

Youth in Zanzibar: Their Cultural ‘Struggle’ Through Bongo Fleva Music

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Abstract

Hip hop music (henceforth Bongo Fleva music) is a global phenomenon as youth from various parts of the world engage in it. Today in Tanzania, Bongo Fleva 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 on the Tanzanian mainland the music is fairly accepted, in Tanzania Islands its development is still slow. The objective of this paper is to examine the youth’s engagement in Bongo Fleva music on the Tanzania Islands since its inception in the 1980s and the cultural challenges and controversies it raises in society. It discusses the situation of Bongo Fleva in the Tanzania Islands, where the majority of the population are Muslims, and examines youth initiatives or ‘struggle’ in engaging in it in the construction of a cosmopolitan culture in contemporary Zanzibar in spite of the problems and the generational conflict. This ‘struggle’ is also 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’.

1.0 Introduction

Bongo Fleva music is one of the popular Tanzanian youth genres at the moment, others are comedies, gospel music and Bongo movies. Bongo Fleva songs are widely heard at music kiosks, wedding ceremonies, households, on *daladalas* (public commuter buses), phone ring tones, disco halls, and political campaigns. It is also common to hear a certain artist has moved to the big cities, such as Dar es Salaam, in search of opportunities with regard to music¹.

This paper examines the initiatives of the Zanzibar’s youths in engaging in Bongo Fleva music. It discusses how youths in Zanzibar adopt Bongo Fleva music as a medium to articulate their cultural identity and resistance to traditional art forms. A few songs will also be referred to in order to understand their themes and contextualize their struggle. The data of this study were collected through interviews conducted among the public and artists in Pemba and Unguja between September 2010 to and October 2010. This paper

¹ Currently, there is a popular Bongo Fleva song by Ambwene Yessaya (a.k.a AY) ft. MwanaFA that explains this situation, it is called *Usije Mjini* ‘Don’t Come to town.

intends to answer three questions: Why do Zanzibar's youth engage in Bongo Fleva music? What conundrums do they get? How do they tackle them? The argument in this paper tries to build on the notion that cultural identity is not a static phenomenon by drawing on the work by Stuart Hall (1990: 223) who on cultural identity emphasises as equally important as "what we really are", "what history has done", "what we have become". In this sense cultural identity is not something that already exists, transcending place, history, and time. It undergoes constant transformation. Identities are the ways we position ourselves within the narratives of the past. What elements of difference and contrast are important and emphasised at different times, and in different social contexts, must by necessity vary (in Palmberg 2002:118). The analysis is also aligned with Burgess (2002) who studies Revolutionary politics and youth soon after the Zanzibar Revolution. Burgess looks at how in the 1960s and 1970s political leaders in Zanzibar attempted to prohibit youth in appropriating Western clothing fashions and hairstyles in defense of nationalist, socialist, African and Islamic standards and values. His arguments are very useful in the analysis of the contemporary youth and their struggle through Bongo Fleva music. Although space does not permit us to discuss comprehensively the history of Zanzibar and its society, in the following section the paper summarizes briefly its background.

2.0 Zanzibar society in brief

By way of background, Zanzibar is a coastal region of Tanzania which consists of two major islands, Pemba and Unguja. Following Omanis expulsion of the Portuguese from the coast at the end of the 17th century, the Swahili towns were 'under the impetus of Omani-dominated trade and accompanied by markedly greater Arab influences (Nurse and Spear 1985:81 in Insoll 2003:201). After the abolition of slavery in 1897 Zanzibar was declared a British Protectorate. It achieved her political independence from British colonialism in 1963 and in 1964 united with Tanganyika to form the United Republic of Tanzania. The population of the islands is approximately one million that comprises the Swahili, Shirazi, Arabs, Indians, Goans, and Pakistans. Most people of Zanzibar are Muslims and there is also a small population of Christians and Hindus. Traditional African beliefs are still held by most local people, and there is often considerable cross-

over between aspects of Islam and local customs (McIntyre et al. 2009; Depelchin 1991; Bowles 1991; Ferguson 1991; Sherrif 1991; Othman 1995; Hoyle 2002). The following section discusses the development of the Bongo Fleva music in Zanzibar.

3.0 Emergence of Bongo Fleva in Zanzibar

Bongo Fleva music, which started as hip hop music, started in Zanzibar in the late 1980s but it was not until 1990s that got its shape. The popular appeal of this youth culture in Tanzania, and many African countries, was a by product of globalization and cultural imperialism (Ekstron 2020). Also, liberalization resulted into many youth returned to foreign styles of music for inspiration that represented the otherness and foreignness that many urban [...] youth sought in their movement toward a sense of cosmopolitanism (Perullo 2007:252). In the early days of rap, like in the Tanzanian mainland, DJ Salehe notes that “youth started by imitating the American rap songs by singing in English. At that time there were no private media outlets, there was state-owned radio station *Sauti ya Tanzania Zanzibar* (STZ) and Television Zanzibar (TVZ) but could not air our music as it was associated with hooliganism”². As rap developed they switched to Kiswahili and that was one of the early developments of rap in Tanzania, as Cool Para explains “On a Christmas of 1993 I rapped Saleh Jabir’s song³. People who attended the show at Fuji bar in Jang’ombe were very excited to hear an English song being sung in Kiswahili”⁴.

