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TRADITIONAL DANCES AND BONGO FLEVA: A STUDY OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN *NGOMA* GROUPS IN TANZANIA

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Kasi ya vijana katika kukuza muziki wa kizazi kipya katika kipindi cha utandawazi haiendani na kasi ya ukuzaji wa ngoma za asili. Mpaka sasa haujafanyika utafiti wa kina kuhusu kuzuka kwa tabia hii. Makala haya yanatumia mahojiano na vikundi vya ngoma vitatu halikadhalika wanamuziki wa kizazi kipya kuweka bayana chanzo cha tatizo. Aidha, makala haya yanatumia nadharia ya utendaji kama darubini kuchunguza matatizo ya kijamii, kisiasa, kiuchumi na kiutamaduni yanayowakumba vijana na namna yanavyochochea mfumuko wa tabia hii mpya. Utafiti huu umegundua kwamba uhaba wa mianya ya kiuchumi na kisiasa kwa vijana, nafasi ya ngoma za asili katika jamii ya sasa, mahusiano hasi kati ya vijana na wazee katika kuuendeleza utamaduni pamoja na vijana kutaka maendeleo ya haraka kuwa ndio chimbuko la tatizo.

Introduction

Much has been done pertaining to traditional dances in Tanzania. Studies have been conducted to explore the continuity and change of traditional dances, analysis of form and content, movements and formations in traditional dances (Kaduma 1972; Kapingu 1990; Songoyi 2005). An evolution of traditional dances from societal to commercial use and choreographic changes as an outcome of this shift was also explored by Elias Songoyi (1989) and Herbert Makoye (1996). Megan Browning (2009) conducted her study on the transformation of Tanzanian traditional dances as a result of Westernization and globalization. Laura Edmondson (2001) explored the manifestation of the female body in Tanzanian traditional dances from a feminist point of view. Through female dance movements she reveals the marginalized status of women in Tanzania.

As for hybrid cultures in Tanzania, studies have been conducted to explore Hip-hop and Bongo Fleva music. The roles of Bongo Fleva in shaping youth identities and bringing change to Tanzanian society have been studied by Maria Suriano (2006, 2007), Birgit Englert (2008), Shani Omari (2011), and Uta Reuster-Jahn (2007). Likewise, the position of Bongo Fleva in Tanzanian politics has comprehensively been examined by Reuster-Jahn (2008) and Englert (2008). The function of Bongo Fleva as an industry, with special attention to the relationship between youth artists and the music producers has been discussed by Reuster-Jahn and Hacke (2011). Another area of research has been the form and content of Bongo Fleva lyrics and the connection of it to traditional culture (Englert 2003; Reuster-Jahn 2007).

Notwithstanding the numerous studies conducted on the subjects of traditional dances on the one hand and Bongo Fleva on the other, scant attention has been paid to the impact of youths' current concern with Bongo Fleva on their involvement and participation in traditional dances. This article sets out to examine the problems youth face in traditional dance groups which are usually led by older persons.[1] It will show that youth get negative responses when trying to innovate dance styles. Moreover, they often feel deprived of economic opportunities by the older group members and as a result tend to imagine better prospects in the sector of Bongo Fleva. The article asks for the social, cultural, economic and political factors that contribute to such a shift of youths' interest from traditional dance to Bongo Fleva.

As a prerequisite for this study, it must be defined what youth in the Tanzanian context means. According to the African Youth Charter (2006: 3) youth is a person between 15 and 35 years old. The Tanzania Youth Development Policy suggests that youth is anyone whose age ranges from 18 to 24 (Ministry of Labour and Youth Development 1996: 5). These definitions, however, need to be reviewed because they do not take into account the reality that is currently on the ground. A common understanding of youth in Tanzania goes beyond a life course perspective to include anyone whose survival depends upon his or her parents irrespective of age. In other words, an individual who does not have established an own family is categorized as youth (Reuster-Jahn 2007: 226) even if his or her age exceeds 45 years. In some contexts being a youth depends upon individuals and the way they portray themselves in a society. When an old person looks like a youth in either one or two of the following aspects - namely clothing style, hair cutting style, movements and language – he or she may be labelled as youth with the special name of *mzee-kijana* (an elderly-youth). This term has the negative connotation that an individual, due to different reasons, has been unable to fully experience his or her youth life. For this reason, he or she is trying to make up for it in adulthood. Following the categorization of youth in a life course perspective, I argue that similar to the concept of gender and race, the concept of age is socially constructed (Falk & Falk, 2005: 67). As such, it can neither be adopted nor generalized. For this article youth is the one who considers him or herself as youth (even if the age exceeds 40). The most important definition the article considers is that of a person defining him or herself as youth.

