Dar es Salaam. Histories from an Emerging African Metropolis

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In October 1998, members of the hip hop group Kwanza Unit went on stage at the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Dar es Salaam for a TeleFood charity event. In the audience were the First Lady, Mama Anna Mkapa, the Zanzibar President, Dr. Salmin Amour, the media tycoon, Mr. Reginald Mengi, and 250 other influential Tanzanians. Kwanza Unit had been asked to perform one

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kwanza Unit</th>
<th>Msafiri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mimi msafiri bado niko njiana.</td>
<td>I am a traveller, still on the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sijui lini nitafika.</td>
<td>I don’t know when I will arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na ulizia watu kule ninakakokwenda.</td>
<td>I inquire from people wherever I go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sijui lini nitafika.</td>
<td>I don’t know when I will arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hii ndo' picha kabla ya pazia la udongo</td>
<td>This is the picture before the curtain of dirt comes down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndani ya futi sita, vita</td>
<td>At six feet under, war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kila watu tisa kati ya kumi dhidi ya hali duni</td>
<td>Nine out of ten people living in abject conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naeleke nchi ya ughaibuni</td>
<td>I am heading to a foreign place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimezungukwa na dhoruba</td>
<td>I am surrounded by a hurricane [I am confused]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nshapagawa, sioni rasi wala ghuba</td>
<td>I am possessed, I don’t see cape or inlet [I don’t see land]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya Allah, Jah Jehova</td>
<td>Ya, Allah, Jah, Jehovah witness the way the soul is destroyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuhudia jinsi roho inavyoangamia</td>
<td>The weather has become rough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halihewa imechafuluka</td>
<td>Darkness is hiding consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giza lauficha utakatifu</td>
<td>I don’t see anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kote sioni kitu</td>
<td>Suffering [in the ghetto] without bitterness toward life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateso bila chuki mkushi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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of their popular Swahili songs, ‘Msafiri’ (‘Traveller’). Originally a dansi song written by the singer King Kiki, it had been rewritten and remixed by Kwanza Unit and turned into a popular rap. While being broadcast live on two television stations (DTV and ITV), Kwanza Unit sang the song to the audience and to the many people watching throughout Tanzania. KBC of Kwanza Unit sang the first chorus, while Rhymson rapped his socially charged verse about the suffering that takes place over the course of one’s life. The directness of the lyric was typical of many hip hop songs in Swahili at that time. Further, the mix of 1960s dansi with hip hop made the song sound Tanzanian, despite the Western origins of hip hop culture.

‘Msafiri’ was a major success. Not only did it receive a standing ovation at this event, but it brought Kwanza Unit continued success on the local airwaves. Yet how did hip hop music, an American phenomenon typically sung in English, turn into such a powerful musical symbol for Tanzanian society? How did it succeed in becoming such an important part of a major media event in 1998? And how was a young rap group allowed to sing about the problems of life in the ‘ghetto’ in front of the First Lady and other prominent Tanzanians?

In this paper, I trace the rise of hip hop music and culture in Dar es Salaam from 1984 until 1997. Using interviews with artists, promoters, producers, and radio personalities, I present the movement of hip hop in Dar es Salaam from imitation to localization. While many authors criticize the phenomenon of hip hop in Africa as only an infatuation with America, I argue that, over time, artists moved beyond mere imitation of their Western counterparts to creating original lyrics, instrumentals, and immersing hip hop with local cultural knowledge. Hip hop music and culture, now referred to as either kufokafoka or bongo flava, emerged through Dar es Salaam youth’s interest in identifying with African-American culture, power, and wealth, but evolved into an indigenous source of inspiration and meaning.

Many authors, particularly Tanzanian writers, characterize Tanzanian hip hop as a form of cultural imperialism or an extension of Westernization that is occurring throughout Africa. Certainly, processes of globalization have increased the economic dominance of Western countries (Europe, the USA, Japan) in many parts of Africa. Despite early projections that globalization, with an equalizing of communication, transportation, and trade, would create a stronger balance between the ‘west and the rest’, the opposite has occurred. Most African countries are now more reliant on Western markets, trade, and aid than ever before.

Yet despite this economic imbalance, people in Tanzania and other African countries remain culturally empowered. In other words, artists, writers, performers, and others have not assimilated aspects of the United States and Europe while disregarding their own cultural practices. Instead, processes of localization are taking place where ideas, styles, and trends from one part of the world are integrated with and adapted to local cultures. This interchange is not predictable or straightforward. Rather, it is a complex result of the increased ease with which Tanzanians can access the music and culture of the West (and vice versa), and draw aspects from what they see and hear into their own traditions.
Further, hip hop’s emergence follows a historical pattern of Dar es Salaam youth integrating foreign musical genres with local aesthetics. During the 1920s and 1930s, under British colonialism, Tanzanians listened to and performed Western music, such as ballroom dance, swing, and military marches. Local artists melded these Western styles with other musical forms popular at that time, such as Congolese music and local ngoma, to develop the most enduring popular genre in Tanzania, dansi. Through the increased availability of records, other Western genres such as jazz, country, and, by the mid 1960s, soul and funk, also became popular. Some bands formed to imitate these genres as precisely as possible, while many others took ideas from these new popular musics to add to the dansi sound. This constant musical borrowing from non-Tanzanian culture continued until the 1970s at which point the government began to limit peoples’ access to foreign music under stricter socialist policies.

During the early 1980s, however, the socialist practices that limited people’s access to foreign music and culture began to break down. Under the presidency of Ali Hassan Mwinyi (1985 to 1995), people were given a great deal of economic freedom. Mwinyi dissolved many of the socialist proscriptions on privatization and business, and also ignored some of the duplicitous activities that rose alongside the burgeoning informal and formal economies. The Mwinyi presidency became known as the Ruksa years, derived from the word ‘ruhusu’ or ‘to allow’. Mwinyi believed that his economically ‘free’ policies would create a stronger local market for goods and services, particularly as it became financially difficult to import goods from outside of Tanzania. The result of Mwinyi’s liberalization policies was a tremendous growth in the informal economy, increased corruption, and, for many, more opportunities to make a living through any means necessary.

Another result of liberalization was that many youth returned to foreign styles of music for inspiration. Congolese rumba, reggae, and American pop (such as the music of Michael Jackson) all became popular in this period. These genres represented the otherness and foreignness that many urban Dar es Salaam youth sought in their movement toward a sense of cosmopolitanism. It was hip hop music, however, that garnered the strongest following in subsequent decades. Internationally, hip hop grew in popularity during the 1980s, and it was a culture – of dress, music, and dance – that many Dar es Salaam youth admired. Further, it was a cultural phenomenon that emerged among African-Americans, a group that young Tanzanians have long admired and emulated. Although local musical genres, such as dansi, taarab, and, in the early 1990s, mchiriku, were also popular among youth, it was hip hop, performed by both foreign and local artists that became the most successful musical genre.