The rap founders in Zanzibar in the early 1990s include DJ Salehe, DJ Kim, Cool Para, Dula Ukasha and Abdullah. Later on joined Makoya Man, Cool Muza, Salima Juma Kibao a.k.a SJ, Dogo Halifa, Kif B, the defunct New Rapping Style (Rama B, Bakari a.k.a Cool B, Stick Bingo and Ibrahim Jeshi), Alihaji Goya, Off side Trick, Ally Ramadhani (AT), the defunct Wazenji Kijiwe (Mussa Mjusi Kafiri). Other popular artists today are Rashid Amin (Rico Single), Shubana Halifani Metaya (Short Gun), Mbaraka

² Salehe Abdalah Yusuph a.k.a DJ Salehe who is one of the hip hop pioneers in Zanzibar. He is working with Television Zanzibar (TVZ) since 1996. Interview by author on 27 October 2010, Zanzibar Town.

³ Saleh Jabir is one of the early rappers in Tanzania; he is credited as a founder of rapping in Kiswahili.

⁴ Ali Ahmed Khamis a.k.a DJ Cool Para is an old hip hop artist in Zanzibar. He is the founder of *taarap* music style in the early 1990s; which was a combination of rap and taarab. He used to be a club DJ, rapper and radio presenter. Interview by author on 27 October 2010, Zanzibar Town.

Abdalah Mbarak (White Berry), Mbaraka Abdalah Mgeni (Berry Black), Dorica Mukaka, Jamila Abdallah Ally (Baby J) and Hadija Ramadhan Rashid (Didah).

The motivating factors for the young generation in Zanzibar and Tanzania in general, to do Bongo Fleva music more importantly according to them are the possession of a singing talent, desire to engage in a global culture, in search of employment and fascination with local and foreign stars. According to Hatibu Hassan, “When we sing we entertain and educate society and most importantly we also want to be known up to America and across the world like Ronaldo who is renowned worldwide as a soccer player from Brazil.”⁵ Although in its advent it was not known that rap music would develop to this stage, it is was through struggle and persistence that Bongo Fleva has got its current shape and has become a source of employment and a forum of expression for most youth. The number is not as big as in the Tanzanian mainland but a handful of artists are continually engaging in it. As a result, the generational conflict between young and older generations arose as we are going to examine in the next section.

4.0 The generational conflicts

It has been revealed in fieldwork that it is difficult for some of youths to engage in Bongo Fleva music. Various reasons have been put forward by informants. With regard to Pemba, Salum Ali Mselem, like many other informants of this study, raises the issue of religion as the main factor of the parental refusal. He points out that “Although Bongo Fleva is contemporary youth music but few of them get involved in it, because Pemba is compliant to Islamic morals. Morals of this island don’t give opportunity for both girls and boys to involve in such music. Even in Unguja it is not entirely acceptable as the Tanzanian mainland. It is true that Unguja and Pemba’s population is mainly Muslims but we differ in our stands [...] here in Pemba people are so devoted compared to Unguja”⁶. Salum reveals that in the Tanzanian islands, Bongo Fleva is to some extent acceptable in Unguja than in Pemba. He links this disparity of reception to religious conformity. He argues that Pembans are more religious than Ungujans. Alongside this we

⁵ Hatibu Hassan, interview by author on 22 September 2010, Pemba.

⁶ Salum Alli Mselem *ibid*

can also argue that from the early 2000s in Unguja, apart from STZ, there has been an establishment of FM radio stations such as Spice FM, Coconut FM, Zenji FM, Chuchu FM, Bomba FM and Hits FM. On the contrary in Pemba there are STZ (which cover Pemba Island for only few hours), Radio Istiqama and Radio Maria which are religious and Radio Micheweni. In addition while in Pemba there is currently no recording station in Unguja there are a few of them namely Heartbeat Records, Teddy Record, Jupiter record and Makonela Records. In comparison with the Mainland, Rico Single also adds “In Zanzibar we are lagging behind in Bongo Flewa because in the Mainland people are mixed up so they live a Western style but here we follow Arab traditions so we are more religious”⁷.

As we have stated earlier on a large percent of Zanzibaris are Muslims, and most of my informants discourage and/or comment on music with reference to Islam, let us briefly discuss the stances regarding music and Islam so that we can understand well their arguments. With regard to music and Islam it seems that there are two stances. The first category belongs to the staunch advocates of the legality of music-were first and foremost the Muslim mystics-to whom music was a spiritual staple, not merely a permissible (*halāl*) but a required religious practice (*wajib*). With regard to the significance and legitimacy of music in the Islamic tradition S.H. Nasr (1987:153-4) points out, that it is not merely juridical or theological; it involves most of all the inner and spiritual aspect of Islam (in Lewisohn 1997:2). In the second category-opponents of music-one finds the mediaeval ayatollahs accuse the blasphemy of all who believed music to be food for the soul. Such exoteric clerics considered music as belonging to the category of hateful things such as usury, fornication and intoxication, and argued that all musical activities, whether playing instruments or singing, are fundamentally vanity, interpreting, for instance, the reference in the sixth verse of the Sura Luqman to “idle talk” as designating and thus banning singing (Farmer 1942:14, in Lewisohn 1997:3). This paper, therefore, argues that those who prohibit their children from doing music make reference to the second stance that music, in particular Bongo Flewa, is profane (as opposed to sacred).

