

SOUNDING TANZANIA IN THE STUDIOS OF DAR ES SALAAM

David Kerr and Hashim Rubanza

“When we were at school we were taught to sing the songs of the Europeans. How many of us were taught the songs of the Wanyamwezi or of the Wahehe? Many of us have learnt to dance the rumba, or the cha cha, to rock and roll and to twist and even to dance the waltz and foxtrot. But how many of us can dance, or have even heard of the gombe sugu, the mangala, nyang umumi, kiduo, or lele mama?”

Julius K Nyerere, Tanzanian president from 1964-1985
Inaugural Presidential Address, (Nyerere 1966, 186)

As the above quote makes clear, music performed a central role in the project of imagining post-independence Tanzania [1]. Technologies such as recording studios and radio stations were crucial in defining the musical sound of the newly independent nation. State-run Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam (RTD) was tasked with recording and broadcasting Tanzanian music to the nation (Sturmer 1998, 115) [2]. It was largely in the studios of RTD that the music which defined the sound of the post-independence nation was recorded. The nation, as Ana M Lopez argues of Latin/o America nations, was to be “insistently sung and danced” into being (Lopez 1997, 310). Musicians, as the lyrics of the Asilia Jazz Band below show, were tasked with supporting the state’s ideology of African socialism or *Ujamaa* [3].

Sasa vita imetangazwa jamaa, wananchi wote tuwe imara, vijijini na mijini tuisite kuwafichua, wahujumu na walanguzi eh.

[The war has been announced, let all citizens be stern, be it in the villages or cities let us not hesitate to expose the manipulators and defrauders.]

Asilia Jazz Band, Wahujumu na Walanguz (Manipulators and Defrauders)

In the 1980s under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank, Tanzania began to move away from a socialist social and economic model. The shift to a private economy had a profound effect on musical production and who, where and how the sound of the nation was created. Across Africa, structural adjustment reforms of the 1990s radically changed social, economic and political realities. Relaxation of import duties allowed individuals to buy recording equipment, which led to the establishment of several private studios and a consequent explosion of musical output. At the same time, private media ownership enabled FM radio stations not controlled by the state to broadcast music previously considered unsuitable by RTD. For Tanzanian audiences, music created in Dar es Salaam's recording studios came to define the sound of this post-structural adjustment era in the nation's history, much as RTD's musical output had characterised that of African socialism. In this article, we explore the role of technology in shaping the new post liberalisation sounds of Tanzanian musical production. While audiences may not have been aware of the technological changes in music making, these could be heard in the new sound of songs. Paul Greene suggests "listeners and musicians around the world invest sound technologies and studio recordings with anxieties on the one hand, and desires on the other" (Greene 2004, 10). Drawing on Greene's observation we argue that technologies, and the sonic texts they produced, were heard by Tanzanian audiences as embodying both the new possibilities and uncertainties of neoliberal reforms.

During the 1990s, private studios in Tanzania produced an array of new genres which came to be known collectively as *muziki wa kizazi kipya* (music of a new generation). *Muziki wa kizazi kipya* was an important means through which young people expressed their thoughts, whether positive or negative, celebratory or censorious, about transition to a capitalist economy. Implementation of structural adjustment programmes in Tanzania created both openings and insecurity; as opportunities for waged labour collapsed, the informal sector became the major source of income. Informal economic activities called "*miradi ya maendeleo*" - (development projects)

largely run by children, young people and women - became the principal sources of income for most families (Tripp 1997, 105). Simultaneously, new signs of musical stardom, celebrity and financial success were emerging post-liberalisation as symbols of the new social and economic realities of Tanzania. In the course of political, economic and social reforms, music became increasingly recorded and broadcast through private studios and FM stations rather than state-owned radio RTD. The development of private studios and radio stations moved, rather than removed, control over what was recorded and broadcast. Music of the immediate post-structural adjustment period became, for Tanzanian audiences, emblematic of the social and economic transformation taking place. Lyrics from popular *muziki wa kizazi kipyra* songs evoke both the potentialities and impossibilities of this period [4].

