

CALL ME 'TOP IN DAR'¹: THE ROLE OF PSEUDONYMS IN *BONGO FLEVA* MUSIC

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Over the last two decades *Bongo Fleva* music has become a popular form of entertainment as well as a key cultural element among Tanzanian urban youth. The objective of this paper is to examine the role of pseudonyms in this musical genre in Tanzania. It focuses on how *Bongo Fleva* artists adopt their pseudonyms and discusses their role in identity formation among urban youths in contemporary Tanzania. The paper argues that pseudonyms in *Bongo Fleva*, as in various other fields, have an important role to play in portraying one's identity, culture, characteristics, profile, actions, hope and imagination.

Ni zaidi ya miongo miwili sasa muziki wa Bongo Fleva umekuwa moja ya burudani na utamaduni maarufu miongoni mwa vijana wa mjini nchini Tanzania. Lengo la makala haya ni kuchunguza dhima ya lakabu katika muziki huu Tanzania. Inalenga hasa kuchunguza mbinu mbalimbali zinazotumiwa na wasanii wa Bongo Fleva kupata lakabu zao na pia kujadili dhima za lakabu hizo katika utambulisho wa vijana katika Tanzania ya leo. Makala haya yanabainisha kwamba matumizi ya lakabu katika muziki wa Bongo Fleva, kama ilivyo katika nyanja nyingine, yana dhima muhimu katika kuonyesha utambulisho, utamaduni, tabia, wasifu, matendo, matumaini na njozi ya kitu fulani miongoni mwa watumiaji wake.

Introduction

Pseudonyms have been widely used in *Bongo Fleva* to the extent that some artists' real names are not known by the public. A pseudonym is generally a fictitious or coined name used by a writer, singer, artist, movie star, dancer, person or group instead of a real name. It is often a self-designated name based on individual characteristics (Wallah 1988: xxiv), or a name that is bestowed on someone by others due to body characteristics, lineage, behaviour or actions (Mulokozi 1996: 42). A pseudonym can also be a nick name, alias, stage name, pen name, false name, assumed name, performance name, fictitious name, or nom de plume. In Anglophone popular culture, a pseudonym is often preceded by the initials 'a.k.a.', which stand for 'also known as.' Pseudonym (in Kiswahili, *Lakabu*), is also classified as a genre of sayings in Kiswahili literature, beside riddles, proverbs, puzzles, slang and tongue twisters (Mulokozi 1996).

Pseudonyms have been employed in various fields and art forms in different societies from time immemorial. In Tanzania today, pseudonyms are used in sports such as football and wrestling, in dance and music, in politics and literary works, among others. In politics, pseudonyms have been used for rulers or politicians since before independence. For instance, the German officer Tom von Prince in colonial Tanganyika around 1890-1916 was known as Sakarani ('Drunkard'). Chief Munyigumba Mwamuyinga (1850-1898), a leader of the Hehe

¹ The first part of this title was taken from the stage name of *Bongo Fleva* artist Khalid Salum Mohammed: TID, i.e., "Top in Dar es Salaam."

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ethnic group from Iringa in south-central Tanzania during the German colonial period, was known as Mkwawa, a name derived from Hehe language *Mukwavinyika* ('Conqueror of Dry Grassland') (Mulokozi 1996: 42). The first president of Tanzania, the late Julius Kambarage Nyerere, was known by his honorific name *Baba wa Taifa* ('Father of the Nation') and former president of Zanzibar, Salmin Amour, was known as *Komandoo* ('Commander'). Pseudonyms have been commonly used for prominent local and foreign leaders and politicians in all of East Africa (cf. Knappert 1979: 67, 167) and Africa. For instance, Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, was known as *Mkuki Uwakao* ('Burning Spear'). The former emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, was known in East Africa as *Simba wa Yuda* ('Lion of Judah') (Mulokozi 1996: 42).

In Kiswahili poetry, the use of pseudonyms is also a long-standing tradition among poets. Some Kiswahili poets who used pseudonyms include Mugyabuso Mulinzi Mulokozi (alias *Nyundo*, 'Hammer'), Euphrase Kezilahabi (known as *Kichwamaji*, 'Watery Head') and the blind Amiri Sudi Andanenga (known as *Sauti ya Kiza*, 'Voice of Darkness'). Other Kiswahili poets with pen names are Sheikh Mahmoud Hamduniy (known as *Jitu Kali*, 'Fierce Person') and Khamis Amani Khamis (popularly known as *Nyamaume*, 'Male Lion'). Others are Mzee Waziri (alias *Kijana*, 'Youth'), A. Mitimngi (whose pen name is *Vumbi*, 'Dust'), Ali Salim (with the pen name *Jinamizi*, 'Nightmare'), and Juma Nassoro (also known as *Zee la Mwanza*, 'Old Man from Mwanza') (Mulokozi & Sengo 2005: 109-115). These pseudonyms have been used, among other things, to demonstrate their personal characteristics, capabilities, roles and status. With regard to Kiswahili popular drama, Lange points out that "all actors, in commercial Swahili theatre, have taken personal artist names that they use in all the plays no matter what the age or social status of the character that they are impersonating is, and their fans generally know them by these names only" (2001: 146). Pseudonyms are also prevalent among traditional healers as well among the members of families. They are thus in use across a wide variety of social spheres.

