghana, see Collins 2002: 64). More than ten years later, artists still have to justify themselves: in 2003 in his rap *Naamini nitashinda* ('I believe I will do it'), Professor Jay declared: "*Rap sio uhuni, kuna wahuni wanaorap*" ('Rap is not 'layabout culture'/hooliganism, but rather there are layabouts/hooligans who rap'). Other scholars have suggested that in Tanzania young rappers imitate gangster culture, building an identity which is breaking with the past, as they oppose the parental generation, and are linked to a world community more than to the local society.[29] I disagree with these opinions. First, the lyrics are clearly addressed to a local audience, and not just because they are in Swahili. Secondly, if we listen both to the songs and raps carefully, most of the time we find that conventionally accepted values in society are neither denied nor challenged, but reaffirmed, even if alternated with new aspects which belong to a certain kind of youth culture. For instance, in the song *Wife*, Daz Baba sings:

> "*…sasa nahitaji mrembo wa kuishi nami, kuzaa na kulea watoto nami, kwenye shida na raha avumilie nami.*"
>
> "…now I need a beautiful woman to live with me, to have children with and to bring them up with, to cope with bad and good times with me."

In the same song, the part performed by Albert Mangwair (Mangwea or Ngwea) says:

> "*ikiwezekana apandishe hata majani isiwe anaboreka anapokuwa nami … Anakata viuno aliyefunzwa unyagoni, ili tunapokuwa ndani anipe burudani.*"

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[27] HIV/AIDS in slang is *ngoma* ('drum'), or *mgeni* ('guest/stranger'), while -*kanyaga miwaya* ('crushing the electricity wires') means 'to get AIDS'.

[28] Interview with *mzee* Mustafa Ally, 7 September 2005. That is why Innocent Nganyagwa is against using the term *muziki wa kizazi kipya* to refer to Bongo Fleva (Interview with Nganyagwa 2005).

[29] In June 2005 I heard the opinion set out above while attending a panel on "Generations: Connections and Contrasts", at the first AEGIS (Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies) Conference on African Studies (SOAS, London, 28 June-3 July 2005). However, it was not the first time I heard such a comment.

> "If possible she will grow marijuana so that she won't be bored with me … She moves her hips as she was taught during *unyago* [a puberty rite], so that when we're 'at home' she will give me a good time."

In spite of this paradox, there are continuous references in songs and raps to marriage, or God. In *Cheka Kidogo* ('Laugh a little'), the rapper Dudu Baya says: "*Mwenye funguo pekee ni Mola*" ('the Almighty is the only one with the key'), and "*namshukuru muumba Mungu Baba*" ('I thank the creator), God the Father'), while the chorus of *Sheria* ('Laws') by Wagosi wa Kaya reminds us: *Sheria zimewekwa zivunjwe? Nooo!* ('Are laws made to be broken? No!'). I could quote many similar lyrics. Artists, even the toughest, still revere the figure of *Baba wa Taifa*, Nyerere, and consider him a role-model (photo 4). Daz Baba himself was formerly called Daz Mwalim.

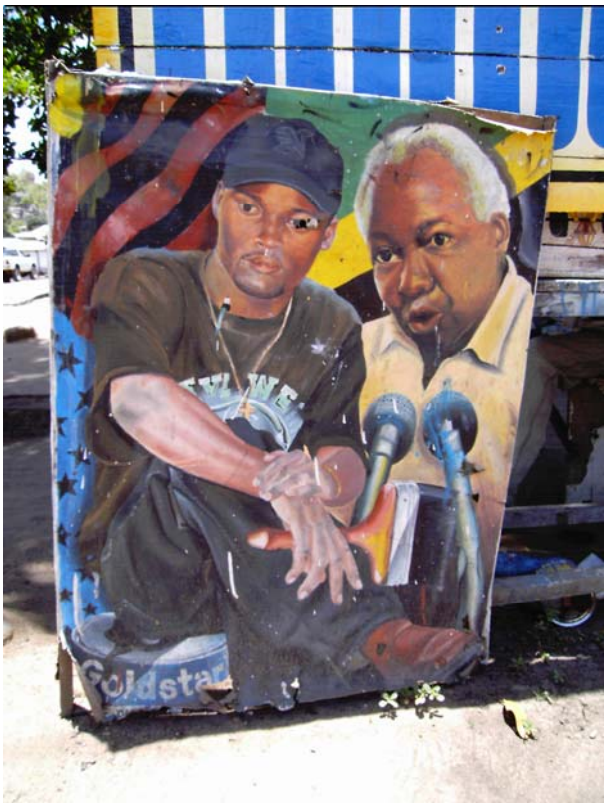


Photo 4

Most artists' explicit aim is to deliver a message. Their fans and journalists too, see music as educational. For instance, in the tabloid *Maisha*, in a weekly column in which songs are criticised and explained to the audiences, we read that K. Saul, in *Mwana Mkiwa* ('orphaned child'), "seems to sing about the issue of patience ... he believes that one day the patience [of all orphans] will allow them to eat well done food", that is to say patience will bear fruit (Abbas 2005).[30] In other words, popularly accepted values are reiterated, such as *uvumilivu*