⁷ Rico Single (real name Rashid Amin), interview by author on 26 October 2010, Zanzibar

In regard to music and Islam Hatibu Hasan elaborates that, “Society is against this music because it does not confine to Islamic practices. Parents don’t like to see us wearing *bling bling*, smoking *weed* and drinking alcohol. Things that will make us abandon prayers”⁸. Although alcoholic beverages can be consumed at various occasions ‘Alcohol is portrayed as a modern demon luring people into disorderly conduct and threatening the moral order of people’(van Dijk 2001:259). This caution is made knowing that ‘there is a link between alcohol consumption and [...] sex’ (Chirwa 1997: 10, in Moto 2004:352). ‘Islam signifies a civilization and a culture [...] *Music* and art in an Islamic environment are inevitably affected by Islamic thought and artistic tradition (Adahl 1993:131, 141, emphasis added). It should be noted that however, ‘many urban youths (even Muslims) appreciate *dansi* and Western clothes and *Bongo Fleva music* without necessarily meaning to oppose their parental generation and its religious and moral rules’ (Suriano 2007b, in Suriano 2008:202, emphasis added) and Zanzibar is not a conservative Muslim society (Hoyle 2002:147). It is also important to quote Insoll (1999a:11, in Insoll 2003: 34, 139) that Islam in Africa [...] adapted in many different ways to suit many different contexts. Though the core elements of belief might remain the same, there exists diversity, represented by different ways of life-nomad and sedentary, town-and country-dweller-ethnic, cultural and geographical factors, elements of non-observance, and varying interpretations and creeds. The East African coast must also be seen as an area of diversity, rather than as homogeneous entity [...] remarkable similarities also exist’.

In Zanzibar, some older generations perceive Bongo Fleva related culture such as clothing styles and way of dancing is harmful to not only religious beliefs but also to traditional practices. Hence, it should be discouraged to safeguard the longstanding traditional practices in society. Because today “Most youth avoid the traditions; they go to Bongo Fleva performance rather than to traditional dances”⁹. Haji Bakari, who is 77 years old, adds that “I watch and hear Bongo Fleva music on TV and radio stations. In our childhood you could not see girls wearing clothes showing their navels and breasts. But nowadays youths wear half-naked exposing their bodies; they don’t respect our

⁸ Hatibu Hasan *ibid*

⁹ Hakim Saidi Juma, an Officer of Culture in Micheweni district, interview by author 22 September 2010, Pemba

traditions. Their songs are very open; they don't hide things. Contrary to what we used to dance our traditional dances such as *Msewe* or *Uringe*, today when they dance they mingle so closely, there is no boundary between man and woman as we used to dance in the past. This could easily lead them to adultery. Besides that, male artists cut their hair into clumsy styles and braid their hair which I found immoral to our country. Our society is intertwined with Islamic religion, and our religion does not want things being done and exposed like that".¹⁰

Local traditions such as respectful dresses, traditional music and dances such as *taarab*, *Msewe* and *Uringe* and religious practices (don't commit adultery and women and men to dance separately) are very observable in Haji Bakari's words. This shows how traditional and religion practices intermingle in defining a culture of a certain society. Even if hair plaiting for men is practised in other Tanzanian societies such as among Maasai, some informants consider it inappropriate. This informant's argument resonates well with Òkè (2006: 333) who argues that 'it is also commonplace for the older generations in many places to value the cultural patterns of their own times better than the succeeding patterns'. In addition, with regard to dress code it is important to quote Fair (1998:83) who discusses the dress culture in Post-Revolutionary Zanzibar that dresses that cover most parts of one's body are 'worthy of respect, as well as a reflection of their growing understanding of Islamic prescriptions about modesty in dress and behaviour'. The impact of Islam, in much of the continent, has been felt on several fields. 'Islam must be seen as more than a religion, it is a way of life. But also blending of older traditions with Islam has occurred in many instances. The emphasis of the traditional dances shows the nature of the societies and belief systems prior to Islam, and also how these survived in whole or in part and in a variety of associations with Islam' (Insoll 2003:1- 2). Because 'all culture is the ever changing result of mixing, and [...] in culture there are no parents, only old and new mixed forms (Palmberg 2002:125).

¹⁰ Haji Bakari Simba, he used to be a traditional dancer from 1960s to 1980s, interview by author 22 September 2010, Pemba

Aside from the parental intention to safeguard religious and traditional values, another factor that leads to a low number of Bongo Flewa artists in Zanzibar is the fact that the Mainland’s population (approximately forty million) is bigger than Zanzibar’s (one million). Other hindrances are shyness and lack of self-motivation especially for female artists. Currently, there is no Bongo Flewa mainstream artist in Pemba and there a few in Unguja because as we have just seen above the informants reveal that there is disparity between Pemba and Unguja in terms of religious devotion, media development and economic development. The disparity is also due to the fact that “Zanzibar is a tourist place so the town is mixed up with foreigners unlike Pemba”¹¹. With regard to Islam and tourism Sherrif (1995) also reveals that Islam in sub-Saharan Africa is a point of pride to many governments, and measures have been taken to preserve the monuments. In East Africa, for instance, now a major tourist destination, monuments play a significant role in many areas as a source of tourist revenue. The monuments of Zanzibar island provide such an example, and especially those in the old stone town of Zanzibar itself, where much effort and money have been invested in restoring and presenting cites such as the Omani fort built upon the remains of the Portuguese church in conserving traders’ mansions built in the 19th century (Sherrif 1995 in Insoll 2003: 403). The decline of Zanzibar's agricultural economy has encouraged the heritage industry and tourism promotion (Hoyle 2002:154).