Self-chosen stage names are also an important aspect of hip hop culture; artists have been employing it around the globe. In France, some notable artists are Philippe Fragione of IAM hip hop band who performs under the stage name Akhenaton, and MC Solaar whose civil name is Claude M'Barali. In America, MC Hammer was born Stanley Kirk Burrell, Jay-Z's common name is Shawn Corey Carter, Queen Latifa's is Dana Elaine Owens, and MC Lyte's is Lana Michele Moorer. British rappers using pseudonyms include Slick Rick (born Ricky Walters), Monie Love (whose real name is Simone Johnson) and Kano (born Kane Brett Robinson) (Mitchell 2001, Bynoe 2006). Pseudonyms have been used by graffiti writers, deejays, break-dancers and rappers. Tricia Rose notes that

"in many African and Afrodiasporic cultural forms hip hop's prolific self-naming is a form of reinvention and self-definition. Rappers, DJs, graffiti artists, and breakdancers all take on hip hop names and identities that speak to their role, personal characteristics, expertise, or 'claim to fame'" (1994: 36).

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Similarly, some popular East African hip hop artists with their stage names in brackets are Julius Owino (Maji Maji), Joseph Oyoo (Gidi Gidi), Hubert Nakitare (Nonini), David Mathenge (Nameless), Swabri Mohammed (Redsan) and Joseph Mayanja (Jose Chameleon). Most hip hop artists are widely known by their stage names within or outside their countries. Regarding the importance of performance names in creating identity among them Simon Frith insists that “musical practices need to be interpreted as processes through which identity is actively imagined, created and constructed” (cited after Mitchell 2001: 32).

Pertaining to Tanzania, hip hop or rap music is the first purveyor of the emergence of what we now call *Bongo Fleva* music or the music of the new generation.² Other genres include Rhythm and Blues, Zouk, Reggae, and Raga. At its inception Tanzanian rap music was first sung in the English language and imitated the beats and lyrics of American rappers. As time passed, rap artists began to compose their own lyrics and beats and to sing in Kiswahili, the national language of Tanzania (cf. Mangesho 2003, Masonga 2005, Suriano 2007, Perullo 2007, Reuster-Jahn 2008, Omari 2009). With regard to its emergence, Reuster-Jahn points out that “*Bongo Fleva* music was originally derived from American hip hop music, but over time became increasingly accommodated to local tastes and conditions. Thus, it has been diversified by the artists and producers during the last years to include elements of traditional music as well as popular dance music of African, Western and Oriental origin” (2008: 43). *Bongo Fleva* is now mostly sung in Kiswahili and includes a blend of musical and cultural features from within and outside Tanzania (Omari 2009: 10-11). The term ‘*Bongo Fleva*’ that started to be used in the mid 1990s has now become popular referring to the contemporary youth music in Tanzania.³ The word *Bongo* is derived from Swahili ‘ubongo’ literally meaning the brain. *Bongo* is used as a slang referring to Dar es Salaam or Tanzania. It also implies that one needs to have ‘brains’ to survive in Tanzania. The word ‘Fleva’ comes from the English word flavour. *Bongo Fleva* implies ‘Tanzanian tastes’ (cf. Mangesho 2003: 21; Omari 2009: 10, among others).

In examining the use of pseudonyms among *Bongo Fleva* artists this analysis draws on Castells (1997) who argues that one form of identity building in the context of power relationships is the projection of identity, “when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, in so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure” (Castells 1997:8, cited after Kießling & Mous 2004: 313). This paper argues that artists, as social actors, do not employ pseudonyms to seek the transformation of overall social structure but as a way to

² Hip hop music and *Bongo Fleva* may be synonymously used among the general public, however some artists insist on a clear distinction between the two genres. This music is also called the music of the new generation as at the beginning youths were the main followers, however, today the older people also listen to it.

³ According to the informants of this study such as Nicodemus Nyang’ali, Levison Kasulwa, Fred Saganda and Hamadi Ali Seneda the term *Bongo Fleva* was originally coined by DJ Steve B. It is also believed that Mike Mhagama, the then radio presenter, formed this term in 1996 on the music programme called DJ Show of Radio One, to mean a foreign music that is mixed with flavours from Tanzania. The objective was to differentiate it from the foreign music, especially America. See <http://pesambili.blogspot.com/>.

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project their identity, which arises from both local and Western referents. It also draws on the works of Gutmann (1997) and Edley & Wetherell (1999) on the multiple meanings of masculinity. In this paper masculinity factors into both the images that artists identify themselves with as well as a need to appear powerful and competent in the Tanzanian music arena. The data of this paper were collected through literature reviews of related works and interviews with *Bongo Fleva* artists and the general public. There is a multitude of *Bongo Fleva* artists of which I am able to discuss only a small number. Yet a detailed analysis of a small group of artists will convey a rough picture of the relevance of these artists' pseudonyms in Tanzania's *Bongo Fleva* music.

***Bongo Fleva* Artists and their Pseudonyms**

Almost every Tanzanian *Bongo Fleva* artist has one or even more stage names:

| Male artists | Female artists |
|---|---|
| Abbas Hamis Kinzasa a.k.a. 20% | Florence Kassela a.k.a Dataz |
| Abdul Sykes a.k.a. Mr. Misifa | Fredinah Peyton a.k.a. Rah P |
| Adili Mkwera a.k.a Hisabati ('Mathematics') | Hadija Ramadhan Rashid a.k.a Didah |
| Albert Mangwea a.k.a. Ngwair | Happiness Thadei a.k.a Sister P |
| Ali Ahmed Khamis a.k.a. DJ Cool Para | Jacqueline Ntuyabaliwe a.k.a. K-Lyinn |
| Ambwene Allen Yessayah a.k.a. AY | Jamila Abdallah Ally a.k.a. Baby J |
| Farid Kubanda a.k.a. Fid Q | Judith Daines Wambura Mbibo a.k.a. Lady Jaydee, |
| Fred Maliki a.k.a. Mkoloni ('Colonialist') | Jide, Binti Machozi or Commander |
| Gerald Mwanjoka a.k.a. G Solo | Khadija Shabani a.k.a Keisha |
| Godfrey Tumaini a.k.a. Dudu Baya, later Dudu Zuri | Rehema Chalamila a.k.a. Ray C |
| Hamis Mwinjuma a.k.a. Mwanafalsafa or MwanaFA ('Philosopher') | Sara Kaisi a.k.a Shaa |
| Innocent Sahani a.k.a. D-Nob | Witness Fred Mwajjaga a.k.a. Bad Gear |
| John Simon a.k.a. Joe Makini or Mfalme ('King') | Zainabu Lipangile a.k.a Zay B |
| Joseph Mbilinyi a.k.a 2Proud, Mr. II, later Sugu | |
| Khalid Salum Mohammed a.k.a. TID (Top in Dar) | |
| Kibacha Singo a.k.a. KBC or K-Singo | |
| Lucas Mkenda a.k.a. Mr. Nice | |
| Mbaraka Abdalah Mbaraka a.k.a. White Berry | |
| Mbaraka Abdalah Mgeni a.k.a. Berry Black | |
| Mbwana Mohamed a.k.a. MB Dogg | |
| Mike Mwakatundu a.k.a. Mike Tee or Mnyalu | |
| Nasib Abdul a.k.a. Diamond Platinum | |

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| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Ramadhani Madogo a.k.a. Rama B | |
| Ramadhani Mponjika a.k.a Rhymsen | |
| Rashid Amin a.k.a. Rico Single | |
| Seif Shaban a.k.a. Matonya | |
| Selemani Msindi a.k.a. Afande Sele | |

In *Bongo Fleva* or hip hop music aliases are also used by recording studio owners and producers, managers of *Bongo Fleva* artists, music deejays, and radio/television presenters. For instance, with regard to producers, Boniface Kilosa is also known as DJ Bonny Luv, Paul Matthyse of the famous Bongo Records studio is known as P Funk, Joachim Kimario as Master J, John Shariza as Man Water and Ludigo Deosdedit K. Bichosha as Prof. Ludigo. In examining aliases of the *Bongo Fleva* artists this paper intends to answer two questions: What techniques do *Bongo Fleva* artists use in adopting pseudonyms? What significance do pseudonyms have for urban youth identity and contemporary Tanzanian culture?

Analysis of *Bongo Fleva* artists' pseudonyms

Not all *Bongo Fleva* artists use pseudonyms. Some of them just keep their real names; this includes, among others, Ferooz Mrisho, Ally Salehe Kiba, Hussein Machozi, Banana Zorro and Fred Saganda. Female artists using their real names are Stara Thomas, Hafsa Kazinja, Mwasiti Almasi, Chiku Ketto, Nakaaya Sumari, Linah Sanga and Dorica Mukaka. The list also includes Rahima Kipozi, Radhia Kipozi and Radhina Kipozi from Unique Sisters group.

For other *Bongo Fleva* artists who adopt stage names each has his or her own way of coining a name. Many pseudonyms are based on abbreviations or acronyms of given names. Examples are Ambwene Yesaya, as AY; Rehema Chalamila, as Ray C; and Ramji Adoph, as RADO. For instance, Ramji Adoph reveals that “my alias is self-given, it originates from taking two letters from my first and my surname.”⁴ Another hip hop artist, Jacob Makalla, from the Watengwa hip hop group in Arusha, notes “I formed my alias JCB by taking three letters from my first name JaCoB, JCB also means Jesus Comes Black. My coming in hip hop music is like the coming of Jesus because I helped (saved) many hip hop underground artists.”⁵ I have also another stage name ‘General Degree’ because I am the General of hip hop in A-Town”.⁶ JCB here reveals how he has given himself several names; he firstly shortened his first name and that acronym likens him to Jesus the Saviour. JCB has further baptized himself the General of hip hop in the Arusha region. JCB alludes to the frequent change of aliases among *Bongo Fleva* artists and the use of military titles, which will be discussed below. The

4 Ramji Radoph a.k.a RADO email interview by author, on 19th March 2011, Dar es Salaam.

5 Underground artists are those who have not become successful yet, and who are not well known in the hip hop scene.

6 A-Town means Arusha town. Jacob Makalla phone interview by Salehe Stambul on 24th November 2010.

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few examples show that pseudonyms often make names shorter and easier to pronounce. With regard to hip hop culture in America, Bynoe similarly points out that “performers within in the hip hop community have routinely renamed themselves, reflecting a common practice within African American culture. Artists adopt names that represent how they see themselves or how they wish to be seen...Hip hop performers choosing names that speak to their mastery of an aspect of hip hop, personal characteristics, or are just a play on real names” (2006:277). However, for artist Seif Shaban, whose artist name is Matonya, the story is different. He points out that he adopted his name in honour of a famous beggar in Dar es Salaam known as Matonya, who several times in the 1990s travelled to Dar es Salaam to beg but eventually repatriated to his home region Dodoma. Seif, who is also from Dodoma but now living and doing music in Dar es Salaam, likened his trials and struggles to Matonya’s.⁷

