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Imitation and Innovation in the Music, Dress, and Camps of Tanzanian Youth

ALEX PERULLO

The imitation of foreign music has been central to the formation of several Tanzanian popular music genres. In the late 1800s, taarab, a genre that imitated Egyptian song, appeared as royal court music in Zanzibar. In the 1920s, *dansi*, a form of upbeat dance music that remains popular in Tanzania, originated as a form of ballroom dance music for expatriate Europeans living in Tanganyika. And kwaya, a mixture of European Christian choral music with local rhythms and melodies, started as a form of hymn singing at missionary facilities throughout the country. A general pattern for these genres was to imitate foreign styles, localize the sounds, words, and meanings into Tanzanian culture, and then innovate on the newly formed genres in distinctive ways. Over time, composers and performers of these genres purged some of the Western sounds and incorporated more local, national, and pan-African aesthetics into their music, a process which helped move these genres toward being regarded as distinctly Tanzanian or East African musical forms.

Bongo flava, a category of music that encompasses several genres, including rap, R&B, zouk, and ragga, is the most recent form to move from imitation to localization. Currently, bongo flava, a name that connotes the "wisdom" (*bongo*) that one needs to survive in Tanzania, is the most popular and financially lucrative musical form in the country. The genre emerged during the country's liberalization in the mid-1980s among middle- and upper-class youth who had access to foreign records, cassette tapes, and videotapes (Perullo 2007). Through imitating the music they heard on these albums, these artists learned the basic forms and structures of hip hop, but eventually began altering their use of language (from English to Swahili), rapping style, message, and many other elements to make the music more meaningful to other Tanzanian youth. Due to these musical and cultural shifts, bongo flava moved beyond the small circle of hip hop aficionados who initially

supported the genre into a popular musical form that appealed to a broad array of Tanzanians.¹

In this chapter, I examine three areas of bongo flava—music, dress, and camps—to comprehend the ways youth innovate on physical, aural, and ideological elements associated with rap music. In particular, I suggest that innovation occurs in the ways that youth modify their music, appearance, and lifestyle to connect with the many communities with which they want to be a part. Whether an artist composes a song meant for an international audience or for peers in Dar es Salaam, s/he shifts various elements to reach his or her audience. Albums frequently feature a broad array of songs aimed at different listening communities. A composition for an international audience may contain references (musically and lyrically) to American or European songs, and the meaning of the song may deal with general topics about youth rather than specific Tanzanian issues. Alternatively, songs composed for a local audience of peers may have slang terms and local ideas that only make sense to them. Vocal style may remain steady throughout an artist's compositions, yet an album can show the ways that artists understand and relate to many communities. It is in an artist's understanding of each of these communities that innovations are made.

Each of the areas of this chapter is critical to the identity of bongo flava as well as to the identities of the people involved with the genre. The first area, music, refers solely to the "beats" that support the lyrics. Elsewhere I discuss language use and meaning in bongo flava lyrics (Perullo and Fenn 2003; Perullo 2005). Here, however, I focus only on the ways producers, who compose, perform, record, and mix all of the beats for bongo flava, use foreign and local genres to create music meant to reach different communities. The second area, dress, analyzes the clothing styles that many urban youth use to create a bongo flava fashion aesthetic. Youth combine international concepts of beauty, American hip hop culture, and locally available clothes and materials to create distinctive styles that visually distinguish bongo flava youth from other members of Tanzanian society. Finally, camps refer to the organization of youth into groups based on similar interests, backgrounds, and ideological views. These camps exist as support networks for artists and fans of bongo flava and offer a critical means for urban youth to find direction in Tanzania.

In the 1950s, as dansi and taarab were becoming increasingly popular as urban forms of expression, scholars discussed theories of cultural imperialism, using the terms *Americanization* and *Westernization* to describe the impact of Western cultures on the music of the non-Western world (Tracey 1954; Bose 1959; Mensah 1959). In writing about the impact of "western and other foreign intrusions" on the Bantu peoples of Africa, Hugh Tracey (1954: 34) lamented that African music had changed for the worse and that local culture "was exposed and vulnerable to attack by determined proselytizers, both progressists and priests." Tracey's analysis put forth a center-periphery model where Western colonialists, whether adminis-

trative officials or priests, impacted or "damaged" local cultures to the point where the locals could not prevent the changes taking place in their music.

In more recent years, scholars have critiqued this position and offered alternative notions of local interaction with global flows of cultural ideas and practices. Many of these theories, such as creolization (Hannerz 1987), syncretism (Herskovits 1966), hybridity (Kapchan and Strong 1999; Gross, McMurray, and Swedenburg 2002), and glocalization (Robertson 1992), attempt to show the ways people interact with local and global cultural flows, presenting people as more engaged in the world around them rather than as passive observers. These theories often dismantle the center-periphery model and, instead, posit a movement of ideas, even if unbalanced, between the West and other parts of the world and also between "peripheries" (Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Adelt 2005).

While theories of creolization and hybridity are helpful in moving scholarship beyond notions of cultural imperialism and articulating the complexities of daily life, there is a tendency to reduce the various ways people interact and engage with the world around them to simplified notions of cultural assimilation or cross-fertilization. Synchronization theories can set up dichotomies between the merging of two different things (e.g., global/local, Western/African, traditional/modern). While, theoretically, most scholars attempt to move beyond these dichotomies, a tendency remains for ethnographic analyses to return to the merging of two elements thought to be in opposition. (One only has to look for the abundance of articles that draw on the global and local dichotomy.)