Dilemma of the Terms Tradition and Traditional Dance

In the context of this article, it is also important to define the meaning of the term tradition and traditional dance, as they are often perceived negatively by youth. In many situations something traditional is linked to conservatism, barbarism, and old-fashioned behaviour preventing the civilization process (Huntington 1993). Principally, the definition of tradition depends on who

[1] The paper was first presented at the International Swahili Colloquium, Bayreuth University, Germany, held between 17th - 20th May 2012.

defines it, from which perspective and for whose interests (Santos 2008). It has been argued that the concept of tradition is a western concept, which emerged to justify other cultures as ill-fated cultures (Adeleke 2005). Not only does the concept imply that non-western cultures are backwards, but it holds up western cultures as the superior cultures. It is along this line where Boaventura Santos argues that classifying some cultures as 'other' and other cultures as high-class cultures should be viewed as ignorance that needs to be addressed by seeking knowledge about it (2008: 18). Karin Barber (2007) insists on the importance of recognizing non-western cultures as cultures similar to western cultures since they are useful to the people who created them. In her study titled *The Anthropology of Text, Persons and Publics – Oral and Written Culture in Africa and beyond*, she argues that oral texts such as songs, dance performances, proverbs and sayings are not given the same weight as printed texts merely because they are not in written format, and are transmitted orally from generation to generation. She calls for the recognition of oral texts on the ground that they are commentaries, interpretations and reflections of how communities understand themselves (Barber 2007: 5).

Despite the fact that the article calls for recognition of oral text and performances, this study admits that some of the oral traditions and performances that are performed can cause social, economic and health risks. For example, among the Sukuma there is a dance called Chagulaga which involves young people coupling up and engaging in sexual intercourse. This practice is now deserted, because of fear of HIV as well as the rejection by religious and educational institutions particularly in urban areas (Elizabeth Shakidula and Debora Shejamabu, interviews by the author, 2013). In rural areas, where these cultural performances and rituals are prevalent, the government takes various measures to alert people with regard to detrimental effects of such traditions.

In this article, I use a concept of tradition that does not imply an exact reproduction of the past but rather is characterized by continuous change and modification of experiences to reflect to the changing realities (Hammer 1992: 398). Accordingly, the concept of traditional dance for the purpose of this article is any traditional dance that reflects the history and culture of Tanzania society. Such dances, however, are not static. They undergo changes that reflect social, economic, political realities of Tanzanian society.

Bongo Fleva in Tanzania

The name Bongo Fleva was formed by combining two terms. *Bongo* is a Swahili word that recently has become a nickname of Dar es Salaam and Tanzania as a whole, whereas *Fleva* is a term borrowed from the English term ('flavour'). The Swahili equivalent of flavour is *ladha*. Thus, Bongo Fleva means *ladha ya hapa hapa* or *ladha ya nyumbani*. As a musical category, it fuses elements from Hip hop, R&B, Zouk, Reggae, Congolese Bolingo and Indian music (Suriano 2006; Reuster-Jahn & Hacke 2011). The term bongo is derived from the Swahili word ubongo meaning

'brain'. The word connotes that surviving in Dar es Salaam is not easy. One needs an active brain to sustain a living, unlike in the countryside where farming activities and support from others can, without a doubt, assist one to sustain a living, even without the use of much intelligence. To emphasize the linking idea between *ubongo* (brain) and Dar es Salaam, there is the saying *kuishi Dar es Salaam ni kidato cha sita* (living in Dar es Salaam is being a high school graduate). Such a saying signifies that everybody qualifies to be identified as a graduate of Advanced Level as long as he or she manages to sustain a living in Dar es Salaam. The saying was built around the fact that life in Dar es Salaam is expensive as one has to buy everything. The saying was essentially coined to refer to youth who left the villages and fled to Dar es Salaam in search of work and better living conditions. Nevertheless, in Dar es Salaam many have not found decent employment, though they manage to survive. Recently the name Bongo Fleva has been changed by some DJs and Bongo Fleva artists to Bongo clever. The term was coined to mean that those who engage in Bongo Fleva to make a living also need brains and smartness in order to attain this goal. It reflects the growing difficulties for artists to survive in the music industry. In addition, the use of this term was a strategy employed by some Bongo Fleva musicians to intimidate newcomers among musicians. By using the term, they tell them that becoming a Bongo Fleva musician is not as easy as many think (Reuster-Jahn 2008: 44). Apart from talent, cleverness matters.