Other *Bongo Fleva* artists got their names by being baptized by their fans or entourages. For instance, Zanzibar *Bongo Fleva* artist Ali Salehe Juma, also known as Alhaji Goya, says “my name is derived from the fact that I am versed myself in Islamic education; so my teacher and relatives called me Alhaji. *Goya* in Kipemba, one of the dialects of Kiswahili language, means a joke or something not serious. Alhaji in a real sense is a term of respect that refers to a Muslim man who has completed the fifth pillar of Islam, pilgrimage to Mecca. As I have not been to Mecca I had to add Goya, meaning a fake Alhaji.”⁸ Likewise, Rashid Ziada Rashid, a.k.a. KR, one of the early rappers in Tanzania in the 1990s, reveals that his alias KR stands for Kaka Rashid (Brother Rashid). KR explains how he got the name, “because I have started music long time ago and I helped many new *Bongo Fleva* artists. As a result they called me their brother. I see no reason to use another alias, KR is more appropriate to me”⁹.

The names of some early Tanzanian rappers or hip hop groups were modelled after American rappers, for example: the late Robert Mwingira, a.k.a. D Rob (whose name seems to be derived from the American rapper Rob Base); Tribe X (from A Tribe Called Quest and, possibly, Malcolm X); and Bernard Luanda, also known as Eazy B (a name that seems to be derived from the American rapper Eazy E, whose real name is Eric Wright) (cf. Perullo 2007:255). Other Tanzanian rappers preferred names such as nigger (nigga), rough, killer or gangster. For instance, the late Adili (RIP), a.k.a. Nigga One; Joseph Haule, who was known as Nigga J; and Badi Sangu, also known as Killer B.¹⁰ As argued elsewhere (Omari 2009:57), some of these nick names such as, *Killer* and *Rough* portray a negative image of a gangster or a violent person. Thus, although the use of pseudonyms may be a good way for artists to

⁷ <<http://lyrics.fienipa.com/fr/taxonomy/term/9?page=3>>; accessed on March 10, 2010. Repatriation of the unemployed young to rural areas was also common in Dar es Salaam in the 1960s and 1970s (Ivaska 2007:223).

⁸ Ali Salehe Juma a.k.a. Alhaji Goya, interview by author on 27th October 2010, Zanzibar.

⁹ Rashid Ziada Rashid, a.k.a. KR, interview by author on 6th September 2010, Dar es Salaam; he was a member of Gangsters With Matatizo (GWM) founded in 1993; other members were Robert Makalla (D Chief), Richard Makalla (Easy Dog) and Gabriel Chambo (Gabby).

¹⁰ Eliuteri Msiagi, a.k.a. Fanani, interview by Salehe Stambul on 19th January 2011, Dar es Salaam.

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introduce themselves to their fans, some names sounded so uncouth that artists in the early days of hip hop music in Tanzania were often considered hooligans. The adoption of stage names that look similar to those from American rappers is partly due to the history of Tanzanian hip hop in the 1980s. Tanzanian hip hop began as a simulation of American hip hop. Thus, artists imitated the lyrics, clothing fashions, and beats of the American hip hop artists (Remes 1998; Haas & Gesthuizen 2000; Perullo 2003; Mangesho 2003; Raab 2006; Englert 2008; Omari 2009; among others) as well as their nick names. Similarly, there are a number of early *Bongo Fleva* artists who adopted such practices. These include: Joseph Mbilinyi who was formerly known as 2Proud, a name that looks like that of the American artist Tupac Shakur, alias 2Pac (i.e. Tupac)¹¹; Anselm Tryphone Ngaiza, also known as Soggy Doggy Hunter; and Mbwana Mohamed also known as MB Dogg. These pseudonyms are similar to the nicknames of American hip hop artists Calvin Cordozar Broadus, who is known as Snoop Doggy and the late Nathaniel Dwayne Hale, also known as Nate Dogg. In addition, there is a *Bongo Fleva* artist who firstly known as Snoop Lee, later adopted the name Sna Lee and currently he is known as SNA.¹² Rap pseudonyms were a way for them to identify with a particular American group (Fenn & Perullo 2000:80) or artist. With regard to the adoption of foreign stage names, KR has this to say:

“In the early period of hip hop music in Tanzania artists were adopting aliases or hip hop group names that looked similar to Western hip hop because we were unable to formulate ours.”¹³

What KR is pointing out here is demonstrated not only in the adoption of aliases but also in singing completely in English and imitating beats and lyrics of Western rappers. The inspiration to adopt Western artists' names among Bongo Fleva artists demonstrates not only “a high value of Western cultural products to the youth” (Ntarangwi 2009: 22) but it is also, as Paul Gilroy (1993) observes a ‘part of a black Atlantic history of connectivity and return through which a logic of cultural syncretism and dynamism (un)consciously underpins African modernity’ (cited after Nyairo 2008: 80).

The alias ‘Crazy’ is particularly popular among *Bongo Fleva* artists, for instance Eliuteri Clementi Msiagi, also known as Looney T or Crazy T; Gwamaka Kaihula, a.k.a. Crazy GK; and Taikun Ali, a.k.a. Mchizi Mox (‘Crazy Mox’). The use of the nick name ‘Crazy’ evokes Kunene’s analysis of praise poems where he notes that “in the Sotho and Tswana praise poems a hero can be likened to a mad-cow who is breaking the restraining cords around its legs, upsetting the milk pail, kicking mud into the milk, while the herd boys try in vain to subdue it” (1979: 315). The same madness and craziness of a cow when inferred in *Bongo Fleva* pseudonyms may imply that it is hard to stop them from doing music. Another

¹¹ Mr II inspiration was from American artists namely Ice Cube, Niggers With Attitude and above all Tupak Shakur. More information about Mr II is available at <http://www.jambonetwork.com/blog/?p=53474> accessed 20th April 2010.

