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Uta Reuster-Jahn and Gabriel Hacke: The Bongo Flava industry in Tanzania and artists' strategies for success

Zusammenfassung

Bongo Flava ist eine Kategorie zeitgenössischer Musik der urbanen Jugend in Tansania, deren Entstehung mit vier simultanen Entwicklungen verbunden ist: Demokratisierung, Privatisierung, Globalisierung und Digitalisierung der Medien. Stilistisch ist Bongo Flava hauptsächlich, jedoch nicht ausschließlich, von Hip-hop und R&B geprägt. Im Prozess der Aneignung spielte die Umstellung auf Texte in Swahili eine wichtige Rolle. Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht Bongo Flava im Hinblick auf Karriereverlauf und sozialen Aufstieg der Musiker. Von Anfang an wurde Bongo Flava als ein Sprachrohr der einfachen Leute und besonders der Jugend betrachtet. Gleichzeitig sehen die Musiker darin einen Weg um der Armut zu entkommen und ein besseres Leben zu verwirklichen. Die Vorstellung eines kometenhaften Aufstiegs leitet sich sowohl von Vorstellungen des amerikanischen Hip-hop als auch von lokalen Vorbildern ab. Allerdings müssen sich die aufstrebenden Künstler im Feld des Bongo Flava mit vielen Akteuren wie beispielsweise Studios, Produzenten, Distributoren, Radiomoderatoren, der Presse, dem Publikum sowie ihren Musikkollegen auseinandersetzen. Im Fokus des Artikels steht die soziale Seite des Bongo Flava, die Crews, Gruppen und Netzwerke, die von den Künstlern aufgebaut und gepflegt werden, um ihrem Ziel des Aufstiegs näher zu kommen. Dabei wird auch untersucht, wie die Künstler in diesen Konstellationen mit Problemen wie Korruption, Eifersucht und Gier umgehen. Eine These ist, dass die Künstler soziales wie auch kulturelles Kapital akkumulieren, das sie auch außerhalb des Feldes Bongo Flava einsetzen können. Allerdings zeigt die Studie auch, dass Gatekeeper in den Radio- und TV-Stationen die Karriere von Musikern stark beeinflussen können, oft zum Nachteil unabhängiger Musiker mit begrenzten finanziellen Ressourcen. Der Artikel beruht auf Feldforschungen der Autoren in Tansania, die zwischen 2001 und 2011 durchgeführt wurden.

Abstract

Bongo Flava is a Tanzanian category of contemporary urban youth music related to four simultaneous developments: democratization, privatization, globalization and media digitalization. Stylistically, it comprises Hip-hop and R&B as well as other styles which have been appropriated by local artists who rap or sing mostly in Swahili. This article explores this cultural phenomenon in the context of social upward mobility. From its very beginning, Bongo Flava has been regarded as a mouthpiece for the youth and the ordinary people. At the same time it has always been seen as a means to escape poverty and to achieve a better life. The narrative of the meteoric rise is derived from American Hip Hop imagination, as well as from local success stories. However, there are many players in the field of Bongo Flava with whom the aspiring artists have to cope. These include studios, producers, distributors, radio presenters, the press, the audience etc., but also their fellow artists from other crews and formations. This article looks at the social side of Bongo Flava, the bonds that are built, developed, or, eventually, broken up, as well as larger networks that exist between the artists and other players in the field, and the ways the artists use them for their goal of making their way up. It also examines how the

artists cope with difficulties such as corruption, jealousy and greed in their social lives. It is argued that the experience acquired in the field of Bongo Flava can be seen as a form of capital that can be employed for other purposes too. This includes experiences with studios, the media, as well as stage experience and self-promotion. However, it is also shown that gatekeepers in the radio and TV have a strong influence on artists' success, often disadvantaging the career path of independent artists, at least those with little financial resources. The study is based on field research in Tanzania from 2001 to 2011.

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The Bongo Flava industry in Tanzania and artists' strategies for success

Uta Reuster-Jahn and Gabriel Hacke

Introduction

Political change towards multi-party democracy, as well as economic liberalization, has caused a profound transformation of cultural practices in Tanzania. The privatization of media along with new techniques of production and distribution facilitated the emergence of a new music scene, which has accordingly been termed “the music of the new generation” (Swahili *muziki wa kizazi kipyaa*). This development started off with Hip-hop and R&B, but other styles such as Zouk, Reggae, Congolese Bolingo, Indian music, and “traditional” tunes and instrumentals also form part of it. In the process of appropriation, musical styles and elements, as well as lyrical content are constantly being debated. The *music of the new generation* is also known as *Bongo Flava*, a term that emerged and became popular through radio programs. The well-known DJ Papa Luv¹ recalled in an interview with Peter Mangesho how the name *Bongo Flava*² appeared around the year 2000 in radio programs devoted to this music, which from the beginning included Rap and R&B, while excluding Swahili *dansi* (‘dance’) music:

“[...] I was at Clouds radio (when it was launched back in 1998) hosting the Dr. Beat music session, which specifically dedicated itself to play American, Tanzanian hip-hop and R&B. Later my fellow DJ, KBC, who is now in the United States, started another music episode, and named it Bongo Session, whereby we only aired Swahili rap and R&B, but we never played Swahili *dansi*! When KBC was on air he used to say ‘... and now what we are going to have are some Bongo flavours ...’ Then another DJ, Phat Black by name later started a program and called it ‘Bongo Flavours Session’ which was by then strictly R&B, Bongo hip-hop, and zouk-like songs. Last year, DJ Venture and DJ Steve B renamed it to ‘Bongo Flava’, the name used up to the present.” (DJ Papa Luv in Mangesho 2003: 22)

The term *Bongo Flava* aptly conveys how Tanzanians conceive of this music: Bongo is the nickname of Dar es Salaam, being an augmentative form of the Swahili noun *ubongo* meaning ‘brain’. The etymological motivation is that one has to use one’s brains in order to survive in the city of Dar es Salaam (Reuster-Jahn and Kießling 2006: 100). Through

¹ Also known as Bonny Luv.

