

Ambiguous Relationships: Youth, Popular Music and Politics in Contemporary Tanzania

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Abstract

Bongo Flava music has helped to shape a generational identity of those Tanzanians who grew up in the era of liberalisation and multi-party politics. More importantly, this youthful musical genre has helped to increase the visibility and *voiceability* of youth in the Tanzanian public and thus at least indirectly encouraged the political participation of youth in political discourses. In this article I argue that it are not so much the critical lyrics of some of the songs which have helped achieve this, than the fact that the successes of Bongo Flava musicians have conveyed self-consciousness to young people who experience that they can achieve more than hitherto thought. In this sense Bongo Flava has helped provide the background for the emergence of young, charismatic personalities such as Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe who became Members of Parliament after the elections in 2005. They have started to challenge the conventional, hierarchical ways of Tanzanian politics which used to be dominated by the older generation. The article further outlines how young “underground” musicians perceive contemporary Tanzanian politics and how this influences their own strategies in musical production.

Introduction

“Democracy, based on the principle that the majority of the people decide, has another meaning in [the African] context. Here a minority (above 18 years) of the population decides for the majority (below 18 years).” (Peters 2004: 25)

Demographically speaking Africa is a young continent. In Tanzania the census of 2002 revealed that 63,83 per cent of the population were below the age of 25, with 19,58 per cent alone between the ages of 15 and 24 (GOT

2002: 6). As in other African countries, the young majority in Tanzania has found itself in a situation of subordination vis-à-vis the political establishment which predominantly consists of members of the elder generation. Widespread lack of opportunities for political participation of the younger generation has characterised the post-colonial period. When living conditions for the average African worsened considerably since the economic crisis in the 1980s, young people were among the most affected by cuts in the education system and the reduction of formal employment opportunities which were part of the neoliberal reforms prescribed to most African states by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. (cf. Abbink 2005: 1, Frederiksen 2000: 9) Between 1995 and 2005 the number of unemployed youth in all of Africa grew by about a third - a development which forces more and more young people "to undertake jobs that are characterized by poor conditions in the informal sector and agriculture." (UN 2007: 2) With reference to Tanzania, a country whose total population was 33,5 million in 2002, Issa Shivji (2007: n.n.) noted recently that „[E]very year over 800,000 young persons are released on the labour market; hardly one-tenth of whom find formal jobs. Meanwhile, privatisation and capital-intensive investments continue throwing out more and more as redundant." It is important to note that high unemployment rates among the young population are not a new phenomenon but were also a problem in (late) colonial Tanganyika where demographic growth had produced an increasingly youthful population which poured into the urban centres and found itself unemployed.¹ (cf. Burton 2006) However, it nevertheless seems appropriate to state that in contemporary Tanzania, as in many other African countries, young people take up a greater share of the population than ever before while they are at the same time more marginalised from economic opportunities than the generations before them, turning them – in the words of Christiansen, Utas and Vigh (2006: 9) into "a generation of people who have been born into social environments in which their possibilities of living decent lives are negligible and in which many have found themselves stuck in positions of inadequate life chances and bleak prospects [...]." (cf. Abbink 2005: 7, de Boeck/Honwana 2005: 8)

¹ Burton (2006: 3) notes that it would be more accurate to term them "jobless" as they engaged in the emerging informal economy, an observation which holds also true for contemporary formally unemployed youth.

In several African countries the difficult economic circumstances and the resulting lack of opportunities have contributed to the emergence of more or less violent cultures of the street. (cf. Biaya 2005) In contemporary Tanzania however, a youth culture dominated by violence cannot be observed - another similarity to late-colonial Tanganyika where urban joblessness equally did not translate into unrest. Burton (2006: 20) explains this with the expanding informal sector which absorbed young who had poured to the urban centres, a factor which certainly also plays a role in present-day Tanzania. However, other political and sociological factors seem to play a role as well. Abbink (2005: 17) emphasises a strong central state tradition and a society used to plurality of beliefs and ethnic identities as characteristics which Tanzania shares with countries such as Botswana, Benin and Ghana where large-scale youth violence has equally been absent so far. But the absence of youth violence does not mean that youth is not increasingly becoming a political factor in Tanzania – a point I want to make in this article. Waller (2006: 88) has suggested a focus on the “field of leisure” as a good starting point for the analysis of youth experiences in Africa as this allows for a focus on the spaces which young people create for themselves. In this article I focus on popular music as one such space where youths are visible as artists as well as audience.

Bongo Flava – musical expression of a new generation

In the last two decades new forms of popular music emerged in several African countries which have a distinct generational identity as they were developed by young people who also form the majority of their audience. The process of democratisation which started in most African countries in the 1990s and the accompanying liberalisation of the media provided the context which allowed for these new musical genres to take off. On the one hand the liberalisation of the media brought young people in African countries in increased contact with global developments – a process which was further intensified through the rapid spread of new information technologies such as the internet but also mobile phones, especially in the urban areas. (Mercer 2005) On the other hand the liberalisation provided for the necessary plurality of media - radio and TV stations as well as newspapers - which proved crucial for the spread of the new music.

Many of the new musical styles that emerged all over Africa have their origins in HipHop which originated in the USA in the late 1970s (cf. Englert 2004, Raab 2006 for more background on HipHop music and how it spread to Africa). In different countries HipHop was developed into specific localised forms of music which became known under various names such as for example *Senerap* in Senegal, *Hip-Life* in Ghana² or *Bongo Flava* in Tanzania which is in the focus of this article.