¹² Sna Lee abatizwa kwa mara ya 3! [Sna Lee has been baptized for the third time!] in <http://216.69.164.44/dar/BongoXplosion/2007/04/03/31471.html> accessed 20th April 2010.

¹³ Rashid Ziada Rashid a.k.a KR, *ibid*.

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interpretation is that “an artist wants to be close to his fans and be friendly because the word ‘crazy’ can literally be translated in Kiswahili as *Kichaa* or *Mchizi* which in Kiswahili slang connotes ‘friend’.¹⁴ Regarding the use of the stage name ‘Crazy’ in the early days of hip hop in Tanzania Fred Saganda notes that “in the early 1990s I used to call myself Crazy F but later on I found it did not make sense as I was not a mad person so I later abandoned it”.¹⁵ Some of the pseudonyms show artists’ talents and physical attributes. For instance, Rehema Chalamila who was known as Ray C is also known as *Kiuno bila Mfupa* (‘Boneless Waist’). This alludes to her dancing prowess: the name metaphorically refers to her ability to wiggle her waist in dancing.

Other Tanzanian hip hop artists use military and police titles as nicknames. Some artists also wear military gear¹⁶ as a hip hop fashion. For instance, Jacob Makalla, a.k.a. JCB, is alternatively known as the General of hip hop in Arusha. Haroun Kahena’s stage name is Inspector Haroun, and Karama Bakari is also known as Luteni Karama (‘Lieutenant Karama’). Masoud Karama, the leader of hip hop crew Kikosi cha Mizinga (‘Artillery Unit’) is also known as Kala Pina or Commander Mullah.¹⁷ The adoption of military titles appears similar to that of the youth in Kinshasa (DRC) who act as soldiers. “The soldier is one of the multiple models that these youth select for ‘becoming a man’. The figure of the soldier incarnates physical strength, muscles and power which are the grounds upon which they claim their dominance and status; hence they are imagining and constructing their masculinities’ (Pype 2007: 257-264). The equation of masculinity with physical strength and endurance has played a significant role in the power struggle between the sexes (Edley & Wetherell 1999: 107). In addition, some *Bongo Flewa* artists’ aliases and crews reveal their male orientalism, for example Seleman Msindi is also known as Afande Sele (‘Soldier Sele’) or Dume la Simba (‘Male Lion’). TMK Wanaume Family meaning Family Men from Temeke neighbourhood in Dar es Salaam. With regard to female artists, Judith Wambura, for instance, is also known as Komandoo (‘Commander’) to show her diligence in the music industry.¹⁸

The use of the imaginative military and masculine titles among artists shows how *Bongo Flewa*, with its large number of artists, becomes like an army full of workers of different ranks such as soldiers, inspectors, lieutenants and commanders. It can also be argued that their intention is to construct an identity, show competence, compete, or create a feeling of supremacy over others. Artist may also seek to make other artists fear them. For instance, when one hears the name Kikosi cha Mizinga (‘Artillery Unit’) whose leader is Commander Mullah, one imagines that the crew is well equipped with weapons such as guns and cannons, and has specialized fighters. Symbolically this means that the crew is formed by competent

¹⁴ Benson Gideon, interview by author on 12th December 2010, Dar es Salaam.

¹⁵ Fred Saganda, *ibid.*

¹⁶ At the beginning artists wearing military gear shocked and stunned many Tanzanians but nowadays the style has become familiar.

¹⁷ The name seems to be adopted from Mullah Mohamed Omar, a Taliban leader.

¹⁸ Judith Wambura has been in *Bongo Flewa* music since the early 1990s.

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artists. It is important to bear in mind that the use of pseudonyms is a substantial aspect of hip hop culture across the world. Regarding America Rose notes that “many rappers have nick names that suggest street smarts, coolness, power and supremacy” (1994: 36). These military ranks are also being used by other Tanzanian musicians such as Hamza Kalala, who is known as Komandoo (‘Commander’). In the past, European military ranks and titles such as king, captain and lieutenant had been widely used by *beni* dance groups in the German colonial period (Ranger 1975:75) to show competitiveness among the groups. In colonial Africa, the British used *chief* as a common term of reference for a variety of traditional leaders. Chief refers to a person of eminence or high office, a community leader or overlord. In the most sophisticated hierarchical traditional systems such as the Alafin of Oyo and the Kabaka of Buganda, the holder of the chiefly position received recognition as king or queen, and their unique traditional titles were respected (Hagan 2004: 60). ‘Chief’ and ‘King’ are also among the nick names which are preferred by a number of *Bongo Fleva* artists. These include Ramadhan A. Mponjika, a member of the rap crew Kwanza Unit in the 1990s, whose stage name was Chief Rhymson; Anselm Tryphone Ngaiza, also known as Chief Rumanyika¹⁹; and Peter Kiwinda whose stage name is Chief Kiwinda (cf. Englert 2008: 46; Bancet 2007: 326). Female artists, both *Bongo Fleva* and musicians of other music genres, also use ‘queen’ in their nick names. For instance, a *Bongo Fleva* artist Darlin is also known as Queen Darleen and the Tanzanian taarab singer Khadija Omari Kopa is also known as Queen of taarab. The use of these particular pseudonyms responds to the fact that chiefs had become symbols of the dignity and identity of African cultures and, as natural leaders, kingpins of national stability and progress (Hagan 2004: 60-61), and they were of high reputation and highly regarded even by Europeans (cf. Hartwig 1968: 229). Although in Tanzania, the chieftaincy system has declined, *Bongo Fleva* artists still want to be identified with chiefs, to demonstrate their important position in society, self-esteem, superiority,²⁰ as well as nostalgia for the past system. As Mungai asserts, the singer who harks back to the past history “shows how useful the past is in the forging of new, contemporary imaginaries” (2008: 64). The adoption of pseudonyms such as chief, king and queen also demonstrate artists’ desire to ‘dominate’ the *Bongo Fleva* music ‘kingdom’. Their desires for recognition and prominence among the fans at a particular area and time make these artists declare their ‘kingdoms’. For instance, Khaleed Mohamed, a.k.a. TID, wishes to be the top *Bongo Fleva* artist in Dar es Salaam as his pseudonym stands for Top In Dar [es Salaam]. He also started a band which is known as Top band. John Simon Mseke has a similar pseudonym: King or Mwamba wa Kaskazini (literally Northern Rock or Northern King). Mwamba (‘Rock’) depicts toughness; the Northern King may imply that he is a renowned artist in the Northern part of Tanzania, as he hails from Arusha.