While much of the youths engaged in Bongo Fleva think that it is cleverness that matters, young dancers in traditional dance groups believe that technological development contributes to the success of Bongo Fleva youth in the music industry. This is because they see that Bongo Fleva artists do not need instruments or an orchestra on the stage, whereas in traditional dance the music crew is as essential as dancers since they depend on one another to make the performance comprehensive (Kibena, interview by the author, 2012).

Performance Theory

Performance is a very broad term used in different fields of study varying from organization studies, education, media, sports, theatre, to name just a few. For the purpose of this study the discussion will focus on performance as a theatrical activity with special focus on its social and political dimension. Performance as theatrical activity is understood as tangible, bounded events that involve the presentation of rehearsed artistic actions. Schechner (1985) defines performance as restored behaviour or twice behaved behaviour.

Performance as social, economic and political activity has been explored by a good number of scholars. Penina Muhando Mlama (1991) who explores performance from a social point of view argues that performance is a powerful tool in helping community members discover their social problems and involve themselves fully in finding out solutions which are within their capacities. Kelly Askew (2002) investigates performance from a political point of view. In her study of Taarab

she argues that performance grants performers with the opportunity to engage in political disputes. It offers the audience as well as performers an opportunity to reflect upon their situation by distancing themselves and to adopt another personality that offers them a new way of understanding themselves.

In my study I employ performance theory as an analytical tool to explore how youth's involvement in dance groups as performers helps them discover their social, economic, cultural and political problems and whether or not dance assists youths' search for solutions.

Selection of Groups and Methodology

Three dance groups were selected for this study, which was conducted in Iringa and Dar es Salaam from June 2012 to December 2012.[2] These were Tanangozi, UMATI, and Hayahaya dance groups. Tanangozi is a village in Iringa rural district, almost 35 kilometres from the town of Iringa. The name of the group was derived from the village name. The group was established in 1986. Since its leader Mzee[3] Fabian Mwakalinga received an invitation to perform in Dar es Salaam in a political event, the group continues to perform for commercial purposes. The group has 30 members, three females. The group has two leaders; Mzee Fabian Mwakalinga is the chairman of the group, while Chesco Mduda is the assistant chairman. The group was selected to represent dance groups in rural locations.

Hayahaya dance group from Dar es Salaam was selected as part of respondent surveys. Hayahaya as a group began in 2008 with six members. Currently the group has eight members. This means that since its establishment, the group has grown by only two members. The rationale is, therefore, to examine the factors for the small increase in members.

The third group selected for this study was UMATI, a dance group located in Iringa town. The name UMATI was derived from the name of the NGO for which this group was initiated. UMATI is an abbreviation of *Chama cha Uzazi na Malezi Bora* which means the 'union for reproductive health and quality care'. The group was inaugurated for the purpose of sensitizing the community concerning the significance of reproductive health services and childrearing. The group was selected because of its location in urban Iringa. In this respect, it offers the possibility for the researcher to triangulate information provided by respondents from Iringa rural.

The study employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews and Participant Performer Researcher (PPR) as methods. In-depth interviews were employed to leaders and Bongo Fleva musicians and some members who felt timid to articulate their views during FGDs. The

[2] A second period of field research for my PhD project on ngoma groups was conducted between September 2013 and January 2014.