[30] "*Anaonekana akiimba kuhusu suala la uvumilivu ... anaamini siku moja uvumilivu wao [wa wale wote walioko katika hali ya ukiwa] utawalisha mbivu.*"

('patience') and *utulivu* (calm), opposed to *mapepe* ('continuous agitation'), *hasira* ('anger'), or *ujeuri* ('arrogance'), vices repeatedly condemned in written literature too. In my opinion, this emphasis on learning is partly related to the function of songs as a socio-political commentary in many East African communities in pre-colonial and colonial eras, but is more particularly a legacy of post-colonial state policies. The Ministry of Culture and Youth, established by Nyerere in 1962, "conceived literature and art ... as means of educating the masses" (Songoyi 1988: 10). Recently *Bongo Fleva* and Hip-Hop, once considered as *muziki wa kihuni*, "*umeteka hisia wa watu wazima kwa kiasi fulani*" ('has to some extent captured the feelings of people of a certain age') (Nganyagwa 2005a: 10).[31] The current change in attitude of the *watu wazima* is not only due to the sing-along songs, but more precisely to their social message.[32]

5. Non militant hits and audience's reactions

By just quoting lyrics with a social slant, however, I would not give a complete picture of the present situation: songs without educational aims, but with a good tune can have great success. At the moment, the vast majority of *Bongo Fleva* songs are about 'love', the rest, often 'Hip-Hop style', are about social issues (interview with Saleh Ally, 8 April 2005). It is possible that intransigent rappers have self-excluded themselves from the category '*Bongo Fleva*', not so much because Hip-Hop is an 'old style', as previously mentioned, but essentially because it is supposedly still committed to telling the truth (*ukweli*), respecting the original function of this style, while too many *Bongo Fleva* songs simply say "I love you, I love you", to the point that "there is no challenge in the music", as Sugu says (Interview with Sugu, 22 March 2005). Moreover, it is important to underline that some of those same so-called love songs are in praise of female physical beauty, how women dress, or how women dance. The rapper Kalapina complained that

> "*wasanii wengi nchini wanaimba nyimbo za ngono na siyo mapenzi kama wanavyodai, hivyo wanachefua [sic] jamii na kuharibu kizazi kipya … Nyimbo za mapenzi waliimba kina Marijani Rajabu miaka hiyo.*"
>
> "Many artists in the country sing sex songs, not love songs as they claim, and in that way they spoil the society and ruin the new generation … Love songs were sung by people like Marijani Rajab at that time."[33]

The former East Africa TV-Channel Five presenter 'Seki' pointed out that "*watu wa Bongo wanapenda starehe [tu]*" ('Tanzanians [just] like to have fun') (informal conversation with 'Seki', 3 March 2005). The politically engaged *Kura yangu* ('My vote'), by Dokta Levi featuring Sugu, released before the October 2005 general elections is a rap complaining that politicians have been the same for the last forty years and that nothing is really going to change.

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31 *Watu wazima* means both 'adults' and 'people of a certain age'.

32 This is the conclusion at which Peter Mangesho (2003) also reaches.

33 Anonymous author, "*Kalapina alaani nyimbo za ngono Bongo Fleva*" ('Kalapina complains about *Bongo Fleva* sex songs'), Dimba, 25 September-1 October 2005, p. 7. The late Marijani Rajabu was a popular jazz musician, famous for songs such as '*Georgina'* and '*Mwanameka'* (cf. Beck 1992).

Although the video of this song was shown on TV in East Africa, *Kura yangu* never got into the hit-parade. On the other hand, we have very successful songs such as *Twenzetu* ('Let's go') by Chege, based on "*Twenzetu tukapige ulabu*" ('Let's get going, let's go drinking'), or *Mikasi* by Mangwair, released in 2004, the chorus of which says: "*Mitungi, blanti, mikasi, kama ukitaka kuvinjari nasi, basi mfukoni mwako nawe uwe safi*" ('Alcohol, marijuana, sex, if you want to have fun with us, you too must have the readies'). In slang, *mitungi* ('clay pots') means 'alcohol', *mikasi* (literally 'scissors') means 'sex', while *blanti* is 'marijuana' (from 'blunt'). In other words, in order 'to have fun' (*kuvinjari*, or *kujivinjari*), you must have some money in your pocket. Hits such as those, depict a way of enjoyment for one part of Tanzanian youths. Unfortunately so, as one might say, since the focus is on going to clubs in order to get drinks (*kupiga ulabu*) and to 'check-out' *mademu bomba* (slang for *wasichana warembo*, 'beautiful girls'). This is clearly a male (and male chauvinist) point of view, but girls don't seem to object. However, one has to come to terms with this Tanzanian urban reality, which celebrates 'disco-life'. More generally, without expanding on this subject, and perhaps with a somewhat provoking tone, it might be said that the tradition of 'revelry' is part of the Swahili culture. The audience expectations, on the other hand, are still message 'oriented'. For instance, in an interview, a young underground artist, Mbaraka from Sinza, criticised Bwana Misosi for his meaningless and frivolous songs:

> "*Nyimbo zake hazina ujumbe, hazielimishi jamii. Nitamgusa nani? Nimewasaidia watu gani?*"
>
> "His songs do not carry any message, do not give any lesson to society. Who will I touch? What kind of people have I helped?" (Interview with Mbaraka-Singer One, Dar es Salaam, 4 April 2005).