One means to overcome these dichotomies is to consider the many ways that people use music in their daily lives. While bongo flava is certainly influenced by the movement of sounds from the United States to Tanzania, each artist, producer, and composer uses music in different ways. Innovation occurs as artists alter the sounds, uses, and interpretations of music. It is a means of subtly transforming words and sounds in ways that make them appear new within a specific context. The issue then is not how is bongo flava a synchronization of global and local sounds but how do artists apply their conceptions of music to different communities and in different contexts? How do they draw on various sources to achieve a desired result? The establishment of a musical sound or identity particular to a person's interests and community involvement is central to informing his or her choices in music, dress, and lifestyle. Thus a person does not merge or synchronize various elements in a repeatable manner but continually innovates on sounds, symbols, language, and ideologies to interact with others in different communities and social contexts.

In Tanzania, youth who participate in bongo flava place themselves within several communities that are intrinsically connected yet often socially separate. International hip hop, African youth, and urban Tanzanian youth communities, as well as communities associated with class, ethnicity, and family background, critically

affect the approach that artists take in their music. Youth respond to sonic, linguistic, and physical elements from different parts of the world by creating music to participate in several communities. They merge or mimic foreign sounds, local aesthetics, and community ideals to various degrees depending on their desired audience.

Members of the group X Plastaz, for instance, wear traditional Maasai clothing during their performances abroad, a modified version of Maasai clothing in local performances, and similar styles of dress as other Tanzanian youth wear off-stage. The Maasai look sets the group apart in local performances, but is particularly important in foreign shows where images of the Maasai—red outfits, sandals, beaded necklaces—has come to represent Tanzania and, to some extent, Africa as a whole. X Plastaz plays on this representation of Tanzania to promote their music abroad, but also to encourage engagement with their cultural background. For international audiences, the Maasai-ness of the group is a selling point even though only one member is actually a Maasai. Ntarangwi (2009: 40) notes that the use of the Maasai identity becomes a “tool for youth to access an international market for their music by reverting to essentialized ‘African culture’ that affirms the stereotypical images of Africa.” It also may be a means to endorse certain cultural traditions historically admonished in Tanzania and stereotyped abroad. Internationally, using the Maasai identity can create moments of intense outside interest in something imagined to be proto-African, which can then be subverted in socially conscious lyrics being delivered in a technologically sophisticated rap song. In Tanzania, the use of Maasai dress becomes a means to highlight national pride and ethnic identity, thereby establishing originality within the local music scene.

Interest in being part of the American hip hop community is particularly strong. Most youth look to the United States as an important center of hip hop culture and to African Americans as progenitors of rap music. Ramadhani Mponjika, a Tanzanian rapper popularly known as Rhymsen, explains the view of many Tanzanian youth during the early years of bongo flava:

If you look at African Americans, they unconsciously look at Africa for cultural inspirations. But we [Tanzanians] do the reverse. On the radio or in the newspapers—we did not have TV—we see people who are like us, but they live in America. I remember when I was young, I saw a picture of Mohammed Ali. It really inspired me. Yes, that is the champion, and he looks like me. Like he was one of our people. Music was the same. When we heard the music of black people, it interested us. At that time [late 1980s], anything foreign was considered good.²

Professor Jay, another Tanzanian rapper, also found African American culture appealing, particular the messages in the music and the empowerment of black people:

I started to rap in O level, when I was in the seventh grade. In 1989, there were many different styles of rap music being heard in Tanzania. During this time, I was listening to rap, such as Public Enemy, "Fight the Power." This music really drew me straightaway to become a rapper because I saw the way that a black man was able to search for his own thing [identity]. Public Enemy had the power to stand somewhere and speak with people. Those people listened to what the group had to say and followed their message. So it was this type of thing that drew me to rap. People such as Public Enemy, LL Cool J, KRS-One, and others like that.³

Many Tanzanian youth borrow symbols and styles from the United States, even if those elements mean something different. A Yankees cap, which many Tanzanians wear, for instance, does not symbolize baseball, a powerful team, or even an American city, as it often does in the United States, but rather notions of blackness, Americanness, and power. This mimetic process provides youth with the means to identify and associate with an international and imagined community of hip hop culture.

Aside from African American culture, Tanzanian youth are also keenly aware of their roles and connections to local communities. They identify with local trends and believe that their success as members of the hip hop scene depends on how well they connect with local audiences. To do this, they have to compose music, assemble a fashion sense, and follow a lifestyle that makes sense to their understanding and interpretation of the local music scene.

For some youth, the promotion of more Tanzanian aspects of bongo flava has led them to envision traditional African music as a precursor to hip hop, thereby grounding their connection to hip hop in real historical terms and overcoming the notion that hip hop is a product of Western cultural hegemony. In an online chat room, for instance, one writer commented, "I used to buy a lot of hip hop on vinyl since the mid 80s (e.g., Run DMC) and will take them home to tz [Tanzania] with me. I'll be playing them and my grandmother would tell me I am playing the *ngoma zakwetu* [native ngoma]. *Na nikibisha* [And, if I argued with her] she used to remind me when we go *vijinini* [rural areas] and listen to the drummers play, the beats were the same."⁴ In the Tanzanian hip hop video *Hali Halisi* [The Real Situation], Mr. Mashili from the National Arts Council (BASATA) comments, "When I was young, there was a particular rap that was performed by the drum players. I still remember those raps they used to sing. So when I heard the modern raps, I compared them with those from the past. Then I realized that rap has been with us since the past." Neither of these commentators link the actual sound of hip hop to traditional Tanzanian culture. The electronically produced beats are a distinctly foreign phenomenon. Instead, they hear the rapping and rhythmic makeup of songs as something reminiscent of traditional ngoma. The argument that African American music as well as many forms of Western popular music are indebted to African cultures is not new (Saakana 1995). But in the case

of bongo flava, it helps empower youth and others to see hip hop as more than just an American or Western musical form.

