

The Cultural Construction of the Zanzibari Youth: The ‘Struggle’ through Bongo Flava Music

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Hip hop music (henceforth Bongo Flava music) is a global phenomenon as youth from various parts of the world engage in it. Today in Tanzania, Bongo Flava music has become the youths’ main form of entertainment and one of the most important sources of income for unemployed youth. However, in spite of the fact that in Tanzania mainland the music is fairly accepted, in Tanzania islands (Zanzibar: Pemba and Unguja) its development is still sluggish.

The objective of this paper is therefore to examine youth engagement in Bongo Flava music in Tanzania islands since its inception in the 1990s and the challenges and controversy it raises till the present. This paper discusses the situation of Bongo Flava in Tanzania islands where the majority of the population is Muslim, and examines the efforts made by the youth in Zanzibar to appropriate this music genre in spite of the infrastructural problems and the generational conflicts that characterize the Zanzibari environment. Additionally, this paper will discuss how the youth ‘struggle’ in engaging in the construction of a cosmopolitan culture in contemporary Zanzibar. Throughout this paper, this ‘struggle’ is contextualized within a larger historical framework to see how the Tanzanian youth have been struggling since soon after independence (1960s) to shape ‘new forms of culture’.