*Aliyeuziwa cheni katoa hela bandia, aliyepokea hela naye kauza cheni
ya bandia
Tuliozoea jiji tunasema ngoma draw*

*[The buyer of the chain pays in fake money, the seller of the necklace
sells a fake chain
Those of us familiar with the city, we say it's a draw]*

Professor Jay, Bongo Dar es Salaam

The first independent studio to be developed in Dar es Salaam was at Don Bosco Youth Centre, in Upanga, between 1990 and 1991. This was followed by Mawingu (Clouds) studio started by Joseph Kussaga, for which Bonnie Luv was the producer (Perullo 2011, 249). By the mid-1990s there was a small number of studios operating in Dar es Salaam, including Bongo Records, MJ Records and Sound Crafters, which produced and recorded most of the *muziki wa kizazi kipyra*. Studios play a critical role in shaping the contours of musical production and are where its lyrical and sonic content are largely defined. The 1990s were a period of technological innovation in Tanzanian music, with studios readily adopting newly available electronic and digital technologies. Producers of *muziki wa kizazi kipyra* increasingly used the computer and synthesizer, rather than the live band, as the building blocks of musical production. New FM radio stations largely broadcast *muziki wa kizazi kipyra* with the result that in major cities this new music was ubiquitous. Debates about whether *muziki wa kizazi kipyra* could be considered 'real' music or authentically Tanzanian raged in the media.

The changing recording technologies of the post-structural adjustment period were a material manifestation of the shifting nature of Tanzanian society. This material shift was perceptible to Tanzanian society in the sound of the music broadcast on the radio and heard in everyday life. Listening is an intimate experience which places the listener in relation with the social realities of the musical text. For the Tanzanian audience, it was not only song lyrics that represented the changing social realities of the country but the music's sonic texts. Paul Peter Matthysse (Majani / P-Funk), the producer and owner of Bongo Records, describes the technological shift inside Tanzanian studios thus:

In the beginning recording studios were still based on hardware with a little combination of software ... computers weren't so powerful, they could only do a certain amount of things, but it was still an upper hand. The biggest thing then was the multitrack recorder. For us locally we had the 8 track machine which used chrome tapes. We used to have mixing consoles, so all your pieces of equipment would enter into that mixer, all the sounds from your computer, whatever recordings you had, for example voices, extra pianos and such, would go to the mixer then you would mix with your hands, physically.

Majani / P-Funk, Dar es Salaam 2020

In addition to the influential studios of Don Bosco, Mawingu, Bongo Records, Sound Crafters and MJ Productions, several other entrepreneurs and budding producers recorded *muziki wa kizazi kipya* songs. By the early 1990s, studios such as Sound Live in Magomeni Mapipa, on the edge of Dar es Salaam's central business district, were recording hip hop. This studio used a Yamaha keyboard for making beats and it was from this keyboard that all the drums (kicks, snare and hi-hat) as well as bass and flute sounds came. Recording was done on a vintage tape deck with two sizeable reels protruding from its frame. Beats were typically accompanied by high-pitched melodies.



These ranged from alternation between two keys within a C minor, C major, D minor or D major frame, which functioned as the central thematic sound of the composition. In other compositions, a flute or whistle created in the synthesizer would be added. As the number of studios in Tanzania expanded in the late 1990s and 2000s, each began to have a distinctive musical character. Producers began to use the JV Roland Keyboard to sequence keys and beats, others used the Tascam 8 track spool, or the 8 bus 24 channel Makie Mixer, as was the case with Sound Crafters.



Paul Peter Matthyse (Majani - P-Funk) in his studio in Dar Es Salaam Tanzania.