Similar to the early years of dansi, access to hip hop music had a great deal to do with education and class. Well-educated youth, for instance, who had family members that traveled abroad, had privileged access to imported records, clothing, and magazines. Those that lived in central and more exclusive areas of the city, such as City Centre, Upanga, Kinondoni, and Oyster Bay, had closer connections to the schools, clubs, competitions, and parties that gave rise to hip hop. Youth who came from wealthy families were also able to
see and hear hip hop on home televisions, stereos, and VCRs. Poorer residents of the city were unable to experience hip hop until the local economy caught up with international urban cultures, and with the technology that was needed to bring hip hop to a wider audience.

One consequence of this social differentiation among Dar es Salaam youth is divergent streams of memory about the history of Tanzanian hip hop. Those from upper class or well-educated families tend to conceive of hip hop’s emergence much earlier than other youth. They know more about American artists and culture particularly because they have a stronger command of English (and thereby access to foreign radio shows and other media). They also hold to certain pillars of hip hop more in line with American cultural practices. Other youth, however, conceive of American culture as it is filtered through local news media and word of mouth. They identify certain local artists as being the progenitors of a Tanzanian style of rap, and view hip hop as less an American phenomenon than a cultural element that fits naturally with their urban experiences. These different conceptions, based on class, education and access to local and foreign cultural elements, create a complex history—one that shifts and changes depending on an individual’s social position. In this chapter, I address these divergent streams of memory while recognizing that many voices remain left out or incomplete.

Rap emerges: 1984-1989

American hip hop culture is often divided into four elements: breakdancing, deejaying (also called mixing), rapping (also called MC-ing), and graffiti art. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, these four pillars of hip hop emerged, mainly in the Bronx borough of New York City. During the rise in popularity of hip hop internationally, youth in different countries incorporated part or all of the hip hop ‘expressions’. The Dutch, for instance, incorporated all four elements of hip hop into their scene, while the British and French focused more on rapping and deejaying. In Tanzania, youth were first drawn to hip hop culture through breakdancing.

In 1984, Dar es Salaam youth saw their first images of breakdancing on videocassettes. Within a period of a year, most of the dance community had abandoned earlier styles, such as the robot, for the new American phenomenon. American videos, such as Wild Styles, Breakin’, and Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo, were the first visual elements of this American cultural form to appear. The films were shown publicly, such as at the 1984 Saba Saba festival. Since few families in Tanzania had VCRs at this time, the breakdancing trend initially centred on middle and upper class youth. These youth, who mainly lived in the Upanga, Oyster Bay, and City Centre areas, borrowed and traded videos with one another in order to mimic breakdancing moves.

While breakdancing was the first dominant element of hip hop culture to appear in Dar es Salaam, a handful of youth did rap. These mostly elite youth tended to be well educated and have connections with people abroad that allowed them access to music from the United States. The two most revered
names of this small group of early rappers were Conway Francis and Fresh X. Francis rapped complete songs of American hip hop, dressed in American-style rap clothing, and used American vernacular in his speech. He was friendly with many of the local deejays, who would pass him the microphone to rap during dance events. Like Francis, Fresh X, known also as Eddo King and as Fresh X E, also had access to American cultural items. His brother, Franco Mtui, had a sizeable record collection, which gave Fresh X opportunities to study rap music. Fresh X would also fashion his clothing after American rappers, such as Flava Flav from the American group Public Enemy (he even wore the large clock around his neck). Most remarkably, however, Fresh X composed his own lyrics, and wrote some in Swahili. KBC, who lived near Fresh X in Oyster Bay, explains his importance in the local community:

The first person that I ever seen rap, writing his own lyrics was Fresh X. He was older than me—I was going to school with his young brother Franco Mtui. I would come back from school, and stop at Franco’s house. The whole neighborhood would want to go to Franco’s house because the family was so musical. They used to collect records, so people would go over there to hear new records. And, at that time, Fresh X was just interested with rap music. This was in 1984. They had a group called Badboys—the deejay was Franco, and the rapper was Fresh X. They would throw their own parties, and every party they threw, Fresh X would rap. It was like a house party—that was the spot to hang out. No smoking or drinking, nothing crazy, people would go for the love of music.

KBC, who became a well-known rapper himself in the early 1990s, goes on to describe the reverence that many people had for Fresh X. His ability to compose his own songs, tell stories, and ‘work a room’ made a tremendous impression on many Oyster Bay youth. It also made him an exception in Dar es Salaam, and essentially, an artist many years ahead of the local scene.

Both Conway Francis and Fresh X eventually joined together to form Three Power Crew with another rapper, Young Millionaire. The group performed at disco clubs, and became well known among more elite youth in Dar es Salaam. Other rappers, such as Samia X and Cool Moe C, also from affluent backgrounds, found success in this period. DJ Kim, who met many of these artists in local clubs, describes the early scene:

You know, in the early years [1986-1989], many of the people that rapped were the better educated, the elite. They would be able to imitate songs, such as ‘OPP’, from the beginning until the end, just like Naughty by Nature. These youth would come to the discos, and they would say, ‘DJ play OPP for me.’ And, I would play the instrumental of ‘OPP’ for them, and then they would take the mic, and sing the song. So, they would liven the music by rapping over the instrumental.

Since many of these artists, including Fresh X, Samia X, and KBC, left Tanzania for other countries, this group of artists would eventually lose influence in the local scene.

Outside of this elite community of MCs, however, few people attempted to rap in the mid-1980s. At clubs, deejays such as DJ Ice-Q, Master T, and DJ
Alex Perullo

K, rapped over instrumental music while people danced. Yet most Dar es Salaam youth were still a few years away from rapping entire songs, composing their own lyrics, or performing as solo rappers. Where deejays used their short raps to add excitement, full-song rapping entailed an immersion into poetic composition with a focus on putting words together to tell a story. It required skills, such as following the beat and creating an overall flow to the music, which artists had to hone over time. Further, due to the limited availability of American records, rapping remained secondary to dancing, and never grew beyond a few artists who tried to experiment with the music.

The movement toward more professional rapping was formalized through the frequency of American music heard in Dar es Salaam in the late 1980s and early 1990s. DJ Kim elaborates:

In the cinema, came the rap show *DJs of Music Rap Show* that had rappers such as Run DMC and Public Enemy. So, people in Tanzania saw how these artists moved and rapped from the cinema. From there, Tanzanian youth began to imitate the artists that they saw. But, a lot also came in through the disco [clubs]. We would get rap albums from Tanzanians abroad, and artists would imitate the rappers on those albums. Mostly, this imitation occurred in 1989, 1990, and, in 1991, with local artists copying the music of Naughty by Nature (“OPP”), MC Hammer (“Hammertime”), Bobby Brown, and LL Cool J.