In response to the importance of tourism in Zanzibar Cool Para in his song *Zanzibar* also discloses:

Zanzibar by Cool Para	
<p>Kiitikio Nchi yetu Zanzibar karibuni twawambia Ni visiwa vya fahari Pemba na Unguja pia Mzunguko wa bahari na fukwe za kuvutia Imepangika vizuri twaieleza dunia</p> <p>Ubeti 1 Jambo la kujivunia hapa kwetu Zanzibar Biashara ya utalii inazidi kushamiri</p>	<p>Chorus We welcome you all in our country Zanzibar We are proud of our Pemba and Unguja islands It is surrounded by ocean and attractive beaches It is well structured we want the world to know it</p> <p>Verse 1 One thing we are proud of our Zanzibar Is the tourism industry that continues to flourish Let’s nurture and value it so that it flourishes</p>

¹¹ Answari a.k.a Michael Jackson, interview by author on 13 Sept. 2010, Pemba, Ramadhani Madogo (Rama B) on 29 Oct. 2010, Rashid Amin (Rico Single) and Hadija Ramadhan Rashid (Didah) on 26 Oct. 2010, Dorica Daudi Mukaka (Dorica) on 27 Oct. 2010 and Ali Salehe Juma (Alhaji Goya) on 27 Oct. 2010, Zanzibar.

<p>Tuitunze tuienzi izidi kustawi Itoe na matawi na matunda tufaidi... Wageni wakifika kwa heshima tuwapokee Utalii ukombozi wa uchumi tutambue tuelewe Zanzibar</p> <p>Ubeti II Watalii karibuni na msije mkahofu Kwa upande wa amani hapa ndio ngome Muweze kutembea Ngome Kongwe Mangapwani hata Fuji Welcome to Zanzibar feel at home every day every time Kwa upande wa Wizara ombi letu twalitoa Utalii ukuzeni nyie ndo marubani Ndio cha kujivunia hapa kwetu Zanzibar</p>	<p>more So that it branches out and we enjoy its fruits When visitors arrive let's welcome them respectively Zanzibaris let's understand that tourism is the saviour of our economy</p> <p>Verse II Tourists are welcome don't be fearful Zanzibar is known as the land of peace You can visit anywhere in Old Fort, Fuji and Mangapwani Welcome to Zanzibar feel at home every day every time We urge the responsible Ministry To develop tourism industry In Zanzibar we are proud of tourism</p>
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In his song *Zanzibar*, Cool Para welcomes people from across the world to visit Zanzibar and enjoy beautiful beaches and peaceful environments. He emphasizes the importance of tourism in Zanzibar as it contributes to its economy. Even though he seems to invite tourists to visit Unguja and Pemba but all places he mentions in his song [Old Fort, Fuji and Mangapwani] are located in Unguja. Cool Para's song though intends to attract tourists and recognizes the importance of tourism in Zanzibar's economy, his deliberation might coincide with the assertion that Zanzibar (Unguja) being famous for tourism might be a catalyst for the availability of Bongo Flewa artists. As these tourists are going to be some of the audience of their music performances. Through Bongo Flewa songs artists also strive for the development of the Zanzibar's economy. According to interviews if many tourists visited Pemba it would have sparked its development in terms of the emergence of Bongo Flewa artists. Unfortunately, 'Pemba is a dark undercurrent unseen and unknown by the majority of visitors' (McIntyre et al. 2009:38). So far we can argue that to 'understanding popular culture in East Africa, *Bongo Flewa is not exception*, means to engage with larger social forces in the local context, such as [...] Uswahili (Swahili-ness), local perceptions of 'modernity', Islam, [...] *and the role of media* (Suriano 2008:95, emphasis added).

To this point it has been discussed that there are a few Bongo Flewa artists in Pemba compared to Unguja. It has also been revealed that in Pemba up to now there is no music

recording studios and FM radio stations are few. It is important to present Alhaji Goya's song *Hali ya Pemba* (Situation of Pemba) so that to get a rough picture of Pemba.

<i>Hali ya Pemba</i> [Situation of Pemba] by Alhaji Goya	
<p>Ubeti Hali ya Pemba miji ishafifia jamani Hizo barabara nazo zina shimo pima Kazi za Mpemba Pemba ni kubahatisha Ni lazima ahame Pemba kwenda zinga maisha Mbona haigeuki hali ya Pemba... Kazi zetu huku kwetu ni uvuvi na ukulima Na zao kubwa twategemea karafuu Karafuu zangu mwenyewe nikisafirisha Naambiwa ni magendo Serikali ndio wanunuzi Bei wao wenyewe wajipangia Basi pesa muuzazo mafanikio tuyaone Niwekeeni umeme na maji wenye uhakika Pesa nyingine mwanunulia silaha Maana hizo twaziona maana awamu iliyopita Zanzibar kwa Wapemba ilikuwa mashaka Ila haya Mungu muwezi Bila yeye sisi wenyewe hatuwezi... Sisi ajali kubwa kuanguka na mkarafuu, uzazi na papa Ila hatutakishwa Kwani uzazi wa Mpemba asiye na kizazi watoto tisa</p>	<p>Verse Pemba's towns have declined Roads are full of big potholes There are no reliable employments in Pemba One has to move somewhere else to look for life Why Pemba's situation does not change? Our main occupations are fishery and farming We depends mainly on cloves If I transport my cloves I am told that I am smuggling Because government is the sole buyer It sets the price it wants But we don't see any development There is no reliable water and electricity in Pemba You spend some money to buy weapons Because we saw it in the former government Pembans were harassed in Zanzibar But God is almighty He saves us from many calamities Our main accidents are falling from a clove tree, maternity death and shark attacks But we will not be in extinction Because in Pemba a small family has nine children¹²</p>