As the musical forms of *muziki wa kizazi kipyra* evolved, a new and distinctively Tanzanian music genre, Bongo Flava, emerged. Derived from the Swahili word *ubongo*, or brain, Bongo has become shorthand in Tanzania for the city of Dar es Salaam, and indeed Tanzania itself. Dar es Salaam and Tanzania are Bongo because they are places which demand the concerted use of intelligence and cunning to survive [5]. Initially, for many Tanzanians such as the singer Carola Kinasha, Bongo Flava was a form of 'rap music done in a Tanzanian way or with Kiswahili' (Carola Kinasha, Dar es Salaam 2006). For others such as rapper 2 Proud, (also

known as Mr2 and Sugu), it was a new style of Tanzanian hip hop, a medium which would speak truth to power and describe 'like *hali halisi*' [the real situation] (2 Proud, Dar es Salaam 2006). Early hip hop groups such as Kwanza Unit, GWM, the Villains, and Hardblasters, as well as solo artists like 2 Proud, were important in the development of Bongo Flava. Almost all the early Bongo Flava songs were recorded in one of five studios, (Don Bosco, Mawingu, Bongo Records, MJ studios and Sound Crafters). Each producer, whether Boniluv at Mawingu, Master J at MJ Productions, or P-Funk at Bongo Records, developed their own characteristic sound. While Bongo Flava may initially have been oriented towards hip hop, by the turn of the new millennia it had begun to incorporate a wider range of elements lyrically, vocally and musically. Songs were increasingly sung rather than rapped, and lyrical content began to celebrate the 'good life' enabled by neoliberal reforms.

Sema unachoweza , Fanya unachoweza , mbona unashangaa , mambo ya fedha

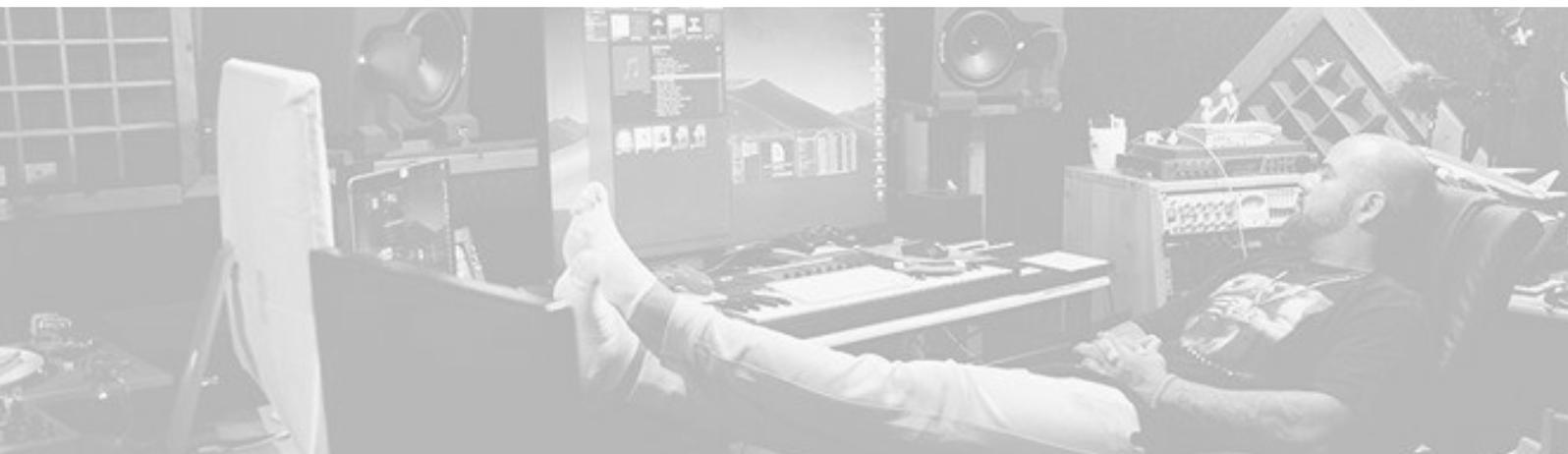
[Say whatever you can, do whatever you can, why are you wasting time, (where) money is concerned]