Though DJ Kim places a great deal of emphasis on the clubs—he was, after all, a well-known disco deejay in Dar es Salaam—youth also learned to rap through listening to music at home, or sitting in front of a store that had music playing. Ramadhani Mponjika remembers:

When I was in secondary, youth would gather at events, like picnics, and you would make contacts with people who had the same interests as you. At that time, there were few people that had an interest in rap. So, we all started to get to know each other. Many times, you would find someone with a cassette, borrow it, record it, and return it to him/her. We would make mix cassettes. One person would always get cassettes from WBLS, so we would listen to those.

Schoolyards, social ‘picnics’, and parties were all places that youth, often too young for clubs, would learn about rap. As Mponjika states, during this time, only a handful were into the music (breakdancing remained the more popular element of hip hop culture). Yet, these youth actively engaged in the trading of American hip hop, and eventually enticed other youth to try to rap.

By 1989, rapping had become a vital aspect of Dar es Salaam schools. Students imitated American fashion, practiced rapping after school, and took on names modeled after famous American artists. Some of the better known artists included D Rob (whose name was taken from the American rapper Rob Base), Tribe X (from A Tribe Called Quest and, possibly, Malcolm X), Eazy B (Eazy E), Fresh G (Doug E. Fresh), Dre B (Dr. Dre), and Nigga One. Groups such as Raiders Posse from Oyster Bay, Villain Gangsters from Temekte, and Hardblasters from Upanga also formed in this period. In essence, between 1989 and 1991, Dar es Salaam school age youth embraced American rap as something they wanted to replicate. This was the generation that would bring...
about the genre’s most profound integration into Tanzanian culture. Most Tanzanian rappers identify 1989 to 1991 as the formative years of the Dar es Salaam scene.

During this time, imitation remained the best way for Tanzanians to achieve their skills as rappers. Mr. II, a well-known rapper, states, ‘When we [Tanzanian rappers] first started, you would listen to someone’s song and learn his lyrics. This was the style that we had in the beginning. Then, later, we started to write songs in English’. Though the use of English was difficult for many, particularly in trying to copy the rapid delivery of American rappers, the imitation process was crucial for Dar es Salaam youth to learn to ‘flow’ over the music, find the beat of songs, and create a unique sound. Mponjika elaborates:

I’ll tell you a funny story. I tried to write the lyrics to one song, ‘I Got Soul’ by Rakim. I listened to it on the radio [from a cassette] and then I wrote the lyrics for two verses, because, we did not have the original cassette with the lyrics. I learned the song, and then performed it. After about three or four months, I found the original cassette with the lyrics. The lyrics that I learned were completely different than the original. It was not even what Rakim was saying. So, I did not understand the meaning on the songs, but I learned the flow and about following the beats.

Although many other artists struggled with the lyrics, particularly American vernacular, the practice of imitation gave artists the skills necessary to rap.

Despite the interest in hip hop during the 1980s, by 1990 only a small number of artists were rapping. Students at schools would often try to mimic popular rap songs, but actual attempts to compose and perform rap were few. Further, the fan base was still small. Cassette tapes did circulate in Dar es Salaam and elsewhere in Tanzania, but youth were still more enamored with American artists than the music of their Tanzanian counterparts. While the popularity of rap was slowly moving outward from the exclusive areas and schools, rap had to go through several changes before it was accepted by a large base of fans and rappers in Dar es Salaam.

Competition and style: 1990-1992

Competitions were an important part of Dar es Salaam’s music scene after independence. Dansi and ngoma bands frequently competed against one another in state sponsored events. During the 1980s, there were regular dance competitions, not just in breakdancing but in other styles of popular dance. The emergence of rap competitions was, therefore, a natural progression. The first such event was at the Lang’ata Club in Kinondoni, Dar es Salaam. Held in 1990, it brought together solo rappers such as Conway Francis, Fresh X, and Dika Shap. Although the event was significant in that it was the first major competition of Tanzanian rap, it is left out of most Dar es Salaam rap histories. The reason may be that many of the contestants did not continue to perform rap for very long after the event ended. Alternatively, it arose from the fact that it involved an exclusive group of rappers and not those who
would bring about the most significant changes to the genre. Whatever the reason, the winner of the competition, Dika Shap, is typically not acknowledged as a rap pioneer, even though he apparently won the competition by singing part of a song in Swahili, an innovation that would have the strongest impact in localizing Tanzanian hip hop.

The event generally acknowledged as the first major competition is Yo! Rap Bonanza. Organized by DJ Kim and the Boyz Promotions, the competition was to find the best rapper in the country (although it was mainly restricted to Dar es Salaam youth). The event took place on the seventh floor of the New Africa Hotel, where over three hundred people gathered over two days to witness the best local talent. The competition proved expensive to organise. As a result, the door charge was high and limited attendance to better-off youth. Four judges, including Slim A. Slim (a clothing designer), sat in attendance, scouting for the most talented MC. Yo! Rap Bonanza featured a who’s who of young artists such as Nigga One, Eazy B, D Rob, KBC, Y Thang, and Kill B. Most performed American rap songs in English, and strove to precisely imitate the sounds of the original lyricists. Nigga One, for instance, performed a song by the American group N.W.A. (Niggaz with Attitude). According to the rapper Balozi Dola, who was in attendance during this performance, several of the artists believed that exact imitation was the best way to perform rap music and, as a result, win the competition.\textsuperscript{35}

One artist, however, opted not to directly reproduce an American rap. Saleh Ajabry, a twenty-year-old Dar es Salaam-born artist, took several popular American songs and performed them with his own lyrics. Ajabry, who also went by the name Saleh J, started his rap career in the late 1980s, writing original lyrics over imported hip hop instrumentals. He recorded his first song, ‘The Power’ by the group Snap, in the late 1980s at his home using a microphone and a dual-cassette tape deck. In 1991, Ajabry recorded ‘Ice Ice Baby’ after receiving the song’s instrumental track from Mr. A, a deejay at the Continental Disco Tech. According to Ajabry, a friend of his took these recordings and sold them to local distributors. Through the release of this rap single, the first by a Tanzanian artist, Ajabry’s name gained recognition in Dar es Salaam. As a result, when Yo! Rap Bonanza was being organized, it was important to have Ajabry compete. On the second day of the competition, Ajabry performed two songs. The first was the Heavy D and the Boys’ hit, ‘Now That We Found Love’. By the time Ajabry arrived on stage for his last song, the audience was shouting for him to perform his new hit, ‘Ice Ice Baby’.\textsuperscript{36} Of all the songs he composed, ‘Ice Ice Baby’ remains the best remembered, mainly because he added a level of social commentary to his lyrics that would become prominent in Tanzania’s future hip hop scene. On the original song, the American rapper Vanilla Ice sings about driving around looking for women, stopping at a party, and then getting involved in a drive-by shooting. He raps, ‘Gunshots rang out like a bell/ I grabbed my nine, all I heard were shells/ Falling on the concrete real fast/ Jumped in my car, slammed on the gas.’ Ajabry turns Vanilla Ice’s verse about cruising for women into a warning:
The poignant message, that one should fear AIDS because there is no cure, took rap songs that had little local significance to most Dar es Salaam youth and imbued it with meaning.