Producers Imitate to Innovate

Upon first listening to bongo flava, most Western audiences comment on the American sound of the music. The pulsating snare, deep throbbing bass, and synthesized harmonies are common sounds in the production of hip hop, both in the United States and Tanzania. For many Tanzanian listeners, the reliance on foreign sounds is a sign of a lack of originality and an unhealthy fascination with the West. Fredrick Sumaye, the former prime minister of Tanzania, gave a speech at the Bagamoyo College of Art at which he said: "They [hip hop artists] copy foreign music and then they just change the words and put them into Kiswahili" (Mlekani 2002). Sumaye told his audience that Tanzanian musicians should stop being "lazy" by copying other people's music and turn to traditional music for creative inspiration. Many other government officials, non-hip hop-based musicians, and music fans echoed Sumaye's comments, lamenting the Western quality of Tanzania's latest and most successful musical form.⁵

These criticisms are difficult to refute. The majority of producers in Tanzania borrow heavily from foreign studio techniques, musical arrangements, and timbral sonorities. For instance, numerous producers layer the bass part of songs over several octaves, including those not easily heard by the human ear at the low frequency range, which creates the thumping sound that listeners of rap feel more than hear. Many producers digitally manipulate vocal tracks, such as the use of Auto-Tune, which was first popularized by Cher in the song "Believe." And the majority of bongo flava songs center around a steady rhythm created from electronically produced sounds; real drum kits are rarely used by bongo flava producers. The result of these and other practices is a sound that many people, both inside and outside Tanzania, dismiss as imitative of foreign music and uninspired for the country's popular music scene.

It is critical to realize, however, that producers purposely mimic American hip hop songs to educate themselves about production techniques, and the results of this imitation are innovations localized in urban Tanzania aesthetics. The first point is partially a result of the history of Tanzanian musical production. Before 1994, no one in Tanzania knew how to produce music for bongo flava. A handful of recording engineers worked at the government-owned radio station, Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam (RTD), which recorded dansi, taarab, and ngoma music, but no one had tried to create complex and multilayered digital sounds such as those heard on Notorious B.I.G.'s "Things Done Changed" and Nas's "The World Is Yours," both released in the mid-1990s when Tanzanians first attempted to create their own beats. When youth started producing music, most were at a loss for equipment and methods to create hip hop sounds. Attempting to imitate foreign

artists became central to establishing credibility as a producer and learning the basic skills necessary to create hip hop beats.

Some of the earliest producers, such as Boni Luv, Master J, P Funk, and Malone, learned techniques from foreign producers who either showed them how to use equipment, play instruments, or organize recording projects (P Funk also studied engineering in Holland). Master J, who studied business in England and learned some recording techniques from a college friend, Owen Paris, recalls one of his earlier recording projects upon returning to Tanzania:

I returned from England with a synchronizer and then started recording the song "Moja kwa Moja" [Straight ahead, a song by II Proud, who is now called Mr. II or Sugu]. When we started recording the song, II Proud dropped the vocals with just a click, a metronome [vocalizes metronome sound—tick-da-da-da—and laughs]. And II Proud was looking at me like, "This guy's insane, there's no beat." But he recorded the verses and choruses anyway, and then left. So after he left, then I started making the music. I would do a beat according to the vocals, and add chords, bass, rhythm, etc. After three days, I told him, "Look, the track is ready." "Yeah, okay, let me hear it." And he came to hear the music for the first time. He was shocked—they [artists] used to go wild. And I used to do tracks for free, just for the fun of it.⁶

The three days spent in the recording studio were a key period for Master J to experiment in composing, recording, and mixing beats. Working with his newly purchased recording equipment, learning how to manipulate the computer and sequencer, and composing a backing track using a keyboard, drum machine, and bass, Master J assembled a multilayered hip hop beat behind II Proud's vocal track (see figure 9.1).

In listening to "Moja kwa Moja," obvious links to American hip hop sounds can be heard. The basic beat of the song is made by a drum machine simulating a drum kit with a sharp strike on the snare for the downbeat. A sample of a trumpet solo also signals the chorus of the song, similar to "Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)" by the American group Digable Planets. The use of sampling and a drum kit are common in American hip hop, and Master J admits that some of his inspiration comes from studying the music of foreign artists.

Since I never studied sound engineering, I learn the most from reading books and listening to a lot of foreign music. At home, I put on headphones and just listen for a half hour or hour a day. I want to listen to how they [the foreign producers] use the stereo spectrum; what do they do to the chorus, the vocals; what effect do they use and how do they use it; you know, these are things that I listen to a lot. Because, I don't know, I didn't study [to be a] recording engineer. So I learn a lot of things through listening to foreign music and reading books.⁷

Using CDs and cassettes of foreign artists, which are widely available in Tanzania, Master J learns techniques for composing and recording bongo flava songs. The



Figure 9.1. Master J (center) in the studio with members of Gangwe Mobb, Inspekta Haroun (left), and Luteni Kalama, July 2001. Photo by Alex Perullo.

sounds he hears in his headphones certainly appear in his compositions. Thus, as the music changes in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, so too do productions of bongo flava.

Nevertheless, a great deal of innovation and localization exists in Master J's backing tracks. "Moja kwa Moja" is a bit more laidback than most of the foreign hip hop that Master J was listening to in the late 1990s. It opens with a four beat, three chord keyboard sequence—Dmin, Emin, Fmaj7—followed by four beats of sustaining the Fmaj7 chord. The effect, which is repeated throughout the song, adds a sound reminiscent of dansi (the seventh chord is commonly used in dansi music). Master J also layers the song with an arpeggiated guitar part, again hinting at the dansi tradition in the country where rhythm guitarists make strong use of this technique. Since Master J's father was a dance band musician, the influence of the dansi sound on his composition is not surprising. It does, however, provide aesthetic qualities of Tanzanian culture within the American hip hop framework, an innovation central to much of the studio production of bongo flava. Further, the basic layering of parts—bass, drums, keyboard, guitars, and samples—in Master

J's initial composition has continued to follow him in his later work. Listeners can, therefore, frequently identify a song composed and produced by Master J simply by listening to the backing track of a song.