[3] *Mzee* meaning 'old man' in Swahili is a respectful form of address.

interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. PPR is another method employed in collecting data for this study. All chosen methods were useful for collecting data for this study. FGD for instance, helped me to gather information within a short period of time (Laws, Harper & Marcus 2003: 57). Whilst interviews provided me with enough time to discuss issues with my informants in detailed fashion, PPR gave me admission to collect first-hand data since the method suggests that the researcher has to join performers in the course of performance (Na'Allah 2009: 39). PPR assisted me to live the world of dancers all the way through my fieldwork and to experience first-hand challenges, fears, expectations, hopes and what dancers considered achievement.

Youth Participation in Dance: A Historical Overview

In Tanzania, similar to any African country, in the pre-colonial era people learned to dance from childhood. It happened almost naturally as mothers in Africa tended to carry infants and very young children on their back in social activities, including cultural gatherings. Funeral and harvest ceremonies constituted cultural activities where parents taught their children to dance by dancing with them on their backs (Nketia 1974: 60). Following such a tendency, youth as they crossed frontiers to adulthood were likely to possess some early knowledge of dance as an outcome of this early experience. Being a youth in a pre-colonial society had its own connotations. Commonly, the concept of youth included submissiveness, respect towards older people and a passive reception of culture (Riccio 2007: 137). Such a condition, therefore, signified a need for supplementary training to enable unskilled youth to gain proficiency in their culture, including dancing.

In contrast, the older generations were taken to be experts, active participants of traditional dances and their role was to guarantee the transmission of traditional dances from one cohort to the next (Semali 1999; Diallo & Hall 1989). Youth's socialization to culture in pre-colonial society depended much upon the older generation (Muchira 2001: 2). Preparing youth for traditional dances was the responsibility of the whole society. In the absence of the biological mother, an African child was likely to be raised even by the neighbour and taught all necessary skills (Dike 2004: 85) including the art of dancing. Involvement of youth in traditional dances was not a choice but rather a necessary step towards acquiring the knowledge, skills and moral values of society. Through youths' involvement in traditional dances, the community was able to know them better and select what was seen as best for them. Selection of what was appropriate in their future was done through critical analysis of feelings, thoughts and the mood they demonstrated in the course of dancing (Muchira 2001: 5; Diallo & Hall 1989). Through youths' involvement in dance, their careers were revealed, nurtured, and later, internalized in their actual lives. Looking at the role traditional dances played in pre-colonial society, it is appropriate to view them as similar to social institutions, for they helped participants by involving all their senses in the learning process.

Irrespective of the fact that traditional dances during pre-colonial Tanzania were handed down smoothly from generation to generation, the recent situation differs greatly. The next part discusses the factors behind transitions from traditional dance to the Bongo Fleva sector.

From Traditional Dances to Bongo Fleva: the Question of Authenticity

Authenticity refers to an act of being sincere to the source. However, today, authenticity does not mean copying traditional culture, but rather involves flexibility and negotiation (Peterson 1997: 6). Examining the notion of authenticity in a performance perspective, Richard Peterson points out that authenticity in recent times is a matter of negotiation between performers, diverse commercial interests and fans. Owing to changes taking place around the world and the rapid transformation of consumer taste as an upshot of global interconnectedness, he contends that the authenticity of a performance is perceived differently by spectators depending on their taste. In the light of performances organized for international audiences, even a superimposed and juxtaposed performance combining a variety of elements from diverse sources can be authentic while a similar performance presented to a local audience may be written off as inauthentic (Ibid). Peterson argues that the idea of "hybrid", in our time, is increasingly becoming a new form of authenticity.

In Tanzania, the issue of authenticity was a major constraint faced by youth, who founded their own groups or joined established dance groups to raise their income. The situation was apparent during interviews with young members of UMATI dance group from Iringa town. They offered a fascinating example of a new creative dance called *Lingunjumu modern*, which is a product of their own creativity. The dance juxtaposes a variety of dance movements and patterns from *Lingunjumu* and *Sindimba* dances of southern Tanzania, the *Akasimbo* dance from the Haya ethnic group, and *Mdundiko* dance from the coastal region. In addition, it also fuses gestures from Bongo Fleva music prominently known as *Kiduku* and *Kibega*. *Kiduku* is a dance movement where the dancers kneel down and their hands move against one another to and from, while *Kibega* is a movement that indicates wiping away the dust from one's shoulders. Among the dances which youth frequently performed, *Lingunjumu modern* was their favourite one. It is because the dance was made up in a sense that it combined different styles treasured by many of them. Paulo, an enthusiastic young drummer of UMATI, stated that adult members provided negative commentary about the dance and in extreme cases the group was advised not to perform the dance in big events. The dance was censured on the basis of lacking faithfulness to Tanzanian culture and validity to Tanzanian society. Paulo explained:

> *Mara inapotokea tunacheza ngoma, ambayo kiukweli tunaicheza karibia kila onyesho, baadhi ya watu wazima mara nyingi husema tunachanganya miondoko mbalimbali kwa sababu hatuzijui ngoma za asili kwa urefu wake. Kwa maana hiyo tunawachanganya watazamaji kwa ujumla hasa watoto.* (September 2012, Iringa).

> When we engage in dance performance (i.e. Lingunjumu modern), which we perform it in almost every event, some adults often become critical in our performance, arguing that we confuse movements from diverse sources, because we are not fully accustomed with traditional dances. In this sense, we also confuse the audience – younger audience in particular.

Whilst the older generation posed criticism on choreographed dances performed by the youth, youth and young adults gave their opinion that the dance is captivating. Their appreciation grounded on the creativity that youths employed in dance. They also appreciated the way youths introduced musical instruments such as guitar and keyboard. This was partly born out of the necessity to replace special drums that were difficult to find or needed the skin of wild animals, which, in some cases, are not allowed to be killed without special permission.

My discussion with youth from UMATI dance group revealed that their aim in combining various movements from different traditional dances, contemporary musical instruments and Bongo Fleva is to capture the interests of youth, older people and children alike. Most of the children had certainly not been exposed to traditional dances but only to modern styles through television and YouTube. The dancers of UMATI argued that combining a variety of movements and modern instruments attracts the younger generation, not just to consume, but also to learn traditional dances.

To find out the perception of adults concerning the new practice of combining traditional dances with modern styles, an interview was conducted with Mzee Fabian Mwakalinga of Tanangozi group. By the time this study was carried out, he was 85 years old. He was the chairman of Tanangozi Dance Group in rural Iringa. Regarding the hybridity in traditional dance, Mzee Mwakalinga had this to say:

> *Kuchanganya mambo ya kisasa katika ngoma si lolote zaidi ya kuzitia uchafu tu ngoma zetu. Ni alama ya ulimbukeni wa baadhi ya vijana wanaodhani kila kitu kinachofanywa na wa Magharibi ndio bora sana. Katika kundi letu vijana hawana nguvu ya aina hiyo.*
>
> Combining modern elements with traditional dance is nothing but distorting our traditional dances. And this is a sign of parroting the Western elements of dances by youth who think that everything that comes from the West is the best. Youth in our group do not hold such influences. (Mzee Mwakalinga, July 2012, translation by the author)

Mzee Mwakalinga's view was also expressed by adult audience members in Iringa, who I interviewed. Hybrid dance styles were blamed by some adults as "*aina mpya ya ufisadi unaofanywa na vijana katika tamaduni zetu"* (a new form of cultural corruption engineered by the youth on our culture) (Rebeka, interview with the author, December 2012). Muñoz and Marín (2006) also revealed such a tension between the older generation and youths' creative works in Colombia. In their study they found that new trends in performing art are seen by older people as corrupting culture or as cultural illiteracy rather than a novel form of creativity. Authors further

suggest that youths' creative performances should be understood by adults, not as a corruption of culture but rather an interpretation of traditional culture according to youths' understanding of the world.

My study revealed that conflicts with their leaders and older audience over the question of authenticity that youths encounter in traditional dance groups is an important factor that pushes them to abandon their career as dancers and attempt to uncover other chances for survival. UMATI dance group in Iringa town offers a good example here. Some of the youth in this group already had their own Bongo Fleva *mistari* (verses)[4] recorded in local studios in order to try their luck as musicians. It was an attempt to change their careers from traditional dancers to popular music that would allow the youths to stay in the creative sector. However, this turned out to be difficult, as they encountered discouragement by radio DJs who rejected their locally produced recordings.