Ajabry was a major success. Not only were his lyrics intelligible, but the message of his song resonated with the local population. During the early 1990s, AIDS was a significant topic of conversation in schools, on the radio, and among youth. By taking this prominent social topic and weaving it into a popular song rapped partially in Swahili, Ajabry allowed rap to function according to its original intention: to communicate verbally. Though Ajabry was not the first rapper to use Swahili or even the first to rap about a topical social issue, the popularity of his song and his skills as a lyricist created a significant turning point in Tanzanian rap. Most future acts would follow Ajabry’s lead, using Swahili and incorporating socially conscious messages in their music.

It is interesting to note that there was some conflict at the Yo! Rap Bonanza concert. Some contestants believed that Ajabry, who is part Arab, should not have been involved. To these contestants, rap was a black music, and sung in English. If Tanzanians wanted to rap, in other words, they needed to remain ‘true’ to the original form. One contestant derogatorily called Ajabry ‘mwarabu’ [Arab], proclaiming that he was not black enough to rap. It is impossible to know how widespread such attitudes were. However, the popular memory of Ajabry and the success of his songs established a new direction for the local scene. Due to his success at communicating with the audience, Ajabry won Yo! Rap Bonanza. Soon after, he released his first, and only, album Swahili Rap. The album, which featured all the songs he performed at the competition, influenced many Tanzanian youth. The rapper Inspekta Haroun, from Gangwe Mob, recalled: ‘At that time, we, Tanzanians, had not proved ourselves… But, the thing that [Ajabry] rapped about could be understood by many people, and was very impressive’. Ajabry also inspired Soggy Doggy Anter, another well-known rapper:

So, around this time, I started to listen to Vanilla Ice and, then, came a Tanzanian named Saleh Ajabry who started to sing Vanilla Ice songs in Swahili. At the time, I could rhythm like other rappers, such as Snoop [Doggy Dogg], but with his words. I did not write my own words. But, in 1993, after hearing Saleh Ajabry, I started to write and rap in Swahili. At first, my raps were simple and funny to hear, but [Saleh Ajabry] gave me hope that I could do it.
Cover for the Rough Niggaz’s album Maisha, which was released in 1996. Eddy T is on the left and Easy S, also known as Steve 2K, is on the right.
Mac Mooger’s 1995 album The Mac-Mooger was the first commercially distributed album of Tanzanian hip hop.

Many rappers who grew up in the mid and later 1990s consider Swahili Rap by Saleh J to be the most influential album in encouraging them to rap in Swahili about issues related to their lives.
Moreover, Ajabry's music provided inspiration beyond Dar es Salaam. According to Mr. II, ‘[h]is music was able to penetrate into many regions [of Tanzania] because people were able to understand what he said’. Ajabry’s success had major repercussions. Previously, those who listened to rap or attended events in Dar es Salaam were fellow performers. With the advent of more widely intelligible lyrics, a community of rap afficionadoes started to form. The key to this social change was the localization of hip hop through the use of Swahili, transforming hip hop from something American to something more Tanzanian.

The Yo! Rap Bonanza and its aftermath document the tensions that existed at that time in Dar es Salaam. Whether it was racially, socially, or linguistically driven, there were at least two conceptions of what hip hop should be. Many of the more privileged youth bonded together to continue their vision of hip hop as a black music sung in English. The strongest progenitor of this style was Kwanza Unit, a group that drew together members of Villain Gangsters, Raiders Posse, and Tribe X. As Rhymson (one of Kwanza Unit’s central figures) explained, the formation of this group was in response to the outcome at Yo! Rap Bonanza, which they thought was a slight to their version of hip hop. Although Kwanza Unit would eventually write songs in Swahili (see above), the group believed they had an alternative ‘mission’ for hip hop: a mission that was closer to the genre’s American origins. To separate their music from more populist hip hop, Kwanza Unit and similar groups defined their vision of hip hop as ‘underground’. Theirs was a decidedly anti-populist, purist vision, catering more toward what they saw as the ideals of the genre. Other members of the rap community were less concerned about the maintenance of a hip hop mission and instead pushed to localize it as a dominant form of popular music. This large body of youth would eventually compose and perform hip hop songs that were more commercially successful than the underground groups. They would also set the standards for instrumental and lyrical styles, which some of the underground groups would eventually follow to gain access to larger commercial markets.

**Studies and media: 1993-1995**

Despite the success of Yo! Rap Bonanza, Tanzanian rap risked becoming culturally disconnected if artists did not have music composed for them by local producers who could create a more Tanzanian sound. Before 1991, only government facilities recorded Tanzanian artists, and these studios would not record overtly foreign music, such as hip hop. Once interest in rap developed, however, a number of young producers came to the fore. Between 1991 and 2002, fifteen studios formed in Dar es Salaam. The first rap song produced in Tanzania was ‘Msela’. The engineer on the recording was Bonnie Luv who worked for Mawingu Studio, a part of the Clouds Disco organization. Luv recorded ‘Msela’ for a group of artists who took the English name of the studio, Clouds, for themselves. The lyricist and
lead rapper of the group was Othman Njaidi, who was accompanied by Sindila and Pamela. ‘Msela’ literally means charlatan or braggart, but in local vernacular translated as urban sailor. The symbolic meaning of the term, however, was far more complex. Njaidi’s opening verse tells a more vivid story of msela or wasela (plural) in Dar es Salaam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clouds</th>
<th>“Oya Msela”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kama unataka kujua jina langu, niulize</td>
<td>If you want to know my name, ask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kama ninaweza nitakueleza</td>
<td>If I am able to, I will explain to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina washikaje kwenye vipaji</td>
<td>I have talented friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now imagine</td>
<td>Now imagine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wote ni wasela</td>
<td>All are wasela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hata kama hatuna hela</td>
<td>Even though we do not have money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatusikwenda jela</td>
<td>We do not go to jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na tena kila wasi</td>
<td>And still, for every need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bora kuwa mchizi</td>
<td>It is better to be a crazy friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitakuwa mwizi</td>
<td>I will not be a thief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haina siku hizi</td>
<td>There is no day for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mambo kwa mazizi</td>
<td>Acting like animals [literally: things of an animal pen]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usipendekeozo</td>
<td>Do not make suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na usifanya mchezo</td>
<td>And do not play games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alifuolela mishikaji kuwa msera</td>
<td>That is the way it is, a friend becoming a msela.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Njaidi describes wasela as poor youth who rise above their problems without getting involved in drugs or crime. This image of wasela as honorable youth who suffer due to the environment they live in, not their own ineptitude or waywardness, conveyed a powerful message in the early 1990s. The chorus, sung by the female singer Pamela, added an allure to the status of msela. She sings, ‘I love msela/ Even if he has no money’. As the song grew in popularity, it became especially important for urban (mostly male) youth to be called msela. The term is still in use today, and often appears in popular rap songs. Moreover, the song had a significant musical impact. As the first instrumental composed for Tanzanian hip hop music, Luv’s accompaniment paved the way for a strong interest by Dar es Salaam artists to rap over an original backing.