In *Darubini Kali*, Afande Sele voices this kind of popular feeling, blaming songs which focus on entertainment: "*watu wanataka ujumbe sio majigambo tu/na sifu ngono na pombe*" ('people do want the message, not only to boast about themselves and honour sex and alcohol'). In an article on the website www.darhotwire.com on Daz Baba's album *Elimu Dunia* it is said that:

> "*Tofauti na wasanii wengine wengii [sic] tuliozoea kusikia wakiimba nyimbo za mapenzi na burudani mara kwa mara, albam hii iko tofauti kabisaa [sic] kwani ina nyimbo ambazo zinalenga kufundisha, kushauri, kukanya kuhusu maovu pamoja na kuburudisha jamii.*"
>
> "Unlike many other artists whom we are used to hear singing love songs and songs about entertainment, this album is totally different because it aims to teach, advise, warn against negative things together with entertaining people."[34]

Between October and November 2005 in the magazine *Lete Raha* there was a debate lasting for weeks about the bad influence of the song *Itikadi* ('ideology', 'creed'). In this hit, released by East Coast Team, the crew declares amongst other things: "*Itikadi zetu ni kusaka mshiko*" ('our ideology is making money'). In the video clip, they act like gangsters. The girl raps:

[34] Anonymous Author. "Daz Baba", www.darhotwire.com (accessed 10 May 2006).

"*niko klabu, napata ulabu*" ('I am in the club, getting drinks'), and tells us that she eyes up a well dressed client, "*wanaelewana kiasi gani*" ('they agree on a price'), she gets him drunk, takes him to a room, and "*kukomba everything*" ('she takes everything from him'). In *Lete Raha*, Ibra Poza deplored the song because "*unafagilia vitu kama kumlewesha mtu … na mabalaa mengine kama hayo*" ('it encourages such things as getting someone drunk … and other similar disasters').[35] The same article reports that, interviewed by the presenter Salama Jabir for the programme *Planet Bongo*,[36] a member of the crew said:

> "*Hatuwezi kuimba 'meseji' [ujumbe] kila siku. Hata wewe utaboreka. Lazima tuangalie mambo mengine pia.*"
>
> "We can't always sing [songs with a] message. Even you will get bored. We have also to look at other things."[37]

However, as Idrissa Eid, a reader of *Lete Raha* rightly wrote, these artists

> "*wanajaribu kufikisha ujumbe kwa jamii jinsi vijana wa nchi hii wanavyokuwa, inapotokea wakakosa ajira au kutowekwa 'bize' katika masuala ya michezo, na mambo mengine ya kijamii.*"
>
> "Try to get a message across to society on the lifestyle of young people in this country, when there is no employment or when they are not given the conditions to be kept 'busy' in issues such as sports, and other social activities."[38]

If a song is about a certain reality, such as delinquency, it doesn't mean that its author is agreeing with this, or that listeners will be 'badly influenced', and will imitate that anti-social behaviour just because they admire the artists who performed that hit. On the other hand, people continuously hear from the newspapers and from rumours that in Dar es Salaam in particular, it is a common practice amongst delinquents to get someone drunk or drug them, and steal everything from them.

6. Concluding remarks

I consider this popular music not only as an artistic movement, but also as a vehicle for ideas, and as a cultural expression necessary to understanding a substantial part of Tanzanian urban youth. I think that young (especially male) artists from different backgrounds - but frequently from *uswahilini* – rather than affecting Tanzanian youths, are unavoidably representing them, with their generational, class and gender grievances and contradictions.

Mixing local and foreign 'flavours', and following unprecedented paths, *Bongo Fleva* and Hip-Hop became entrenched in East Africa, and through them, both artists and their audiences 'have more of a voice' and therefore more autonomy from their parents and from authority in general.

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[35] Ibra Poza, "*Madhara ya Itikadi: Wasemavyo wana barizi…*" ('Damages of *Itikadi*: what our forum participants say'), *Lete Raha*, 30 October-5 November 2005, p. 8.

[36] An EATV programme, giving information on music and gossip on artists.

[37] *-boreka*: slang for 'to get bored'.

[38] Idrissa Eid to *Lete Raha* (e-mail), 30 October-5 November 2005.

Despite the fact that their audiences are generally 'youths', the popularity of these genres does not allow to consider this music a passing 'teenage' fad. Reaffirming values from the past, as well as - sometimes in the same album - expressing their crazy desire to have fun and forget their daily problems, these artists show themselves to be complex figures in Tanzanian society, and embody many contradictions. These elements, as well as the so-called *lugha ya vijana*, are parts of the contemporary Tanzanian youth culture, whether one likes it or not.

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