Goya expresses his resentments as regard to Pemba: there is no reliable employments, roads, electricity and the price of cloves is low. He asserts that government bought weapons to harass Pembans. Goya alludes to the general elections in multiparty Zanzibar before power sharing between CCM and CUF in 2010. For instance, 'general elections of October 1995, in which President Salmin Amour from the ruling party *Chama cha Mapinduzi* (the Revolutionary Party) gained a narrow victory, was controversial, and involved accusations of human rights violations and persecution of opposition Civil United Front (CUF) members' (Hoyle 2002:147), who most of them are from Pemba. Goya refers to the 'outbreaks of riots and state-sponsored violence especially during elections (Askew 2006:34). Goya laments on the miserable situation of Pemba, 'the

¹² I was told by some informants that now the situation in Pemba has been improved following the release of *Hali ya Pemba* in 2000. There is availability of electricity and some main roads have been rehabilitated

impoverished island whose cloves were the main source of the Isles' foreign exchange' (Cameron 2002: 313) but 'since the international clove market has collapsed, international cultural tourism is reviving rapidly (Hoyle 2002:147). Goya fights for farmers and pickers who 'have a grievance with the government's exploitative monopoly on the clove producer price. Pemba growers and pickers have perception that foreign exchange earned supported the infrastructure of the Zanzibar Town or found its way into the pockets of elites and bureaucrats, rather than into their own rural communities' (Cameron *ibid*: 320). Goya's language is full of humour that in spite of poor living conditions; Pembans cannot die out because the smallest family has nine children. 'Humour allowed artists to continue to make *ujumbe mkali* (strong message), while listeners could laugh at the absurdity of the country's political development' (Perullo 2005: 84, in Reuster-Jahn 2008:52) and makes criticism entertaining (Omar 2009:186). Goya, like many other Bongo Flewa artists, leaves all these lamentations to God to punish the wrongdoers. 'God is evoked as a higher power, who determines the destiny of political leaders' (Reuster-Jahn 2008:49) and saves the oppressed.

Introduction of private media in Tanzania has significant impact on the spread and popularizing rap music in Tanzania. 'The legalization of private radio broadcasting in 1993 and the introduction of satellite television for the first time in 1995 altered patterns of musical consumption, and in turn led to the rise of new forms of music to take advantage of them. As performances could be recorded on video and replayed back, many clubs and bars found it cheaper to buy a television and sound system' (Hilhorst 2009:122). Youth music fascinates the young generation as it is aired on radio and television stations. According to Omari Mwinyi Sued who is in his fifties, 'It is very hard to stop youth [...] we can't force them to do things we used to do in our youth hood; things like to dance *Msewe* and so forth. They want changes [...] scientific and technological development made them to see 'cultures of others' across the world. As a result, our children think that if they don't do it they will be out-of-date'¹³.

¹³ Omari Mwinyi Sued interview by author on 23 Sept. 2010, Pemba; he used to be a singer of *Msewe* in the 1970s and 1980s.

5.0 Stick to the Guns: Strategies Adopted

Parental refusal and allegations that music is hooliganism do not completely discourage Zanzibar's youth to appropriate Bongo Flewa music. "Artists had to fight hard to make this music get its current shape¹⁴ because at the early period of rap music these generational conflicts occurred all over the world [...] Zanzibar is not exception"¹⁵. They had to adopt various techniques to engage in this music, one of the first initiatives is reflected in their music group names as DJ Salehe explains "We call our group *Hard to Find* whose members were me, DJ Kim, Cool Para, Dula Ukasha and Abdullah because at that time there were no rap crews and we as the founders we faced a lot of difficulties from society. Even if it was hard to find our way through rap music we didn't give up. And the situation was very difficult, especially for female artists [...] But today the music enabled me to take care of my family, construct a house, and establish my music video production company"¹⁶. Another early rap group in Zanzibar that falls in the same line is *the Struggling Islanders* whose members were Cool Para, Cool Muza and Salma Juma Kibao (SJ)¹⁷. The names of the early rap crews in Zanzibar were not accidentally chosen. They were partly reflecting the difficulties and challenges they got in appropriating this music genre. I argue that they were resorting to African naming customs where in most of the time naming refers to circumstances, events or seasons that taking place surrounding their birth (Lubisi 2004: 288).