Over the next three years at Mawingu Studio, Luv recorded various albums for groups such as Kwanza Unit (Tucheze), Hardblasters (Mambo ya Mjini), G.W.M. (Kipe Kitu and Yamenikata), and Dar Young Mob. Though these albums did not sell well—mainly because there were no distributors willing to take a risk on local rap—they became revered in the Dar es Salaam hip hop community. These artists, as well as Luv, became well known in and beyond the city for establishing a Tanzanian sound. However, in 1996 all of the equipment and several semi-completed albums were stolen from Mawingu Studio. The Clouds organization decided not to purchase new equipment, partly because they were planning to start a local radio station.

Other studios also recorded artists during the early to mid-1990s. These studios, such as Soundcrafters and Don Bosco, tended not to be innovators in
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composing instrumentals or in creating a Dar es Salaam hip hop sound as was the case with Mawingu Studio.\(^{50}\) Yet both contributed to the first successfully produced and sold hip hop albums. In 1994, the group W.W.A. (Weusi Wagumu Asilia/ The Original Hardcore Blacks) recorded the first full-length album in Swahili at Don Bosco. The album, called *Sauti ya Wagumu* [Voice of the Hardcore], was a moderate success when released the following year. In particular, the song ‘Rumba Kali’ (Severe Rumba), which later became the name of a well known African hip hop website, was a hit in Dar es Salaam.\(^{51}\) Other artists, such as Mac Mooger and Mr. II, also recorded at Don Bosco. Mooger became the first Tanzanian hip hop artist to sell his album, *The Mac Mooger*, to a local distributor.\(^{52}\) Bands from other genres of music, such as *dansi* and *taarab*, were already accustomed to bringing their master tapes to local distributors, who were, in the 1990s, entirely of South Asian descent. The distributor bought the cassette for a small sum of money—in the mid 1990s, a cassette could be sold for anywhere between Shs. 20,000/- and Shs. 50,000/-—which gave them the rights to sell copies of the album, indefinitely, anywhere in the world. Despite the negligible compensation, most artists felt that the sale of their cassettes gave them some income and, in the long run, garnered them publicity and recognition. Mooger, who sold his cassette to a local Indian named Mamu in 1995, only made a small amount of money but was able to establish himself as an important rapper, simply because copies of his albums were so widely available.

Marlone Linje produced the recordings at Don Bosco. Marlone was more accustomed to recording choirs and bands rather than hip hop. As a result, most artists had to tell Marlone what they were looking for in the backing music. Mr. II, who used the name II Proud until 1997, recorded his album *Ni Mimi* in 1994 with Marlone. He explains the recording process as follows: ‘Marlone did the engineering, but the ideas I would give him. So, I would give him the rhythm and whatever else by mouth. In essence, I was the producer, Marlone was the engineer’.\(^{53}\) Since hip hop instrumentals were still new to most producers, the instrumentation had to be worked out by the artists, giving them a great deal of control over their songs. However, recording time was extremely limited. Engineers or producers would have to record songs quickly in order to meet the demand of customers waiting to record. In 1995, the Rough Niggaz album *Maisha* (which included the hit, “Nani Kama Mama” [No one like Mama]), was recorded and mixed in under two days. The one-day recording of an entire album was not unprecedented in Dar es Salaam in the mid-1990s, which by any recording standards was exceptionally fast.

Several studios offered recording space to rappers free or for delayed payment. Sound Crafters, for example, offered free recording to the Deplowmatz, who formed in 1994 when the original members, Saigon and Trip Dogg, were at Tambaza Secondary School, Dar es Salaam.\(^{54}\) The group went to Sound Crafters, then located in Tembeke, but realized on arrival they could not afford the studio’s costs. One of the owners agreed to sponsor the group and allowed them to record two songs free. Those two songs, ‘Word is Born’, and ‘Turuke kwa Furaha’ (Let’s Jump for Joy), gave the Deplowmatz radio airplay on Radio One and opportunities to earn money performing concerts at cinema halls, beach
parties, graduation parties, and at school events.\textsuperscript{55}

Youth were well aware of the opportunities that a good studio recording could provide them. A well-recorded track had the potential to receive airplay, which was free promotion. Once a song became popular on the radio, artists were then assured of well-attended concerts and, by the late 1990s, strong album sales. In other words, a strong song, both lyrically and musically, could give a rap artist sufficient exposure to make money from their music. In the early years of hip hop in Dar es Salaam, this money was typically funneled back into recording more songs. However, by the late 1990s several artists had become financially independent through their music.