The situation was even worse for some youths in the Hayahaya dance group in Dar es Salaam. For some of the youths in this group, their presence in the dance group was just because they had no other pastime activity. Some had not expected the challenges in performing traditional dances. Thus, the dance group was used as *kijiwe* (a meeting place) while searching for other opportunities. Although youth enjoyed their career as dancers, yet, challenges from the older generation made them feel as outsiders in their own culture. Some stated that because of these challenges, they felt better to give up the dance career in order to enjoy creative freedom individually.

The Question of the Structure of Dance Groups

Traditional dance groups, similar to other organizations, need being managed. Usually, the management team is made up of a chairperson, a deputy chairperson, a secretary and a treasurer. Chairpersons and secretaries in particular are responsible for searching for performance opportunities and ensuring that group members fulfil their obligations as stated in the constitution. Likewise, leaders are accountable for planning and reshuffling the performance casts, and organizing, who will do what and how during live shows.

However, the study revealed that managerial issues are an enormous setback for the development of dance groups, particularly in the rural areas. Tanangozi dance group, residing in a village, may be used as an example. Once a leader was appointed it was implied that it was death alone (or permanent sickness) that would cause him to step down. In the case of sickness, yet, the sick leader was obliged to appoint somebody who would subsequently assume his responsibility; a practise which denied the youth the opportunity to show their leadership proficiency. Discussion

[4] *Mistari* (literally meaning 'lines') is a slang term used by the youths to mean verses. The Standard Swahili term for 'verse' is *ubeti* (singular) and the plural of it is *beti*.

with adults indicated that the practice was justified by the necessity to keep the group going. Arguing against youth leaders, Chesco Mwinuka, a village chairman had this to recount:

> *Tunapendelea wazee kushika madaraka kwa sababu uzoefu wetu unaonyesha kuwa vijana katika makundi mara nyingi ni watu wenye kughafirika kwa haraka, wanapenda kupata matokeo ya haraka pia hawana uwezo wa kutulia muda mrefu katika kundi hasa wanapoona matokeo si ya papo kwa papo. Tunachukua jambo hili kuwa ni la hatari kwa maendeleo ya kundi letu.*
>
> We prefer that elders take the leadership role, because our experience shows that youth in dance groups quickly forget our past and want to see immediate results of their efforts without entertaining perseverance in dance activities in our groups. We consider this matter as undermining the progress of our groups.

The quotation reflects the view that youth are rarely selected to assume leadership responsibilities. They are bypassed in the name of preparing them for taking up leadership responsibility in the future.[5]

Youths' lack of access to leadership is also seen through the number of years the older generations have spent in leadership. Mzee Mwakalinga, for example, began to lead the Tanangozi dance group since 1986. However, this practice has grave impacts on issues related to payments. In productions where no payment was involved, youths had access to major roles. However, in productions where payment was involved, youths were either excluded in the cast or given minor responsibilities, so as to lower their share. Discussions with youthful informants in Tanangozi group shed some light on the financial exclusion of youths:

> *Kwa maonyesho ambayo mwisho wake ni pesa, mara nyingi tunanyimwa majukumu mazito. Badala yake tunapewa majukumu mepesi tu. Majukumu hayo ni pamoja na kupasha ngoma, kubeba ngoma mpaka eneo la onyesho na kuwasaidia wachezaji katika uvaaji wa sare wakati wa maadalizi ya onyesho. Hakuna kijana anayependa haya. Tunapenda kufanya zaidi ya hayo lakini hatupewi nafasi hiyo.*
>
> In performances which are money oriented, we are often not assigned major roles. Instead we are given only minor roles, such as warming drums, carrying drum to the performing location and helping adults in putting on costumes for the show. None of the youths is happy with this. We all want to do more than we do, but we are not given the chance to take major roles. (Mwalole, interview by the author, 2011)

Owing to such an economic exclusion they experience in traditional dance groups, the majority of youths, male youths in particular, were of the view that Bongo Fleva was the only means through which one can make his money without being exploited by the generation above them. More importantly, Bongo Fleva was believed to offer a possibility for youth to become rich within no

[5] Youth' lack of access to leadership was also observed by the United Nations (UN) in their World Youth Report 2005. They argue that youth are denied their right to participate in politics as leaders. The UN study connects the problem of political and social instability in many countries with political exclusion which youth experience throughout their lives (UN 2005: 16).