² Now increasingly written *Bongo Fleva*, which is a phonetic spelling. In the beginning the English spelling *Bongo Flavour* was also common.

generalization, this term has now come to be used for the whole of Tanzania. Bongo Flava is therefore understood as music of foreign, mostly Afro-American origin which has become localized and infused with the flavor of Tanzania, or Dar es Salaam, as the cultural center of the country. The delineation of Bongo Flava and Hip-hop is somewhat problematic, as artists may blend rap music freely with sung parts in one track, or mix rapped tracks with Reggae or R&B songs on their albums. They do so in order to satisfy a broad spectrum of tastes, aiming at the highest possible number of consumers.³ The artists themselves have divided opinions about Hip-hop and Bongo Flava. Some say that Hip-hop is part of Bongo Flava, while others prefer to distinguish pure Hip-hop from the more hybrid and commercial Bongo Flava category (Suriano 2007: 208-9). They claim that Hip-hop music has to be angry and condemning (*muziki wa kufokafoka*). This chapter will not try to dissect Bongo Flava stylistically, but will consider it as an emic concept that has been shaped a great deal through Hip-hop. Our focus will be on Bongo Flava as a music industry in Tanzania, which is one of the so-called “least developed” countries in Africa (United Nations-OHRLLS 2009).

From the very onset, Tanzanian Hip-hop and later Bongo Flava have been used as a mouthpiece for the youth and ordinary citizen. At the same time it has always been seen as a means to escape poverty and to achieve a better life. The narrative of artists’ meteoric rise is derived from American Hip-hop imagination, as well as from local models like the artist Juma Nature, who, coming from a poor family, earned a lot of money which enabled him to spend it generously, build a house and drive a Mercedes Benz. It accounts for the numerous talent shows and events where unknown rappers try to come out of the shade and make it to the radio, which is considered the first step to a promising career. However, there are many players in the field of Bongo Flava in Tanzania with whom the aspiring artists have to cope. These include studio producers, distributors, radio presenters, sponsors, the press, the audience etc., but also their fellow artists from other crews and formations. Starting from the observation that the artists invest a lot in their relationships with the players in the field, we will look at the social side of Bongo Flava. We will explore the maintenance of relationships as a strategy for success, as well as the groups that are built, developed, or, eventually, broken up.

We will start with a short history of Hip-hop and Bongo Flava in Tanzania, and give an overview of the existing literature on this cultural phenomenon. In this section, the stages and periods of its development will be described. This requires elaborating on the role of globalization and localization, the artists’ attitudes towards the Tanzanian nation, their perceived role as educators of society, as well as the linguistic factor in the development of

³ The Hip-hop crew Big Dog Posse’s latest album *Kona zote* (2009), for example, comprises Dancehall, Hip-hop, Zouk, Bolingo and Twist. For the practice of mixing styles see also Englert 2008.

Bongo Flava. In section two, we will concentrate on the present state of the Bongo Flava industry and the situation of the artists. Lately, the musicians have come under pressure due to several unfavorable factors and developments, on which we will try to shed some light. In section three, individual histories of artists' careers will serve as a basis to identify certain patterns of their behavior and strategies, as well as characteristic problems and obstacles they are confronted with. Here we will examine the role of social relationship as a prerequisite for success in contrast with cultural assets such as talent and training. From the individual artist we will move to associations such as crews and larger groupings. It will be asked to what extent those associations are functional as means to solve economical and organizational problems and to gain greater bargaining power.

The appropriation and localization of Hip-hop in Tanzania and the formation of Bongo Flava

Tanzanian Hip-hop and Bongo Flava have received scholarly attention starting with an early study by Pieter Remes (1998), who identified Hip-hop as an important part of youth culture in Tanzania. Other contributions focused on certain aspects, such as globalization and localization, cultural appropriation, youth empowerment, linguistic factors, and regional differences. Alex Perullo (2007), and Peter Mangesho (2003) have outlined the early history of Hip-hop in Tanzania, from its very beginning in the 1980s to the year 1997 and 2003, respectively. Perullo bases his history on "the processes of localization [that] are taking place where ideas, styles and trends from one part of the world are integrated with and adapted to local cultures" (Perullo 2007: 251). In this process of appropriating globally circulating cultural forms by local artists, thereby making them into something endowed with meaning for their local audiences, the artists' positive attitude and reference to the Tanzanian nation has been crucial (Raab 2006). This derives from post-colonial Tanzanian cultural politics in the context of nation building (Askew 2002). Hip-hop reached Tanzania between 1984 and 1989, when at the end of *ujamaa* socialism⁴ "the socialist practices that limited people's access to foreign music and culture began to break down" (Perullo 2007: 252), and the pre-socialist practice of cultural borrowing from outside Africa was resumed. Music and video cassettes brought Hip-hop images and sounds to Tanzania. As, at the beginning, these were only available if one had relatives or friends in Western countries, the first to come in contact with them were youth from middle and upper class families. Local rap music took off slowly, the first stage being marked by imitation. Initially, a few youths would perform original English Rap versions with instrumentals being played by DJs in

⁴ A form of African socialism developed by Tanzanian president Julius K. Nyerere, focusing on self-reliance and collectivism.

discos and clubs.⁵ Through this process of imitation, the rappers learned to combine the music with rapid speech and developed a feeling for beats, rhyme, and flow. Slowly, Hip-hop reached wider circles of secondary school students through private exchange and copying of cassettes, as well as through Hip-hop films shown in cinemas (Perullo 2007: 255). Over time, some artists became famous in these circles and the first groups were formed. However, the most vital development that turned Hip-hop music into a popular and even a mass cultural phenomenon required recording facilities, appropriate lyrics in Swahili, and organized promotion.

Swahilization became a powerful trend from the time Saleh J released his Swahili version of *Ice Ice Baby* by Vanilla Ice in 1991. Although the purist Hip-hop pioneers tried to resist this development at first, they had to give in if they wanted to persist in the game (Perullo 2007: 261). Saleh J's song, which was also the first Hip-hop single on the Tanzanian music market, was about AIDS, a topic many young Tanzanians were concerned with. It laid the foundations for the further development of lyrical content, which to date is dominated by the goal of "educating society" (Swahili *kuelimisha jamii*) and of representing the realities of the lives of the poor, especially in urban environments. This includes exposing the hardships of the poor in Tanzania, warning against dangerous behavior, namely in the context of HIV/AIDS, and calling on the audience to hold up humaneness, even in difficult living circumstances. In that respect, Tanzanian Hip-hop refuses to conform to the US Hip-hop genre, as "much of Bongo Flava does not address the tangible category of 'youth', with corresponding subculture, but the whole of society, as a political leader would" (Stroeken 2005). In the process of Swahilization, Hip-hop spread to more deprived youths who started using it to speak out about their lives, as mirrors of society (in Swahili *kioo cha jamii*). Often, the lyrics are narrated from a first person perspective, centering on the life experience and world view of the artist. Topics range from the life in shared rented rooms (in Swahili slang called *geto*), HIV/AIDS, crowded minibuses and corruption, to unemployment and domestic violence. Many songs in the mid 1990s were socially critical while there were other meaningful lyrics that celebrated enjoyment, parties, and hanging out with friends, initiating a discourse on new values of the "new generation" in the liberalization era. By 1997, many Rap lyrics were socially conscious and in Swahili, and the artist II Proud became a leading figure of that trend of localization. In his album *Ndani ya Bongo* ('In Dar es Salaam') he exposes inequality and injustice, and challenges state authority with unprecedented directness by defying a policeman.⁶ For some time, that album set the standard for other

⁵ CDs with instrumentals of songs from US rap stars like Snoop Doggy Dogg, Dr. Dre or Naughty by Nature were sold on the streets. The youth wanted to see something that "looks American", as Issah of the crew Big Dog Posse remembers (Hacke and Roch 2004).

