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Mzungu Kichaa and the Figuring of Identity in *Bongo Fleva* Music in Tanzania

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Abstract - Résumé
This article draws from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of refrain and Louise Meintjes' concept of music figure and examines various ways a Danish-born *Bongo Fleva* musician in Tanzania, Mzungu Kichaa deploys music figures to construct African and Tanzanian identities. It also examines how he uses these figures to negotiate his position in relation to these identities. To illustrate the performative effects of music figures on people's identities the article examines how the deployment of musical figures serves a double function: to claim one's Tanzanian or African identity and to announce one's difference with other identities (e.g. European or English identities) at least with regard to musical taste. As a result, Mzungu Kichaa's attempts to enter into the mainstream UK's and Danish music industry were not successful since the music figures he used, the figures that justified his identity as a Tanzanian or African, occupied marginal spaces in European contexts.
Keywords: *Bongo Fleva* • Mzungu Kichaa • Music of Tanzania • Hip Hop and Rap Music • Popular Music and Identity • Music Figures • Deleuze and Guattari

Introduction

Born in Denmark in 1980 by white Danish parents, Espen Sorensen (known famously as Mzungu Kichaa) came to Tanzania in 1995. In collaboration with a number of local and foreign musicians in Tanzania, he has been actively involved in shaping *Bongo Fleva* music scene in Dar es Salaam as guitarist, singer, rapper and composer. Like many other *Bongo Fleva* musicians in Tanzania, Mzungu Kichaa draws music materials (including rhythmic and melodic elements, manner of rhyming, singing styles and guitar playing techniques) from a variety of music cultures and styles ranging from Rap and hip hop to Rumba and Reggae, and from Congolese Soukous to Tanzanian *Muziki wa Dansi* (dance music). Through the lyrics of his songs and through his creative selection and deployment of various global and Tanzanian local music elements, Mzungu Kichaa participates in imagining, expressing and enacting Tanzanian and African identities – identities with which he identifies himself. This article examines how Mzungu Kichaa

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uses various figures to construct Tanzanian and African identities and to enact his own identity in relation to these identities. The article is informed by my interpretation of his songs and performance practice and my interviews with him conducted in March 2010 in Dar es Salaam. First, what is *Bongo Fleva?*

Bongo Fleva[1] is one of the newer Tanzanian music genres. According to Mwangi Ntarangwi *Bongo Fleva* refers to »Tanzania's popular music predominantly performed by the youth, which blends R&B, hip hop, and local music styles« (2009: 129). As Maria Suriano observes, *Bongo Fleva* music is performed in many styles (2007: 207). Suriano mentions a number of styles that are considered to fall under the category of *Bongo Fleva* including Zouk, hip hop, R&B, reggae, Takeu, Bongo Bangra. But she immediately alerts her readers that this list is somehow outdated because some styles especially hip hop and reggae »no longer seem to be part of *Bongo Fleva*« and that scholars who use the term *Bongo Fleva* as Tanzanian Rap in Swahili, to use her own words, »have missed the point« (2007: 209).

It is true that by the accounts of many popular musicians in Tanzania today, hip hop and Reggae are no longer considered to be part of *Bongo Fleva* and most rappers today do not identify themselves as *Bongo Fleva* artists. However, it should be noted that in practice the lines that separate these music styles are not only narrow but also fluid and permeable. Hence, even those *Bongo Fleva* artists who will hardly accept to be labelled hip hop musicians incorporate hip hop styles in their music. In some cases the hip hop or rap sections in their songs are performed by invited featuring hip-hop musicians. At other times such sections are performed by *Bongo Fleva* musicians themselves. Both of these practices are evident in the music of Mzungu Kichaa.

As it has been noted by a number of scholars of *Bongo Fleva* music such as Alex Perullo (2005), Birgit Englert (2003 and 2008), Uta Reuster-Jahn (2008), Pieter Remes (1999), Maria Suriano (2007) and Mwenda Ntarangwi (2009) among others, *Bongo Fleva* music is mostly associated with youth in terms of the involvement of young people as performers and listeners of this music and the use of *lugha ya mitaani* (street language) which is predominantly a youth language culture. So too, most topics addressed in the lyrics of *Bongo Fleva* songs are the ones that young people identify with. Consequently, *Bongo Fleva* music is commonly referred to as *Muziki wa Kizazi Kipya* (the Music of the New Generation).

To the extent that this music genre has been used by musicians to address social and political issues and air their criticisms against corruption and other inhuman practices, it has been considered to be a good channel for voicing young people's concerns. Hence, a focus on »tough social and political realities of the day,« addressing everyday realities of the underclass, articulating the prevailing

[1] Sometimes it is also spelled *Bongo Flava* and the second word is pronounced as 'fleva'. I prefer to spell it *Bongo Fleva,* the spelling which is consistent with the writing of most Kiswahili words. Phonologically speaking, in Kiswahili the sound 'le' is written 'le' as in *Fleva*.