¹⁹ Rumanyika was the ruler/king of Karagwe in the 19th century. The word Rumanyika also means ‘renowned’ or ‘famous’. Personal communication with Prof. Mugyabuso Mulinzi Mulokozi on 28th February 2011, University of Dar es Salaam.

²⁰ Similarly, the prominent Tanzanian hip hop pioneer Salehe Jabir in 1991 produced a rap album in Swahili known as *King of Swahili Rap*.

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Apart from some artists employing army titles, other *Bongo Flewa* artists use academic titles. These include Joseph Haule, a.k.a. Professor Jay; Levison Kasulwa, a.k.a. Doctor K; and John Simba, a.k.a. Doctor John. Bearing the title ‘professor’ or ‘doctor of philosophy’ in a particular discipline, in our case *Bongo Flewa* music, shows how one is knowledgeable and experienced in the genre, and one’s songs carry useful messages. For instance, Fred Saganda points out that “Joseph Haule in the 1990s was known as Nigga J, but as he has been doing music for a long time, he is now known as a Professor J”.²¹ In regard to the late Remmy Ongala, popular musicians in Tanzania, Hilhorst also notes that “his professional career developed in Tanzania and the didactic character of his lyrics caused him to receive the nickname ‘Doctor’, diagnosing the ills of an unequal society” (2009: 105). Another artist is Hamis Mwinjuma, a.k.a. Mwanafalsafa which means ‘Philosopher’. The name Philosopher gives an implication that the artist has wisdom, rational ability and philosophical reflections in his songs and acts as compared to other artists. It is important to note that, the use of incisive song texts in Tanzanian hip hop can be a compelling reason as to why artists claim stage names such as professor, doctor and philosopher: implying that their texts are educational in dealing with various societal issues such as poverty, unemployment and HIV/AIDS. In reality, most of these artists get involved in the music without much formal music education. This is due to the fact that rap or hip hop is a type of music that can be produced cheaply, with little formal knowledge of music. Technological innovations enable works of art to be available to the masses; almost everybody can be an artist because the means of expression are available (Haskins 2000:114; Starr et al. 2003). However, the use of academic titles such as doctor or professor is also prevalent among traditional medicine men, which intends to show not only their ‘qualifications’ in the field but also attract customers in order to earn their daily bread.

Furthermore, the title ‘Honourable’ is also preferred by some *Bongo Flewa* artists. The late Julius Kambarage Nyerere, in his leadership (1961-1985), discouraged grandiose and ostentatious titles such as *Bwana* (Sir), *Mheshimiwa* (Honourable), *Mtukufu* (His Majesty, His Lordship, Most Respectful) and *Mkombozi* (Redeemer, Saviour) as titles for formal or official address (see Mmari 1995:178). Instead he popularized *Ndugu* (comrade) as a title for formal address to be applied to all Tanzanians, and his own preferred form of address had been *Mwalimu* (Teacher) (Mmari 1995: 178).²² *Bongo Flewa* artists, like other leaders who disagree with Nyerere in this respect, often prefer to be addressed in more traditional official and political ranks of respect. For instance, *Bongo Flewa* artist Amani Temba is also known as *Mheshimiwa* Temba (Honourable Temba). Another notable hip hop artist, as we have seen above, who falls in this line is Jacob Makalla who is also known as JCB (Jesus Come Black). He likens himself to the Saviour due to the fact that he assists numerous hip hop artists to

²¹ Fred Saganda, interview by author on 19th May 2011, Dar es Salaam.

²² Julius Kambarage Nyerere (b. 1922-1999) was the first President of Tanzania from 1962-1985; he was a teacher by profession.

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develop their musical skills. Thus pseudonyms, according to my informants, show artists' identities and creativity.

