

Bongo Flava (Still) Hidden „Underground“¹ Rap from Morogoro, Tanzania

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Abstract

Bongo Flava, the Tanzanian variety of HipHop has become a big issue in Tanzania during the past few years. More and more young people use rap lyrics to express themselves. This article first gives a brief overview of the history of Bongo Flava and discusses the topics, lyrics and the sound of this music. It then turns to the situation of the underground rappers with focus on the regional capital Morogoro. The second part of the article discusses selected parts of three songs that were written by Juma Madoweka, one of the young rappers from Morogoro who rap because they want to pass on a message to the society they live in.

Introduction

„ni bora kula bwembwera chisamvu palipo amani
„it is better to eat a poor man's food in peace
kuliko chipsi kuku pa matatani
than chicken and chips in a troubled place
ee bwana tuzidi kudumisha hamani
hey man, let us strengthen the peace [we have]
wenzetu nchi jirani wapo matatani
our brothers in the neighbouring countries are in a troubled situation
kwa kukosa amani
because they lack peace
au sio jamani...?“
isn't it my friends...?“

(Juma Madoweka, „Sijaridhika moyo“)³

1 In the context of Bongo Flava the term „underground“ is used to denote the large majority of rappers who have not made it (yet) - those who are only known in the part of town where they come from or not known at all.

2 I want to thank Juma Madoweka for raising my interest in Bongo Flava and sharing his lyrics with me. Special thanks also to Albert Fechs for introducing me to US-HipHop and for his critical remarks on an earlier version of this article.

Juma Madoweka, the author of those lines, is one of many teenagers as well as young men and – though significantly fewer – women in Tanzania who dream of becoming famous HipHop artists by performing rap songs in Kiswahili, the national language of Tanzania.

For Juma who calls himself Docta Dox, HipHop is „kujigamba” (to proud oneself) and he certainly does not lack self-consciousness when he explains his aim: to pass on a message to the people in his society: „Ujumbe wangu ni kusafisha watu ambao wapumbavu, through message nitawaponya”. (*„My message is to cleanse the stupid people of their stupidity, through my message I will cure them.”*)

But as he expresses in the lyrics of his song „Sijaridhika moyo” to reach ones aims does not mean that one can satisfy ones heart:

„kwani dacta dox niliota kuwa mwanamuziki
„because me Doctor Dox I dreamed of becoming a musician
 nikafanya kile na hiki mpaka nikashika mike
I did this and that (everything) before I could hold the microphone
 lakini bado moyo unataka anaza kick”
But still the heart wants another kick”

the chorus being:

„sijaridhika moyo (n)a (h)ujaridhika moyo
„I have not satisfied my heart and you have not satisfied your heart
 (h)atujaridhika moyo, moyo moyo
 We have not yet satisfied our hearts, hearts, hearts
 kuridhika moyo (h)adithi”
To satisfy one’s heart is a tale”

1. Hip-hop in the „Peripheries”

Not only in Tanzania young people increasingly express themselves through HipHop. As Newsweek magazine recently noted, HipHop has emerged in countries as varied as Greenland, Indonesia and Senegal and functions there widely as a new social voice. (Beith/Spencer 2002)

³ The songs were transcribed by Juma Madoweka himself. Transcription does not always correspond with proper Swahili orthography, but rather corresponds to the way the words are pronounced when rapped.

In the United States however, the country from where it conquered the world, HipHop has lost much of its social consciousness. Mainstream-HipHop, as it is prominent on music channels such as MTV, is dominated by rappers who have little message to pass on but many golden necklaces to show off with. With increasing success, many of those who literally have made their way from „the ghetto“ have lost their credibility. In Germany the development was largely similar while in Japan HipHop was from the beginning rather seen as a fashion than as a social movement. (cf. Beith/Spencer 2002)

In the so-called „peripheries“ of the HipHop scene though, the majority of the rappers still has a message to pass on. In most countries rappers first created lyrics in English, but success only came about when rappers decided to use their own languages in order to spread their messages. (Beith/Spencer 2002: 79)

The actual impact that HipHop as a social movement can have, is of course a matter of debate but it certainly opened a new channel to express criticism that had not existed in this way before. Therefore HipHop rivals other forms of music that also spread messages but do not comment on contemporary issues to such an extent. (Beith/Spencer 2002: 81)

In Senegal, the country with the largest HipHop scene in Africa, rappers even claim to have played a crucial role in motivating voters to participate at the Presidential Election 2000 (see Maraszto 2002).