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social problems, have become signposts of this music (Ntarangwi 2009: ix). Perullo, for example, argues that *Bongo Fleva* music has enabled musicians to »create a sense of community among other urban youth, voice their ideas and opinions to a broad listening public and alter conception of youth as hooligans« especially by composing and singing songs with »politically and socially relevant lyrics« (2005: 75). Similarly, Ntarangwi shows that young hip hop musicians compose songs on issues that are considered important in their societies so as to claim relevance of their music in these societies and refute widely spread stereotypes that associate hip hop music with hooliganism, laziness and vagrancy (2009: xi, 119). In order to legitimize hip hop music and construct a positive image of it, most of hip hop musicians compose lyrics which engage with daily »struggles of youth and other marginalized groups« and articulate everyday realities and problems of the underclass (2009: ix). To be sure, the issue of addressing »tough social and political realities« has been mentioned by a number of scholars of *Bongo Fleva* (Remes 1999, Perullo 2005, Stroeken 2005, Suriano 2007 and Reuster-Jahn 2008). Reuster-Jahn who examines the role of *Bongo Fleva* in 2005 electoral campaigns in Tanzania, for example, concludes her article by pointing out that from the 1990s, *Bongo Fleva* artists have »provided the youth with a medium to make their voices heard, their complaints, their criticism, their life experiences, their problems, their needs and their desires« (2008: 67). Note that in Perullo's argument, *Bongo Fleva* seems to provide space for musicians who are youths themselves to speak out their own concerns. In Reuster-Jahn's account, on the other hand, these young musicians of *Bongo Fleva* act as mouthpieces, spokespersons or representatives and speak for youths in Tanzania generally.

The concept *Bongo Fleva* indicates, in part, the cosmopolitan nature and history of *Bongo Fleva* music. Thomas Turino construes cosmopolitan forms as specific types of cultural formation and constitution of habits that are »translocal in purview« (2000: 7). He also points out that cosmopolitan cultural forms are characterized by processes of localization and internalization (2000: 9). The term *Bongo* is usually used to refer to Dar es Salaam. In some cases it is also used to refer to Tanzania or Africa as a whole (Stroeken 2005: 488). Thus, a term *Mbongo* (pl. *Wabongo*) refers not only to a person who lives in Dar es Salaam or Tanzania. It also refers to any African as opposed to people who carry other identities such as *Mzungu* (a European or a white person) and *Mhindi* or *Gabacholi*[2] (an Indian,

[2] The term '*gabacholi*' is often used with racial negative connotations which people in Tanzania have against people of Asian origins. This is partly because of the privileged position granted to Asians by colonial system. Asians occupied a middle status between white European colonizers and colonized black Africans. This meant that these Asians had more economic benefits over blacks, the benefits that made it possible for the growth of Asian business class and that made it possible for them to dominate the music business in Tanzania. *Mzungu Kichaa* also uses this term in some of his songs when he refers to racial conflicts between local black Tanzanians and the Tanzanians of Asian origin.

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especially, who lives in East Africa). The term *Fleva,* a Swahilized form of the English term flavour, signals the localization or Swahilization of global musical forms such as hip hop, rap, reggae, Zouk and rumba by incorporating Tanzanian musical and linguistic elements. This localization or Swahilization transforms the taste (or flavour) of the music genre which in the 1980s and early 1990s was considered to be an aping of American rap and hip hop by adding to it some flavours from *Bongo*. The transformation also enhances another process that characterizes cosmopolitan formations: internalization. Through internalization, people in Tanzania and *Bongo Fleva* musicians in particular no longer consider *Bongo Fleva* as something foreign to them. They now consider it as »part of who they are,« to borrow a phrase from Turino (2000: 9).

In what follows, I begin by explicating a theory of musical figures by using Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's concept of territorial refrains. Then I focus on Mzungu Kichaa's life experiences as a *Bongo Fleva* musician and examine how he uses musical figures to construct, express and perform Tanzanian and African identities. I also discuss how he negotiates his position in relation to these identities. Finally, I discuss the performative effects of the figures of identity he employs in his music.

Theorizing Figures of Identity as Territorial Refrains

In *A Thousand Plateau: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari discuss various ways through which birds and animals mark and claim their territories. Among the territorial marks they include bird territorial-defence calls, rabbit territorial urine or excrement and monkeys' brightly coloured sexual organs which are normally displayed to mark their territories. These territorial marks are referred to as refrains (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 310-50). Referring to bird territorial-defence calls, they argue that through these refrains the birds establish and defend the boundaries of their territories by keeping other birds of the same species away from the marked territories (1987: 312).