Mr II and Lady JayDee, Mambo ya fedha [Where Money is Concerned]

Paul Peter Matthyse describes the evolution of the sound of Bongo Flava thus:

The distinctive sound came from a combination of influences... reggae, ragga, hip-hop, RnB, we had influence from South Africa and also Lingala was involved when it comes to melodies and guitar riffs [6]... We kept on fusing and changing it more and more and creating an identity, from the kinds of basslines we used to play, certain grooves, certain drum patterns we also used to use distinctive sounds.

Majani / P-Funk, Dar es Salaam 2020



While early Tanzanian *muziki wa kizazi kipya* had a certain roughness to it, by 2000 further development in digital technology gave producers the ability to create a wider range of sound. The use of more sophisticated digital studio technologies made the cutting of samples, the layering of sounds and the building of tracks much easier. Combining the synthesizer with the computer made the range of instrumental sounds available to the producer wider. The sound that resulted from these new technologies was smoother and more polished than the production of *muziki wa kizazi kipya*. Bongo Flava encapsulated the emerging Tanzanian identity, distinct from the period of *Ujamaa*. Bongo Flava became a musical phenomenon and its stars began to perform regularly across the wider East African region. Singers and producers became celebrities, appearing in Tanzanian films and on TV, as well as being a regular source of stories in the Tanzanian popular press. Music, and musical celebrities, were at the centre of the new imaginings of a poststructural adjustment citizenship, which represented wealth, recreation and corporeal pleasure rather than a celebration of the modest, hard-working, rural citizen of the *Ujamaa* period. Bongo Flava's novel, slick and accomplished sound sonically represented commercial and financial success. In its sonic qualities, the music spoke of the new possibilities for consumption, wealth and pleasure enabled by neoliberalism.

*Tunapenda sana ma-wine mashmpain, lakini ndio vile tena hatuna mahela
Tunatamani mamisosi ya kumwaga ni mapiza mabaga, na mazaga zaga ila ndio vile tena hatuna mahela*

*[We like wine and champagne but this is just the way it is, we don't have any money
We crave a variety/plenty of food, pizzas and burgers and different things to eat
But that's just the way it is, we don't have any money]*

Ngwear feat. DarkMaster, Nipe Dili [Give me a Deal]

As Bongo Flava continued to gain commercial success, and digital software and plug-ins increasingly became the means of musical production, between 1999 and 2008 several new studios were established including Fishcrab, Kama Kawa, 41 Recordz, FM Studios and Dhahabu. Songs such as Diamond Platnumz' "Moyo Wangu" [My Heart], produced by Lamar, Ngwair's "Ghetto Langu Tu" [Only My Ghetto], produced by P-Funk, and Dully Sykes "Dhahabu",

produced by Master J came to define this era. Throughout the 2000s, Bongo Flava dominated Tanzania's airwaves. In 2009, the catchy hook from Dully Sykes' song "Bongo Flava" was used by the mobile telephone company, Tigo, in its radio adverts. The sound of this hook became ubiquitous across Tanzania to such an extent that it seemed to become part of the very fabric of everyday life. Bongo Flava songs have become an important part of Tanzanian musical history and the 'classics' of the genre are broadcast weekly on radio programmes such as DJ Fetty's *kali za kale* (blast from the past) on Clouds FM. Rather than the earlier *muziki wa kizazi kipya* songs, it is the popular hits from the Bongo Flava era by artists such as AY, Dully Sykes, Ngwair, Ray C, Lady Jay Dee, Ali Kiba and Professor Jay which continue to feature regularly on the radio. For Tanzanian audiences, songs from this period came to embody the late 1990s and 2000s, when the dreams of liberalisation seemed to be, at least symbolically, realised through music. The sound of Bongo Flava was a sonic assertion of an alternative vision of national citizenship, one whose sweet melodies and borrowings from transnational genres spoke to the fantasy of liberalisation and new relations of global participation. The relationship between Tanzanian publics and the sonic texts of Bongo Flava is complex and nuanced. As we explore in the remaining part of this article, audiences in Tanzania brought multiple readings to these sounds.