⁶ In the song *Nimesimama* ('I am standing upright').

musicians, regarding the lyrics as well as the instrumentals, which were produced by Master J (Perullo 2007: 266-7).

In the early 2000s, a debate on appropriate lyrics was going on, which exposed the issues in the localization process. While all artists agreed on the importance of “delivering a message”, there was divided opinion on Hip-hop features such as battle and lifestyle, classified pejoratively as “nothing but flava” (Roch and Hacke 2004, Raab 2006). Battle and lifestyle-related lyrics are commonly perceived to collide with the role of artists as educators of society, which is linked not only to trends in the socialist era but also to the long established tradition of song as social-political commentary (Englert 2008: 48).⁷ Reuster-Jahn (2007) suggests that those ‘lifestyle lyrics’ gain their meaning in the context of discourses on youth identity by claiming the right to enjoy life the way one prefers. After Hip-hop music had reached the poorer youth, part of this discourse centered on *msela*⁸, the Tanzanian version of the American *gangsta*. This model of the black male rapper has become a global pattern for identification (Klein 2003: 24 ff.). However, in the Tanzanian context, the violent component of this model was rejected. To be a *msela* means to have a hard life, to share the love for rap music and a Hip-hop style of clothing, to greet each other with certain gestures, to speak a certain slang and to smoke marijuana (Hacke 2007: 41). Those *masela* who are active rappers view rap music as an occupation that promises them a better life and prospect than does education or any other work. However, even though the *msela* featured in a number of Bongo Flava songs, this figure and those who identify with it remained sub-cultural, while Bongo Flava became main-stream.

Artists, producers, promoters, audiences, as well as economic and technical factors have formed Hip-hop music and Bongo Flava in a joint process. Private recording studios were set up in Dar es Salaam from 1990 onwards and by 2002 there were more than fifteen studios in the city (Mangesho 2003: 39).⁹ Before, recording studios were government-owned and would not record “Western” music. In addition, the new studios, using electronic technology, made recording more affordable as no instruments were required. The cost of recording Hip-hop music was substantially cheaper than for R&B or Jazz (ibid. 42).

However, Hip-hop music would not have achieved its extraordinary popularity in the early 2000s without promotion through private media and live events, which brought

⁷ It should be added that this role perception is not confined to music and poetry, but is equally found amongst writers and film makers.

⁸ Often translated as ‘urban sailor’.

⁹ The most famous studios in 2002 were Master J’s MJ Records, P-Funk’s Bongo Records, and Enrico’s Soundcrafters. According to estimations by producers, today there are several hundred studios in Dar es Salaam.

about the “Bongo Explosion”, as the sudden increase in popularity became known. Since the governmental radio did not play Western music, and private radio broadcasting only became allowed in 1993 with the Tanzania Broadcasting Act, Hip-hop music was initially promoted primarily through live shows and competitions. The first such event took place in 1990 at Lang’ata Club in Kinondoni district of Dar es Salaam (Perullo 2007: 256). Performances at sponsored events organized by NGOs for their campaigns followed, as for example, the promotion of condom use for HIV/AIDS prevention. The *Yo! Rap Bonanza* competition, held for the first time in 1991, is collectively remembered as a milestone in the history of Tanzanian rap music, where the best rapper in the country was sought (ibid.: 257 ff., Hacke 2007: 16). The tradition of competitions and awards has since continued, with the national *Kilimanjaro Music Award*¹⁰ being the most prestigious of them. More recently, two reality TV shows dedicated to competitive talent search have been launched: *Bongo Star Search*¹¹ in Tanzania and the East African *Tusker Project Fame*¹². In 2006, Tanzanian Bongo Flava artist Nakaaya Sumari did well at the Tusker Project Fame. She released her debut album *Nervous Conditions* in 2008; it included the very successful song *Mr. Politician* featuring the US American rapper M1 from the rap crew Dead Prez. Nakaaya toured Europe in 2009, and Sony BMG offered her a contract as the first Tanzanian musician ever. This was a big story in Tanzanian media over months, even when the deal finally collapsed and no song was produced.¹³

From the mid-1990s, radio became central for the spread of the new music style. In 1994, Radio One was established as the first private radio station in Tanzania dedicated to entertainment. Its DJ Taji Liundi acted as a driving force for the popularization of Swahili Hip-hop. Not only did he initiate broadcasting of such music on the radio; he also organized talent shows and encouraged youths to bring demo tapes, which he would play in his program (Mangesho 2003: 48). However, Hip-hop made a great leap forward when, starting in 1998 with Radio Clouds FM, further radio stations began to operate. Taji Liundi who had become the managing director of Radio Times FM (founded in 1998) gave a vital push to Hip-hop music when the station played Swahili Hip-hop almost exclusively for two months. He also encouraged newcomers to bring demo tapes to the station where he would play them, and he recalls receiving more than 100 tapes a week. This led to increased attention for this music at other radio stations and the employment of special DJs (ibid.: 51). In addition,

¹⁰ Organized by Tanzania Breweries Ltd.. The full name of this competition is *Kilimanjaro Premium Lager Tanzania Music Awards*.

¹¹ Organized by Benchmark Productions Ltd., a professional Video and Audio Production Company based in Dar es Salaam.

¹² Organized by East African Breweries Ltd.

¹³ Nakaaya blamed her ex-boyfriend for having schemed against her, so that the deal with Sony did not work out (Nakaaya 2010).