Deleuze and Guattari argue that territories are created through a process of deploying refrains. In other words, a space in itself (be it physical or social) is a non territorialized space. It becomes a territory through a process of territorialization which involves the deployment of refrains. For this reason, the territorial factor (or »the T factor«, as they call it) is always located in »the becoming-expressive« of rhythm, melody and/or other proper territorial qualities in a form of color, odor, silhouette, sound, posture etc. Describing the constitutive effect of refrains or territorial marks, Deleuze and Guattari write:

> The territory is not primary in relation to the qualitative mark; it is the mark that makes the territory. The functions in a territory are not primary; they presuppose a

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> territory-producing expressiveness. In this sense, the territory, and the functions performed within it, are products of territorialization.
> (...)
> The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a having more profound than being. Not in the sense that these qualities belong to a subject, but in the sense that they delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries or produces them. These qualities are signatures, but the signature, the proper name, is not the constituted mark of a subject, but the constituting mark of a domain, an abode (1987: 315-16).

Like animals and birds, human beings use similar refrains to mark their territories or to proclaim their ownership of and/or their belonging to particular physical or social spaces. Human territories may be organized under the banners of nationality, race, ethnicity, class, gender and religion, among other forms of territorial assemblages. A territory based on any of these forms of territorial assemblages becomes a critical distance (physical or social) between individual persons or groups of people and it is produced by deploying territorial marks or placards (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 319-20).

In her book *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio*, Louise Meintjes uses a concept of figure to refer to a recurring musical motive or pattern, especially timbre or sound quality which is normally subjected to ornamentation and variation over a more or less steady line, and is used as an icon or a way of representing and constituting social identities and/or relations. She considers figuring as a »process of realizing abstract tropes into particular voices and as specific experiences... In a sense, it is a process of arguing musically, by means of repeated and varied motives, over ideas about social relations« (Meintjes 2003: 149). For example, Meintjes illustrates how guitar styles, riffs, particular playing and vocal techniques, specific timbral features and drum patterns, to name only a few, are manipulated and used in a South African studio as sonic icons or tropes of Zuluness, South Africanness or (more generally) Africanness. These musical elements are normally transformed and/or used differently when the musicians want to represent »whiteness«. As Meintjes writes:

> The notion of the figure in this South African case slips into a form representing a social type – an African, a white person, or a Zulu. By form here I mean a set of sonic parameters shaped in a particular way and repeated with variations in multiple musical contexts. A technological, measured, and rationalized sound is interpreted as white; some version of strident guitar sound with percussive attack, strong upper frequencies, flanging, phasing, and chorusing effects to give the sound some exciting impurities, and some reverb to add a bit of ring, is heard as Zulu, or in a broader context as South African (Meintjes 2003: 170).

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Meintjes' concept of figure has close affinity not only to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of refrain but also to Thomas Turino's concept of index.[3] Drawing from a semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce (1955), Turino points out that a sign is an index when people connect it to the object it stands for by experiencing it (the sign) and the object together (2008: 8). For example, and this is only one of the many examples Turino provides, »If a person hears the same tune played as a bride and groom march to the altar, this tune might call weddings or marriage to mind even when heard outside a wedding situation...« And Turino concludes that: »Because people commonly hear particular styles of music played by particular individuals or social groups or in particular regions, music typically serves as a powerful index for these types of identity« (2008: 8). When used as markers of people's identities, people's experiences of their social identities become inextricably linked to these indexes, figures or refrains.

Like the South African musicians discussed by Meintjes, musicians in Tanzania including *Bongo Fleva* musicians and Mzungu Kichaa in particular, deploy figures or refrains to construct an African (and Tanzanian) identity and reshape various meanings and images that have been associated with these identities. In some cases, this process involves the use of traditional music elements from different music cultures in Tanzania or other African countries (see: Askew 2002, Barz 2005, Edmondson 2007, and Sanga 2008). In other cases, the process involves the adoption and localization of cosmopolitan musical styles that have been used in other places. For examples, sometimes musicians localize styles such reggae (in most cases together with the associated visual aspects such as dresses, hair styles and dancing styles) and use them to resist various kinds of social marginalization, oppression and exploitation. The localization process, however, is often characterized by creative re-interpretation and hybridization of the adopted musical elements from a range of music cultures worldwide.

In the next section, I identify and interpret prominent refrains or figures that Mzungu Kichaa deploys to construct or perform African and Tanzanian identities. In the discussion I also show how he positions himself in relation to these identities by thematizing his life experiences in several rural areas in Africa, by thematizing various meanings associated with his own artistic name (Mzungu Kichaa) in several songs in his album *Tuko Pamoja*, by deploying musical elements from various African music cultures (from within African and from the African

[3] Turino makes a distinction between an index and other types of signs: icon and symbol. Following Charles Sanders Peirce, he defines an icon as a type of sign whose connection to what it stands for is established through resemblance (2008: 6). A symbol is a sign which is connected to its object »through linguistic definition« (2008: 10). The scope of this article does not allow me to go into details on other types of signs and the distinction between various types of indexical sign (for such details and their application to music semiotics see Turino 1999: 222-41; 2000: 56-58 and 2008: 22; Cumming 2000: 72-104, Dougherty 1997 and Tarasti 2002: 9-12).