Bongo Flava music is an incredibly dynamic phenomenon (Raab 2006: 19, cf. Perullo/Fenn 2003: 2); the term itself has changed its meaning over the last ten years.³ (cf. Suriano 2005: 2) Initially very much modelled on US-HipHop, Bongo Flava now encompasses a great variety of musical styles ranging from hardcore-rap to Rhythm and Blues and songs with great influences from the longstanding Tanzanian music genres *ngoma*, *dansi* and *taarab*. It thus serves as an umbrella for popular Tanzanian music produced by relatively young musicians who consider themselves as “the new generation” (*kizazi kipya*).

The enormous popularity of Bongo Flava among Tanzanian youth was clearly reflected in the survey⁴ I conducted among young people aged approximately 15 to 25 in Morogoro where three-quarters of female and more than four-fifth of male respondents declared that they liked listening to Bongo Flava music. The ranks which followed in the popularity scala of popular music were much more clearly gendered⁵ – suggesting that Bongo

² The term Hip-Life is set together of *HipHop* and *Highlife*, a Ghanaian musical style which evolved in the first half of the 20th century and became very popular among huge parts of the population but was regarded as old fashioned and “colo” (colonial) by the younger generations from the 1960s on (see Collins 2002: 63).

³ The expression *Bongo* is derived from *ubongo*, literally meaning brain in Kiswahili. It was originally a term used with reference to Dar es Salaam, a city where brains were said to be needed by its inhabitants in order to survive, and later became extended to mean the whole of Tanzania. *Flava* is derived from the English term “flavour”. (Englert 2003: 75)

⁴ During my research stay in Morogoro in 2006 I distributed a questionnaire on young people’s perceptions of music, media and politics in several schools and also among youths who were employed in the formal or informal sector. In total, the questionnaire in Swahili was filled in by 300 people aged 15 to 25 years. For more background on the fieldwork see below.

⁵ The second most popular music among young women was local gospel music *Injili*, among male respondents it was *US-HipHop*. Collins (2002: 71) observed a similar gender split in musical preferences among Ghanaian youth where local *Hip-Life* is a male domain in terms of musicians as well as audience while local gospel is a rather female one.

Flava can truly be viewed as the music of contemporary Tanzanian youth, male as female. It has to be noted, however, that on the side of the musicians, male artists are still dominating the scene even though the number of female performers has clearly grown and women such as Lady Dee Jay, Ray C, Sister P or Keisha, to name but a few, have made themselves a name as Bongo Flava artists in recent years.

Quite a number of scholars have researched into the phenomenon of Bongo Flava in the past couple of years, most of them focussing on the musical scene of Tanzania's largest urban centre Dar-es-Salaam.⁶ My main interest in Bongo Flava regards the role this music plays for average Tanzanian youths, and if, and how, it impacts on their political attitudes, beliefs and actions. In my research I therefore focus on the aims and motivations of young artists who write and compose Bongo Flava songs in the smaller towns of the country. This article is based on material from Morogoro, a town in Eastern Tanzania with about 250,000 inhabitants. During two stays in 2006 and 2007, I enquired into the strategies of those Bongo Flava artists who think of themselves as *maandagraundi*⁷ – a name which those who have not yet experienced success on a larger scale apply to themselves. The study combines methods belonging to the qualitative spectrum such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation⁸ and quantitative methods such as a questionnaire which was however situated within the qualitative research design.

Similarly Frederiksen (2000: 5), in her case study on Nairobi, found that while *Soukous* and *Reggae* were very popular with young men, gospel and rhythm and blues were preferred by young women.

⁶ Cf. Remes (1999), Haas/Gesthuizen (2002), Mangesho (2003), Perullo (2003, 2005, 2007), Perullo/Fenn (2003), Englert (2004), Bancet (2007), Suriano (2005, 2007), Saavedra Casco (2006), Stroeken (2005a, 2005b), Reuster-Jahn (2006, 2007), Reuster-Jahn/Kießling (2006), Roch/Hacke (2006), Raab (2006), Lukalo (2008).

⁷ The term is derived from the English term "underground". It is important to note that "underground" in the context of Bongo Flava music refers to a socio-economic category and does not carry the Western connotation of "alternative" music styles. (Englert 2003: 73).

⁸ Qualitative interviews were held in 2006 and 2007, mainly with artists but some few were also held with young people who had great interest in and knowledge of Bongo Flava. All names of interviewpartners referred to in this text are pseudonyms. Both parts of my research, the qualitative as well as the quantitative one, have benefited to a great extent from the help provided by Abdul Moreto and Azizi Matiga.

My argument in this article is that Bongo Flava music has helped to shape a generational identity of those who grew up in the era of liberalisation and multi-party politics – an identity which transcends social classes, ethnicities and gender. Bongo Flava is not only a channel of expression of the young generation but actually serves as a medium for the creation of a youthful identity which translates into a greater visibility and *voiceability* of youth in public discourses and as such it has also contributed to prepare the ground for the appearance of two youthful politicians, Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe, who shook the Tanzanian political establishment since the last elections of 2005 and who stand in the centre of discussion in the second part of this article. While the impact of Bongo Flava on politics might not be as direct as scholars have argued for example for the cases of *Senerap* in Senegal (Maraszto 2002, see also Ludl in this issue), it certainly is an important aspect in our understanding of the political role of youth in contemporary Tanzania – a role which is rather ambiguous.