In the decade since the emergence of independent recording studios in Tanzania in the early 1990s, the local production of music has grown dramatically.⁸ Around 50 commercial and hundreds of home studios now exist in Dar es Salaam to record bongo flava artists (Perullo 2011: 244-45). Many young producers also apprentice with the more experienced producers, thereby avoiding the need to purchase their own equipment. (Before temporarily closing his studio in 2004, Master J had two bongo flava producers working for him and one producer who worked with other genres of popular music.) Although it is difficult to provide an exact number, some producers estimate that more than 100 producers work in Dar es Salaam composing and recording beats for bongo flava compared with only 4 a decade earlier in 1996. The dramatic rise in the number of studios and producers and the cost of recording highlights both the popularity of the genre and its market potential.

During this period of dramatic increase, the sound of bongo flava production also evolved to reflect a broad array of styles and production skills. While producers remain the engineers and composers of bongo flava songs, artists are more central in creating ideas for a track. Frequently artists arrive at the studio with lyrics and an idea of the sound of the backing track. Some arrive with an American track that they want to emulate. Mr. Blue, for instance, based his recording "Holla Back" on the American artist Fabolous's song "Young'n." Often the producers discuss ideas with artists until an agreement is made about the best way to produce new material and establish an audience, since producers rely on hit songs to bring quality customers to their studios.

When not based on American or other foreign sounds, artists frequently refer to the rich array of genres contained within bongo flava to guide producers to the sound that they are seeking. Frequently artists appropriate foreign and local genre names to mean something specific to bongo flava. Zouk, for instance, refers to slow, romantic R&B ballads rather than the upbeat West Indian genre; bomba, which emerged in Kenya as boomba, is a more aggressive sound with upfront vocals and thick layering of an urban, east African keyboard sound; taarap, mainly created by the artist Cool Para, is a combination of taarab melodies and rhythms with rap vocals; ragga-*is* vocally similar to the Jamaican style of guttural rapping but, in Tanzania, often has less aggressive rhythms than its Jamaican counterpart.

Several styles are associated with only one producer or artist. Mr. Nice created *takeu* (which stands for Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda) to advance both his vision of an East African sound and his style, a dancehall rhythm with regionally inspired African harmonies and a heavy use of Auto-Tune. The artist Zozo's style is bongo culture, and it borrows from traditional ngoma music. Saidi Comorieni, who runs

Metro Studio, produces beats that he calls African American or Africa-U.S.A., a reference to the mixture of African and American sounds in his productions. Some producers never label their style, but create consistent hits in a way that artists want to emulate.

Due to the vast array of styles, bongo flava producers need to be able to compose a broad spectrum of backing tracks, from those that imitate American hip hop to those that sound similar to other forms of African or Tanzanian popular music. Bizman, for instance, learned to produce from P Funk in 2001, and he also plays in a hotel band called In Afrika Band. His production for the artist TID on the song "Zeze" is similar to the work of Master J in that it merges sounds from both American popular music, particularly R&B, with Tanzanian aesthetics in a standard Dar es Salaam rap production. Yet Bizman's solo album, *Ningekuwa Kwetu*, relies more on the sounds of dansi and ngoma than on American hip hop. The title song features traditional drumming from the Mwanyamwezi ethnic group. Bizman explains the diverse recording practices as a combination of artists and producers attempting to achieve a certain sound and find access to different music markets: "The bongo flava artists, from what I can see, are just keeping up with what is happening in the world. If we compose really good beats, it can be heard throughout the world. The beats are a means of capturing the interest of many people."

In many ways, the producers of bongo flava are repeating the practices of early dansi composers, who incorporated elements from foreign styles into their music. Some bands, such as the Sparks and the Comets, attempted to write music that more directly emulated the sound of their foreign counterparts. Other bands, such as Tabora Jazz Band, Dar es Salaam Jazz, and Western Jazz, appropriated foreign rhythms and melodies to create music that reflected an urban cosmopolitan view but still sounded distinctly Tanzanian. Due to the political movement toward socialism in the late 1960s, foreign music faded as a dominant force in the country, and Tanzanian artists established a dansi sound based more on local and national aesthetics of that period.

A similar process of mixing foreign and local sounds of various consistencies—depending on worldview and aesthetic interest—is occurring with bongo flava. Unlike dansi, however, bongo flava producers are able to innovate within a liberalized economy, which provides them with more latitude to decide the future direction of their music. Producers do not need to refocus their compositions to accommodate dominant political views of national identity. They can consider their place within a global economy, borrow ideas from foreign music, localize their music using Tanzanian sounds and ideas, and ultimately cater to the interests of artists who hire the producers to give them a backing beat for their music. This results in various production styles, such as transnational, African, Tanzanian, or Dar es Salaam hip hop.

Wearing Clothes, Defining Style

On the March 2005 cover of the Tanzanian lifestyle magazine *Bang!* appear three "bongo flava Divas": K-Lynn (Jacqueline Kanyana Ntuyabaliwe), Ray C (Rehema Chalamila), and Renee (Irene Lwelamira). Each wears a sheer white top with either torn blue jeans or form-fitting stretch pants. They all wear makeup, have eyebrows trimmed to a perfectly thin arch, and have well coifed hair. The glossy full color cover could easily be mistaken for an American or European fashion magazine, as there are few symbols that can identify the women as being Tanzanian or African: removed are the bright colors, the complex patterns, traditional hairstyles, and conservative dresses that typify Tanzanian daily fashion.