time. For this reason, some of them were heard talking about the advantage of moving to Bongo Fleva, and thus were planning strategies to become Bongo Fleva performers. One of the youth informants in Tanangozi village revealed to me:

> *Wenzetu wa Bongo Fleva akitoa albam moja au mbili tu mambo yake yananyooka kinoma. Mtu anajenga, ananunua gari yenye akili na kupata pesa ya ziada kwa ajili ya kutoa albam nyingine.* [6]
>
> Our fellow youth doing Bongo Fleva who manage to produce two albums, often get a lot of money. They own houses, buy expensive cars, and still can save some money for recording more albums in the future. (Sijali, interview by the author, 2012)

The youths' perception of the opportunities of becoming wealthy overnight is incompatible with reality.[7] The evidence shows that these are simplistic notions of youths towards Bongo Fleva music. The majority of Bongo Fleva musicians have very little income or benefit.

The youth's growing dream, however, seems to be grounded on achievements of renowned musicians, so-called superstars such as the Bongo Fleva artist Diamond. His success and popularity in Bongo Fleva music has been at its peak for some years now. He gains good income out of his career as Bongo Fleva musician. His success, though, was not achieved just from his talent as many youths think. He did, and still does, work hard to get and hold that position. Some of these efforts include composing in Taarab, Muziki wa dansi and Mchiriku lyrics as well as Bongo Fleva. The artist's versatility with lyrics from different musical genres can be viewed as an attempt to prepare for whatever shift of taste among the customers in the market might occur. An additional strategy he employs is to work with media companies. Since the second half of the year 2012, Diamond began to work with Global Publishers, a private company dealing with publishing tabloids. The company now plays an important role in marketing Diamond and assisting him organizing his shows. It is obvious that since Diamond began his music career, he has travelled many places within Africa, Europe and the US for live shows, too.

The Shift to Bongo Fleva: the Question of Gatekeepers and Access to the Market

A tendency of government leaders to utilize dancers' energy and intellect for their interests has a long history in Tanzania.[8] Songoyi (1988) in his study of commercialization and its impact on traditional dances recounted that after independence, dance groups were a tool for social and political control. Dance groups were utilized by leaders as a mouthpiece to voice their political propaganda to the masses. TOT (Tanzania One Theatre) and Muungano were groups inaugurated

[6] *Gari yenye akili* (a clever car) is a slang term employed by the youth to refer to an expensive car or a car of high quality.

[7] See for example Reuster-Jahn (2010) and Reuster-Jahn & Hacke (2011).

[8] For further information about exploitative behavior of leaders to the artists see also Askew (2002).

soon after independence to serve such an end (Songoyi 1988).[9] In spite of utilizing dancers to spread their propaganda, dancers occupied an incredibly subordinate position (Edmondson 2007: 20).

The recent status of dancers is not very different from that of the post-independence period. Exploitation sometimes is even worse than soon after independence. Youth dancers who got a chance to participate in political events often lamented that their value was reduced after the show ended. In circumstances where the payments were not made beforehand, dancers sometimes made no profit at all seeing that they had to carry the musical instruments with them in public transport or to rent a car, costs which they had to bear themselves. While youth dancers were abandoned at the showground, they perceived Bongo Fleva artists being smartly handled and their pay processed faster.

The solemn scenario of financial exploitation was clearly manifest in the relation between the UMATI dance group and their cultural officers. Customers who did not know where to find dance groups usually communicate with cultural officers. Instead of cultural officers helping youth enter into profitable contracts with customers, they often use the chance to exploit the youth. Youth from one of the groups I interviewed recounted painful experiences caused by one of the cultural officers. As cultural officers represent the government, it might be appropriate to argue that the government negates its slogan of creating as many job opportunities as possible to the thousands of Tanzanian youths.[10] This is how youth perceive the situation:

> *Maafisa utamaduni mara nyingi huingia mkataba na wateja. Tuna uhakika wanapewa kiasi cha kutosha toka kwa wateja. Jambo la kushangaza maafisa hawa wanaficha pesa nyingine na kiasi kidogo kinachobaki ndicho hutuletea sisi. Tukijaribu kushawishi waongeze kiasi, hututishia kuipeleka kazi katika makundi wengine.* (Subira, interview by the author 2012)
>
> Cultural officers often make a contract with customers. We are sure that customers pay a reasonable amount only that officers take a big chunk from that payment and leave for us just a little money. Once we attempt to negotiate for a reasonable payment, we are threatened by being told that they will approach other groups to perform for similar rates.