Through working with local producers, artists were able to compose songs that suited their interest in rap. It allowed the music to develop more organically within the city, and not remain confined to the sounds emanating from the West. Although many producers took their inspiration in musical composition from the United States, artists continually tried to find sounds that fit their vision of Dar es Salaam hip hop. Local rap took on the sounds, experiences, and timbres of their city thereby becoming more meaningful to Tanzanian youth. Moreover, the movement toward locally recorded albums removed some of the social demarcation that existed between different classes of city youth. The localization of rap in Tanzania had a great deal to do with the genre’s movement from an elite to a populist art form. Youth from all social classes wanted to participate. While producers came from upper class or educated backgrounds, they worked with a wide diversity of artists from all over Dar es Salaam (and East Africa). Because many artists viewed hip hop as a new cultural form they were unconcerned about class and education: social difference was less important than the musical enterprise taking place.\textsuperscript{56}

**The message: 1996-1997**

Thus far, the two main elements discussed in the movement of Tanzanian hip hop from imitation to original composition were language and instrumentation. Another factor critical to localizing hip hop was the lyrical message. Obviously, not everyone in the Dar es Salaam scene agreed what this should be. Some considered rap to be important for divulging the problems of an individual—a self-reflexive lyrical exercise. In referring to Tanzanian hip hop, KBC states, ‘You are supposed to talk on how you live, how you handle your bills. You have to be positive . . . doing positive reality rap.’\textsuperscript{57} Others believed that lyrics should be more directly political. Perhaps the biggest advocate of this style, Mr. II, explains: ‘I do not write songs for me, myself. I do not write songs for some individual. I write songs for people, so that they can listen to me’.\textsuperscript{58} The different compositional styles led to divergent messages in songs. Yet what unified all rappers was their refusal, with few exceptions, to use foul language, rap about violence, or use strongly sexual material. The push for clean lyrics that were culturally meaningful came from some of the better-known rappers and local radio announcers. Taji Liundi, a Radio One presenter who played hip hop, explains:
That is because from the very beginning I was the only one playing hip-hop on radio, and I decided that I am not going to put on the songs with the explicit content. If they [the artists] brought music in that had cursing, I would not play it. And at concerts, I would get them off the stage, make a lot of noise, and look disappointed.\textsuperscript{39}

John Dilinga, from East Africa FM, took a similar approach: ‘If I think that [a song] is leading society astray, I do not play it. If I think that it is educating society, I play it, promote it.’\textsuperscript{60} While several local artists continued to rap in English, and occasionally use vulgarity in their lyrics, rap in Kiswahili was almost completely free of violent or vulgar content.

Many songs in the mid-1990s had strong messages. SOS B’s ‘Makonda’ (Conductors), which criticized the way local daladala conductors treated students who paid reduced fares, and WWA’s song ‘Rumba Kali’, which explained the problems of living in Dar es Salaam, are popular examples.\textsuperscript{61} The Rough Niggaz song ‘Nani Kama Mama’ was another hit with a message. The song describes the courage that mothers have to raise their families in Tanzania. The second verse even comments on domestic violence and the strength that mothers need to deal with drunken husbands.

Using a high voice for the mother and a low voice for the father, the story that unfolds over the verse forms a compelling narrative delivered over a tight drumbeat, percussive bass line, and the chords of a keyboard. At the time, it was unheard of for young musicians to write so forcefully about domestic violence. Outside of hip hop, groups wrote songs that addressed such issues, but concealed the meaning of their songs in metaphors and double entendres (especially if these groups wanted their songs recorded at the government radio station, which often censored ‘sensitive’ lyrics). By contrast, Rough Niggaz spoke about domestic violence openly, and with a powerful narrative that resonated in the minds of listeners.
“Here’s a Little Something Local”

Not all lyrics that were meaningful, however, had to be as socially charged. Many songs were about enjoyment, friends, and the importance of rap. Several groups were also caught between rapping in Swahili and English. The Deplowmatz for instance called their style Kiswakinge, a mixture of Swahili and English. Their attitude, according to Balozi Dola, was to ‘think local, act global’.63 In other words, Dar es Salaam rap should make sense to Tanzanians but also fit into international concepts of hip hop culture. One of the Deplowmatz most famous songs, ‘Are U Down’, was released in 1996, had one verse in English and two in Swahili. Dola raps the third verse in Swahili: ‘Deplowmatz, We bring serious fever/ Like modern ngoma/ For the current generation/ We are hotter than the ‘Kiti Moto’ program/ And things could get even hotter’.64 Although the message was not political, it still bolstered Dar es Salaam culture and values.

By 1997 the progression toward the majority of rap being socially conscious and composed in Swahili came to fruition. The album that provided the final push for Dar es Salaam artists to take notice of this localization of rap was Ndani ya Bongo by II Proud (later Mr. II). Recorded at Master J’s studio in 1996 but released to the radio in 1997, the album features a variety of songs about love, life and rap music in Tanzania. One song stood out, and was unprecedented in its directness. The song, ‘Nimesimama’, featured an introduction—a conversation between Mr. II and a police officer—with socially charged commentary.65

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**II Proud**

**“Intro”**

“**We kijana, njoo hapa. Unaenda wapi? Simama hapa.”**

“You, kid, come here. Where are you going? Stand here.”

“**Pole nimesimama.”**

“Alright, I am standing.”

“**Eebu, njoo hapa. Unaitwa nani?”**

“Come here. What is your name?”

“**II Proud**”

“II Proud”

“**II Proud? Kitambulisho chako kiko wapi? Kitabumbulisho cha nini?**”

“II Proud? Where is your identity card?”

“**Cha kazi.”**

“Identity card for what?”

“**We afande vipi. Kazi yeneye ziko wapi hapa Bongo mpaka unamaliza kutambalisho cha kazi. Wewe wenye wajua haina ajira sahizi”**

“What are you talking about, cop. Where is there enough work here in Bongo that you can get an identity card. You know that there is no employment now.”

“**Kwa hiyo, wewe ni mzururaji.”**

“So, you are loiterer?”

“**Mzururaji vipi? School nimeshaua, nimewendwa shule nimeua. Sahisi niko mtaani tu. Kazini sina, unaelewa?”**

“What do you mean loiterer? I went to school and finished. Now, I am just [hanging out] in town. I don’t have work, understand?”

“**Ala, unaleta ujeuri siyo.”**

“Ah, you are being arrogant.”

“**Ujuri vipi wakati . . .”**

“What arrogance, when . . .”

“**Kaa chini hapa.”**

“Sit down here.”

“**Ni kaa chini wakati ninasimama.”**

“How am I supposed to sit when I am standing?”
Youth who lack work often hang around on Dar es Salaam streets in areas called *kijiweni*. Many are educated and/or skilled but unable to find employment. Often, these youths are considered scourges and have in the past been arrested or deported for loitering. Mr. II addresses the issue of urban joblessness and, particularly, the abuses that youth face in the hands of corrupt police officers. Most strikingly, Mr. II outwits the policeman in the final line by pointing out that he asked him to stand first, then told him to sit. Mr. II responds, ‘How am I supposed to sit when I am standing?’ The reply has a direct significance (mocking the police officer) and a hidden one (telling other youth to stand up for their rights).