2. HipHop in Tanzania

2.1 Who raps in Bongoland?⁴

It is no longer possible to list all the crews and artists who have made themselves a name in Tanzania in the past few years. But among the most popular ones are certainly Mr II (2 Proud), Bongo Flava's first superstar who has retired by now and Prof. Jay who has probably taken over his role as the leading rapper with very socially committed texts. Both fall into the cate-

⁴ Bongo, literally meaning „brain“, „intelligence“, is a common slang expression for the country's largest city, Dar-es-Salaam, from where Tanzanian rap started to conquer the country but can also refer to the country Tanzania in general. „Bongo Flava“ as Tanzanian HipHop is called thus refers to the sound (flavour) from Dar-es-Salaam or Tanzania respectively.

gory of so-called „solo artists“ as they are called in Tanzania, which means that they cannot be classified as belonging to one of the two „camps“ that have come up in the last couple of years: „TMK“ and „East Coast“.

„TMK“ stands for Temeke, one of the poor neighbourhoods in Dar-es-Salaam where some of the more radical and critical crews like Gangwe Mobb and Juma Nature have their origin.

„East Coast“ on the other hand is the term given to the rappers whose background is the middle- or upper class of society and who reside in Upanga, a rather posh neighbourhood close to the city center. Rappers like TID, Crazy GK or Mwanafalsafa who represent this fraction of Bongo Flava sing more about the sunny side of life or like Azizi Matiga puts it: „East Coast wanaimba commercial, maswala la upenzi, wanachanganya na R'n'B, siyo HipHop sana.“ (*„[The rappers from] East Coast sing commercial music, about love, they mix it with R'n'B, it is not real HipHop.“*) (Interview 01.09.2003)

Female superstars are still few, one of the first who started to rap was Zay Bi. She was followed by Sister P whose success created a fierce competition between the two, each of them getting support from male rappers who also articulated the competition in their verses. Mwanafalsafa for example was singing: „Sister P, ungeimba nini asingekuwepo Zay Bi?“ (*„Sister P, what would you be singing if it had not been for Zay Bi?“*).⁵ Also the list of producers has grown rapidly⁶ and a number of very informative websites have come up. While www.africanhiphop.com has been the portal for HipHop from all African countries since 1997, www.mzibo.net and „BongoExplosions“ on www.darhotwire.com are exclusively dedicated to Bongo Flava and in Swahili, the latter being at the moment the only major website dedicated to Bongo Flava maintained from Tanzania.

5 And there is of course highly successful Lady Jay Dee, another „East Coast“ who is sometimes rated as a rapper though she rather belongs into the category of R'n'B.

6 Among the more popular studios are for example The Producers, Bongo Records, Tafsiri Records, Poa Records, Mambo Jambo Records, Backyard Productions, Marimba Studio, Mj Productions, Empty Souls Production, Sound Crafters, Fm Production.

2.2 A short history of Bongo Flava

HipHop reached Tanzania during the 1980s, but at that time there was no television and only one radio station dominated by Taarab and other traditional forms of music. HipHop did not have a platform and the shortage of recording studios posed a problem for young talents.

Thus in the beginning, HipHop was listened to by the children of better-off parents who had either studied abroad or had access to imported tapes and CDs from America. In the „early days“ HipHop was mainly heard in the discos of the big hotels and on the beaches around Dar-es-Salaam (De Rycker 2002: 3). Only later did HipHop also reach the less privileged youth and was largely taken over by them.