Tanzanian youth in general, and Bongo Flava musicians in particular, cannot be said to take an oppositional position per se towards the political establishment – an attitude which has often been attributed to youth and their cultural expressions. The study of youth culture, and more generally youth, in Africa, seems to be determined largely by two extremes: on the one hand youths have often been portrayed as a destructive force and on the other hand youth have also been subject of rather “romantic” projections of researchers who like to see young people positioning themselves against the political and economic establishment. Wishful-thinking concerning the possibilities for resistance as expressed by youth cultures seems to have influenced much scholarly analysis. Marchart (2008: 115-116) observes that for many leftist scholars in the field of Cultural Studies in the 1970s youthful sub-cultures took over the role played by the proletariat up to then: to represent an authentic representative of opposition. Although Marchart's observation refers to Europe in the 1970s, I nevertheless think that it is also of some relevance to the contemporary African context where scholars tend to attribute per se resistant attitudes to youth cultures. This also leaves the impression that African youth cultures have to take over a compensatory function since contemporary youth cultures based in Europe and the USA are nowadays widely viewed as commercial and apolitical. Also in Bongo Flava, discourses on the increasing commercialisation – by musicians themselves, their Tanzanian audience as well as outside observers and

scholars – are an important topic. Many, artists and scholars alike, have lamented about the increasing commercialisation of Bongo Flava music and the assumed consequent loss of power of this youth culture as a voice of the marginalised youth. While commercialisation is certainly occurring – or rather was an important feature of Bongo Flava right from the beginning - it does not mean that this process necessarily goes hand in hand with an apoliticisation of youth. The question is rather how we conceive of „political“: in the sense of the *Resistance through Style*-Paradigm where resistance against an assumed co-optation into the mainstream is also viewed as a political act or do we ask what impact a given youth culture actually makes on the macropolitical level? (cf. Marchart 2008: 126) I am interested in the latter aspect thus largely leaving aside the politics of style. I argue that Bongo Flava has a political impact in the sense that it motivates young people from all levels of Tanzanian society to use their creativities in trying to make their living, thereby working as a source of a self-confidence and empowerment. Even though just a few out of those who aspire to become Bongo Flava superstars actually succeed, Bongo Flava artists have become important role models for young Tanzanians. Their success shows that young people can achieve more than previously thought. This new self-confidence is also visible at the political level where young people have recently begun to challenge and transform the political establishment from within.

In the 1980s Karin Barber (1987: 3) observed in her seminal work on popular arts in Africa that „[i]n Africa ordinary people tend to be invisible and inaudible. In most African states, numerically tiny elites not only consume a vastly disproportionate share of the national wealth, they also take up all the light. Newspapers, radio, and television offer a magnified image of the class that controls them.“ While the wealth is still owned by a tiny (even tinier) portion of the population, the liberalisation and consequent growth of the media has led to a much greater presence of the fates of ordinary people in the public. In many colourful tabloids popular musicians, not only the superstars, are regularly featured, showing the Tanzanian youth that the “light” is no longer exclusively shining on the wealthy and educated but also on those who can make use of their creativities – irrespective of their educational and economic background.⁹

⁹ Obviously though, those youth who are economically better-off are more likely to find the necessary means required to finance their recordings.

Aims and strategies of the *maandagraundi* of Bongo Flava

“Music is pleasure, music is life, music is work, music is a way of life.”¹⁰
(John, Interview, August 2007)

With the growing popularity of Bongo Flava also the number of songs which deal with topics such as love, lifestyle and party life has grown while the number of more explicitly political songs is decreasing – leading to reproaches that the young people are falling prey to the temptations of the music market and sell out their ideals. From the point of view of the young musicians, things are however somewhat more complicated and I think that their strategies and perspectives should be taken seriously.

In the case of young Bongo Flava artists this means to recognise the efforts and strategies it takes to pursue one’s way out of poverty and difficult living conditions through creative work. From the point of view of those who refer to themselves as *maandagraundi* it makes perfect sense to aim at entertaining their audience with non-political songs as a means to ameliorate their own situation. Most of the *maandagraundi* I talked to share a difficult socio-economic situation – many came to Morogoro in search for work from different parts of Tanzania and are now struggling to make a living with jobs in the informal sector such as selling second-hand clothes. In the best Tanzanian tradition, all emphasised their aim to educate the society (*“kuelimisha jamii”*) through their music.¹¹ In accordance with this aim, all young artists had written songs which address issues such as HIV/AIDS, child-abuse and unemployment among others. However, all who had written songs containing socio-political commentary also had a number of songs in their repertoire which were just meant to entertain without conveying any deeper message, also not a hidden one. These songs are to fulfill two main functions: first of all to bring fun and pleasure to their

¹⁰ *“Muziki ni starehe, muziki ni maisha, muziki ni kazi, muziki ni utamaduni.”*

¹¹ Educational lyrics are not a phenomenon which reached Tanzania through HipHop. For some such as Perullo and Fenn (2003: 7) they stand in continuity with “the country’s socialist past where aiding others was encouraged as a way to promote equality among the country’s people”, for others the song’s function of socio-political commentary is rooted in African societies as Nyairo and Ogude (2005: 235) note with reference to the Luo society in Kenya. But also the influence of Christianity and colonialism in general have played a role in this respect.

listeners (and their writers) – something that should be taken as a legitimate function of music, also (and perhaps especially) in a society where the majority finds it difficult to make a living. Secondly, so the argument of those I interviewed, these “fun-songs” should prepare the ground for songs with “heavier messages”. As the *maandagraundi* explained, songs with socio-political commentary, let alone explicit political criticism, would not sell as well as the so-called fun-songs on easy-going issues such as love or the good life. Songs dedicated to these issues were therefore the ones chosen for recording when – thanks to offers from recording studios or sponsors – the chance emerged to record one song out of the usually larger corpus of the artist.