It is important to point out that these pseudonyms change frequently for a variety of reasons. One of the founding members of Hard Blasters Crew (HBC), Eliuteri Clementi Msiagi whose current stage name is Fanani explains the reasons for changing his stage names: "I was formerly known as Looney T or Crazy T but I am now known as Fanani. Fanani was derived from our third album 'Funga Kazi' in which one of the songs is called *Fanani* (Performer). In that song I was asking the audience who is a true *Fanani*? In response my fans called me Fanani".²³ Zainabu Lipangile also reveals that "I started hip hop in 1995 and my first stage name was Zein B and later changed to Zay B. As there were many male artists, I had to change my name to be known as Terrorist Sister (*Mwanadada Gaidi*) to show that I was a strong girl among male artists to survive in this music".²⁴ Zab B hints at the large number of male *Bongo Fleva* artists as well as the issue of terrorism which has escalated recently. In regard to the change of stage names, it is also important to mention the case of two *Bongo Fleva* artists in 2004. It was reported by print media that a hip hop artist Godfrey Tumaini, alias Dudu Baya, (Bad Bug) assaulted Lucas Mkenda, also known as Mr. Nice, while the latter was performing live on stage at the Diamond Jubilee Hall in Dar es Salaam (cf. Mtui 2004 and Chitama 2004). Interestingly, after their dispute was over it was reported that Godfrey Tumaini switched to the new alias Dudu Zuri (Good Bug). Contrary to his previous pseudonym Dudu Baya, that looks destructive and harmful to people, the newly adopted alias looks friendly and harmless to others. This is a commendable action as the late Shaaban Robert in his poem titled *Huacha Jina* (Leave a Name) in *Sanaa ya Ushairi* (1972: 31) insists²⁵:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Mtu wa fikira njema kwa watu huacha jina Na watu wajao nyuma wakapenda kuliona Katika dunia nzima likawa kama hazina Akili sio kusema lakini ni kufikiri Ukajua jambo jema lisilokuwa la shari</i></p> | <p>A considerate man leaves behind a good name So that the next generation would like to see it The name that becomes valuable worldwide Intelligence comes by thinking not by talking To know a kind thing that has no hostility</p> |
|--|---|

This stanza by Shaaban Robert supports Dudu Baya's decision to confess and opt for a new alias, Dudu Zuri, so that he leaves behind a good name in his society and becomes exemplary to other emerging *Bongo Fleva* artists.

According to my informants, the frequent change of their pseudonyms also shows changes in tastes and preferences over time. As Mponjika²⁶ also puts it:

²³ Eliuteri Clementi Msiagi a.k.a Fanani interview by Salehe Stambul on 19th January 2011, Dar es Salaam.

²⁴ Personal communication with Zainabu Lipangile on 20th May 2010, University of Dar es Salaam.

²⁵ Shaaban Robert is one of the prolific writers of Kiswahili literature (909-1962).

²⁶ Email communication (on 26th March 2010) with Zavara Mponjika formerly known as Ramadhani Mponjika a.k.a Chief Rhymson who was one of the founding members of Tanzanian hip hop crew Kwanza Unit in the

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“One of the reasons for changing a stage name is the fact that an artist sees that the attributes that go with his previous name had waned so he has to find new traits to add on top of it. And to amuse your fans *and be up-to-date* one has to have something new all the time” (my translation, my emphasis).

For instance, Anselm Ngaiza, who was formerly known as Soggy Doggy Hunter later preferred to be called Chief Rumanyika. Similarly, Joseph Mbilinyi who was known as 2Proud later switched to Mr II, and later on he became known in Swahili as Sugu to mean ‘Tough or Long-standing artist’, as he has been in this music since its inception in Tanzania in the 1990s. Ngogi Philbert in the same way notes that

“artists are like snakes, after every certain time they have to peel off their skins so that they look new especially when their previous aliases lack popularity. By so doing it also brings newness in their songs too”.²⁷

It can be argued that the change of pseudonyms is partly due to the fact that cultural identities are not fixed but are actively created through particular communication processes, social practices and articulations within specific circumstances (Negus 1996: 100). *Bongo Fleva* artists realize that African or Swahili names such as Rumanyika or Sugu carry lineage, ethnic and cultural meanings. The tendency is true not only of musicians but also of other African youth more generally. Pongweni asserts that Sotho-Tswana youngsters adopt new praise names, both coined and borrowed from traditional heroes and chiefs. The source of inspiration may be the individual’s desire to defend, safeguard and maintain cultural names, and to comment on other artists’ Western names (2004: 358). In support of the use of local pseudonyms Rashid Ziada Rashid, alias KR, argues,

“foreign names are not good because our local names are much better than the foreign ones. Most of the foreign nick names we take are short-lived [...] and a foreign person would feel so pleased to pronounce our local names rather than ‘our’ English pen names”.²⁸

However, when an artist adopts a new alias it does not mean that he or she has abandoned the former alias but demonstrates an ‘interchange in their stage names between local and international images’ (cf. Thompsom 2008: 33).

Frequent change of stage names leads to artists having multiple names. As a result presently, there are many artists who have multiple stage names. Some of them are Philipo N. Nyandindi, a.k.a. O-Ten or Pamba na Pozi (Dressy and Posey guy); Gwamaka Kaihula, a.k.a. King Crazy GK or Bokassa²⁹; Haroun Kahena, a.k.a. Inspector Haroun or Babu (Grandfather); Juma Kassim, a.k.a. Juma Nature, Qiblah, Sir Nature, or Msitu wa Vina (Forest of Rhymes). Likewise, Joseph Haule was formerly known as Nigga J but he later

1990s. He is currently one of the principal organizers of WAPI (Words and Pictures) Tanzania, initiated by the British Council.

²⁷ Ngogi Philbert, interview by author on 25th February 2011, Dar es Salaam

²⁸ Rashid Ziada Rashid alias KR *ibid*

²⁹ Jean-Bedel Bokassa (1921-1996) was the military ruler and then emperor of the Central African Republic.