Over the past decade, clothing in Tanzania has become a symbol of the bongo flava generation. Most fans and artists modify Western clothing to establish identities that connect them to various communities. *Bang!* represents one part of the Tanzanian fashion style associated with youth. It is a glossy spread where the publishers create a sense of belonging to an international community, mainly for upper-class urban youth who want to emulate foreign fashions.¹⁰ Other youth in Tanzania innovate on the symbols of Western clothing to create styles that take on new meanings in local contexts. They also create their own items of clothing, such as jewelry and locally made T-shirts. For instance, the popularity of "I Love Dar" T-shirts highlights the connection that many bongo flava artists have with Dar es Salaam and the respect they have for it as an urban environment unlike other parts of the country. Selecting clothing, both to buy and wear, becomes an art form that helps youth find connections to other like-minded people within the city while also asserting their own identities. In other words, youth assemble styles out of the "material culture available to them in the effort to construct identities which will confer on them 'relative autonomy' within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work, etc." (During 1999: 441).

Western clothing has always been a part of the Tanzanian popular music scene. Starting in the 1920s, artists who performed ballroom dance for expatriates at clubs, such as the Dar es Salaam Club, wore tuxedos during concerts. Decades later, tuxedos were shed for suits, particularly as performances moved out of exclusive clubs and into other local establishments. After the country's independence in 1961, many musicians continued to wear suits, while others adopted the styles of American soul and Motown artists. Magazines, such as *Nyota Afrika*, promoted images of James Brown, Aretha Franklin, and others, which encouraged young people to wear afros, bellbottoms, and miniskirts. Due to the strong nationalist movement, however, many youth worked together to ban the overt Western fashions that were seen as indecent.

During the country's liberalization (after 1984), many performers and dancers modeled their own clothing on the fashions seen in Western movies and music

videos, which were flooding the local market. Since it was difficult to purchase foreign clothing locally, many artists modified available materials. Fresh X, one of the first Tanzanian rappers (he started rapping in 1984), often appropriated the fashion style of American artists and, for one event, cut his jeans, painted graffiti on his boots, and cut his hair in the style of Cameo, the American funk group.¹¹ Although this practice was unusual for everyday dress in the 1980s, it was prominent in clubs with dancers imitating Western stars.

Once independent television and radio stations emerged, clothing became an increasingly important symbol for youth to show that they were cosmopolitan and knowledgeable about foreign trends. The government station, Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam (RTD), had limited the airing of foreign music on its local services since the late 1970s, and no television stations existed in the country until the formation of ITV in 1994 (Perullo 2003; Sturmer 1998). RTD had controlled the local music market since the country's inception, which left little locally produced material available to the newly independent stations. Independent stations, therefore, spent a great deal of energy and money traveling abroad, purchasing foreign records, and airing them in Tanzania. Listeners, the majority of whom had little means to hear foreign music under the government ban, clamored to hear the "new" sounds coming out of Europe and the United States. Additionally, music videos provided strong visual cues for youth to learn about foreign styles. A short time after foreign videos began broadcasting to the Tanzanian public, youth more directly emulated what they saw on television.

Beauty pageants and fashion shows have also influenced local concepts of dress in Tanzania. With the exception of the Vazi la Taifa (national fashion shows), the majority of beauty competitions, such as Miss Dar City Centre, Miss Sinza, and Miss Ubungu, all of which take place in Dar es Salaam, draw heavily on international standards and styles of modeling shows. At these competitions, women typically wear Western style evening gowns with long slits up the legs and low-cut necklines and extremely revealing "beach wear." Hair is often straightened and occasionally bleached blonde, and nails are extravagantly manicured. Women imitate runway models in walking, turning, and posing, and most have the international modeling body shape—tall and thin—rather than the more stereotypical full-figured women promoted in other areas of popular culture. (Take, for instance, the songs "Jimama" [Big Mama] by Babloom Modern Taarab and "Nyambizi" [Large Woman] by Dully Sykes, which praise women with large, shapely figures.)

Even with historical connections to Western forms of dress and the popularity of television images and beauty pageants, the most important reason for the use of Western clothing in Tanzanian daily dress is the importation of *mitumba* (second-hand clothing). During the late 1980s, wholesalers imported large bales of used clothes from the United States and Europe. Because the Tanzanian textile market was already in a state of decline, partly due to its reliance on government subsidies (de Valk 1996), the market for *mitumba* grew dramatically.¹² By the late 1990s,

it was difficult to visit a part of Tanzania where mitumba clothes did not feature prominently, and only the kanga—a thin, colorful cloth typically worn by women around the waist, shoulders, and head—remained as prominent a fashion as used clothes. Due to the intense infiltration of inexpensive secondhand clothing in Tanzania, bongo flava artists and fans in the country's major cities, such as Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Mwanza, and Morogoro, rely on the importation of used clothing to furnish their bongo flava style, especially since they cost far less than the other options available to them.¹³

Despite the many uses of Western clothing, Tanzanian youth are not “powerless recipient(s) of an imposed” system of foreign styles (Ivaska 2002: 587). They use clothing to participate in international and local concepts of hip hop culture and to establish specific identities for themselves within their various communities (home, school, work, or with other hip hop enthusiasts). The presentation of self is *thereby dependent on an individual's position and interest in a given context*. For instance, in live performance, many youth use the stage to display the identity of communities with which they want to be associated. These communities are known as camps in Tanzania and refer to the gathering of youth in specific locations throughout the city who share common ideological perspectives. Displaying the proper forms of attire onstage is important in communicating to local audiences and building a fan base of like-minded youth. Off the stage, youth vary their clothing considerably, from those who maintain their stage presence to those who blend into everyday life in Dar es Salaam. This fluctuation of dress allows youth to identify themselves as being part of specific communities. A marijuana plant symbol, a Yankees hat, FUBU shirt, an American sports jersey, locally beaded jewelry, baggy pants, Timberland boots—all carry local meaning.