From my own lived experience as a young artist during the last 20 years, I can confirm that some top officials have been utilizing younger artists for their own gains. The difficult economic situation and fears of being exploited also affect the relationship between dance groups. I repeatedly heard of instances where because of economic difficulties groups betrayed one another particularly when one group refused to work on the grounds that the money was not enough. Once a group negotiates

[9] See also Lange (2000).

[10] A slogan which led the recent president Honourable Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete to gain votes from youth especially in his first term bid in 2005.

for an increased amount of cash, another group often contacts the sponsors and agrees to work for less money.

The problem of a lack of solidarity is also present in Bongo Fleva. Because of fear they would jeopardise future opportunities, Bongo Fleva youth abandoned one another irrespective of friendships they had built for quite a long time. Honourable Joseph Mbilinyi's case (famously known as MR II or Sugu, his artistic name, now a member of parliament through the ticket of opposition party *Chama cha Demokrasia* - CHADEMA) could be used as an example of the struggle modern musicians face. His desire to become a politician developed over the last 10 years. Before he entered the political arena, he began to establish his interest by composing politically related songs.[11] In 2010 he decided to become a politician and in the process believed that his fellow artists could lend him a hand. However, according to Sugu the majority of youth musicians rebuffed the offer to avoid jeopardizing their economic prospects. They feared negative repercussions from the ruling party, which often gave them space to perform in political campaigns and provided them with money for their performances. Honourable Joseph Mbilinyi explained:

> When I decided to engage myself in politics through the opposition ticket, the youth whom I worked with disserted me. They thought that I would not be successful. They also thought that I had embarked into a strange game which would lead me to a bad position. They detached themselves from me except three intimacy friends of me whose career is also musicians accompanied me in search of political space. The rest fled. (Sugu, interview by the author, 2012).

This quote shows that youth musicians were disinclined to support somebody who would voice their concerns for fear of cutting the hand that feeds them or, as the Swahili say, *kukitia kitumbua mchanga*.

Conclusion

The article aimed at identifying social, economic, political and cultural problems that youths encounter in traditional dance groups and the reasons why leaving those groups for the promises of Bongo Fleva is tempting for many. Through FGDs and in-depth interviews with older and younger generations, the article could reveal that conflicts with older group members often centering on the question of authenticity on one hand subvert the participation of youth in traditional dance while increasing their participation in Bongo Fleva on the other. While adults preferred pure traditional dances, youths preferred dance mixture of current realities to which they have been exposed. Besides the dilemma in terms of authenticity, the exploitation of dancers was

[11] This in turn led Bongo Fleva artists to believe that it was investment in political songs which assisted Sugu to gain the political post. Such a belief motivated his friend Mbishi Real to begin investing in politically related songs, as is evident from Mbishi Real's album *Juhudi Binafsi* ('Self efforts', 2012).

another problem subverting the participation of youth in dance. Moreover, youth dancers feel marginalized and undervalued simply because they perform traditional dances which recently have lost in popularity compared to Bongo Fleva. Youths working in traditional dance believe that in terms of economic profit, working in the Bongo Fleva sector would be a better choice than staying in a traditional dance career. Apart from exploitation, betrayal between and within groups was another paramount problem that this study discovered. Betrayal was orchestrated mainly by poverty, which youths encountered in their lives. Given that the participation of youths in culture, including dance is vital for the country's development, and given the dilemma of youth unemployment, the government should intervene to lift up the participation. For example, the *Baraza la Sanaa Tanzania* (BASATA - National Arts Council) could introduce rates of payment in order to prevent exploitations of youths in dance groups. Seeing that cooperation between dance groups and cultural officers is problematic, it would be better if BASATA would use both local and modern media to communicate directly with artists. Media will allow communication with and between artists from different parts of Tanzania at lowest costs. BASATA also could initiate a debate on the question of authenticity in the face of globalization and multiplicity of culture. Since westernization and modernization has influenced the manifestation of culture, traditional dance in this case, we should be vigilant to such changes and pay attention to the idea of local roots and transcultural influences.

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