Those who have not yet had the chance to record more than one or two songs liked to talk about their plans for a complete album and besides a great variety of musical styles, thoughtful variation (referred to with the term *kuchanganyachanganya*) of topics is guiding the choices taken by the *maandagraundi*. Their aim to reach the broadest possible audience is further reflected in their preference for standard Swahili as the language variety used in the lyrics.¹² The writing and recording of songs with political issues was equally considered a stylistic choice as one of my interview partners accounted: “*These [songs] about politics, on an album – you know on an album you need to put different flavours, you cannot have an album where you sing in one style. [...]*”¹³ (Gabriel, Interview, July 2006)

„Other things are our secret“ – attitudes towards music and politics

*“Music is work like other work. This means, it is a business like others.”*¹⁴
(Thomas, Interview, August 2007)

This professional attitude to music is also reflected in the *maandagraundi* attitudes to participate in political campaigns. As Uta Reuster-Jahn has explored in her article for this issue, Bongo Flava songs were featured quite

¹² For a detailed discussion of language and topic choices of the *maandagraundi* see Englert (2008).

¹³ „*Zile [nyimbo] za siasiasa, kwenye albam - unajua kwenye albam lazima ina vyonjo tofauti, huwezi kuwa na albam nzima unaimba staili moja. [...]*”

¹⁴ “*Muziki ni kazi kama kazi nyingine. Yaani, it’s a business like others.*”

prominently in the election campaign of 2005 when the ruling party *Chama cha Mapinduzi* (CCM, "Party of the Revolution") realised that it was more dependent on the vote of the young people than ever before – especially given the fact that the youth who are faced with a high percentage of joblessness were viewed as prepared to vote for change and thus for the opposition.

Music has always been an important element in Tanzanian election campaigns - and certainly not only in the past few years but for many decades when performances of *ngoma* and/or *taarab* musicians used to accompany political rallies. (cf. Askew 2002, Lange 2002) With the emerging popularity of Bongo Flava music and the recognition of youth as an important segment of voters, *ngoma* and *taarab* performers partly had to give way to Bongo Flava musicians which were invited to tour the country with the candidates of the contesting parties. (for more details on this see Reuster-Jahn in this issue) Kikwete also had the support of other personalities in the field of popular culture such as Ben R. Mtobwa, one of the most popular Tanzanian authors who is especially known for his detective stories. He published a book "Kikwete. Safari ya Ikulu" (Kikwete. The journey to Parliament) on Kikwete's background and political career while the election campaign was still going on.¹⁵ (cf. Mtobwa 2005)

However, my interview partners did not assign the involvement of Bongo Flava artists (or popular culture in general) a significant, let alone decisive, role in the elections of 2005 which the candidate of the ruling CCM party, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, won with an impressive 80,28 per cent of the vote. This result is quite remarkable considering that his predecessor Benjamin Mkapa, also from the CCM, won the first multiparty elections in 1995 with 61,82 per cent of the vote and was reconfirmed in 2000 with 71,74 per cent.

The success of Jakaya Kikwete, often referred to as JK in the Tanzanian media, was partly attributed to his youthful personality. During the campaign, Kikwete portrayed himself as a man who likes to dance and to listen to music. He was admired for his rhetorical skills and his ability to explain his policies. Kikwete was - although at the age of 55 certainly not "young" from a biological point of view - perceived as youthful in the political sense and thus also appealing to young voters. Kikwete has widely

¹⁵ Another publication on Kikwete for a Swahili-speaking audience which came out after the election, however, was written by Prince M. Bagenda (2006) and has the title "Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete. Tumaini Lililorejea" ["Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete. The returned hope."]

been viewed as somebody who is close to the people and he was often compared to the deceased first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere who is still widely honoured as the *Baba wa Taifa* (Father of the Nation). As Paul noted in 2006: *“People agree with him, and all agree with him because he is so close to the people. [...] If it were not Kikwete the “game” would be somewhat tough, eh.”*¹⁶ (Paul, Interview, July 2006).

Although the participation of Bongo Flava musicians in the political campaigns did not seem to have played an important role in the outcome of the elections, it is interesting to note that also great numbers of *maandagraundi* participated in the events organised by the regional party branches of CCM, thereby supporting the ruling party. This shows that the cooperation was not limited to the well-known Bongo Flava crews but also sought by those who can be viewed as representatives of the “underprivileged” youth – a group which is often expected to show the most critical consciousness. The *maandagraundi* I talked to, however, perceived the offers to play at electoral campaigns as perfect opportunities to get known to a wider public and thus as important for their careers.

As Aziza stressed several times, for her, as for many other *maandagraundi*, music is work and part of this professional attitude is not to take a clear stand in favour of a certain political party. She portrayed herself as a musician who separates her political opinion from her artistic work: *“If you are doing music as work, don’t watch [at the political orientation]. [...] You go there, you get on stage, you sing, you do your business, you finish. You don’t say: “I don’t like CUF, I only like CCM”. [...] I love music, I do music like a job, other things are our secret, you see.”*¹⁷ (Aziza, Interview, July 2006)

While Aziza’s answer points rather at the economic aspect, the fact that the young aspiring musicians cannot afford to make their political convictions determine their professional decisions, others such as Paul point at the political dimension. He draws on the post-colonial Tanzanian political mantra which holds national unity over anything else when he adds that musicians have a kind of obligation to work together with politicians from any party as they should be careful not to do anything that contributes to a