This is almost contrary to the context in which HipHop originated in America. There, HipHop was a voice for the marginalised youth of poorer areas, which were often also subject to racial discrimination – a context that also shaped HipHop in South Africa for example. (cf. Geesthuizen 2002)

Saleh Jabir is said to have been the first Tanzanian who started rapping in Swahili in the early 1990s. He did not write his own lyrics though but translated lyrics by American HipHoppers into Swahili. The release of his „Ice Ice Baby – King of Swahili Rap“ tape certainly marked a new stage of HipHop in Tanzania. His success though was limited – mainly because his songs lacked an original message.

De Rycker (2002: 6) writes: „As a person, Saleh J fits perfectly the description of the youths of the first period of Tanzanian hip hop. He has relatives living in the UK, he himself is a child of mixed origin with a white mother and a black father, at that time he had his own double tape recorder with microphone at home, and he moved to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates shortly after the release of a full album in 1992.“

Since then „Bongo Flava“, as the new sound soon got called, has developed rapidly. The first one to have success with his own verses in Swahili was Mr II who was dominating the Tanzanian HipHop scene throughout the 1990s. While Mr II became a role model for many young Tanzanian rappers, the probably biggest idol for most, including Mr II himself, remained Tupac Amaru Shakur, the American rapper who got shot in 1996.

In Tanzania rap was in the beginning widely regarded as „uhuni“ („hooliganism“) a situation, which is recalled in a cynical dialogue between a fictive „mzee“ (respected elder man) and the young artist on the tape „Machosi, Jasho na Damu“ (2002) by Professor Jay.

This term however, is not reserved exclusively for rappers within the Tanzanian music scene. Graebner notes: „In Tanzania musicians are commonly considered to be wahuni, i.e. vagabonds, drunkards, drugtakers, while their music is enjoyed by the same people who call them these names“ (Graebner 1989: 243 cited in De Rycker 2002: 40)

Nevertheless, the acceptance of Bongo Flava music by the Tanzanian society is constantly growing and the music of those „with a message“ like Prof. Jay seems to attract people of all age groups as Azizi Matiga’s observations suggest: „Nimeshangaa siku moja nilimwona mama ambaye alinyosha vyombo, akaimba nyimbo za Prof. Jay, mama kabisa, na miaka sitini na kitu, lakini maneno yanamtouch.“ (*„I was surprised, one day I saw a mama who was washing the dishes, she was singing a song of Prof. Jay. She was a real mama, sixty and something years old, but the words touch her.“*) (Interview 01.09.2003)

This development is certainly related to the fact that since the late 1990s HipHop is being played up and down on the now many Tanzanian radio channels, and artists feature prominently in newspapers and journals.

In 2001 HipHop was recognised as an official genre within Tanzania’s pop culture by the Tanzanian Arts Council BASATA and also became one of the categories at the first national music awards in 2002. „Ndio Mzee“ by Professor Jay won in the category „Best HipHop Single“, the award for the „Best HipHop Album“ went to Gangwe Mobb for „Simulizi la Ufasaha“ – both certainly among the most socially and politically committed Tanzanian rappers.

(www.darhotwire.com/where_at/tma.html, 2.6.2003)

The immense popularity of rap music did not go unnoticed by various interest groups such as NGOs who started to sponsor MCs⁷ who would translate their messages to the youths. Mr II for example was hired by Population

⁷ MC is the abbreviation for „Master of Ceremony“ as rappers are also called in HipHop jargon.

Services International for an advertisement (Toroka 2002: 1) and also UNICEF Tanzania uses rappers in their AIDS-awareness campaign.