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Diaspora) and by performing his songs in Kiswahili. Consequently, my use of the concept of figure in this article is similar to what Deleuze and Guattari call a »general sense«. In this general sense, a refrain refers to *»any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes* (there are optical, gestural, motor, etc., refrains).« This use differs from another sense which Deleuze and Guattari call a »narrow sense«, referring to only those refrains that are sonorous or »dominated« by sound (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 323, italics in original). In the general sense, for example, national or ethnic refrains may include not only musical refrains such as anthems, particular drumming patterns or dances (*ngoma*) but also non musical refrains such as flags, names, languages or particular kinds of dress. Although in this article I use this general sense, most of the non musical figures referred to here are somehow linked to the narrow sense because they too have some bearing on the sonic aspects of *Bongo Fleva* music and in most cases they are produced and deployed within the context of musical performance.

Mzungu Kichaa and the Deployment of Figures of African and Tanzanian Identity

After spending only six years of his childhood in Denmark, Mzungu Kichaa travelled to Zambia where he went to live with his parents who went to Zambia to work with an international rural development organization. During the interview with the author Mzungu Kichaa pointed out that for all the three years he spent in Zambia he lived and experienced ordinary life just like other children in the village. He remembers specifically experiences of walking with bare foot (without shoes), hunting birds and fishing together with other village children. It was during this time that Mzungu Kichaa also attended a number of indigenous ceremonies and musical performances where he learnt Zambian music as a participant in this traditional context. For him this experience was an important stamp in his becoming African (p.c. Mzungu Kichaa, March 6, 2010). In 1989 he went back to Denmark and then to the UK where his parents went to attend university education.

Mzungu Kichaa first came to Tanzania in 1995 when his parents came to work in Tanzania with international development organization. First, he was enrolled at the International School of Tanganyika (IST) in Dar es Salaam. Later in 1998 he went to study at Moshi International School in the northern part of Tanzania. When he came to Tanzania, he was already good at playing a number of music instruments such as pentatonic flute, violin and guitar, all of which he learnt in the schools he attended in the UK. His stay in Tanzania during this time marked his entry and involvement in the *Bongo Fleva* music scene in particularly through his two bands he established in the two schools he attended. At the IST he

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established his own band called *Zege*. The group comprised three young white musicians. At the Moshi International School he established another band namely *Espen and the Easiest*. In this band he collaborated with other two musicians (both teachers at the school) one playing drums player and the other playing a bass guitar. Mzungu Kichaa composed most of the songs for these two bands. Some of the compositions were sung in Kiswahili and others were sung in English. The music was mostly performed in rock style. The bands also performed rendition of Jimi Hendrix's songs.

This early involvement in Tanzanian music scene was interrupted by some years he spent at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University, studying for his BA and MA degrees. After completing his studies, Mzungu Kichaa came back to Tanzania in 2006 and founded a band namely *Effigong*. In 2008, he recorded and released his own solo album titled *Tuko Pamoja*. The album has been released both as a CD and an audio cassette.

What I would like to emphasize here is that in most of his songs Mzungu Kichaa repeatedly mentions about his travels and his life and musical experiences in various places in Africa, and Tanzania in particular. His travels to Zambia and Tanzania act as figures through which he enacts and claims his African and Tanzanian identity. In a song titled *Ujumbe* (Message), for example, Mzungu Kichaa expresses his love for Tanzania and its people not only for »many beautiful things to be found in Tanzania« but also for the good people who have welcomed him, the »young foreigner into their midst« (as he puts it in the liner notes of this song on the album's cover). He praises Tanzania and its people for making him feel at home such that he feels himself to be a Tanzanian. For this reason, Mzungu Kichaa discourages a widespread notion (especially among the youth in Tanzania, and other postcolonial countries) to dream to go and live in America or Europe (or *Mtoni* as he puts it in Kiswahili slang) thinking that life is easier there. He says that there too life is not easier and that people have to work hard to become rich. In Europe and America, as it is the case all over the world, there are bandits, unemployed, street children and orphans.

In the same album, *Tuko Pamoja,* there are other three songs in which he sings about his experiences of going away from home: *Ndugu na Jirani* (Relatives and Neighbours), *Safari* (Journey), and *Tuko Pamoja* (We are One). In *Ndugu na Jirani,* Mzungu Kichaa tells his relatives and neighbours that he is about to leave them and go to live somewhere else. He asks them not to be sad and not to demand that he continues to stay with them since the place where he is going is also a good place. In *Safari,* he says that travelling is an enriching experience of loving and being loved. It is an experience of learning to live in peace and harmony with other people. So too, in *Tuko Pamoja,* he thanks his family (parents and siblings) for raising him and teaching him many life skills that have enable him to live well with other people. Specifically, he thanks them for granting him freedom to travel and become a citizen of the world, a cosmopolitan. He says during the travels he meets with many

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dangers and confronts difficult situations which make him stronger and brave. It is important to note thought that in both *Safari* and *Tuko Pamoja* Mzungu Kichaa expresses an attachment to a specific home (Appiah 1997). He says that although he has travelled far from his natal home his heart will still be on the hands of this »home« and that he is not leaving home and his natal parent and siblings permanently. He hopes that one day he will come back and see them again.