¹⁶ *“Watu wanamkubali, na wote wanamkubali kutokana na kuwa karibu na wanachi. [...] Kama isingekuwa Kikwete game lingekuwa nzito kidogo, eh.”*

¹⁷ *“Kama ukifanya muziki kama kazi, usiangalii. [...] Unaenda, unapanda, unaimba, [...] unafanya biashara, ukamaliza. Husemi: “Mi sipendi CUF, napenda tu CCM”. [...] Napenda muziki, nafanya muziki kama kazi, mambo mengine ni siri yetu sisi, unaona.”*

splitting of the society: „[You sing for] any party which is going to take you, without watching whether this is opposition or what. [Musicians] are afraid of splitting society. [...] Therefore from the side of music, as an artist you do not show from which party you are.”¹⁸ (Paul, Interview, July 2006)

It is important to note that these were views expressed in mid-2006 when expectations in the government under the leadership of Jakaya Kikwete were still high and Tanzanians from all levels of society talked almost exclusively in positive terms about the new president and his cabinet. The opinions and attitudes expressed by the young people I interviewed just a year later, in August/September 2007, displayed a changing attitude as we will see below. The differences were not just due to differences on a personal level but rather reflect discourses on youth and politics which are connected to developments at the macropolitical level during that year. Those discourses are closely connected with the fates of two young people who entered the political scene in Tanzania after the elections of 2005 and consequently became the cause for and content of many political debates: Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe. Both rapidly became among (if not) the most talked about politicians in the country and I consider it worth delving somewhat into their background and the role they played in the Tanzanian political scene in the last two-and-half years in order to see their significance for discourses on youth, politics and popular culture in present-day Tanzania.

A new wind of change in Tanzanian politics¹⁹: Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe

Amina Chifupa was born on May 20, 1981 and attended primary school in Mwanza. In 2001 she completed Form Six (*The Guardian*, June 28, 2007) and then started to work as a broadcaster for the Dar-es-Salaam-based radio station Clouds FM. In this position she became very popular in the whole country, especially among the younger part of the population. Amina Chifupa maintained close relationships with many of the Bongo Flava scene

¹⁸ “[Unaimba kwa] chama cho chote ambacho kitakuchukua, bila kuangalia kwamba ni upinzani au nini. [Wanamuziki] wanaogopa kutenganisha jamii. [...] Kwa hiyo kwa upande wa muziki, kama msanii unataka usionyeshe ni wa chama fulani.”

¹⁹ This is a paraphrase of a sentence coined by Dennis Msacky (2008) in reference to Zitto Kabwe.

and was regarded as influential in the establishment of careers of musicians. (*The East African Tribune*, June 27, 2007) In 2005 she quit her job as a radio presenter and became a Member of Parliament on one of the seats reserved for members of the youth wing of the ruling CCM.²⁰ (*The Guardian*, June 28, 2007) At the age of 24 Amina Chifupa was the youngest member of the Tanzanian parliament ever. (*The East African Tribune*, June 27, 2007; *Bongo Celebrity* 2007)

In the beginning her appointment was met with much scepticism by the media and ordinary Tanzanians alike, mainly because her formal education did not go beyond Standard 6 when she had joined the parliament.²¹ (*The Guardian*, June 28, 2007). But despite her lack of higher education, Amina Chifupa managed to become one of the most talked about politicians in the country within short time. She was often in the headlines with the actions she took in order to ameliorate the situation of women and young people. Another aspect that was featured often in the press, especially the tabloid papers, was her rather tense relationship with parts of the establishment within her own party. Behind these tensions stood not alone her outspokenness on uncomfortable issues but also her occasional disregard for the strict regulations of the party, such as the dress code for CCM parliamentarians. In mid-2006, the Swahili-language tabloid *Risasi* (Nr. 339, July 5-11, 2006, p. 1-2) reported under the headline "*Amina awachefua vigogo tena!*" (which translates into: "Amina again disappointed the leaders of CCM!") about the trouble Amina Chifupa caused when she, at the day of Jakaya Kikwete's election as leader of the CCM, exchanged her party uniform for a dress while the party meeting was still going on. This was regarded as an offence by many CCM members and as it was not the first occasion at which her clothing had provoked disapproval, this incident caused CCM leaders to call Amina Chifupa for a meeting where her unconventional behaviour was on the agenda.²²

²⁰ The CCM youth wing is one of three organisations within the CCM which have the right to appoint their members of parliament.

²¹ She was enrolled though for a Bachelor's degree in Political Science at the Open University of Tanzania (*The Guardian*, June 28, 2007a).

²² At another occasion she had been wearing a cap in parliament and as a result she was chased out of it. During the consequent discussions of the matter within the party, the chairman of the CCM of Dar-es-Salaam partly defended her, stating that she was still young and therefore should not be judged so hard: "*Mimi nakubaliana na wewe, kuhusu tukio hilo lakini mwacheni kwanza, huyu ni kijana.*", *alisema Mzee Mkali huko akicheka.*" ("I agree

She gained most publicity however with her attempts to fight the drug trade, a growing business in Tanzania. Drug abuse has developed into a problem over the past decade, facing especially young people. The issue had not received much attention in politics until Amina Chifupa brought it into the headlines. She received most attention when she stated that she knew the names of some of the main drug barons in the country and suggested that also high-ranking politicians were involved in the drug business. Following this announcement she received several short-messages in Swahili containing death threats as was widely reported in the Tanzanian media. (cf. Mwilolezi 2007; cf. *The Guardian* 2007b) Relatively short thereafter headlines were again filled with Amina Chifupa's name, this time announcing her death on the 26th of June 2007 at the age of only 26. Malaria and diabetes were reported as the reasons behind her early and sudden death. Tanzanians, however, widely believe that she was poisoned because of her outspokenness on the involvement of leading politicians in the drug smuggle. Whether this interpretation of her death is right or not can obviously not be the matter of discussion here. What is interesting though is the perception of her death by the population, and especially the young generation for who Amina Chifupa had become a role model - first as radio presenter and later as a Member of Parliament.