The song that followed the introduction, ‘Nimesimama’, was no less political. In the opening verse, Mr. II, in a condemning voice, rants, ‘This life is hard/ This is why so many youth like to go to Europe/ And girls decide to become prostitutes’. These lyrics, which some Tanzanians have argued were too political and too direct, targeted issues that affected youth faced. His words, like those of other popular rap songs, were repeated and rapped by many young people throughout Dar es Salaam. Mr. II garnered a strong following, becoming a voice for disenfranchised urban youth. Not only were the lyrics of ‘Nimesimama’ important, but the instrumental produced by Master Jay set high standards for local rap. Master Jay used many layers of sound to evoke a relaxed, laid-back vibe. He emphasized the drums, particularly the snare and bass, which were programmed on a drum machine. In one layer, there is a keyboard sound or sample that appears as if it is being played backwards. There are several percussion instruments ‘dropping in’ during the track. Occasionally, a keyboard chord sounds to give an ethereal quality to the music. Overall, the music provides a backdrop strong enough to be an influential hip hop beat, yet sufficiently distanced on the recording to accentuate the vocal track. The sound that Master Jay created would set the stage for his future studio work and influence a large body of producers in Dar es Salaam.

After the release of *Ndani ya Bongo*, the messages of songs became important in every area of the music scene. There were competitions, such as the National Rap Competition, the Dar es Salaam Music Awards, and the Tanzania Music Awards, where judges were especially interested in socially meaningful songs in Swahili. Promoters were especially aware of hiring groups that were popular on the airwaves and who would, consequently, draw in large crowds. The result of this infrastructure was a rap scene that moved increasingly toward socially conscious Swahili rap. Artists that rapped in English or that used vulgar language found it difficult to make their way into any local media. Although groups such as Kwanza Unit still garnered respect for their English works, their Swahili songs had a stronger impact locally (see, for example, ‘Msafiri’ discussed at the beginning of this article).

**Bongo Hip Hop**

The title of this article, ‘Here’s a Little Something Local,’ is taken from the song ‘I Shot an MC’ by the Dar es Salaam-based artist Hashim. The song is a
self-reflexive diatribe about Hashim’s skills as a rapper. Hashim raps in English, uses some vulgar language, and has a fairly violent chorus (‘I smoked an MC, but I did not smoke his deejay’). As I have argued in this article, the overall progression of rap music in Dar es Salaam from 1984 until 1997 was a movement away from vulgar and violent lyrics in English toward songs in Swahili that were socially meaningful. Hashim’s song is, therefore, more of an exception than the rule in Dar es Salaam’s hip hop culture.

Yet, due to the inherent irony, his words and the song that follows help describe the Dar es Salaam hip hop scene of the 1990s. They make clear that the scene is far from monolithic, but dynamic. Many artists are ‘underground,’ meaning that they do not fit into the more popular hip hop movement described in this article. They continue to rely on Western concepts of rap and are interested in connecting with an international subculture. Even the majority of popular local artists continue to search for ideas from international hip hop. At the same time, a process of localization has occurred and is occurring in Dar es Salaam. Artists are consciously attempting to make rap music meaningful to Tanzanians. ‘Here’s a Little Something Local’ depends on one’s place in Dar es Salaam society. ‘Local’ is something without clear boundaries, and that should be understood within the complexities of an urban African city.

Even taking into account both popular and underground movements, however, this chapter counters the homogenization theories of culture within the global economy and emphasizes the processes by which music is localized. Music is not something that simply spreads ‘from a center to the periphery, by equalizing youth’s musical expressions and styles’. International musical forms such as hip hop, reggae, and R&B are transformed or ‘indigenized’ in different places as youth assimilate them into local cultures. To say that the West homogenizes non-Western cultures with its dominance of cultural forms is to lack understanding of local-level mediation that occurs as part of daily confluences of global and local trends. These confluences are dynamic, always occurring, and infinitely complex given the multiplicity of identities, places, and classes contained within modern urban areas. By looking at a history of hip hop culture in one part of the world, this article shows part of that complexity and the processes by which localization evolves.

In the post-1997 period, rap in Dar es Salaam continued to grow in popularity. Numerous independent radio stations started with shows dedicated to local and international rap. More producers trained to compose and record hip hop instrumentals. Newspapers, websites, and magazines formed to provide biographies of artists and producers, and to keep local fans up-to-date. Concerts and competitions also occurred throughout Dar es Salaam and elsewhere in Tanzania. But it was not just the industry that was growing around hip hop music. Artists were also finding success. Between 1999 and 2001, several rappers released albums that sold over 100,000 copies, an enormous amount in Tanzania. With this money, they bought cars, houses, and traveled outside of Tanzania, achievements that few Dar es Salaam musicians have ever accomplished. Rap artists toured East Africa and, in a few cases, performed at festivals in Europe. To add to Dar es Salaam’s significance in the African hip hop world, many artists from Uganda and Kenya traveled to record their
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albums at the highly regarded Dar es Salaam studios.

More recently, divisions in the hip hop scene have hindered the genre’s continued growth. In what one rapper described as the ‘east-west battles’, verbal attacks have occurred between residents of Dar es Salaam that live in upscale neighborhoods and those that live in poorer areas. Though these largely class-based attacks are rarely taken seriously in the rap community, they emphasize the tension occurring between the upper and lower classes in Dar es Salaam. This tension is based largely on access to the music. Youth from more deprived backgrounds view their wealthier counterparts as trying to control the industry (radio, television, video recording, newspapers, and magazines) that supports rap, and thereby directing the genre’s local evolution. More privileged youth see these attacks as the criticism of individuals unable to use their talents to make a name for themselves and, therefore, jealous of those who do make a living from the local scene. Despite this conflict, the sound of rap has remained steadfast in its appeal to a broad spectrum of Dar es Salaam society and hip hop is still the most popular music among youth in the city.

Notes

1 This event has been organized every year since 1997 in Tanzania through the Food and Agricultural Organization.
4 Takatifu means holy or sacred, but is also a vernacular way of saying consciousness.
5 Mkushi literally means African people and is referencing the life of Africans/Tanzanians in this song.
7 Bongo flava is also written as bongo flavour. Bongo, literally, means wisdom, but in local vernacular it has come to refer to the knowledge that one needs to economically and physically survive in Dar es Salaam. The term bongoland (the land of bongo) refers to the city of Dar es Salaam and, more recently, Tanzania as a whole.
8 Some Tanzanians have been particularly vocal about their dislike of Tanzanian rap music. Gama Mwanga writes that Tanzanian youth are, ‘busy aping Western culture,’ while Paul Meregesi writes, ‘what rap groups need to do is assist society, but not with vulgar language or shameful lyrics’. Business Times, 19 April, 2002; Tanzania Leo, 19 March, 2001. It should be noted that dislike of foreign music often extends beyond rap. An anonymous author writes broadly about music stating, ‘Without being isolationist, something needs to be done to prevent the country being turned into a musical dumping ground.’ East African, 14 July 1999. Many rappers have also been forbidden to rap because parents view it as music for hooligans.
10 The government-run radio station, for instance, stopped playing foreign music on its Swahili service and only aired local or African music.
Here’s a Little Something Local


12 It is important to note that many of these styles, such as reggae and Congolese rumba, were popular even before Mwinyi became president. Yet, with increased access to these musical genres, their popularity rose (particularly as private radio stations appeared in the 1990s). See Perullo, ‘The Life that I Live’.