Apart from figuring his identity as an African and Tanzanian by thematizing his travels and life experiences in rural Zambia and Tanzania, Mzungu Kichaa employs a number of musical elements from various African music cultures. These music elements act as figures or refrains through which he constructs and enacts his own African or Tanzanian identity. In most of the songs he uses old Congolese guitar picking styles. At other times he establishes connections with the African diaspora by adopting some guitar styles and playing techniques from his favourite Black American guitarist Jimi Hendrix. Throughout his music career, Mzungu Kichaa has been a great admirer of Jimi Hendrix and he has been listening to Hendrix's music. In addition, in most of his songs Mzungu Kichaa adopts the singing styles from Tanzanian *Muziki wa Dansi* (dance music). He also, like many other musicians in Tanzania, evokes the Masai chanting style and language in some of his songs (for other cases of the use of elements from Masai culture see Graebner 1997, Thompson 2008, Ntarangwi 2009, and Sanga 2010).

In his 2009 book, *East African hip hop: Youth Culture and Globalization*, Ntarangwi discusses how young hip hop musicians in East African countries (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) participate in negotiating and enacting their African identity through the lyrics and performances of hip hop music. He argues that these young musicians do this by resisting negative images about Africa and Africans constructed by colonialism and neocolonialism, images that enchain Africans within what these musicians describe as »mental slavery« or »cultural inferiority« (2009: 38, 54). The musicians take part in the production of positive images on which African identity is constructed. The use of African or specifically Tanzania music materials in contemporary music of Tanzania is one of the ways these musicians construct a positive image of African identity and inculcate this sense of pride and self esteem in their African cultural identity (see Askew 2002, Barz 2005, Edmondson 2007 and Sanga 2010). Ntarangwi argues that these hip hop musicians construct an African identity not only through the use of African traditional music elements, dresses, languages, or other material things but also through conferring positive »values and attitudes towards those material things« (2009: 43). Therefore, the process of localization, or »vernacularization« of hip hop music, to use Appadurai's concept as Ntarangwi does (Appadurai 1996: 10, Ntarangwi 2009: 17), is not only a material process but also a mental process.

Mzungu Kichaa joins other *Bongo Fleva* musicians in Tanzania in this mental process of »vernacularizing« hip hop and other global musical styles. On the one

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hand, his adoption of Masai chanting style and his use of Ma (the language of the Masai) in some of his songs may be interpreted to be a way of capitalizing the image of Masai as »noble savage« (see Ntarangwi 2009: 39-40) or a way of using Masai cultural elements to win »international success« (Thompson 2008). On the other hand, I interpret the act as a way of giving new and positive meanings to Masai culture and hence contesting previously prevailing negative attitudes towards the Masai.[4] Mzungu Kichaa uses these Masai tropes to invoke the braveness of *moran* (young Masai warriors) and to boast his ability to become one of them. These Masai tropes are figures through which he enacts his own African and Tanzanian identity.

In addition, Mzungu Kichaa has been able to learn *Bongo Fleva* music culture and become part of it through his involvement and collaboration with other musicians in Tanzania. During his career as a *Bongo Fleva* musician he has collaborated with a number of *Bongo Fleva* musicians such as Feruz, P. Funk, Professor Jay, Mwasiti, Juma Nature, Solo and Jay Moo. Some of these musicians such as Professor Jay and Mwasiti are mentioned on the cover of his album *Tuko Pamoja*. In one song namely *Oya Oya* he also boasts himself to have performed with the famous Ihwami Suffer taarab band in Zanzibar as a violinist. The thematization of his collaboration with these Tanzanian musicians is another way of claiming his entry in Tanzanian music and proclaiming his identity as a Tanzanian musician. So too, like many other popular musicians world-wide (see especially Lucy Green 2002), Mzungu Kichaa learnt Congolese guitar styles and the singing styles used in Tanzanian *Muziki wa Dansi* through listening to music recording by Congolese musicians such as Franco and Toubulay as well as Tanzanian musicians such as Mbaraka Mwishehe, Dr. Remmy Ongala and Kilwa Jazz Band, to name a few.

Mzungu Kichaa's entry into the *Bongo Fleva* music culture is also made possible and easier through his mastery of Kiswahili. He does not only speak Kiswahili fluently but also his accent makes him sound as if Kiswahili is his first language or mother tongue. Mzungu Kichaa is also well versed in the slang and new vocabulary from *lugha ya mitaani* (street language). Thus he is regarded by many people in Tanzania as *Mbongo*. Even when they retain his *Mzungu* identity, he is considered to be *Mzungu Kichaa* (a crazy European/white person). Let me illustrate this with an anecdote.