The young Tanzanians I talked to during my research stays in 2006 and 2007 viewed Amina Chifupa as someone who took great risks to work for the amelioration of living conditions of the country's youth. Her tremendous popularity among Tanzanian youth is also visible on the internet where numerous young bloggers of Tanzanian origin²³ who made references to

with you concerning this issue but leave her alone after all, she is a youth., said Mzee (the old man) Mkali as he was laughing.", my translation), cited in *Risasi* (Nr. 339, July 5-11, 2006, p. 2) Struggles for and against certain fashion styles have played an important role in Tanzanian past and present as Burgess (2002: 303) has shown for post-revolutionary Zanzibar where, as he notes "African nationalists within the ASP found the new fashions disturbing, finally, because their display of youthful autonomy was a visual contradiction of their efforts to resurrect precolonial African rural generational relations as a fundamental organizing principle of the new state." See also Andrew Ivaska's (2002) work on Dar-es-Salaam in the 1960s and 1970s.

²³ Judged from the fact that they have the ability and possibility to use the medium of blogging and also from the self-presentations given in their blogs they belong to the economically better-off part of Tanzanian society.

Amina Chifupa²⁴, posted poems dedicated to her²⁵ or a video in her memory on YouTube.²⁶ The comment posted by an internet user who called himself Sir Nyamrang in the blog by Daniel Makunde²⁷, probably points out best what young Tanzanians saw in Amina Chifupa: *“She was an Average Joe like any other young person in Tanzania and therefore many people saw her as someone who stood for them. Wazungu²⁸ like to use the saying “Be Yourself” and yes, Honourable Amina was this.”*²⁹ Her fellow parliamentarian, Zitto Kabwe - who is discussed below - wrote a letter to the late Amina Chifupa in which he praised her for what she had done for the youth of the country: *“Go Amina, go and rest. You showed us that we youth, we can. We have learned (our lesson), we are not going to let you down. [...] You have started the war, we will finish it. You encouraged us (to do so).”*³⁰

Amina Chifupa is an example that a young woman, who did not possess a higher education, could make an impact on the political scene. She used the popularity which she had derived from her work as a radio presenter to work for the betterment of living conditions for the Tanzanian population on the whole and the problems of the younger generation in specific. In my opinion it is important to note that it was not just a coincidence that she was a radio presenter and promoter of Bongo Flava musicians before she joined parliament. If she had not become popular as radio presenter and demonstrated her abilities in this job, she might – because of the lack of formal qualifications – never have had a chance to acquire a position such as Member of Parliament at this young age.

²⁴ See for example the blogs by Lulu Nyeusi, Iddi Mwanyoka and the comments of users below the article reporting her death at the website Bongo Celebrity.

²⁵ See for example the blog by Chemi Che-Mponda.

²⁶ „R.I.P Amina Chifupa” (2007). Fittingly, the motto which the poster of this video who uses the pseudonym “makaveli19802006”, has chosen for his youtube profile is “believe in yourself”.

²⁷ The comment was posted below the letter which Zitto Kabwe had written to the deceased Amina Chifupa and which Daniel Makunde had posted in his blog.

²⁸ Swahili expression used for “Westerners” in the widest sense.

²⁹ „*Alikuwa ni average joe kama kijana yoyote wa Tanzania na ndio maana watu wengi waliona kama anawawakilisha. Wazungu huwa wanapenda kutumia msemo wa “Be Yourself”(sic!) na ndio Mheshimitwa Amina alivyokuwa hivyo.*”

³⁰ “*Nenda Amina, nenda kapumzike. Umetuonyesha kuwa vijana tunaweza. Tumejifunza, hatutakuangusha. [...] Umeianza vita, tutaimaliza. Umetupa changamoto.*” The letter was accessed via the blog of Daniel Makundi where the source indicated was www.freemedia.co.tz.

The other young politician who featured prominently in Tanzanian newspapers³¹ since the last elections in December 2005 is Zitto Kabwe who was born on September 24 in 1976 in Kigoma district. He shared many characteristics with Amina Chifupa who was a close friend of him. The two youngest Members of Parliament regarded themselves as allies in the fight for a new political style which would allow for more debate and more inclusion of ordinary Tanzanians, especially the young majority who did not participate much in politics at the macrolevel until then. The closeness between Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe on the basis of their political goals and their young age is quite remarkable given the fact that they did not belong to the same political party. While Amina Chifupa was a member of the ruling party CCM, Zitto Kabwe belongs to the opposition party CHADEMA (*Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo*).³² Another difference between the two was that Zitto Kabwe is highly educated. After the completion of primary and secondary education at different schools in Tanzania, he studied economy at the Universities of Zanzibar and Dar-es-Salaam. During 2003 and 2004 he lived in Germany where he studied International Marketing in Bonn. (Tanzanian Parliament Homepage) During all his studies Zitto Kabwe was active in politics. At the University of Dar-es-Salaam he became the secretary general of the student union (Daruso) and was part of the movement of left-leaning students. (Msacky 2008)

Zitto Kabwe's time to make it into the headlines of the Tanzanian press came in August 2007 when he strongly criticised the practice of the Tanzanian government concerning the exploitation of the country's natural resources. He questioned especially the contract concerning Buzwagi gold mine which Nazir Karamagi, the Minister for Energy and Minerals, had signed in London with the mining company Barrick Gold - without having informed the parliament as he would have been obliged to do. (cf. Shao 2007, Andrew 2007) Zitto Kabwe demanded the formation of a parliamentary committee which would make enquiries into the matter and review all the contracts signed between the government and investors.