(www.madunia.nl/projects/halisi.htm)

But also commercial companies jumped on the train and used rappers for the promotion of their products – ranging from Kilimanjaro Pure Drinking Water to Benson Hedges cigarettes. (Toroka 2002: 1, De Rycker 2002: 12)

Concerning politics, Pieter Remes noted that certain rap groups might praise a political party during special performances for which they get paid (Kwanza Unit praising CCM in the example given by Remes 1999: 18-19 cited in De Rycker 2002: 23). This however does not necessarily mean that the same group is not taking a very critical position towards politicians in some of its other lyrics. (De Rycker 2002: 24)

Another interesting example that throws up questions about the relation between rappers and politicians is the new song by Mr. Ebbo who became famous with the single „Mimi Mmasai” - a positive confirmation of his Maasai identity. In 2003 Mr. Ebbo collaborated with the Presidential Parastatal Sector Reform Commission (PSRC) in the production of a song whose main objective „is to show the people how privatization helps the economic development of a poor country like Tanzania.” (Mr. Ebbo quoted in *The Guardian*, January 16, 2003: 7)

What certainly gave another push to the HipHop scene is the film „Girlfriend” which came out in summer 2003 and became a big success. „Girlfriend” - despite its English title in Swahili – is a Tanzanian movie situated in the HipHop milieu and starring a number of the most popular rappers. All of them „East Coasters” though – a fact that has stirred up angry reactions among the fans of those who are counted as „TMK”, as letters to the editors of various newspapers show.

While the number of artists who „have made it” is increasing, so is the number of those who dream of becoming famous rappers. A vivid scene of young „underground” rappers is emerging - not only in Dar-es-Salaam but all over the country.

2.3 „Underground“ Rap in Morogoro

In Morogoro, a regional capital about 200 km west from Dar-es-Salaam, the HipHop-enthusiastic youth has the chance to show its talent on stage in the weekly „talentshow“⁸ – a rap contest being held in the Mango Garden.

Every Sunday at 7 p.m. approximately 20 groups of young rappers climb the stage in competition to enter the next round. They can choose between two different beats only and have to show their ability to rap their message to the sound. At the end of each month the winners are being declared and receive their prizes: number One is being rewarded with a bicycle.

To rap various songs to the same sound is not just practised for competition on stage but also because only few can afford to have their individual beats composed in a studio. Juma Madoweka has got one beat, which was composed by a professional producer for a fee of about 5.000 TSh (appr. 5 Dollar).⁹ In 2002 he used this one as the background sound to all his lyrics and he had also recorded one song „Je, wajua“ completely with beats and lyrics. However, this tape produced by a small local studio in Morogoro lacked the quality needed for the song to be played on the radio.

In summer 2003 though Juma Madoweka's song „Sisi ni nani“ was being played on the Morogoro-based radio „Redio Kweli“ and was even listed among the Top Ten. He had managed to save up the 70.000 TSh (appr. 70 Dollar)¹⁰ to produce the single on CD, which he then brought to the radio station himself. Lucky enough the people there liked and played it so that Juma got at least some emotional satisfaction though financially there are of course no rewards.

But a CD also opens new channels for live performances. Most concerts of the „Superstars“ are preceded by (sometimes long) hours of performances by the „Undergrounds“ who have at least one CD to which they perform playback.

Their effort is however rarely awarded by the audience, which is usually still sparse during these afternoon hours and at best ignorant or at worst

8 Such contests are a general characteristic of HipHop and also popular in the United States.

9 Alternatively tapes containing beats only can be bought in the local music shops for a smaller amount.

10 This is approximately equivalent to two monthly salaries of a teacher - though by far too little for a family to live on.

booing at those who stumble across a word – as it happened to Suzi. The 13-year old was the only girl to climb the stage in the warm-up to a concert of Solo Thang in the football stadium of Morogoro at the end of August 2003. But Suzi just carried on with her song and showed that girls are no longer out of the game. Azizi Matiga suggests that they might have it even easier to be successful than their male counterparts: „Undergrounds wa kike wana nafasi kubwa, [...] wana nafasi kuliko wanaume kwa sababu hawa ni wengi sana, [...] wanawake wanapewa priority sasa hivi.” (*„The female undergrounds have a big chance, [...] they have more chances than the men because they are so many, [...] women are now given priority.”*) (Interview 01.09.2003)

This interpretation though does not ask why the number of girls and women in the HipHop scene is still so low, so that the few female rappers stick out to such an extent.