On February 14, 2010 – a Valentine Day – a group of students from the University of Dar es Salaam and I attended an evening concert in Mwenge, Dar es Salaam. The concert was organized by the Danish Embassy in Dar es Salaam. My students and I were not only invited by the Embassy but also we were offered free transport to and from the concert venue. The concert involved performances by

[4] For detailed discussions of the negative attitudes towards the Masai in Tanzania see Thompson (2008), Schneider (2006) and Tidrick (1980).

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two music groups. The first was a group of musicians from Denmark comprising a Senegalese Cora player and lead singer, a Senegalese Drum player and four Danish musicians who played a guitar, drum Kit, keyboard and sung to accompany the lead singer. The second group was that of Mzungu Kichaa. Both groups travelled that afternoon from Zanzibar where they performed at a yearly music festival namely *Sauti za Busara*. Mzungu Kichaa and his group appeared in T-shirts printed with his name. He sang all his songs in Kiswahili. On our way back to the university my students praised Mzungu Kichaa for his mastery of Kiswahili language. »He speaks like *mbongo kabisa*« (a real Tanzanian), one student commented. The students compared him with many other whites (especially missionaries) who in spite of staying in Tanzania for many years haven't mastered Kiswahili language and particularly the Kiswahili accent. The students also praised Mzungu Kichaa for identifying himself as a Tanzanian in one of the songs he sang during the concert namely *Ujumbe*.

His artistic name that he has acquired in Tanzania, Mzungu Kichaa (lit. a crazy white person) is an important figure of identity. The name denotes the ambivalence between his wishes and efforts to become an African or Tanzanian, on the one hand, and the facticity of his being a white person, on the other. The name Mzungu Kichaa was given to him by a famous *Bongo Fleva* musician in Tanzania namely Juma Nature. As Mzungu Kichaa narrates:

> One day I was in Bongo Records studio in Dar es Salaam with Juma Nature. He (Juma Nature) began to call me Mzungu Kichaa. I tried to tell him that I don't want to be called thus but he continued to call me thus. ... I know Juma Nature is my good friend. I don't think that he was scorning me. I think he had good intention for calling me this way. But at the beginning I didn't want the name because in my life I did not want to be called *Mzungu*. I didn't want to be segregated. You know how it is when they call you *Mzungu* while you don't feel to be one! It was »ironic« because I was trying hard to be *mswahili* (a Swahili person, sometimes used interchangeably with *mbongo*) and I think I was successful. When I walk in streets people do not call me Mzungu because they know that I am not *mzungu* but *mswahili*. But how come Juma Nature calls me Mzungu Kichaa? It is somehow funny (interview with the author, March 6, 2010, Dar es Salaam).

Mzungu Kichaa expresses this ambivalence concerning his name even in some of his songs in the album *Tuko Pamoja*. On the one hand, he resists the name. For example, in a song called *Oya Oya* in which he boasts his achievement and his involvement in music making and also boasts himself to have experience of living among the Masai of Ngorongoro, Mzungu Kichaa says that one will be mistaken to call him Mzungu Kichaa. The reason is that the word Mzungu is segregative while he has been working to resist or fight against segregation based on skin colour. A few lines from this song are translated from Kiswahili and quoted below to illustrate the point.

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I have many names: true and fictional names.
You will be mistaken to call me Mzungu Kichaa.
I have never chosen it and it has never suited me.
...
It is important to remember,
I have fought racial segregation between whites and blacks.

The word *Mzungu* as a sign of identity is historically constituted. Mzungu Kichaa tries to resist it because he is aware of various negative meanings, images and values the name has accumulated over the years some of which are associated with Tanzanians' terrible experiences with white people as colonizers and exploiters.

On other hand, the name is also associated with some positive images or values people in Tanzania have (or colonialism managed to inculcate in the minds of the colonized) about white people as superior intellectually and rich financially. These images are still promulgated today with relatively higher position occupied by foreign (mostly European, American and white South Africans) development workers, donors and owners of foreign agencies that are proliferating today as investors in many sectors of Tanzanian economy. Note that the top management positions of most of them are occupied by the foreigners themselves. To be called *mzungu* in this context is to be associated with being rich financially, more advanced technologically and more civilized culturally than *wabongo*.

A philosopher Emmanuel Levinas argues that: »It is through the *already said* that words, elements of a historically constituted vocabulary, will come to function as signs and acquire usage« (Levinas 1981: 37-38). In this sense, Mzungu Kichaa's name functions as a sign or figure and constitutes him in this complicated historically constructed net of values and meanings. To the extent that these meanings and values are associated with racial segregation and white supremacy, this name annoys him. On his account, the name is inconsistent with what he has been fighting against for years: racial segregation and white supremacy.

Drawing from speech-act theorists such as J. L. Austin and John Searle and from Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation, Judith Butler discusses the performative effects of words. She argues that words have the power to produce what they name and hence injurious words have power to psychically wound human subjects (1997). The performative power of an utterance or a name is enhanced by repetitious nature of all performative acts. As a performative act which carries with it an array of historically inscribed meanings and values, the word *mzungu* in Tanzania today constitutes and subjects Mzungu Kichaa in this range of historically constructed meanings. According to Butler:

> If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that »success« is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the

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> action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices.* It is not simply that the speech act takes place within a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice. What this means, then, is that a performative »works« to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historical force (Butler 1997: 51, italics in original).