Salum Ali Mselem, a radio presenter at STZ, also notes that, "There are underground Bongo Flewa artists in Pemba but if I interview them on a radio program they hide their real names and opt for pseudonyms to conceal their identity for fear of recognition by their parents. Because if it happens that their parents notice that they are doing music they will be summoned and advised to pay heed to education for the reason that music can take them into a wrong direction"¹⁸. Most youth who engage in this music are students or are at their school age. Therefore, parents and elders encourage their children to pay heed

¹⁴ Rama B *ibid*

¹⁵ Cool Para *ibid*

¹⁶ DJ Salehe *ibid*

¹⁷ It is from the crew name *The Struggling Islanders* that this paper got inspiration of its title.

¹⁸ Salum Ali Mselem, radio presenter of *Sauti ya Vijana* (Youth Voice) programme of Voice of Tanzania Zanzibar/*Sauti ya Tanzania Zanzibar* (STZ) *ibid*.

to education since ‘It is a key for life’, hence Bongo Fleva is discouraged for ‘fearing that it would encourage students to leave school, turn them into criminals and make them forget their cultural traditions’ (Perullo 2005:77). In this article I argue that the use of stage names in Bongo Fleva, among other things, shows youth’s struggle and the need of the negotiation in cultural identity.

Fusing rap with other local music genres is one of the techniques adopted by Zanzibar’s youth since the early period of rap music in Tanzania. For instance, in the early 1990s, Cool Para knowing that rap music was not widely acceptable by the older generation he fused rap with taarab. This was because “taarab is a traditional music genre in Zanzibar and I had to mix rap with taarab to attract customers as most of them were used to taarab”. He identified his music style as *taarap*, fusion of taarab and rap music. This was a commendable initiative in the youth music development in Zanzibar and Tanzania at large. Artists in Tanzanian mainland and islands fuse various music genres to form Bongo Fleva, because ‘Mixing is a ubiquitous feature of cultural development’ (Tomlinson 1999 pp 141-149 in Palmberg 2002:121). It should also be noted that fusing local and foreign music has been practised since the colonial Tanganyika and the East Africa. This has been useful in the development of urban music genres in Tanzania such as jazz, *beni* and taarab (Ranger 1975, Kubik 1981, Martin 1991).

Furthermore, the emphasis on employing the term Zenji Fleva over Bongo Fleva¹⁹ came to the fore for some artists from Zanzibar. Zenji Fleva should be used to identify youth music in the Zanzibar islands and Bongo Fleva for the Tanzanian mainland. Rama B points it out “The objective of coining the term Zenji Fleva was to emphasize the use of what is musically available in Zanzibar that was not available in other parts of Tanzania. This includes traditional taarab, which even if it is sung in other parts of the country, is originally Zanzibari. We make use of traditional *dances* that are available in Unguja and Pemba such as *Kidumbak*, *Msewe*, *Kibati*, and *Mkunungu*. Additionally, language of our songs should use Zanzibari dialects and accent, together with the use of music

¹⁹ During my fieldwork it was learnt that some artists refer to the use of the term Zenji Fleva instead of Bongo Fleva.

instruments like ganun, oud and others that are not available in the Tanzanian mainland”²⁰. The emphasis of Zenji Flewa over Bongo Flewa is ‘a choice of an identity, signified by the choice of a name, which is the most fundamental act of self-identification that a group can engage in’ (Spencer 1994: 548). Music is the particular space of negotiation of ethnicity and identity (Stokes 1994) and the arena of the cultural struggle. Despite the fact that Tanzania is formed by the merger of Tanganyika and Zanzibar the preference of the term Zenji Flewa by some artists resonates well with words by Hoyle (2002:147) that ‘Zanzibar continues, however, to guard its autonomy, and in some respects the union remains fragile’.

Another technique adopted by Zanzibar’s youth is to do music without the acknowledgement of one’s parent, because “If your parents notice that you do music they feel bad that is why we do it secretly in our *maskani*”²¹. *Maskani* is a place where youth meet as their ‘office’. It can be in one’s room, at the unfinished or abandoned building or under the tree. It is also known as *kijiweni*, camp or ghetto. Most youths especially unemployed and/or on their weekends like to buy time at *maskani*. They use *maskani* to develop plans, strategies, compose songs, rehearse, and sometimes some of them smoke *weed* (cf. Omari 2009: 72-3). With regard to Pemba some of the underground Bongo Flewa artists revealed that they have already composed their songs but they haven’t recorded them yet due to lack of money and recording facilities. But lack of recording studios does not deter these determined artists because “Although I am doing it secretly my plans are to go to Bongo [Dar es Salaam] to look for mainstream artists to help me”²².

Migration in search of more opportunities in music caused by lack of sponsors, recording studios, radio stations, distributors and big artists to collaborate with is also one of the major initiatives adopted by Bongo Flewa artists, both in the Islands and Mainland. For instance, the group Offside Trick and Ally Ramadhani a.k.a AT originally based in

²⁰ Ramadhani Madogo a.k.a Rama B is currently a radio presenter at Zenji FM Radio, Zanzibar. He was a hip hop from New Rapping Style crew (NRS) that started in 1998, he then went solo. He claims to be the founder of the term Zenji Flewa.