3. The Rap Songs

3.1 Topics

Whether superstar or participant at a local talent show, the lyrics of the songs mainly revolve around a few central topics. Besides some „East Coasters” whose lyrics are mainly about love and party life, most rappers, especially among the „Undergrounds”, address more serious topics: social problems, the poor state of the educational system, HIV/AIDS, politics and corruption and especially the problems of the young generation:

„Tunazungumzia maisha, maisha kwa ujumla, ugumu wa maisha [...] na labda mapenzi, lakini mapenzi katika negative side, mpenzi anakukataa, labda kwa sababu huna hela...” (*„We talk about life, life in general, the toughness of life [...] and perhaps about love, but in a negative sense, your loved one rejects you, perhaps because you don't have any money.”*) (Juma Madoweka, July 27th 2002)

The topic of a young man being rejected by his loved one because he lacks money – though certainly not a theme specific to Tanzania- is for example featured in the super-hit of 2001 „Mtoto wa Geti kali” by Gangwe Mobb as well as in „Barua” by Daz Nundaz who were topping the charts in 2002.

And the content of the songs seems to count: 41 % of the voters in an online poll on www.darhotwire.com said that what makes a good rapper is deter-

mined by his lyrics (mashairi). Only 25 % say this depends on the voice and for 18 % the beats are the most important aspect. ¹¹

3.2 The sound

While many of the beats of Bongo Flava songs are still more or less in line with the „original sound“ of American HipHop this is changing slowly and beats become more and more „africanised“. Crews like Mambo Jambo for example use various Tanzanian instruments like *ngoma* and *malimba* to create their sound. X Plastaz from Arusha – who are one of the few groups who have already performed in Europe - integrated Maasai horns and also Maasai singing into their texts, and Mr. II has also recorded a song together with the famous Tanzanian musician Remmy Ongala.

Another new fusion that has come up is „taarap“ which combines HipHop and Taarab. The Zanzibari MC Cool Para for example, recorded a whole CD, „Nayaweza“, together with the well-known taarab group „East African Melody“.

(www.madunia.nl/projects/struggling.htm)

By making the beats sound more „African“, musicians hope to increase the appeal of their music on the world market and thereby also fulfill the demands of producers who claim that „American-sounding“ music with lyrics in African languages have no appeal. (compare Kariuki in *The East African*, September 08-14, 2003, Part 2, II)

3.3 Lyrics

Lyrics by Tanzanian rappers are mainly in Swahili and most often in the variety called „Kiswahili cha mitaani“ (Street Swahili). Code-switching takes place, although borrowings from English seem to be more frequent. To some extent there is also switching or borrowing between Swahili and other Tanzanian languages.

As it is common within HipHop in general transcriptions of lyrics are not easy to come across. Some are being printed in Tanzanian newspapers such as „Kiu“, „Uwazi“ or „Lete Raha“ and increasingly they can also be found on the internet. But in most cases the transliteration is being done by people other than the artists themselves.

¹¹ <http://www.senac.com/voting/2662/vote.cgi?action=show&topic=nini>, letzter Zugriff: 25. 09.2003

Although lyrics are „written“ in a fixed form they can be interpreted flexibly and, especially for the underground rappers, it is common to interchange verses from various songs or to add lines spontaneously. Bongo Flava lyrics do not seem to take on any special form, an exception being „taarap“.¹² The lyrics which Cool Para from Zanzibar raps, are written by an older Zanzibari poet who uses the meter of taarab lyrics. (Geesthuizen 2002: 2)

In the following part of the article I want to concentrate on selected parts of the lyrics by Juma Madoweka who discussed some of his lyrics with me in detail.