³¹ A survey conducted in June and July 2007 revealed that he was the most liked Member of Parliament (MP). (Bongo Celebrity 2008)

³² At the last elections in 2005 CHADEMA won five seats in the National Assembly; at the presidential elections CHADEMA's candidate Freeman Mbowe received 5.88 per cent of the votes which placed him third out of ten candidates.

Instead of voting for the formation of such a committee, a majority of Members of Parliament of the ruling CCM voted in favour of Zitto Kabwe's suspension from parliament. (cf. Grill/Wahba 2008) They argued that the suspension of Zitto Kabwe had nothing to do with the content of his allegations but only with the words he used to utter them – an argument which commentators, among them Issa Shivji, until his formal retirement in 2006 professor of law at the University at Dar es Salaam and one of the most important civil society activists of the country, dismissed as not in accordance with the rules of parliament. (Shivji 2007)

The public debates that emerged as a consequence of Zitto Kabwe's suspension which received wide media coverage, led President Jakaya Kikwete to install a committee to review all contracts and the legislation. While it is not the parliamentary committee Kabwe had asked for, it is nevertheless viewed as important.³³ As Dennis Msacky (2008) observed in the *East African*, Kikwete “was way ahead of CCM's bigwigs in reading the public mood and recognising that Kabwe's was the voice of the people.” Zitto Kabwe's answer to his suspension was to tour the country, drawing huge crowds to political meetings in all Tanzanian towns he visited. At the rallies he condemned the practice of Tanzanian politicians of the post-Nyerere era of providing access to the country's natural resources to large companies from outside the country which make huge profits while the population sees little benefit.³⁴ In *The East African*, the most important weekly newspaper of the region, Msacky points at the political development in Tanzania in the past two decades:

“This feverish reversal of Mwalimu's legacy paved the way for the emergence of a nascent domestic capitalist class that quickly rose to capture space and play middleman between CCM's high command and the foreign investors, allowing it to reap millions of dollars in economic rents through privatisation deals, [...]. The CCM's leadership, once known more for its simple lifestyles, came to be dominated by ministers addicted to ostentation and conspicuous consumption.” (Msacky 2008: n.n., cf. Schicho 2004: 334)

³³ Information on the outcome of this committee could not be accessed.

³⁴ In September 2007 I could attend his political rally in Morogoro which was attended by several thousand people, the majority – though not exclusively - being young men.

The Tanzanian political tradition does not include many independent voices - a consequence of Tanzania's past as a one-party regime as Kabwe noted (in Grill/Wahba 2008). More than a decade after the first multi-party-elections in 2005 „public pressure is mounting on leaders to account for their actions“ as Msacky (2008) observes. In his view Kabwe represents “the new breed of Nyerereists - radical MPs who have risen up to revive Nyerere's ideology of simplicity and his rejection of empty worship of wealth” – a position which is not without its risks. In an interview Zitto Kabwe gave together with the German Federal President Horst Köhler (Grill/Wahba 2008), he makes clear that while Tanzania does not have the same record of murdered politicians of the opposition as countries like Zimbabwe or Kenya, those who question the practices of the political establishment risk their personal security. By his own account, Zitto Kabwe himself has survived at least two attempts to murder him.

In the Shadows of Amina and Zitto

Both, Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe, stand for a new type of politician in Tanzania who dares to question the status quo. They were, respectively are, outspoken on the malpractices of the political elite while they are/were themselves part of it. In this sense, they provided encouragement and hope to the young majority of the Tanzanian population which started so optimistically into the era Kikwete in 2005. However, not much time passed before it became clear that the political climate in Tanzania did not allow for criticism which was too open – a fact which also contributed to a decline of Bongo Flava songs which are critical of political practices in the country in a direct way. The decline of such critical songs has usually been explained with a decrease of the political consciousness of youth who seem to adjust to the demands of the market and write mainly love songs. My interviews with the young artists in Morogoro suggest however, that this decline is at least partly due to the political climate and the repression Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe had to experience. The young musicians I talked to in 2007 viewed outspoken criticism of politics in their songs as a potential risk to personal security. It was the common perception among my interview partners that songs which contained criticism of the ruling party and the political situation in Tanzania risked not getting airplay and the musicians risked becoming the target of some „accident“. They drew a direct

connection between the fate of the young parliamentarians Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe and the decline of songs which criticised the political establishment in more explicit ways - and they reasoned that for their own personal song-writing it meant avoiding political issues. Asked in mid-2007, whether they would also be willing to cooperate with or even write songs for political parties other than the CCM, my interviewpartners laughed out: "*Haiwezekani!*" ("This is not possible!"). From their perspective, artists currently would not even accept doing so against payment because it would mean taking a high personal security risk:

John: It is the ruling party [...] it is a mafia, you only lose -. You think about what could happen later on. You get an accident. If you only touch the microphone, oh, this is fine, but if it is heard on the radio -. [...] They will fight you very much. Like this one, the young parliamentarian, Amina Chifupa.³⁵