Butler stresses the importance of repetition in the functioning of any performative act. Through repetition of performative acts »subjects are called into social being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations« (1997: 160).

More significantly, however, Butler points out that the performance (citing and reciting) of performative acts may also be used to transform the already historically inscribed meanings and help to »reconfigure a different future« (1997: 160). Elsewhere, she uses a concept of »resignification« (2004: 223-24) to refer to a process through which a subject appropriates and uses the very negative or unwanted terms in a new way and assigns them positive meanings and values. Therefore, »resignification« functions as a political act of contestation or »counter-mobilization« through which a subject of injurious words or utterances alters the effects of these words or utterances on oneself and on other subjects as well (1997: 163). In her words:

> In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject *formation*, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well. The performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated. ... Within the political sphere, performativity can work in precisely such counter-hegemonic ways. That moment in which a speech act without prior authorization nevertheless assumes authorization in the course of its performance may anticipate and instate altered contexts for its future reception.... [The] word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that destroys the prior territory of its operation (1997: 160, 163).

Mzungu Kichaa does not completely denounce being called Mzungu Kichaa. In fact, he himself uses this name in the covers of his album *Tuko Pamoja*. His other name, **Espen Sorensen,** does not appear at all on the covers of his album. However, Mzungu Kichaa has made a number of efforts to accentuate the positive meanings and transform the negative meanings associated with this name. In this way he does not submit himself to the prior meanings of his name. The process of resignification of the term *mzungu* takes place particularly when it is deployed with a qualifier *kichaa*. When literally translated *kichaa* means crazy. However, in practice most often people use it as a praise term to refer to an intelligent or talented person. Mzungu Kichaa does not think that his friend Juma Nature had

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bad intention when he gave him this name. Consequently, he believes that Juma Nature had this positive sense of the name in mind. Mzungu Kichaa himself repeatedly describes the meaning of his name in some of his songs by saying that to be called Mzungu Kichaa is to be acknowledged for one's musical creativity. By so doing he accentuates the positive meaning of his name. For example, in a song titled *Wajanja* (Ghetto Youths) he begins with spoken words concerning his name (these words are not written in the album's liner notes).

> *Kichaa ni sifa*
> Kichaa is a compliment.
> *Kichaa ni mtu mwenye uwezo, mtu mwenye kipaji.*
> Kichaa is a gifted person, a talented person.

Within the song he praises Tanzanian ghetto youths because they are capable of fighting against life's hardships. At the end of the song he, as a *kichaa* (a gifted or intelligent person) identifies with this group of young people and says »*sisi vijana wa kibongo ni wajanja*« (we the youths of *Bongo* are clever/intelligent). In another song titled *Sister Kichaa* (Crazy Sister) Mzungu Kichaa uses the word *kichaa* to praise a beautiful and a very attractive woman. In short, it is through these intentional resignifications that he transforms various negative meanings and values of his name and augments positive aspects of it. The resignification process transforms his name and makes it a positive figure of his African and Tanzanian identity. His name becomes something positive and liveable.

Mzungu Kichaa, African Music Figures and Marginal Spaces in Europe

During his time in the UK and in Denmark, Mzungu Kichaa continued to be involved in music making. In his assessment, in both cases his efforts to enter into the »mainstream« music industry in the UK and Denmark did not succeed. He was able to be involved only as one of the marginal individuals. Let me quote his description of his involvement in music scene in these places.

> When I joined the university in London I was involved music making. I wanted to enter into the music scene of the city. But I failed to understand how the music business operated. I was performing with Congolese musicians who lived there. We only performed in *kumbi za waafrika* (African venues) where only Africans were our audiences. I was the only white person who entered there. Many Swahili people came [sometimes the word Swahili, like the *mbongo*, is used to refer to not only to Swahili speaking persons but to all Africans]. Although I enjoyed very much these performances but I found myself unable to enter into the music market in Europe generally. Yes! Sometimes I sang in English, *I wanted to make it* (kutoka) but I saw that I was able to perform only in these small venues.... In general I failed to enter into the mainstream music industry (interview with the author, March 6, 2010, Dar es Salaam).

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This description suggests that the African music figures he was using in his music made his music more accessible and more attractive to the African community in Europe. One reason for this may be political. Mzungu Kichaa performed in the music styles that most Africans were able to identify with. It was the music styles with which Africans who lived in London had political allegiance. A second and related factor is that these Africans have been culturally raised to understand and appreciate the kind of music Mzungu Kichaa performed. This explains why only Africans attended the performances in these venues, venues in which Mzungu Kichaa and other African musicians performed. Third, the physical spaces in London city, as it is the case with other cities worldwide, are marked with social identities such as race, gender or class. Music also participates in marking and structuring these spaces with particular social identities in that music that was identified with African community was performed in these particular venues. Mzungu Kichaa entered the city with musical sounds that already occupied marginal spaces of the city, spaces identified with the African population of London.