4. Juma Madoweka – an „underground“ rapper from Morogoro

Juma Madoweka was born in Morogoro as the last of five children and turned 22 in July 2003. Being a Muslim he nevertheless went to a boarding school of the Seventh Day Adventists in the Pare Mountains.

He finished form four in 1999, and it was then that he started to create his first rhymes. Besides talking about the hardness of life in Bongoland, Juma Madoweka also often refers to motives from Islam as well as Christianity because due to his personal background he is well familiar with the concepts of the two main religions in Tanzania. His interest in philosophy is also reflected in his songs, especially in „Sisi ni nani?“, as is his involvement in an NGO¹³ concerned with environmental protection, the main topic of „Mazingira“.

12 Another exception are the lyrics of Solo Thang from Dar-es-Salaam who is also known as „Mzee wa vina“ because of his skill to text whole songs in the rhyming style of Swahili poetry called vina.

13 He is member of the relatively new-founded Mountain Conservation Society of Tanzania (MCST) which is also active in the Uluguru Mountains to the South of Morogoro town.

4.1. Nitakuongopea (I will deceive you) ¹⁴

This song consists of 13 verses (10 of them with 4 lines, two with 3 lines and the very last one with only 2 lines) and the chorus, which is in a question-answer style and gives the title to this song. In the chorus social rules are being questioned such as having to give a positive answer when asked how things are, even though everyone knows that things are far from fine:

ukiniuliza mambo vipi?
if you ask me how are things?
 nitakuongopea
I will deceive you
 mpango vipi?
what are the plans?
 nitakuongopea
I will deceive you
 maswala vipi?
what is it up to?
 nitakuongopea
I will deceive you
 poa palipo poa
cool is cool
 pasipo poa sipoa
not cool is not cool
 nitakuongopea
I will deceive you

In the main text the rapper comments the bad state of the country by pointing at a situation in class where the teacher does not know how to cope with pupils whose attention is flared due to poverty:

hali mbaya dhiki mkuki
bad situation, distress is a spear
 eti sasa shiling tano aitumiki
the five shilling coin is not being used (anymore)

14 The complete transcription of five of Juma's songs – albeit without translation - can be found on the internet at http://mailbox.univie.ac.at/birgit.englert/Bongo_Flava/juma_madoweka.htm

wanafunzi wengi breakfast hadithi
for many pupils breakfast is a tale
 dalasani maswali ayajibiki
in class questions are not answered

mwalimu haulizi vipi
the teacher does not ask why
 kwake busara stiki
his wisdom is the stick
 nani kakwambia kungulu afugiki
who told you that the Kungulu-bird can not be kept
 hii dhiki kwa wenzetu hadithi
for our friends (from Europe) this poverty is a story only

The second part of the song has more general concerns. The elite is being criticised for not changing anything in the situation of the poor:

wakubwa juu zaidi
the leaders are on a higher level
 tunasubili chini kama visiki
we are waiting down like a stump of a tree
 zapita siku wiki
days and weeks go by
 chochote hakifanyiki
nothing gets done

Then the rapper points at his position and talent. This typical feature of rap texts in general¹⁵ can be found in almost every lyric by Juma Madoweka:

mimi si mzurulaji
I am not an idler
 kipaji changu muimbaji
my talent is singing
 kitambulisho vesi
my identity are these verses
 na mpaka chorus
and the chorus is the limit

¹⁵ The first rappers were actually DJs who started to tell their life stories over the music they played, boasting being an important element of them from the beginning.

The criticism pointed at the government later becomes more specified and is mingled with current events in Tanzania for which the government is being blamed:

tena wale wahatari
they are in danger
 washikadau mjiadhari
the leaders are putting themselves into danger
 kigoma bunduki sio ghari
in Kigoma guns are not expensive

kheli mlio pata zari
it is better that you had the luck
 yakuwa na mali
to be rich
 kwani mpo peponi
because you are in heaven
 hivi hamuoni?
don't you see?