²¹ Ahmed Ali Salim a.k.a Prince, interview by author on 14th Sept. 2010, Pemba

²² Ansvari Etheri, Pemba also known as Michael Jackson *ibid*

Zanzibar have moved to Dar es Salaam. ‘Offside Trick is an old group in Zanzibar but as artists are perceived as hooligans and due to lack of enough support they (with their recording studio called Akhenato Records) moved to Dar es Salaam. In Dar es Salaam they became popular so quickly with their songs which they previously recorded in Zanzibar’²³. ‘In Zanzibar there is a problem of music distributors and population is small compared to Dar es Salaam so we have to go to Dar es Salaam to look for distributors and market for our albums; because Dar es Salaam is the centre for everything’²⁴. Alhaji Goya explains his case ‘I started music in 1998 when I went to Dar es Salaam but when my parents knew that I was doing music they saw that I would become a bandit so they returned me to Zanzibar’²⁵. the tendency to looking for the opportunities for Tanzanians can be traced back since colonial time. ‘The relationship between mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar existed since the colonial rule. For instance, people from Tanganyika used to go to the islands to work in clove plantation (Ferguson 1991: 40; Othman 1995; 170). The reasons given for migrating to Dar es Salaam and not elsewhere do suggest that it is a ‘site of juxtaposition between the local, the national and the cosmopolitan (Brennan et al. 2007:13) which offers the business, social and economic advancement (REPOA 1998: 30).

Furthermore, due to lack of facilities such as recording studios and lack of money to record their songs and/or to travel to Dar es Salaam they decide to engage themselves in dancing, popularly known as *kushakeshake*. *Kushakeshake*, also common in the Mainland, is a dancing style like break dancing which has now re-emerged among the youth. With regard to Pemba there are currently no Bongo Flewa artists, *kushakeshake* serves as one of the ways to engage in music arena. It becomes a quick way for these youth to get money through entrance fees when dancing at the festivals, ceremonies and holidays. Lost Boys, the *shakeshake* group in Pemba, while dancing imitate idols from America in terms of outfits and hair fashion. ‘To make our dancing shows attractive I

²³ Sadick Ali a.k.a DJ Flash in Zanzibar, he is one of the hip hop founders in 1980s, interview by author on 26 Oct. 2010, Zanzibar; Salum Ali Mselem; Answari Etheri also known as Michael Jackson; Dorica, Didah; Shot Gun; Berry Black; Dj Cool Para, *ibid*

²⁴ Rico Single *ibid*

²⁵ Alhaji Goya *ibid*

normally don't straighten my hair but I wear wig so I look like the late Michael Jackson. But we have to do it far from our homes. Parents dislike it because they associate it with hooliganism especially the way artists dress up. They say we imitate Western culture hence we can forgo our tradition of wearing *kanzu* and *kofia*'²⁶. *Kanzu* and *kofia* are popular male Swahili clothes, Fair (1998:79, 82, 94) points out that according to observers of 19th century Zanzibar, male Swahili residents of the island typically wore a *kanzu*, white calico gown reaching to the ankles [...]. They also covered their heads, either with an embroidered cap known as a *kofia* [...]. By the turn of the century, the *kanzu* and *kofia* became the most common items of clothing for men living in Zanzibar. Clothing served as one important and visually immediate means of articulating these changes of identity'.

Youth's effort to make sure that Bongo Flewa music survives is also witnessed on the radio programmes. Ali Kombo, a radio presenter of Micheweni Community Radio in Pemba, reveals that "It is interesting that on the radio program *Chaguo la Msikilizaji* (Listener's Choice) most callers who are youth choose Bongo Flewa music. But the older generations want us to continuously play qasida. But we can't because this is a community radio it is not aligned with any religion or tribe"²⁷. Generational conflicts in Africa before and after independence are commonplace due to having different cultural interests. For instance, 'The clash between older generation and the young educated ones was a general feature throughout sub-Saharan Africa in colonial times. And in post-independence era schools continue to produce music disliked by the older generation' (Collins 2002, Burgess 1999, 2002, Suriano 2008, Chachage 2002, Ivaska 2005, 2007, Ekstron 2010). In the post socialist Tanzania technological development and conglomeration of media are the current sources of the generational conflicts. As they lead to the cheap accessibility of music and disseminate images that are considered immoral or indecent to society. Despite the parental objections and other obstacles Bongo Flewa continues to flourish due to the existence of media and the fact that it offers employment for many youth in Tanzania. Hence, 'The youth...claiming their rightful

²⁶ Michael Jackson and Ahmed Ali Salim a.k.a Prince *ibid*

²⁷ Ali Masoud Kombo, interview by author 22 September 2010, Pemba

place in the never-ending movement of identity construction, of curving out new ways of being and of making history' (Akindes 2002: 101).

Youth continually plead parents and society that music is not hooliganism. Their talents should be nurtured because music is an education, entertainment and employment. To show that artists will not retreat, Alhaji Goya in his song *Mwanajeshi Halisi* [Real Soldier] points out:

<i>Mwanajeshi Halisi</i> [Real Soldier] by Alhaji Goya	
Mwanajeshi bado nipo kwenye vita ya kita Nagangamala nakomaa sitokata tama... Ninachokitaka sasa wasanii tuheshimike Kutuita wahuni hili jina liondoke... Alhaji Goya mdomo ndio silaha yangu Mwanajeshi ukisikia mwanajeshi sio nashika gun...	I am a soldier still in the war I stick to the guns I'll not be discouraged... What I want now is for artists to be respected Don't call us hooligans any more... Alhaji Goya mouth is my sole weapon When you hear that I'm a soldier don't think that I hold a gun...