Times FM started weekly talent shows managed by Mr. Liundi, where youths were invited to exhibit their abilities. They had to rap over instrumentals played by the DJs. Studio producers present at those events approached the best performers. A number of artists who later became famous started from there, like T.I.D., Solo Thang, Mwanafalsafa, Sister P, Wagosi wa Kaya and Juma Nature (ibid.: 52). Radio Uhuru, founded in 2000, broadcast the program *deiwaka*¹⁴ which played 100% Hip-hop for two hours every working day. It also started Top Ten charts (ibid.: 50-1). In the new millennium, Clouds FM, which has a larger coverage than Times FM, “probably ruled the airwaves in Bongo Flava promotion in Dar es Salaam” (ibid.: 53).¹⁵ This station has sustained a very powerful position in music promotion in Tanzania up to now, especially because it is part of an entertainment company active in event organization, radio broadcasting, and discos. While it withdrew from recording after most of the equipment of its *Mawingu Studio* was stolen in 1996 (Perullo 2007: 262), it launched its TV station *Clouds TV* in 2010. Television has increasingly become an important channel of promotion as many households now afford buying a TV set. Today, even in poor areas in Dar es Salaam, the forest of locally manufactured TV antennae above the roofs indicates that this medium plays an important role in people’s lives and in society.¹⁶ This development has prompted the production of music videos. According to Juma4 (2011), the first music videos were produced by Television Zanzibar (TVZ) in 1997 for groups such as Kwanza Unit and Struggling Islanders. Government-owned TVZ, established in 1974, was the only Tanzanian TV station until 1994, and therefore had the equipment for video production. However, the rapper G-Solo recalls that already in 1996, a video clip was produced by the private TV station ITV for the song *Leo ni Leo* (‘Today is today’) by his group G’s Mob¹⁷ (pers. comm. to GH 20.03.2011).¹⁸ A few years later, the first video production companies emerged, as more and more Tanzanian musicians demanded the production of music videos. Today, it is nearly impossible to count the proliferating number of video production companies. With three music TV channels and music programmes from almost all Tanzanian TV stations, this medium now plays a crucial role in music promotion.

Swahili print media were also pivotal in spreading Hip-hop music culture from the early days (Mangesho 2003: 62). The tabloids, whose number has remarkably increased since

¹⁴ *Deiwaka* is the swahilized form of ‘day worker’. Being a day worker or laborer is seen as a characteristic of the urban poor.

¹⁵ In the beginning, this station covered the whole of Dar es Salaam, while Times FM covered only part of the city (Mangesho 2003: 53). Clouds FM expanded its coverage in 2002 to other parts of the country (Hacke 2007: 79). Radio One and Radio Uhuru covered the whole country from the start.

¹⁶ Those antennae are made of used neon tubes.

¹⁷ The group, initially comprising G-Solo and three sisters, later split up. G-Solo pursued a solo career, while the three sisters formed the group Unique Sisters.

¹⁸ G-Solo remembers other videos that were produced in the same year by private TV stations, for example for Gangstaz With Matatizo (GWM), and Sos B.

the 1990s, allocate the most space to music and film, usually at least the two central pages of a paper. While they are especially interested in gossip concerning the artists' lives, they also announce events such as live shows and the launch of new albums. Some maintain top ten lists, or conduct award competitions. Critical columns can also be found, although these are more restricted.¹⁹ The English press has started to have pull-outs on cultural issues. In the mid 2000s, the magazine *Kitangoma* (owned by Prime Time Promotions, one of the enterprises of the founder of Radio Clouds FM, Joseph Kusaga) had a clear bias towards Bongo Flava music. Today, there are the monthly *bang!* and the bimonthly *Base* magazines which feature all sorts of entertainment. Websites have also been established, where information on crews, artists, songs, and events can be found.²⁰

In 2000, the Hardblasters Crew released their immensely popular song *Chemsha Bongo*²¹ (meaning 'think hard'), which became something of a soundtrack for the expansion period. It was the first Bongo Flava song to be played by all radio stations, and managed to remain on rotation for at least two years (Hacke 2007: 24 f.). The early 2000s witnessed the subsequent *Bongo Explosion*. Bongo Flava was in the air – in streets, shops and minibuses. Hip-hop dressing style became widespread, and a number of male youth plaited their hair. The trend for social-critical lyric content continued. Certain songs, especially by artists such as Mr. II²², Professor Jay, and the crew Wagosi wa Kaya, became the subject of conversation and discussion in many settings and contexts throughout the country, and have certainly contributed a lot to Bongo Flava's recognition as a legitimate form of Tanzanian culture. Bongo Flava abounded with creativity: there were experimental beats, a lot of original lyrics, and interesting personalities. The music became accepted by different age and social groups in the country, and was officially acknowledged by the National Arts Council (BASATA) in 2001 (Saavedra Casco 2006: 233). According to their role as social educators and commentators, a number of artists composed songs commenting on the campaign for the General Elections in 2005. These songs reflect the whole range of attitudes present in Bongo Flava, as there were critical ones which tried to raise voters' awareness, while others praised the ruling party's candidate, or made fun of the elections (Reuster-Jahn 2008). As a result of their increasing popularity, individual artists started to profit from their songs. According to

¹⁹ Sultan Tamba, for example, writes irregular columns on art and entertainment in Tanzania in some tabloids.

²⁰ The most important websites are www.africanhiphop.com, www.bongo5.com, www.swahiliremix.com, www.darhotwire.com/BongoXplosions, and www.eastafricantube.com.

²¹ The song tells the life history of a once rich and arrogant young man, who spent all his money and became miserable. The song ends with an allusion to the lost son, expressing the hope that the family will still accept and help him. It can be read as a parable which shows that the attitude and behavior of American Hip-hop stars is not adequate in Tanzania (Hacke 2007: 25 ff., 2008: 32).

²² He started as II Proud and later took the name Sugu (meaning "chronic" in Swahili). His civil name is Joseph Mbilinyi.

Perullo (2007: 268), between 1999 and 2001, several rappers released albums that sold 100,000 copies, which is a great amount in Tanzania. Some toured East Africa, and a few even performed at festivals in Europe. The studios in Dar es Salaam had a reputation for their good work, so artists from Kenya and Uganda, like Kalamashaka and Chameleone, came to produce their songs there. With growing commercialization, the music became to be seen as a means to get rich. Artists were able to buy cars and spend a lot on enjoyment with friends and women. Already in 2007, however, there were signs that this growth was not to be sustained, and differences in the access to the gatekeepers of the music market caused tensions among the artists. The more deprived ones accused their better-off colleagues of trying to control the industry, while the latter ascribed those complaints to jealousy (Perullo 2007: 269).