Bongo Flava Spotify playlist

So far nadhani equipment nyingi sana in terms of the practical equipment, vingi havijabadilika. Kuna aina tofauti tofauti tu ya ma-guitar...kuna aina tofauti tofauti ya keyboard, drums and so forth. Lakini nachoona mimi kama ninaweza kutaja (kifaa kimoja) ni digital audio work station. D.A.W nazo ziko nyingi, lakini DAW tukiitumia kama kifaa kama moja ya sehemu inayotuweka pamoja... imebadilika sana kwa sababu...zamani ulikuwa na uwezo wa kurekodi guitar , solo , yaani rhythm, guitar rhythm , bazi labda, drums na vitu vingine unavirekodi kupitia sound card lakini vinapitia kwenye hicho kifaa kama, hiyo software hiyo , ambayo tunaita digital / audio work station...iwe ni Logic au ni Cubase, au nyingine yoyote ile.

[So far I think a lot of the physical equipment has not changed. There are many types of guitars, many types of keyboards, drums and so forth. But in my perspective the one thing that I can mention [that has changed] is the Digital Audio Workstation, (DAW). There are many types of DAWs, but the DAW is one of the single pieces of equipment that brought us all together. It has changed a lot.... Because back then one was able to record the guitar, solo, that being rhythm, guitar rhythm, bass maybe, drums and other things via the soundcard but would all pass through that device, the software that we called the digital audio working station regardless if it was Logic or Cubase, or that of any other kind.]

Boniphace Kilosa, Boniluv, Dar es Salaam 2020



Boniluv making music in his studio in Dar Es Salaam Tanzania.

How was the polished, skilled and full sound of Bongo Flava heard in Tanzania? In her book, *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music, and Pan-African Solidarity*, Tsitsi Jaji interrogates how African women read images of consumer goods, beauty and technology in the glossy magazines of the 1950s and 1960s. Jaji suggests that the women examined these texts through an interpretative and reflective practice she terms “sheen reading”. Women, she says, had a layered reading of the magazines’ glossy surfaces. The surface was enjoyed for immersion in the pleasures of capitalist consumer culture as well as the exposure to pan-African aesthetics it enabled. Jaji suggests that the sheen invariably wore thin, opening space for readers to recognise and critique their precarity and exclusion from the glossy images inside (Jaji 2014, 116). Drawing on Jaji’s notion of sheen reading, we suggest that Tanzanian audiences heard and interpreted the sonic surface of Bongo Flava in multiple ways. There is a pleasure in listening to Bongo Flava. The genre’s most famous producers are talented musicians and the songs they created are catchy “ear worms” which stick in the mind. Its sound is a distinctively Tanzanian one, particularly for an East African audience. While Bongo Flava producers drew on RnB, hip hop, reggae, soukous and rumba, their production was heard by local audiences as representing a new, emerging Tanzanian identity. Both the music and its creators circulated widely in the East African region, and Bongo Flava was also widely popular in Nairobi and Kampala. It thus represented, for Tanzanians, a sign of national success. In part, Bongo Flava was popular because it was new, exciting and dynamic, and the digital technologies used by its producers created original and energetic sonic texts. However, the sounds created on digital technologies in the studios of Dar es Salaam not only spoke to notions of individuated accumulation and consumption but also reflected the anxieties the social changes that liberalisation had engendered. The lyrics, videos and sonic texts of Bongo Flava songs explored the new possibilities and anxieties of the period. One response was to reflect the anxieties of the new liberalised economy and songs often encouraged young people to strive, work hard and seek to overcome their difficulties. The sonic sheen of Bongo Flava spoke to Tanzanian audiences of new social and economic possibilities but for many also marked the limitations to their ability to participate in it.