The final lines again refer to the chorus which criticises people for always pretending that things are fine while their and the country's situation is far from that:

kwanini nijidai
why do I proud myself
 wakati nakula hangaiii?
while I am still eating poor food (while I am still poor)?

4.2 Sisi ni nani? (Who are we?)

The structure of this song is similar to that of „Nitakuongopea“. It consists of 13 verses with four lines each and one with only 3 lines. The short chorus of two lines is being repeated and placed at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the song.

In „Sisi ni nani?“ the rapper asks for the purpose of being in the world, the chorus being:

sisi ni nani dhumuni letu ni nini na kwa nini
who are we, what is our purpose and why
 tupo kwenye hii dunia dacta dox nataka kujua
are we in this world, me, Docta Dox I want to know

While the lyrics are written in the first person, the rapper partly takes on the position of different people, which may even contradict each other. In the following verse he takes on the role of a disbeliever who fails to find the purpose of life in the bible:

siku moja nilisimama barabarani
one day I was standing on the street
 kama kichaa michanga mingi kichwani
like a fool with a lot of sand in the head
 nauliza wapitao the same question
I ask those who pass by the same question
 kwa nini tupo hapa duniani
why are we here in the world

anakuja ras na bible mkononi
there comes a rastafari with the bible in his hands
 anafungua na kusoma creation
he opens it and reads the creation
 as a pagani sijaweka concentration
being a pagan I do not pay attention
 kwani aikuniingia mwangu ubongoni
therefore nothing enters into my head

This line is followed by a verse, which stands very much in contrast to the statement of the above verse of being a pagan:

yes haile baba wa mbinguni
yes Haile, father in heaven
 tuma malaika mwangu usingizini
send me an angel during sleep

wanieleze ni nini lilo dhumuni
that he explains to me what is the purpose
 la kuwapo hapa duniani
to be here in this world

Later the role of a desperate person, which is on the edge of going crazy, is taken on and the language of the lyrics is changed into rather extreme slang language:

nimepigika sarawili madak wazi
I lack money, my trousers are torn at the backside
 mswaki wangu simba divai machozi
chang'aa (strong local spirit) is my toothbrush
 mi mwenda wa zimu we bitoz
I am mentally disturbed, you despise me
 kukiniletea na kupa buubasi ki bichi boyz
if you look down at me, I will give you bullshit, I am a tough guy

To emphasize the desperate situation the language makes reference to „gangsta language“, rather to be found in American Hiphop than in Bongo Flava. This is also reflected in the language usage as in this verse English dominates:

kwani nimeshadata ili daluga gozi gozi
I have already gone crazy because life is tough
 you can call us the foresee prophets
you can call us the prophetes
 coz tuna present lost gangsters
because we represent lost gangsters
 you primitive pu pata doz
I will give you a dose, you primitive

Like in „Nitakuongopea“, Juma later refers more explicitly to his position as a rapper and composer of lyrics, although throughout the whole song he mingles his real identity with an imagined one:

dox sina cha kuwapa zaidi ya vesi
Dox, I do not have anything more to give to you then the verses
 nna mtabiko tanda banko godoro gunia
I have a poor man's bed and my mattress is a sack
 masikini na umia, aminia
poverty is hurting me, believe me!

The first verse in which the rapper speaks as an unbelieving person is further contradicted by later verses in which God is asked for guidance to live a rightful life. Juma then again reflects his own background for being a Muslim educated at a Christian school by stating that he has read the Bible as well as the Koran and therefore knows that human beings do not live according to the wishes of God.

mungu niepushe na uchawi majungu
God, make me escape from sorcery and conspiracy
 nifunze kuishi na walimwengu
teach me to live with people
 dunia imejaa dhuluma
the world is full of injustice and oppression
 swala hili kweli lina niuma
this question really hurts me

waja wako hawana huluma
your creations do not have compassion
 wanadamu wa umbo roho wanyama
they are human in form but animals in their spirit (heart)
 sivyo ulivyo amuru bwana
this is not what you ordered, Lord
 kwenye bible kurani nimeshasoma
in the Bible and the Koran, I have already read them