Most scholarly studies of Bongo Flava were published in the 2000s. The articles aimed at understanding the process of appropriation and localization (Raab 2006, Perullo 2007), and highlighted the role of Bongo Flava in the formation of contemporary youth identity (Perullo 2005). Language choice was important for that process, but also for audience relationship and role negotiation (Englert 2003, 2008), as well as language development (Reuster-Jahn and Kießling 2006). Since the use of Swahili slang is part of youth identity in Tanzania – a person's actual slang repertoire also depending on social background – it has a firm place in Bongo Flava lyrics (Englert 2003, Perullo 2005, Reuster-Jahn 2007, Reuster-Jahn and Kießling 2006). However, the use of slang is not a general rule. While some artists stress the need for being up to date in the use of Swahili “street language” (*lugha ya mitaani*) as a sign of mastery²³, others are flexible in this regard. They only use it in some songs while in others their lyrics are in everyday colloquial Swahili. In any case, Bongo Flava has played and still plays an important role for the spread of youth or street language (Reuster-Jahn and Kießling 2006: 63 f.).

Language is also essential in the way messages are delivered. Perullo (2005) showed that only few artists dare to deliver “sharp messages”, notably the famous Mr. II and Prof. Jay, and radio stations tend not to play directly critical songs. However, there are indirect ways available to the artists, such as the use of allusions, metaphors, and comic or humour (Perullo 2005, Reuster-Jahn 2008), which are rooted in Swahili and other local Tanzanian cultures.

Two recent articles have concentrated on strategies the artists apply in their pursuit of commercial success. Katrina Thompson (2008) has examined how the internationally successful Bongo Flava crew X-Plastaz, based in Arusha, draw on Maasai imagery in an

²³ Fredrick Mariki (Mkoloni) of the crew Wagosi wa Kaya, pers. comm. to URJ 17.07.2009.

attempt of “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1973), when they project to international audiences “images of African traditionalism, authenticity and hybridity, encouraging a touristic Western gaze” (Thompson 2008: 33). Another strategy, examined by Birgit Englert (2008), is used by aspiring artists - called *maandagraundi*²⁴ - in smaller urban centres in Tanzania. They deliberately mix different styles (in Swahili *kuchanganyachanganya*), and avoid using slang in their lyrics, in order to reach the largest possible audience. Englert (2003) studied *maandagraundi* in Morogoro, the capital of Morogoro Region. Another study has been presented by Sarah Schabel (2007) on the *maandagraundi* in Zanzibar, who produce a distinct musical style, called *Zenji Flava*, which incorporates elements of *taarab*, a coastal music that originated in Zanzibar in the late 19th century.

Bongo Flava in the recent years

Today, the period of Bongo Flava’s continuous rise is over. It now has to defend its position as an important segment of the Tanzanian music industry. Shows do not attract as large crowds as common only a few years ago; a development closely related to consumption of music videos on TV. In addition, musical styles have their ups and downs: the *dansi* genre, which had been outshined by the rising Bongo Flava for a while, has caught up in airplay and popularity, and new bands have been formed.²⁵ In addition, Gospel music (Swahili *muziki wa injili*), with famous choirs as well as solo singers, has become very popular. In August 2009, at the long established music shop Mamu Stores²⁶ in Dar es Salaam, almost forty different Gospel audio CDs were on display at a central place on the counter, while Bongo Flava audiocassettes and CDs shared the shelves with *dansi* and other genres.²⁷ Gospel music is now played for entertainment, even in bars. Like in the early years of Hip-hop in Tanzania, musicians who deem themselves talented now rather try their luck by recording Gospel CDs.

But pressure also comes from media development in the entertainment sector as a whole. Since the turn of the century, popular culture in Tanzania has experienced a powerful trend towards audiovisual material. Not only has TV set ownership increased significantly, but local video film production too has exploded in the last two years. Interestingly, this development kicked off in 2003 with the video film *Girlfriend* that was set in the Bongo Flava scene and starred successful Bongo Flava musicians. Its script-writer and producer Sultan Tamba says that he purposely made use of Bongo Flava’s popularity in order to attract audiences to his film.²⁸ Currently, a minimum of five Swahili entertainment videos are

²⁴ Singular *andagraundi*, derived from English ‘underground’.

²⁵ For example the bands Akudo Impact and FM Akademia.

²⁶ This shop is the central outlet of GMC, the principal distributor of CDs and MCs in Dar es Salaam.

²⁷ The picture was still the same in March 2011.

²⁸ Interview URJ with Sultan Tamba, 07.08.2009. For the film’s huge success see also Böhme 2004: 12 f.

spurned out per week. Indian, Nigerian, as well as Western films get Swahili translations by voice-over (Krings, forthcoming). A multitude of video libraries have sprung up in the urban centres of Tanzania where videos can be borrowed for little money. In addition, in the urban high density areas (in Swahili called *uswahilini* or *uswazi*), local video cinemas show a number of films per day for even less. Those films of course compete with music as a pastime. This trend is expressed in the frequently heard Swahili sentence "*watu wanataka ya kuona*" ('people want things to see'). Wananchi Stores, the central outlet of one of the few distributors in Tanzania, has stopped selling audio-cassettes and CDs in 2007, and is now concentrating on audio-visual material only (pers. comm. to URJ 23.07.2009, confirmed 15.08.2010). Clearly, this move is a reaction to the trend towards visual media, while at the same time reinforcing it. Bongo Flava as an industry has attempted to follow this development with the production of music clips, which are played frequently at almost all TV stations in the country. There are three TV Channels playing music videos during the whole day. East Africa TV Channel 5 (EATV5) plays Bongo Flava video clips, music videos of similar style from Uganda and Kenya, as well as Afro-American video clips. This station is broadcasting all over East Africa. Clouds TV broadcasts mainly Hip Hop and R&B from Tanzania and the United States. C2C plays music videos of Bongo Flava, *dansi* and *taarab* for a Dar es Salaam audience. Other stations, like TBC, Channel 10, Star TV, Mlimani TV or DTV have daily shows for music videos in their programs. While music videos are important vehicles for promotion, they also add heavily to the expenses an artist has to cover.