*Maisha ni kama vita nani atakuokoa? Kijana endelea kupigana
iwe usiku au mchana kijana pambana, Kama kijanani hukujituma
uzeeni utabaki umenuna, maisha hayataniwi.*

*[Life is like war, who will save you? Young man keep fighting Be
it at night or day young man fight If you don't exert yourself
during your youth, you will be frowning. As an old man, life is no
joke]*

TMK Wanume, Umri [Age]

What we have sought to show, in this article, is how the technologies of musical production and the sounds they were able to produce were invested with desires and anxieties by audiences in Tanzania. The development of private studios represented a radical shift in the relationship between music, technology and producer, which if not overtly noticed, was heard by Tanzanian audiences. Changing studio technologies created new sounds which were heard as embodying the uncertainties and opportunities of liberalisation. Through the sound of Bongo Flava, Tanzanian audiences experienced not only an intimate personal but also a collective relationship to the changing social conditions of life in Tanzania [7]. The novel, smooth, digital soundtrack of Bongo Flava was experienced by many Tanzanians as pleasure. Yet, to return to Jaji's notion of sheen reading, the music's smooth sound was also heard as embodying the multiple potentialities, satisfactions and disappointments of the new era.

Postscript

*Kama technological advancements zingeondolewa mimi
ningerudi kufanya muziki kama nilivyokuwa nikifanya zamani
lakini nina wasiwasi ya kwamba watu wengi sana wangeona
muziki sio kitu rahisi tena kama ilivyokuwa sasa hivi.*

*[If these technological advancements were removed I would go
back to making music the way I used to back then but I fear a
lot of people would not find music as easy to do as is now.]*

Boniluv, Dar es Salaam 2020

This article is the product of more than a decade long friendship. It is part of an ongoing collaboration and interest in Tanzanian popular culture and the everyday intellectual life of Dar es Salaam. Our collaboration has involved an Arts Council funded artistic residency which enabled Hashim to come to the UK and work with a range of cultural partners in the West Midlands in 2009. Hashim is currently translating Dr Kerr's first book on the sub-culture of the stowaway in Dar es Salaam into KiSwahili.

David Kerr obtained his PhD from the University of Birmingham in 2014 and since 2016 has been a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Johannesburg. His research has explored amateur, everyday music making practices in Dar es Salaam and Birmingham. The focus of his current research is the vibrant cultural ecology of street performance genres in Dar es Salaam and their role in generating a distinct street episteme. He has published in the fields of cultural and social anthropology, cultural studies and media studies. Dr Kerr is also involved in a number of initiatives to make street music genres from Dar es Salaam available to a wider audience.

d.kerr@bham.ac.uk

Twitter: @DavidKerr_1

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4745-6676>

Hashim Rubanza is an MC, spoken word artist, researcher and writer living in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. His first musical release in 1993/4 was with a hip hop group called Black Houndz. In 2001 he formed a musical collective under the name "kikosi cha Mizinga" [the bomb squad], which provided a space for artists in the emerging hip hop scene to develop a more radical voice. Since 2005, Hashim has increasingly focused on communicating through media other than hip hop including film, spoken word and poetry. Hashim has been a researcher on a range of projects with academic partners, NGO's and in the corporate sector. He is interested in the creative, cultural and intellectual everyday life of Tanzania. In 2020 he will be co-convening a course on African Hip Hop with Professor Msia Kibona-Clark at Howard University in the United States.