Figures 9.2 and 9.3 represent examples of dress among youth interested in bongo flava. King Crazy GK wears a shirt with the name of the camp he belongs to (East Coast Team, although it is written as East Coast Army), a white winter Yankees cap, and an armband with the Jamaican Rastafarian colors and a peace symbol. The clothing is reminiscent of American hip hop trends, particularly the Yankees cap, yet the style connects a specific representation of GK and his target audience. The Yankees cap, for instance, is an obvious reference to New York City, a place that gave rise to hip hop. The cap is also meant to position GK as being affiliated with the “east coast” of Dar es Salaam, just as New York is on the east coast of the United States. GK lives in Upanga, which is centrally located and more or less in the eastern part of the city. This location not only symbolizes privilege—it is one of the wealthier communities in the city—but also references the belief that the artists here gave rise to bongo flava. The shirt strengthens the notion of location and identity, specifically mentioning the camp that GK helped found in Upanga with other local artists. Since the shirt is locally made, as are many of the T-shirts worn by youth in live performances, GK adds to his credibility as a locally conscious performer. Finally, the armband borrows on the images of peacefulness in Jamaican



Figure 9.2. GK performing in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, July 2005. Photo by Alex Perullo.



Figure 9.3. Members of the rap group Mambo Poa in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, December 2000. From left to right: Steve 2K, John Mjema, Spider, and Vincent Magige. Photo by Alex Perullo.

Rastafarian culture. It can be read as a symbol of marijuana use, or it can highlight GK's view on the importance of peace.

Outside of live performance, the use of camp symbols and names often becomes less important, and many artists return to typical forms of Dar es Salaam dress. Figure 9.3 shows the rap group Mambo Poa hanging out in front of a small store in downtown Dar es Salaam. Vincent Magige wears business attire: slacks with a short-sleeved shirt. Spider and Steve 2K wear a style frequently worn by youth, a relaxed collarless shirt with pants. And John Mjema dons his purple suit, which connects him more to other forms of popular Tanzanian music, such as dansi, than to bongo flava, where suits are almost never worn. In their dress, none of the members of Mambo Poa have obvious markers of American hip hop culture, and each easily blends into other forms of dress commonly found in Dar es Salaam. At concerts, these artists may put on attire more easily recognizable as part of a broader hip hop culture, yet in their daily interactions, nothing they wear marks them as being artists or fans of bongo flava. Style, therefore, fluctuates according to context and community interaction.

Style in Tanzanian dress can also be thought of as what local youth do not emulate. For instance, most males refrain from wearing flashy jewelry, tattoos, or pants worn low enough to show their underwear, all of which has become important in the images they see of American rap artists. Men also tend not to braid their hair, a custom heavily criticized by elder community members in Tanzania, since it is a feminine style. Exceptions obviously occur, such as Steve 2K, who has his hair partially braided in rows. Women tend not to wear revealing clothes outside of a performance situation (the assumption being that revealing clothes signals being a prostitute), and if jewelry is worn, it often borrows from Tanzanian aesthetics and design.¹⁴

Style therefore becomes a mixture of trends that are modified for a particular situation. Innovation occurs in the ways that meaning is attributed to symbols and items of clothing regardless of their place of origin. Being constantly aware of the meaning of these clothes and dressing in ways that properly display one's connection to various communities is central to any person's participation in bongo flava. The American rapper Chuck D said in an advertisement, "SO YOU WANNA BE IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS . . . WHATCHA' GONNA WEAR?" (cited in Negus 2004: 537). The quote, aimed at the burgeoning hip hop movement in the United States, is just as applicable to bongo flava: clothing is a visual symbol of youth commitment to international hip hop, East African urban culture, and the local bongo flava movement, all communities that youth relate to in as many ways as possible. How artists put the clothing together has less to do with their reliance on foreign items of clothing than in their choice of styles and materials, all of which create appropriate identities for themselves in the shifting dynamics of urban African communities.

Camps and Urban Communities

When not working in the recording studio, filming a video, or performing onstage, most artists and many fans pass their days sitting with each other in "camps." Camps exist mainly in Dar es Salaam as a home base for artists or a gathering place of an artist's most ardent fans. Camps can be any physical location: a bar, street corner, a lean to, wall, tree, or neighborhood street. While these camps could simply be considered hangouts, they serve as centers for youth to support and educate one another about current events in bongo flava communities. They allow artists to test new lyrics and discuss ideas about stage performance or video production. They provide places for youth to make contacts, network, and in some cases attain financial support for a musical endeavor. Most important, camps are critical for establishing a community of youth who share similar backgrounds and ideological viewpoints.

One of the better known camps in Dar es Salaam is Wanaume Unity Family, typically referred to as Wanaume (Men).¹⁵ KR, a rapper and founding member of Wanaume, explains its importance:

Our camp is a way of showing unity, sharing ideas on everything, and discussing life and the music business in a calm place, without any violence or noise. Practicing is also important because you cannot practice on your own; you learn from practicing in front of others. If you sit in front of others, it is easy for them to tell you "this is good" or "this is bad." This has brought unity to the group and strengthened our music.¹⁶

Almost every day, some of the fifty members of Wanaume gather near a bus stop in Temeke, Dar es Salaam, to ruminate about current events, jobs, and music. They also create TMK T-shirts and armbands (TMK stands for Temeke) and coin new words and phrases, such as *cheua-beiua* [cough up the money]. The group uses the axe as its symbol, and members make a hand gesture—essentially two fists together with the index fingers crossed into an "X"—to represent the axe and their camp. Modeling themselves after the military, they shout "Eh" in unison when one of the group members bellows "Wanaume."