With digitalization and the spread of computers, it has become easy to copy music for both private and commercial use. It is also possible to put songs on mobile phones, or share them via Bluetooth. Such pirate services are offered by many stationery shops in urban areas. This critically affects the sale of legal copies and poses a serious problem to the music industry. In this situation of widespread illegal copying, it is striking that the artists put the blame for piracy almost exclusively on the distributors, whom they suspect of producing illegal copies. These accusations have to be interpreted in the context of stereotypes about "Indians" in the country, as distribution is in the hands of a handful of Tanzanians of Asian descent.²⁹ Their monopoly of course gives them the power to dictate prices, and many artists complain about being forced to sell their master copies below value. Alternatively to selling the master CD, artists can get royalties for every copy sold, which since 2001 have been fixed at 200 Tanzanian Shillings (TSh; equivalent to approximately 16 US cents) for an audiocassette (sold at 1500 TSh³⁰), and 500 TSh for a CD (sold at 6000 TSh). Although the distributors allow them to mark the legal copies with stamp and signature, artists still deem them untrustworthy. In August 2009, the artist AY who is one of the most successful Bongo

²⁹ For the problems of the Asian minority in Tanzania see Voigt-Graf 1998, especially p. 15 ff.

³⁰ The price used to be higher some years ago. In 2005, audiocassettes were sold for 4000 TSh.

Flava musicians complained in an interview that sales records are not laid open to the artists (Anonymous 2009). The government eventually made a move to tackle the problem of intellectual property. In 1999 the Copy Right and Neighbouring Laws Act was enacted and the Copyright Society of Tanzania (COSOTA) took office in 2001. However, it turned out highly difficult to enforce the copyright law. Private radio stations, for example, are still refusing to pay copyright fees. The artists on their part are sceptical of COSOTA. While they claim that this body is ineffective, COSOTA says that musicians are reluctant to register with them and collect their money.³¹ For the period of January to May 2009, almost 24 million TSh for musicians alone were collected from different distributors, radio stations, and clubs (Mfugale 2009).

While the national market for Bongo Flava seems to stagnate, expansion is taking place on an East African scale. Tanzanian artist AY frequently performs in East African countries and even beyond. In August 2009, TMK Family in association with Tip Top Connection were on tour in Kenya. The TV channel East Africa TV Channel 5 broadcasts music, especially Bongo Flava and other East African Hip-hop and R&B, to all East African countries. In this regional expansion Swahili is again playing a crucial role, as Kenyan and Ugandan artists are relying on Swahili lyrics in order to access the East African market. Even beyond East Africa, Bongo Flava artists are gaining recognition, and are regularly nominated for the MTV African Music Award (MAMA). In interviews, many artists express their hopes of eventually accessing the US and the European market. Such aspirations are fuelled by news such as Bongo Flava artist Nakaaya having signed a contract with Sony in 2009.

The musical development of Bongo Flava has been marked by a growing mix of styles. These are mainly derived from Afro-American Rap, R&B, Reggae and Ragga. Moreover, there are sub-categories, such as Bongo Crunk, a Tanzanian version of US Crunk, which was initiated by Ilunga Khalifa a.k.a C Pwaa.³² Sharobaro is used as a label for music coming from the Sharobaro and G-Records studios, said to be smooth and smart.³³ The songs of that style usually display the alleged luxurious life of the musicians. Another sub-style is called Hadicore. Different to US hard core rap with its aggressive lyrics, Hadicore comprises songs with a strong social message mixed with boasting. A special rhythm based on Ragga especially famous in Uganda and recently also in Kenya, is called *Kapuka*. *TaKeU*³⁴ is a style that was created by the Tanzanian artist Mister Nice. It merges Kenyan R&B with Ragga

³¹ Interview URJ with Mr. Yustus Mkinga, director of COSOTA, 11.09.2009.

³² For example Black Rhino, and Noorah.

³³ Sharobaro and G-Records studios, each run by one of two brothers, produce music for artists such as Ali Kiba, Richard, Hakeem 5, Abby Skills. These are known for a bias for love songs and smart appearance.

³⁴ TaKeU is an acronym, made of Ta from Tanzania, Ke from Kenya and U from Uganda.

from Uganda and Hip-hop from Tanzania. Finally, there are many musical influences without a label in Bongo Flava music. For example, it is very common to mix some elements of Zouk in Bongo Flava songs, or to add “traditional” sounds like drums or flutes. Elements of Indian music also play a role.

In contemporary Bongo Flava lyrics, “message” including the representation of living conditions, as well as “lifestyle and party” are still important. In addition, love-songs have become frequent. The artists project the concept of romantic “true” love, while at the same time singing about infidelity and the breaking up of relationships. This can be seen as a reaction to changing gender roles, as well as a new discourse on social values and growing individualism. Few songs dig deeper into questions of social relevance, and this is why many people now say that Bongo Flava songs often convey “light message” (*ujumbe mwepesi*), and that many artists are just too immature to reach the minds of educated adults. The famous Mr. II, now renamed Sugu, who has lived in the UK and the USA, has however recently been elected Member of Parliament in October 2010 as the candidate of the opposition party Chadema, Party for Democracy and Development (Reuster-Jahn 2010). Even though other veterans like Prof. Jay and Juma Nature are still famous and active, they stir up public discussions at lot less than they used to. Probably the most popular Bongo Flava song in July and August 2009 was *Pii Pii* by the artist Marlaw, which is about a man who got stuck in traffic jam with his car. He calls his wife several times, asking her to be patient and to wait for him. At the end he reaches his nice middle class home where his wife welcomes him. While this song is much about middle class life-style, it also touches on the every day life of ordinary people, as traffic jam is a problem shared by everybody in Dar es Salaam. Another recent rap song, *Hip Hop haiuzi* – ‘Hip-hop does not sell’ - by the artist Madee, comments directly on the growing commercialization of Bongo Flava. This song claims that Hip-hop is not successful any more; the cassettes remain on the shop shelves, while Bongo Flava cassettes are shown to be very fast selling.

Economic difficulties, the problem of “promotion”, and artists’ strategies for success

Many Bongo Flava insiders claim that piracy as well as corrupt practices in promotion and distribution is suffocating Bongo Flava artists. In general, artists have to pay for any activity performed by any person which is considered to promote their careers. Promotion for them means, playing the music in the radio or the music video on TV, broadcasting interviews, writing about an artist or his songs in the print media, or providing access to important persons and institutions. Paying for those “services” is a well established practice that most artists, even those who condemn it as a form of corruption, accept as something inevitable. In fact, Bongo Flava artist Mr. II a.k.a. Sugu blames the artists for having started the practice

of bribing themselves in order to outdo their competing fellow musicians (pers. comm. to URJ 11.12.2009).