<https://jamiisanaa.wordpress.com/poems-by-hashim-rubanza/>
swahilified@gmail.com

Twitter: nafsi_okoa

Endnotes

1. There is significant literature on the role of culture in imagining Tanzania: for example, see Kelly Askew's book *Performing the Nation: Swahili music and cultural policies in Tanzania* (2002) and Laura Edmondson's *Performance and politics in Tanzania: the nation on stage* (2007).
2. Initially called the Tanganyika Broadcasting Service (TBS).
3. Following the Arusha declaration of 1967, Tanzania began to follow a policy of African Socialism called Ujamaa. This ideology saw a return to African tradition as providing the building blocks for a modern socialist state. As Nyerere suggested "We, in Africa, have no more need of being 'converted' to socialism than we have of being 'taught' democracy. Both are rooted in our past, in the traditional society which produced us." (Uhuru na Umoja [Essays on Freedom], 1966).
4. There is an extensive body of literature on the emergence of *muziki wa kizazi kipya*, hip hop and Bongo Flava in Tanzania, see Englert (2003; 2010), Omari (2009; 2011), Suriano (2007), Perullo (2007) and Kibona-Clark (2018).
5. Bongo Flava is the musical flavour of Dar es Salaam and Tanzania.
6. Lingala is the lingua franca of Congo and Majani / P-Funk here refers to the influence of Congolese genres Rhumba and Soukous on Tanzanian music production.
7. Listening is rarely a solitary practice in Tanzania and music is largely listened to and heard collectively.

References

- Askew, K. (2002) *Performing the Nation: Swahili music and cultural policies in Tanzania*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Asilia Jazz Band, *Wahujumu na Walanguz (Manipulators and Defrauders)*
- Edmondson, L. (2007) *Performance and Politics in Tanzania: The nation on stage*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Englert, B. (2003) "Bongo Flava (still) hidden "underground" rap music from Morogoro, Tanzania". In *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kritische Africastudien* 5 : 73-93.
- Englert, B. (2008) "Ambiguous Relationships: Youth, Popular Music and Politics in Contemporary Tanzania". In *Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, 14 : 71-96.
- Greene, P. D. (2004) "Introduction Wired Sound and Sonic Cultures." In Porcello, T and Greene, P. D. *Wired for Sound : Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Jaji, T. (2014) *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music and Pan-African Solidarity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kibona Clark, M. (2018) *Hip-Hop in Africa: Prophets of the City and Dustyfoot Philosophers*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- Lopez, A. M. Ana (1997) "Of Rhythms and Borders". In Delgado, C. F. and Muñoz, J.E. (eds) *Everynight life : culture and dance in Latin/o America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Mr II and Lady JayDee, "Mambo ya fedha" [Where Money is Concerned]

Ngwear feat. DarkMaster, "Nipe Dili" [Give me a Deal]

Nyerere, J. K. (1966) *Freedom and Unity: Uhuru na Umoja*. Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press.

Omari, S. (2009) *Tanzanian Hip Hop Poetry as Popular Literature*. PhD Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam.

Omari, S. (2011) "Call Me 'Top in Dar': The Role of Pseudonyms in Bongo Flava Music". *Swahili Forum*, 18: 69-86.

Perullo, A. (2007) "'Here's a Little Something Local': An early history of hip hop in Dar es Salaam 1984-1997". In Brennan J., Lawi Y. and Burton A. (eds.) *Dar es Salaam Histories from an Emerging African Metropolis*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota.

Perullo, A. (2011) *Live from Dar es Salaam: Popular Music and Tanzania's Music Economy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Sturmer, M. (1998) *The Media History of Tanzania*. Salzburg: Ndanda Mission Press.

Suriano, M. (2007) "'Mimi Ni Msani, Kioo Cha Jamii': Urban Youth Culture in Tanzania as Seen Through Bongo Flewa and Hip Hop". *Swahili Forum*, 14: 207-223.

TMK Wanume, "Umri" [Age]

Tripp, A. M. (1997) *Changing the Rules: The politics of liberalization and the urban informal economy in Tanzania*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