Of course, Wanaume also records and performs onstage. Often a single artist, such as Juma Nature, will perform and the other members of the camp will go onstage to support his music. The live performances are popular throughout the country due to the highly choreographed routines, which merge military movements with a contemporary dance aesthetic and socially engaging lyrics. In creating the dancing and rapping, the group draws from the identity and image promoted by Wanaume camp. KR comments on the image that the camp portrays: "The members of Wanaume try to squeeze out a life for themselves. If you look at us, no one is proclaiming to be rich; we come from a poor environment. Tanzania is a country of poor people. So we try to speak for those who are poor."¹⁷ Using an ideology of poverty and a military concept of unity and discipline, the camp members use their music and performances to inform people about the problems that many Tanzanians face. They do this, according to KR, to support the poor and to counter other camps in Dar es Salaam that compose songs about having fancy cars, clothes, or jewelry, material possessions anathema to Wanaume's purpose.

In Wanaume and most other artist-based camps, apprenticeship is important; artists are brought in if they are recognized as having "skills" that can be developed. They start out by learning from the more established members how to rap, dress, and conduct business. In these circumstances, the camps act as schools. As artists improve, senior members feature them in songs in order to give them exposure (featuring involves inviting another artist to perform a verse or a chorus in a song). Once the artist is capable of recording on his or her own, other camp members assist in paying for studio time, negotiating contracts, or finding places to perform.¹⁸

Most informal estimates by journalists and artists are that 1,000 camps exist throughout Dar es Salaam. Camps provide defining and salient forms of identity for members. They can be descriptive, characterized by shared values and backgrounds, and prescriptive, giving members direction in their lives and musical careers. Bongo flava camps are also evaluative, which means that members of camps

are constantly motivated to adopt and maintain behaviors of a group (Hogg, Terry and White 1995: 260). For this reason, camps often adopt symbols, language, dress styles, and other defining characteristics that members constantly assess in order to maintain in-group status.

Being a member of a camp does have a cultural precedent in dansi and taarab bands. During the same time that bongo flava artists sit in their camps, dansi and taarab bands gather at their home base, often a local club, to practice new songs, discuss current events, and hone their skills on individual instruments. Young artists often sit in with the bands to learn performance techniques and improve their playing, singing, or dancing. The music business is often discussed, as are future plans for the band. Among many bands, money can also be borrowed to help pay for funerals, weddings, or other important events in a member's life. For these reasons, camps and bands offer similar support in dealing with the complexities of music, business, and urban life.

The most important distinction between the practice spaces of dansi bands and the camps of bongo flava is the way they function as centers of power. Dansi bands certainly wield power as culturally influential entities within urban centers. Most of the economic power of these bands, however, rests with organizations or individuals who own them. Bands members are paid salaries for their work, and few have any control over where they perform, who they record with, or what songs they should record. The more democratic groups allow members to vote, yet the ultimate verdict rests with the members or individuals who hold economic power. For bongo flava, the established artists enter the camps with economic stability. Many drive cars, possess extensive wardrobes, and enjoy disposable income. When they enter the camps, they do so with the knowledge that they do not have to rely on the other members for financial support, though they also can turn to the camp members if need be. Even artists who have not yet succeeded in the music business recognize that their financial success is determined by their ability to release a hit song and not by an overarching organization that pays them a regular salary.

The movement from organizational control to individual empowerment is a significant transformation in the local music scene and one that has greatly impacted the identity of musical organizations. Youth understand themselves to be connected within camps by similar interests, backgrounds, and skills, but they also recognize their independence. It is up to them to write music, record in the studio, perform onstage, attain airplay, and sell records, even though camps provide a critical support network. Certainly, the liberalization of the local economy and the trend toward individualization within the local music economy have placed more emphasis on the individual. Camps, however, act as a means for youth to ground global and local trends toward individualization with a stronger notion of community. They allow youth a chance to remain independent but still be a part of a strong social network that assists them in establishing a career and moving their message out to other communities.

In the past few years, dansi bands also opted to create camps for their fans. African Stars Band was the first group to form camps of die-hard fans that attend almost all of the band's concerts. Mfano Mchangani Camp, Wagumu Camp, Home Alone Camp, Wazee wa Njaa Camp, Wazee wa Bandari Camp, and Wazushi Camp are all located in the Mwananyamala section of Dar es Salaam, and the African Stars managers provide them with tickets for upcoming shows and clothes that help promote the band. By supporting these camps, African Stars can guarantee that they will have large, enthusiastic crowds at their shows, which further entices people to attend and typically provides good reviews in local newspapers and more airtime on local radio stations.

Bongo flava also has fan-based camps, although clothing and tickets tend not to be provided to its members. These camps support and praise individual artists, such as the camps Choka Mbaya (for the rapper Professor Jay), Dar Skendo (DuduBaya), and Misifa Camp (Dully Sykes). At bongo flava concerts, some camps brandish homemade shirts or flags. When their artist appears onstage, members dance and sing, and a few join the artist onstage. They act as a critical support network in the increasingly competitive music market and provide a sense of purpose for fans who want to identify with a particular artist.

Although Tanzanian youth, as well as other Africans, have long been localizing foreign sounds, one significant difference exists between the previous generations and those currently innovating on the sounds of hip hop: the ability to easily communicate with various communities. The internet, texting, the rapid availability of magazines and CDs, and the frequent travel of artists within and outside of eastern Africa allow youth to maintain constant connections to people, practices, and sounds at a rate that would have been impossible in the past. An artist can e-mail a backing track to the United States, have the song remixed, and then record the vocals before the song is mixed down to be sold. Many artists tour Kenya, Uganda, Europe, and the United States. Youth watch broadcasts of local, regional, and international hip hop videos as soon as those videos are released in their home markets. International stars, such as Jay Z and Sean Paul, find Tanzania an important place to tour and present their music. And numerous individuals post websites with songs, photographs, and videos for listeners to view.