Radio and TV play is most essential for an artist to become known, and to “get a name”, which in turn determines the demand for cassettes and CDs as well as for shows. The artists bring their tracks or videos to the stations personally, usually before they have been released on cassette or CD. Radio and TV presenters act as gatekeepers who decide which songs will be air-played. This is a likely setting for *payola*, which is defined as “a bribe paid in order to influence a gatekeeper’s choice among competing creative products” (Caves 2000: 208).³⁵ In the Tanzanian context, the bribe is often overtly demanded by the radio or TV presenters, which only leaves the artists with negotiating the amount. The payment ranges from mobile phone vouchers to several hundred thousand TSh, depending on the extent of the service. It must also be noted that such promotion “fees” are gendered, since female artists complain about being forced to pay with sexual services. Probably the most expensive “promotion campaign” are *Top Ten* competitions. Presenters offer the service to play a song three times per day during some weeks, and then put it on a lower position on the *Top Ten* list. From there they will move it slowly to the top position, and bring it down again after some time. Further air time during a certain period of time is included.

The practice of such promotion is relevant in the context of the negotiation of culture, as it points to the powerful position of the media as well as individual gatekeepers. Songs are turned into hits by heavy rotation in the media. The song *Pii Pii* by Marlaw, for example, could be heard several times per day in the radio. Of course, presenters stress that they select songs according to quality criteria, and these certainly play a role. A bad song is very unlikely to become a hit, even if it is pushed. However, in a situation where many songs of equal quality are produced, promotion becomes decisive for success. This is also because new artists continuously emerge from competitions or on their own. The practice of *payola* might partially account for the success of Bongo Flava in Tanzania, as it gives this local music a competitive advantage over music from abroad, such as US-American, or other African Hip-hop and other genres.

Today, the investment into one album has become extensive. Official production costs for one audio track are about 150,000 to 250,000 TSh (approx. 150 to 190 US Dollars), while for a music video 500,000 to 1 million TSh (375 to 750 US Dollars) have to be paid. Media promotion costs up to 300,000 TSh (225 US Dollars) for one song on the radio as well

³⁵ According to Caves several factors are responsible for the affinity of *payola* for creative goods: (1) they are of infinite variety, (2) nobody knows the ultimate outcome of the gatekeeper’s choice, and (3) the cost of the product is fixed (2000: 286 f.).

as on TV. At present, all artists agree that a song cannot be successful without a video clip. The total investment for one album, including one music video as well as some promotion could easily reach 4 million TSh (3.000 USD), if “official” prices were to be paid. However, musicians are likely to get discounts when they have a friendly relationship with the person who performs the required service. This is one reason for artists to carefully cultivate their relationships and social network with fellow musicians, producers, presenters and other relevant people.

Key informants³⁶ estimated that only one quarter of all Bongo Flava musicians are making any profit, while three quarters invest more than they get out. The problem is that investments are made piecemeal, and this makes it difficult to stop. There is always the hope that the breakthrough will come with just some more investment which will be small in comparison to what has already been spent. The situation is most difficult for *maandagraundi* who for the most part are jobless youth. However, there are still a large number of such youth who believe in their talent and hope for a promising career if only they could manage to get their songs promoted sufficiently. It is not possible to count them, but the high number of studios in Dar es Salaam which has risen to an estimated thousand, may serve as an indicator of the breadth of Bongo Flava as a musical movement.³⁷ For many, the driving force is their hope to establish themselves in the middle class, to build a house and find a wife, have a car, a business, and a big name. Those artists are looking for strategies of how to obtain money to invest in their dream, but also how to reduce costs. Aiming to get discounts resulting from friendly relationships, they try to establish and maintain as many relevant relationships as possible. Below we will examine how social obligations are constructed and strategically used.

When we asked Bongo Flava artists about their life histories and careers we found some similarities and patterns. First of all, their career has often started with the help of their families, at a time when they already had gained some local recognition as artists. Notably mothers support their children, - in most cases sons -, since fathers often refuse to assist in a career as musician. However, family resources are usually limited and can therefore only help with the first steps such as travelling to the city or recording the first song. The families also lay a foundation for the future artists’ career by sending them to secondary school and paying school fees. The majority of Bongo Flava artists are secondary school leavers. Another source of help is people who share some history with the artist, for example fellow musicians, former school-mates, or other people coming from the same place or ethnic group. This is especially relevant when artists come to a major urban centre, like Dar es

³⁶ Producers as well as musicians.

³⁷ Estimate by key informants among producers.

Salaam or Mwanza. In these environments, social bonds constructed through shared history or group affiliation usually include the obligation to mutually help each other. Such people may help with a room or food, or even with money. From our observation, this form of assistance plays a crucial role.

Most artists have insufficient financial resources to pay for promotion. In this situation they need to establish relationships with people who hold positions in the Bongo Flava industry, such as producers, other artists, promoters, and even secretaries, who they hope will help them. A good relationship with a producer, for example, may result in a reduced tariff for recording. Networking often starts from the place where the artists originate. There they meet with smaller and bigger stars that come for shows from the city of Dar es Salaam. Usually, in those shows the local artists are given the opportunity to perform as opening acts. After the show they will sit together and talk. If the stars have liked a local artist's performance they might encourage him to come to the city and start his career seriously. The local artist may ask them for advice and exchange mobile phone numbers with them. Contacts made in that way will provide a starting point for him when he comes to the city. Such contacts are the raw material from which the artists seek to build lasting relationships that might eventually lead to some voluntary service in their favour by the respective individual. Establishing a good relationship starts with acknowledging the respective person's importance by calling him every now and then, asking how he is getting on. The mobile phone is indeed absolutely indispensable for anybody active in the cultural sector. When we met with musicians or other actors in that field, they were receiving text messages and calls from other musicians in high frequency. One *andagraundi* told us that for him, the mobile phone is his office. The space for relationship negotiation is first of all the recording studio, since there are always several artists present. Bars and social meeting places are also important. An *andagraundi* who really has no money may approach producers and ask for a free recording. If the producer finds him talented he may be inclined to help him, either with a free recording, with reduced fees, or by connecting him to somebody else who might help him. The rationale for helping him with recording has to do with his own name, since, if the song will become a hit, his name will gain fame and increase his business returns. This accounts for the custom to announce the studio and producer in the tracks. Their names, as well as those of others who have been helpful in the production, are usually mentioned in the intro and outro of the tracks. For artists, especially *maandagraundi*, strategies of bypassing the big gatekeepers in order to make deals with the smaller ones are also important. In a recording studio this may involve the secretary who arranges a meeting with the sound engineer. The sound engineer may agree to produce the track for less than the official price outside office hours, and will share the money with the secretary. Such deals also make up common history between the involved parties and start off relationships.