13 Among the entire Dar es Salaam population, dansi was the more popular musical genre during the 1990s (this is based on tape sales and concert attendance). Among youth, however, hip hop was more popular and more in demand. It also dominated local radio stations in comparison to other local musical genres.


15 Many authors point out that hip hop culture drew from many varied elements, such as disco, radio deejays, doo-wop groups, and Jamaican sound system toasters. See David Toop, Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip Hop (London, 1994), and Tricia Rose, Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America (Hanover NH, 1994); Tony Mitchell, ‘Introduction: Another Root—Hip-Hop Outside the USA’, in idem. (ed.), Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA (Connecticut, 2001). In other words, it is important to realize that hip hop culture did not just emerge in the Bronx, but drew from many previous cultural, political, and social elements.

16 See Mitchell, Global Noise.

17 Previous dance styles, such as those seen on the 1970s show Soul Train and in Western music videos, inspired Dar es Salaam youth to integrate many different styles of American dance into a local idiom. The robot, for instance, first popularized by Michael Jackson in the video ‘Dancin’ Machine’, was one of the most successful dance styles in Dar es Salaam during the early 1980s. Several youth were known only for performing the robot, and competed in robot dance competitions throughout Dar es Salaam. Baucha, Ally Mohamed. Interview by Alex Perullo and James Nindi. Dar es Salaam, 11 May 2004.

18 Mponjika, Ramadhani (Rhymson). Interview by author. 23 May 2004.

19 VCRs were considered a luxury item and, therefore, illegal to own during socialism. Nonetheless, many families managed to import these highly prized machines and, in the process, became extremely popular among their peers. See Muhidin Isa Michuzi’s article, ‘Dar TV Video owners demi-gods’, Daily News, 16 June 1990.


21 It is common for Tanzanian artists to change their names once every couple of years. In this paper, I attempt to identity all of the names that an artist has used in his/her career. Yet, for consistency, I only use one name throughout the paper.


25 In particular, the limited availability of instrumental tracks kept artists from rapping over music.


27 Schools often held social picnics to let youth from the city get together. Often, deejays played music and people danced (boys and girls). One of the regular places to hold picnics was at the Kawe Club. Although schools do not hold these types of picnics anymore, youth still gather at places, such as the beach, to hold similar events.

28 Mponjika, Ramadhani (Rhymson). Interview by author. 23 May 2004. WBLS is a New York-based radio station that plays hip hop and R&B.

29 In interviews with youth who grew up in Dar es Salaam between 1989 and 1991, the school that had the strongest reputation for rapping was the American International School, located in Oyster Bay. The most obvious reasons for this were the fluency of English, and the ease of getting recordings from students and their families who often traveled abroad.

30 Often, several artists used the same name. Easy was one of the more popular. In the early 1990s, there was Easy S, Easy B, and Easy T. There was also Fresh E and Fresh G. Generally, these names were created by taking a popular American name, such as Easy and Fresh and using the first letter of one’s given name.
In using the phrase ‘Dar es Salaam rap histories’, I am including interviews with members of the Tanzanian rap community, as well as narratives that appear in local magazines, such as *Kitangoma* and *Rockers*, or on websites, such as africanhiphop.com and darhotwire.com.


38 Articles about AIDS frequently appeared in local papers. See, for example, ‘Aids Scourge, 7,000 orphaned in Kagera. Ndugu Mwinyi Adopts Two Children’, *Daily News*, 15 February 1990. There were also contests for educating youth about AIDS and charities for raising money to fight AIDS. See ‘The Leopard Cultural Nite with Studio J.O. CO. Ltd. variety Show, Charity for AIDS Victims,’ *Daily News*, 28 February 1990.

39 The first artist credited with rapping in Swahili is Fresh G, while Samia X and Cool Moe C are often credited as the first two people to rap in Swahili about significant social events. See Peter Jan Haas and Thomas Gesthuizen, ‘Ndani ya Bongo: Swahili Rap Keeping it Real,’ in Gunderson & Barz, *Mashindano!*, pp. 279-94.

40 Perhaps to respond to these critics, Ajabry rapped, in English, during ‘Ice Ice Baby,’ ‘My mother is white and my father is black/ A father is a father and a mother a mother/ So I don’t care if you’re black or white.’ Through using English, he responded directly to his critics. It should also be noted that ‘Ice Ice Baby’, which won Ajabry the competition, was originally composed by a white American rapper.


43 Mr. II (Joseph Mbilinyi). Interview by author. Dar es Salaam, 5 October 1999.


45 In interviews with these artists, a few disputed the claim of coming from a privileged background in Dar es Salaam. Though they had family that lived abroad and spoke English, they were not financially wealthy nor did they live in the more exclusive neighborhoods of the city.

46 Other groups were also part of forming Kwanza Unit.


49 Don Bosco, which formed in 1991, was the first independent studio in Dar es Salaam, though it focused on all local music, not just hip hop. Soundcrafters, which formed in 1993, also catered to a wide array of music.

50 Alongside the website, Thomas Gesthusian also made a mixed tape called ‘Rumba-Kali’ which was distributed in Holland in 1996. The compilation featured songs by Saleh J and WWA, as well as artists from other African counties. As Gesthusian writes, ‘It was probably the first compilation of hip hop from all over Africa’ (http://www.africanhiphop.com/crew/tanzania.htm).


52 Mr. II (Joseph Mbilinyi). Interview by author. Dar es Salaam, 5 October 1999.

53 Other members, such as Stiggo, Kris Manser, and Sagg Junior, also joined the group. Dola Soul joined in 1996.
‘Here’s a Little Something Local’

35 The Deplowmatz Biography, distributed by the group in 1999.

36 This relaxed view of class would change substantially in the late 1990s.


38 Mr. II (Joseph Mbilinyi). Interview by author. Dar es Salaam, 6 November 2000.


40 John Dilinga, Interview, Dsm, 2 July 2002.

41 Daladala’s are public buses.


44 ‘Kiti Moto’ refers to a popular television program that aired in Dar es Salaam. The program featured politicians and famous people being interviewed by some local critics.

45 On the album, the voice of the police officer is Balozzi Dola.


49 Hashim also goes by the names Dogo and Bongo Psychologist. He was also a member of the group Black Houndz, which formed in the early 1990s.