Reference is made to the state of war in the neighbouring country Congo and its impact on the border region in Tanzania, with its main town Kigoma:

bunduki zauzwa ka pipi kigoma
guns are sold like candy in Kigoma

ni nani mcheza wa hii ngoma
who is the player of this dance
 machozi tiririka sana
my tears are falling strongly

The song ends by quoting a line by Tupac Shakur, the big American idol of Juma Madoweka. It gives a short but essentially positive answer to the question asked throughout the whole song: that rapping has a meaning:

nimezaliwa kufanya ninachofanya
I was born to do what I am doing

4.3 Mazingira (Environment)

This song consists of 3 parts, which are divided by the four-line chorus. The first part has 15 lines and the other two 18 lines each.

The central theme in this song is the conservation of the environment in the Uluguru mountains, which are next to Morogoro town where he lives and the Pare mountains, where he used to live when he went to boarding school. This experience is also reflected in the language of the song of which parts are written in Kipare. Again the topic of „Mazingira“ reflects very strongly Juma’s own background. Being a member of the *Mountain Conservation Society of Tanzania* (MCST), he is involved in efforts to take measures against soil erosion in Nugutu, a part of Morogoro town located in the Uluguru Mountains.

miti uzuia mafriko kama vile erinino
trees prevent floods like those caused by El Nino
 Pale mountain wache na wabwange sikizeni
men and women in the Pare Mountains listen (Kipare)
 erinino 98 kumbukeni sasa miti pandeni
remember El Nino 98 and now plant trees
 kama wakazi wa Nugutu, Moro
like the people living in Nugutu, Morogoro
 wameotesha vitalu nyorolo nanyi mjipe moyo katika kufanya ayo.
they already planted trees on their plots, and now you make an effort to do the same

Like in all other songs the role of the rapper in educating ordinary people as well as politicians about social and political problems is pointed at. Emphasis is marked by placing synonyms after another and repeating the line:

na mc sasa elimisha fundisha komesha adabisha burudishaaaa.....
MC, now teach, explain, stop them, teach good manners, entertain them
 nakazia nalia sikia za juma isia
I insist, I cry, listen to the feelings of Juma
 mc sasa elimisha fundisha komesha adabisha burudishaaa.....
MC, now teach, explain, stop them, teach good manners, entertain them

5. Concluding remarks

HipHop is an art that came to Tanzania from outside – a „globalisation phenomenon” – which was first taken up by richer kids living in Dar-es-Salaam but eventually spread all over the country. More importantly still, it has been discovered by the less privileged youth as a means to express themselves.

Bongo Flava has become a new channel for young people to voice their opinions about society as well as of politics. A strong commitment to educating people is still a characteristic of most Bongo Flava artists – especially of the „underground” rappers. HipHop allows underprivileged youths, who are traditionally denied a voice because of their low standing in terms of age as well as of class, to take over a role normally reserved to the elders and well-educated: that of teaching people how to change their lives.

Rap lyrics, whether written by well-known artists or by „underground” rappers, are a new fascinating form of literary expression in Swahili. They should be studied with respect to form and content, but probably also in reference to their social impact as the question remains: to what extent does Bongo Flava have a potential for transformation of Tanzanian society?

Zusammenfassung

Bongo Flava, die tansanische Variante von HipHop hat sich in den letzten Jahren zur populärsten Musikform im Land entwickelt. Dieser Artikel gibt zunächst einen kurzen Überblick über die Geschichte von Bongo Flava und diskutiert Themen, Texte und Musik. Danach wird näher auf die Lage der sogenannten „Underground“ Rapper eingegangen. Der zweite Teil des Artikels beschäftigt sich mit ausgewählten Teilen aus drei Songs von Juma Madoweka - einem der jungen Rapper aus Morogoro, die ihre Motivation daraus beziehen, der Gesellschaft in der sie leben, durch das Medium Rap eine Botschaft zukommen zu lassen.

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