James: She defended us youth, she had come into parliament via the CCM party, she clamped down heavily on people who sell drugs.³⁶

John: Therefore, politics [is no good as topic] – you need to sing about pleasureable things.³⁷

(John and James, Interview, August 2007)

As pointed out earlier in this article, in 2006 the opinion that artists should be ready to accept playing for whatever political party wanted to hire them had prevailed – a year later, after the death of Amina Chifupa and the dismissal of parliament of Zitto Kabwe – things seemed to be perceived differently. The situation on mainland Tanzania was thus in 2007 no longer very different from the islands of Zanzibar where, as Sarah Schabel noted on the basis of research she carried out in 2006, young musicians tried to avoid politics as a topic in their song lyrics because the political situation on

³⁵ "*Elia: Ni chama tawala [...] ni mafia, unapoteza tu -. Unafikiri, nini itatokea baadaye. Unapata ajali. Ukishika mike tu, oh, ni nzuri, lakini ikisikia redioni - . [...] Watakupigania vita sana, kama yule, mbunge kijana, Amina Chifupa.*"

³⁶ "*Ametutetea sisi vijana, yeye alikuwa amepitia chama cha CCM, aliwabana sana watu wanaouza madawa ya kulevya [...].*"

³⁷ "*Kwa hiyo mambo ya siasa- ..., inabidi unaimba starehe.*"

the Isles was considered too hot.³⁸ (Schabel 2007: 76-77, 62)

Conclusion

Tanzanian youths share - despite many divisions, such as gender, socio-economic background, education, membership in political parties - a generational identity which Bongo Flava, as a new form of popular culture created by young Tanzanians, has helped to shape. More importantly, this new musical genre has helped to increase the visibility and *voiceability* of youth in the Tanzanian public and politics and in this sense Bongo Flava has helped provide the background for the emergence of young, charismatic personalities such as Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe on the political scene. The two, who both were not met with open arms by the political establishment, have started to bring the demands which their generation has begun to voice in public through popular music first to the macropolitical level. It would obviously be naïve to pay tribute to Bongo Flava alone for the emergence of these young politicians. However, it would be just as naïve to overlook the influence of forms of popular culture on young people for who especially its musical expressions are an integral part of their daily experiences. (cf. Dolby 2001: 14) In Tanzania, a country with an overwhelmingly young population and an equally overwhelmingly old political establishment, young people have used the spaces which became available due to the liberalisation of the media to make themselves heard through a new form of popular music. Thereby they made the Tanzanian society – not last the youths themselves – aware of the abilities of young, also non-elite, people and the contributions they have to make to the political development of the country.

What is important though: Bongo Flava has helped to generate new possibilities of political participation via the formal, “traditional” channels of politics and did not confine itself to attempt “revolution through style” or “revolution through critical lyrics”. Bongo Flava music will certainly continue to play a role in this struggle for a greater political participation of youth, even though this role might not always consist in contributing songs

³⁸ Schabel (2007: 63, 77) further observes that Zanzibari artists do not normally participate in political campaigns. However, she quotes one artist, YB, who stated that he had two kinds of songs: his “own” songs and those he wrote for political rallies.

with an outright socio-political critical message. Rather Bongo Flava contributes in the form of conveying self-consciousness to young people who experience that they can achieve more than hitherto thought. In the Bongo Flava “game” they have seen young people, sometimes without higher education and without financial means, get themselves into a position where they can achieve both: make a living and get their message across. Youthful opposition in Tanzania has not taken the form of violent protest such as in other African countries, but has rather seen young people who have a political vision other than seeing politics as the best means to advance their own interests, make their way into parliament and challenge the political elite from within. What is remarkable about Amina Chifupa and Zitto Kabwe is that despite them being members of different political parties, the ruling party and one opposition party respectively, they felt close to another due to their youthfulness and their shared aim to use their position to contribute to the amelioration of the lives of the young generation and the marginalised majority of the population in general. They soon had to experience the limits of what is currently possible. However, the struggle of the “Bongo Flava generation” for more political participation and more attention to the problems of the young is just beginning.

Zusammenfassung

Bongo Flava Musik hat dazu beigetragen, unter den TanzanianerInnen, die in der Ära der Liberalisierung und Mehrparteien-Politik aufgewachsen sind, eine generationenbezogene Identität zu schaffen. Wichtiger noch, dieses junge musikalische Genre hat eine wichtige Rolle dabei gespielt die Sichtbarkeit und das Sich-Gehör-Verschaffen von jungen Menschen in der tanzanischen Öffentlichkeit zu erhöhen und hat damit auch zumindest indirekt die Partizipation von Jugend in politischen Diskursen gestärkt. Das Argument hier ist, dass es nicht so sehr die kritischen Liedtext mancher Lieder waren die das hervorgebracht haben, als die Tatsache, dass die Erfolge von Bongo Flava MusikerInnen dazu beitrugen das Selbstbewußtsein der tanzanischen Jugend zu stärken, die feststellte, dass sie mehr erreichen konnte als bisher gedacht. In diesem Sinne hat Bongo Flava auch dazu beigetragen den Hintergrund zu schaffen vor dem junge charismatische Persönlichkeiten wie Amina Chifupa und Zitto Kabwe

in das tanzanische Parlament kamen und dort die konventionellen hierarchischen Wege der tanzanischen Politik, die bisher von der älteren Generation dominiert war, in Frage stellten. Weiters wird skizziert wie junge „underground“-MusikerInnen diese jüngsten politischen Entwicklungen wahrnahmen und wie diese auf ihre Strategien die musikalische Produktion betreffend rückwirkte.

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