Due to lack of sponsors and distributors of their artistic works artists plead support from the government to intervene and also to start music school. Rico Single puts his pledge that "The Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar is not whole supportive to artists. We want it to be like the Mainland so that companies should be allowed to sponsor us. Because some companies such as breweries are not allowed to sponsor even soccer teams because they are selling beers. It is forbidden to wear sporty jerseys or t-shirts that advertise alcohol; this is unfair, while the same government grants permission to sell alcoholic beverages in Zanzibar. Beers are sold in the hotels and bars, and some officials and Zanzibaris also drink beers. Taxes are imposed on alcoholic beverages whose money helps to run the government. But it does not want to see a soccer player or an artist being sponsored by the breweries and wearing a Serengeti²⁸ t-shirt. Government hinders development of the youth, it lets us down"²⁹. According to Rico Single it is not allowed in Zanzibar for a beer company to sponsor events. Although there are other companies or organisations that can sponsor Bongo Flewa artists in Zanzibar but Rico Single wants breweries sponsor artists like in the Mainland.

²⁸ Serengeti it is the name of the biggest animal National Parks in Tanzania, but it is also a name of a brewery and a beer. Breweries are one of sponsors of various entertainment activities in the Tanzanian mainland. For instance, Tanzania Breweries Company organize the Awards called Kilimanjaro Music Awards that involve various musicians and artists in the Tanzanian mainland.

²⁹ Rico Single, *ibid*

Generational conflict between old and young men has long been recognized as a foundational feature of many African societies (Brennan 2006:223) as youth continually get inspirations from various new styles and fashions such as dance, music and clothes. ‘The struggle over youth was a central theme of Zanzibar's revolutionary past, and it dominated much of the discourse of the period’ (Burgess 1999: 45). The revolutionary leaders in Zanzibar in the 1960s and 1970s prohibited movie goers from adoption of Western clothing and hair styles as they were contrary to African cultural integrity, socialist values and Muslim standards. They even controlled the importation of all clothing into the islands. Clothing decree was introduced to fashions in clothing, cosmetics, and hairstyles. For women included cosmetics, skin creams, long nails, wigs, miniskirts, slacks, shorts, and transparent blouses. Prohibited for men were such as slim fitting shirts, bottleneck pants (*suruali za chupa*), bell bottom pants (*mabuga*), shorts, big Afros, high-heeled boots, and T-shirts printed with ‘disrespectful words’. Despite the prohibition both male and female youth in the late 1960s began to resist by privately taking material to tailors who made clothing according to the latest film styles. They also grew their hair and women began to wear wigs and to use cosmetics. Afro Shirazi Party Youth League arrested the offenders, took them to court, had their heads shaved or beat them up. They also prohibit cinematic images of violence, slavery, marijuana, drunkenness, nudity and sex or those that encouraged disrespect for the government (Burgess 1999, 2002). The similar campaigns were also introduced in the 1960s and 1970s to the youth in the Tanzanian mainland. The Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) Youth League banned the indecent fashion such as mini skirt in Dar es Salaam as was antithetical to ‘national culture’ (cf. Ivaska 2005,2007, Suriano 2008, Ekstron 2010). The generational conflicts are recurrent because ‘The past like the present is not finite, it is continuously under construction informed by new experiences. The balance between the past, present and the future lies at the heart of the enigma called identity. Memories of the past, exigencies of the present and anxiety over the future are the currents that propel identity articulation. They generate the tensions which foreground the *why*, *when* and *how* groups insist upon their identities (Okwori 2002: 149).

6.0 Conclusion

This paper examines the introduction of Bongo Fleva music in the 1980s and how it creates generational conflicts in Zanzibar; between youth who want 'new' cultural identity and the older generation who are in defence of Islamic practices and traditional norms. The argument is that youth in Zanzibar, like other youth across the world, are fascinated by the hip hop culture; but they face various difficulties that hinder their music progress. This include, among others, lack of media and recording facilities, poverty, lack of family support, lack of sponsors and parental support. Throughout this study it is shown that there are struggles in both sides. On the one hand, the older generations struggle for preserving the traditional norms and culture, Islamic conventions and good upbringing of their children. On the other hand, the younger generation struggle against parental objections in favour of Bongo Fleva music. While parents strive to safeguard religious and traditional values, youth strive to be part of the global culture. They adopt various strategies like concealment of their real names, doing it secretively, adoption of *shake shake* and moving to somewhere else in search of recording studios, markets, collaboration with other mainstream artists and media outlets whereby they can be hosted at or featured in various radio or television music programmes. Their cultural struggle is also revealed in their crew names and creativity in their music styles such as *taarap*. In this instance, Bongo Fleva, initially started as rap, is a good phenomenon in explaining youth movement in the construction of cultural identity. Although Bongo Fleva is fairly welcome in Zanzibar it has been revealed that their songs lyrics are very useful in dealing with societal issues. In their songs artists strive to make sure that Zanzibar flourishes by developing tourism industry and criticize leaders' evils and poor life situation. It is also important to note that even if their songs are politically charged they also make fun of leisure stuffs such as alcohol, *Champagne* a song by Rico Single is a good example. This article reveals that in spite of the fact that Zanzibar population is mainly Muslims there is also co-existence between traditional practices, Islamic practices and popular culture forms. To quote Hoyle's word, 'Zanzibar is a product of 'two worlds'; the modern and Islam-traditional (Hoyle (2002:145).

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