For established artists and producers, relationships with relevant people are no less needed. Here too it is essential to acknowledge and honour their importance. Money is also involved, and one “has to pay for good relation”, as one producer told us. The one paying for good relations is not only aiming at a resulting service, but also views this as an investment into his popularity, and hence, his name. Rendering a voluntary service is another means of building relationships. One producer told us that he recorded songs for some artists almost for free when he started his business. This was not only his strategy to make himself known, but it also aimed at building relationships with potentially helpful contacts. This is a case of premeditated volunteerism, “the essence of individual social capital” (Munene 2005: 146). The same producer, who is also an artist himself, told us that artists have to invest in good relationships with any promoter, because, “even if they are not famous, if they are underground presenters – make good relationship with them, ‘cause even they can help you and they might come up.” The maintenance of relationships is part of the existence as an artist which requires both permanent attention and time. Pointing to the artists’ strategic approach to social relationship, however, is not to deny the relaxed and joyful aspects of their social life, the hanging out together as well as their readiness to help each other in difficulties.

Between artists, there are special ways of creating obligations in social relationships. One artist may help another one by taking him on his tour, or by featuring him in his song. Featuring another artist in one’s song or video is direct promotion for that artist, which will pay for him in the form of name, tour engagements as well as album sales. It is also an investment into the relationship, which through an act of reciprocity is hoped to yield some profit in the future. The formation of groups is another strategy and characteristic of Bongo Flava since the beginning. It started from crews mainly formed on the basis of friendship between artists. Larger groups were often attached to a certain area in Dar es Salaam. The East Coast Team from Upanga, TMK from Temeke, Tip Top from Manzese, and La-Familia from Ilala are all well known. While starting from the neighbourhood, all of these groups later integrated artists from other areas. Such groups usually have a leading person or a manager. In the present situation where the demand for Bongo Flava shows has decreased, even larger associations are formed. In 2009, two large groups, TMK Wanaume Family and Tip Top Connection have merged to form TMK/Tip Top. Subsequently, they started to tour all Tanzanian regions and neighbouring Kenya. To form larger groups means that no artists from outside are needed to go on tour. Furthermore, costs for travel and accommodation become relatively cheaper. Problems always come when the gains have to be divided, as the shares depend on the name and importance of each member. Sometimes, members feel that their contribution is larger than their share, or that others get too much. It is therefore very important to have a manager who takes such decisions. However, in Bongo Flava history,

such problems have already caused many artists not only to leave groups, but also to split them off entirely. TMK Wanaume may serve as an example. This group, with their front man Juma Nature and their manager Said Fella, emerged from Temeke district in Dar es Salaam. In 2007, Juma Nature together with a number of other artists left the group because of frictions with Fella, whom they accused of bad management. They started TMK Wanaume Halisi³⁸, while Fella continued with the rest of the group under the name of TMK Wanaume Family.

To summarise, social capital is needed and used to create the artist's name, which in turn is the basis for album sales and profitable contracts for shows. The name correlates with gain size. And the gains are not only to be understood in economic terms. Mkoloni, a member of the crew Wagosi wa Kaya told us that a number of times he got help in difficult situations just because people knew him as an artist. Name and fame are eventually measured in the wealth that an artist manages to acquire. This is demonstrated by symbols such as expensive cars, good clothes, jewelry, and pretty women – symbols related to the US American model of the Hip-hop star. Much is spent in clubs and bars, preferably together with other stars and “superstars”. Part of the money is usually reinvested in new songs. However, some people blame the Bongo Flava stars for not using the money for starting other profitable businesses. They like to point to the Bongo Flava stars Lady Jay Dee and T.I.D. as models to follow. Both have established their own bands, with whom they perform on regular days per week at specific venues.

Conclusion

Hip-hop in Tanzania gained its momentum from a global wave in the 1990s. Through appropriation and localization it became something like a movement for urban youth, and an important symbol of their identity. The process, by which the globally circulating elements of Afro-American origin were connected to local culture, has been examined in several studies. They highlight the role of Swahilization as well as the discourse on lyric content among the cultural producers and Tanzanian society, and concentrate much on the potential for protest in this music. Our study points to the interdependence of this form of expressive culture with social structures and economic conditions. In particular, it has shed some light on the role of gatekeepers, especially with regard to broadcast and TV stations, where bribing is a common practice. Depending on payment to the gatekeepers, some songs are being made popular through heavy rotation, while others are given less airplay or are denied it altogether. Since studios usually do not engage in promotion, musicians are increasingly forced to find a manager who will help getting their career off the ground. This poses a threat to musicians' independence regarding musical and lyrical choice. It also

³⁸ Meaning ‘The real TMK Wanaume’.

means that the popularity of a song should not automatically be interpreted in terms of audience preferences, but also as a result of bribes paid to gatekeepers.

Radio and TV stations are not only decisive for the careers of individual musicians, but also for Bongo Flava as a whole. The stations have played a most essential role in the creation of the Bongo Flava phenomenon as such. If they decide that it is time for other genres to gain ground they can trigger such a development as well. Moreover, the enforcement of copyright law is an ongoing struggle in Tanzania and will be very relevant for the further development of cultural production in the country. This points to the complexity and interrelatedness of political, societal, and economic processes through which culture is negotiated in Tanzania.

In our study, Bongo Flava artists have come to the fore in their role as entrepreneurs. As such, their strategies for success are particularly based on constant investment into relationships with relevant people, in terms of time as well as voluntary services and money. This is based on the assumption that acts of reciprocity will occur. We suggest that this strategy is informed by social learning from early childhood. It is difficult to assess its economic effectiveness, since input and output cannot be measured and compared. However, two problems seem to be connected to that strategy. The artists invest a lot of time and money in relationships and there are signs that some subsequently neglect their artistic development and economic skills. The second problem, however, goes deeper. It has to do with the tension between building relationships for mutual help while aiming at individual success. In this context, spending money with friends as well as helping those who need support may be seen as a strategy to soothe possible jealousy, which is perceived as dangerous. At any rate, it results in the accommodation of many principally competing artists in the Bongo Flava network and industry. With continuing commercialization this situation might change. Some key informants are already convinced that some “big names” will remain while many of the smaller ones will drop out. This would, once again, change and modify the character of Bongo Flava music.

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