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became known as Prof. Jay, Mti Mkavu (Dry Tree) or Heavyweight MC. This reveals that hip hop or *Bongo Fleva* as an urban culture is not a tidy, static reality, and its practices are multiple, contradictory and dynamic. This frequent change of pseudonyms shows how identities are continuously revised through artists' interaction with various forms and practices. Tanzanian *Bongo Fleva* music and East African hip hop artists in general appropriate and juxtapose western musical styles and traditional aesthetics such as costumes, names, and language styles to produce something local (Stevens 2007: 8, Nyairo 2008: 78-80; Githiora 2008: 89; Thompson 2008: 41; Ntarangwi 2009).

Artists' pseudonyms can also be used in a metaphoric way to reflect various events taking place worldwide. For instance, following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre Towers in New York City, United States in 2001, Zainab Lipangule who is popularly known as Zay B later called herself Mwanadada Gaidi (Terrorist Sister). The tendency of adopting new pseudonyms not only reflects these artists familiarity with current issues and events but also draws upon naming customs in Africa. As Lubisi affirms, African people of all ethnic groups name their children according to circumstances or events such as war, famine and circumstances surrounding their birth, or according to the names of their clans (2004: 288). However, as stated elsewhere in this paper, when an artist adopts a new stage name it does not mean that the previous one is jettisoned completely. An artist can be known by or called different nick names at one time. Showing the importance of pseudonyms, Mponjika notes that

“stage names are very important in hip hop music...and this is a long standing tradition before the inception of hip hop. A good example is during the disco era in Tanzania there was a guy named Ray Abdu. Ray was a very popular person in Dar es Salaam during those days, he was a seaman...He had more than 54 pseudonyms such as Ray Abdu, Buti Jiwe (Stony Boot), Njaa Kali (Severe Hunger)...just to mention a few. Practically, one has to have and use as many nick names as possible, one on top of other” (my translation).³⁰

Sometimes, artists' change of their pseudonyms may lead to the composition of albums that bear their preferred new nick names at a particular time. For instance, when Anselm Ngaiza switched from Soggy Doggy Hunter to Chief Rumanyika he composed an album titled *Niite Chifu* Rumanyika (Call me Chief Rumanyika). Joseph Mbilinyi formerly known as 2Proud adopted the new alias Mr II, and he released an album known as *Niite Mister II* (Call me Mr II) in 1998. The same happened when he switched to his new stage name Sugu; the album he released shortly after was called *Sugu* (2004). Seleman Msindi, who is also known as Afande Sele (Soldier Sele), and Dume la Simba (Male Lion), released a song called *Simba Dume* (Male Lion). However, not all artists who change their pseudonyms produce albums that bear their new stage names.

³⁰ Email communication with Zavara Mponjika.

Although not all hip hop artists adopt nick names, pseudonyms are significant as they can conceal the identity of the artist. Some real names may tell one's ethnic origin while the use of pseudonyms may make it difficult to tell the origins of an artist. A name is the identity of and window into one's culture and self, and most cultures attach a lot of significance to names (Wamitila 1999:37). In addition, some artists prefer not to use their real names as they do not sound artistic. The overabundance of hip hop artists, albums at the market, and piracy make the music business very tough. The artists use whatever means necessary to attract many fans, concert-goers and buyers of their works. As a result, some of these pseudonyms are dialogic and boastful. As we have seen for the case of army and academic titles, they seem to be responsive to each other. Also, while Nasib Abdul is known as Diamond another artist by the name Athuman Mwingereza is popularly known as Tanzanite. Their aliases show not only minerals available in Tanzania but also are boastful as these minerals differ in their values. The use and continual change of boastful pseudonyms provides artists with a more marketable and appealing image. According to Englert, most artists engage in this music with "the aim of firstly making a living rather than educating society" (2008: 48). If this is the case, then marketability is particularly important.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the use of pseudonyms in Tanzanian hip hop and *Bongo Fleva* music. It has been revealed that these pseudonyms employ a wide variety of techniques; some are acronyms, and they can also be local, foreign, boastful, professional, or utilize military or official ranks. It has been argued that pseudonyms are crucial in defining and identifying hip hop or *Bongo Fleva* artists since the inception of this music to the present. Through their pseudonyms artists show their identity, experiences, and imagination. These pseudonyms change regularly. The frequency change of their performance names demonstrates the dynamic nature of an urban culture. In this process, the past and 'tradition' on the one hand, and the West and innovation on the other, are incorporated and re-envisioned (Barber 1997: 6) to construct urban youth identity. They also create artistic and commercial effects as most of them intend to lure their fans as well borrow from traditional ways of naming. Tanzanian *Bongo Fleva* artists' pseudonyms, like those of prominent Kiswahili poets or artists, reflect their many different characteristics, whether they are physical or behavioural, reflecting competencies, actions or lineages (cf. Kabuta 1997: 46).

Acknowledgements

This paper was made possible by the Cadbury Fellowship grant offered through the Centre of West African Studies (CWAS) of the University of Birmingham. Special thanks to Karin Barber and David Kerr of the University of Birmingham. This is an abbreviated version of the paper presented at the conference on “Turning in to African Cities. Popular Culture and Urban Experience in sub-Saharan Africa”, organized by CWAS and the Institute of Anthropological Research in Africa (IARA) at Leuven (Belgium), held at the University of Birmingham in May 2010. Many thanks to the informants/artists and the 2010 Cadbury Fellows: Anne Schumann, Patrick Oloko, Alessandro Jedlowski, Lion Tsambu and Katrien Pype for their assistance, critique and thoughtful suggestions. I also thank the editors of *Swahili Forum* and the reviewer of this paper whose comments have been very useful in improving it.

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