The transnational public sphere of hip hop culture, which moves beyond national borders or localized communities, informs youth about current trends (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 9). Youth reify this knowledge of international hip hop and apply it to communities of which they wish to be a part. This provides them with a sense of power as they assign meaning to notions of cosmopolitanism and urbanity to other youth and other communities in East Africa. Partially through bongo flava, youth continually inform each other what it means to live in an African city, such as Dar es Salaam, as well as assert what it is to be young, urban, and Tanzanian.¹⁹

Often the interest in foreign music and styles is interpreted solely as the dominance of the West. In a recent *Kenyan Times* opinion piece, Dominic Omondi writes about the impact of globalization on Kenyan society. At the end of the article, he addresses local music:

As a matter of fact, unlike Tanzanians, who have expertly and strategically fused their local music and Hip-hop, thus culminating into much acclaimed "Bongo Flava," Kenyans have given monkeys a contest by not only singing like 50 Cent, but also dressing like him; speaking his language, putting on his garbs; and with a most daring audacity, claiming to be proud to be Kenyan!²⁰

While initially criticized as being solely a form of imitation, bongo flava is increasingly being recognized as an innovative form of music that embodies the communities and identities associated with Tanzanian youth and music. Omondi dismisses similar innovations occurring in Kenya and instead points to the direct forms of imitation that exist in that country. Of course, these forms of imitation occur in Tanzania and other parts of Africa as well, where American stars, such as 50 Cent, take on powerful roles as cultural icons. Yet in Kenya, too, numerous groups appropriate the symbols, sounds, and ideas of foreign artists and incorporate them into local aesthetics and ideologies. The dualism of imitation and innovation is central to any form of popular music where artists seek to connect to the initial purveyors of the musical form and still compose for local audiences. The increased speed of communication and travel provides artists with the ability to appropriate local, national, and international trends, thus giving them resources to establish styles and identities most useful for the various communities with which they want to be a part.

NOTES

1. The abundance of academic writing on bongo flava emphasizes the social and cultural importance of this genre in Tanzanian popular culture. See Engler (2003); Haas and Gesthuizen (2000); Higgins (2009); Lemelle (2006); Mangesho (2003); Ntarangwi (2009); Perullo (2005, 2007); Remes (1998); Reuster-Jahn (2007); Saavedra (2006); Suriano (2006, 2007); and Thompson (2008).

2. Rhymsen (Ramadhani Mponjika), interview with the author, Canada, May 23, 2004.

3. Professor Jay (Joseph Haule), interview with the author, Tanga, January 19, 2001.

4. This quote was posted October 14, 2004, on YoungAfrican.com on the Ya Tanzania Tupo (All Tanzanians) pages.

5. Many critiques of bongo flava can be found in online forums. In May 2005, the website darhotwire.com asked users about the imitation of foreign beats and lyrics in Tanzanian bongo flava. Of the nearly 500 people who voted in the survey, many of whom live outside Tanzania, 57 percent stated that copying beats or lyrics from foreign sources showed that local artists had "nothing original left"; 30 percent felt that copying was common, while the remaining 13 percent perceived the practice as a form of creativity.

6. Master J (Joachim Kimaryo), interview with the author, Dar es Salaam, November 29, 2000.

7. Ibid.

8. Before 1991, only two recording studios existed in Tanzania: Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam's studio and the Tanzania Film Company's studio. A department of the Tanzanian government owned and operated both studios (see Perullo 2011: chapter 2).

9. Bizman Ntazyo, interview with the author, September 10, 2005.

10. The 50,000 who read *Bang!* are well-connected members of the popular music industry (radio presenters, deejays, business owners, etc.), and the models and clothing used in the magazine represent some of the fashion trends occurring among the wealthier youth in the local scene. The magazine also features photographs and discussions with Tanzanians living abroad, thus creating direct ties to fashion trends abroad and in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa, where the magazine is also sold.

11. One of Cameo's band members had the sides and back of his head shaved close, with the top hair standing straight up. From his description, this is most likely the style that Fresh X imitated.

12. Recently, a debate has ensued in Tanzania concerning whether or not to ban mitumba in an attempt to support local clothing manufacturers. Although this debate has occurred before, it is now being discussed among members of the East African Community (EAC), which would be able to lobby appropriate officials to pass legislation banning the importation of mitumba ("Mitumba Days Are Numbered," *Arusha Times*, August 27, 2005).

13. Other options include new clothing stores, such as D-Jungle and New Look, both in Dar es Salaam, which feature brand-name clothes. Also, several local designers, such as Slim A. Slim and KP Clothing, make original lines aimed at bongo flava artists.

14. Since 2005, when this article was originally written, many of the trends listed in the previous paragraphs have significantly changed. Tattoos, for instance, are more common, even though few people are knowledgeable about creating tattoos and there has been a strong media attempt to curb the practice. For example, on December 20, 2006, the *Guardian* printed an article titled "Common Problems Associated with Tattoos." Four days later, *Nipashe* published an article by the helpful advisor Anti Flora Wingia that described a youth frightened of the dangers involved in tattooing (this story lacked a great deal of credibility and appears mostly fabricated).

15. The discussion of Wanaume in this article concerns their activities before the camp split into two competing camps in 2006.

16. Rashid Ziada (KR), interview with the author, Dar es Salaam, November 9, 2000, and September 10, 2005.

17. Ibid.

18. Camps are predominately a male enterprise, although there are female members. Many female artists perform in Tanzania, such as Zay B, Witness, and Nakaaya. Among these there is a conflicting opinion about gender dynamics in the music economy. Some argue that there is discrimination against female artists and less opportunity to perform or record. Others state that the discrimination is not in the music economy but in the home and society, where people are not as accepting of solo female artists. Several female artists explained to me that urban centers, such as Dar es Salaam, have changed significantly over the past decade to become far more accepting. As more prominent female artists have distributed and broadcast their music, discrimination has become less prevalent.

19. See Magaldi (1999: 313) for this notion in a Brazilian context.

20. Dominic Omondi, "Opinion," *Kenyan Times* (January 26, 2007).