Deleuze and Guattari point out that the deployment of territorial refrains involves not only processes of inclusion but also processes of exclusion of unrelated or different elements (1987: 311-19). When Mzungu Kichaa and other musicians deploy musical figures to claim their Tanzanian or African identity at the same time they also announce their difference with other identities (e.g. European or English identities) at least with regard to musical taste. In other words, a declaration of »Sameness« in relation to African or Tanzanian identity is also a declaration of »Otherness« in relation to other identities.

Mzungu Kichaa says that when he was dissatisfied with his position in the music industry in the UK he decided to go to Denmark. He describes his involvement in music making in Denmark thus:

> I decided to go to Denmark. I thought that because it is only a small country I would be able to meet with people in the music industry and record my album. I tried to record my album in English language. I recorded in a big studio with a good band. The musicians were very good indeed. We also did many live shows but with only minimal success. The venues were small. Though the venues were always full of people but our music was not into mainstream music. We were like »underground«. Also, our music was not played in radios. I realized that I can't succeed to make it to the mainstream there. So I decided to do an album for Tanzania. Here my earlier funs and those audiences who knew my music came and said, look this guy is really good. I recorded my music with Bongo Records (studio) and some of it was broadcasted in Clouds Radio FM.
>
> ...
>
> I did an album in Europe which was released in CD. It was marketed in the music market there (in Denmark). After some live shows many people began to listen to it. Many people not only from East Africa but also those from West Africa admired me. They said this person plays a real African music. I did an album launching concert

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> and I got sponsors who advertised it widely. After sometimes when the organizers of world music awards realized that I was loved by the African community in Denmark they began to invite me in the world music festivals. The problem with performing African music in Europe is that when I performed, the *wazungu* (Europeans) were scared of me thinking that maybe I was deceiving them because they did not have a good knowledge of African music and hence they were unable to assess me. It was important that the Africans began to have a high regard for my music which made even the *wazungu* begin to accept me. During the 2009 Danish World Music award in Copenhagen, the capital city of Denmark, I received an award for the Best Upcoming Artist (interview with the author, March 6, 2010, Dar es Salaam).

Though he succeeded to record an album and do a number of performances in Denmark his experiences of occupying a marginal space did not change. One may be tempted to conclude that the music industry in Tanzania is less competitive and thus he was able to succeed easily in it. However, his description suggests that his success in Tanzania is due to the fact that he performs a kind of music that many people in Tanzania are used to and hence they are able to appreciate it. In other words, the musical figures which he employs in his music are already an established »habitus«, to borrow a terminology from Pierre Bourdieu, and that these »habitus« structure music perception and reception among Tanzanians. Perhaps it is also important to note that his earlier involvement in music scene in Tanzania also contributed in cultivating and structuring this habitus among Tanzanians. Pierre Bourdieu argues in *Distinction* that:

> The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes (Bourdieu 1984: 171).

As Mzungu Kichaa observes when he was able to win recognition in Denmark it was specifically in the World Music festivals where music styles from several parts of the world are performed. His success in these festivals depended mainly on the role of the habitus of African audiences. It was only when the festival organizers found that his music was appreciated by African audiences that they too began to value his music.

Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the way a *Bongo Fleva* musician, Mzungu Kichaa, deploys musical figures in the construction of African and Tanzanian identities. Specifically, I have examined his use of musical elements from African music cultures, his capitalization of his travels and life experiences in Africa

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(Zambia and Tanzania in particular) and his resignification of his Swahili artistic name Mzungu Kichaa to enact his own identity as an African and Tanzanian. Towards, the end of article I have pointed out and illustrated through Mzungu Kichaa's involvement in the Danish and UK music industry that musical figures play a double role: inclusion and exclusion. In other words, depending on the context and the way musicians use them, music figures serve to capitalize and consolidate or challenge and dismantle the »segmented« social world which, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, is segmented according to social classes, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender and age, among other territorial assemblages or segments (1987: 208-09).

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Sažetak

Mzungu Kichaa i oblikovanje identiteta u glazbi *Bongo Fleva* u Tanzaniji

Rođen 1980. u obitelji danskih roditelja, bijelaca, Espen Sorensen (poznat kao Mzungu Kichaa) u Tanzaniju je došao 1995. godine. U suradnji s mnogobrojnim lokalnim i inozemnim glazbenicima u Tanzaniji, aktivno je uključen u oblikovanje glazbene scene *Bongo Fleva* u Dar es Salaamu kao gitarist, pjevač, rapper i skladatelj. Poput mnogih drugih *Bongo Fleva* glazbenika u Tanzaniji, Mzungu Kichaa uzima glazbene materijale (uključujući ritamske i melodijske elemente, način rimovanja, pjevačke stilove i tehnike sviranja na gitari) iz raznih glazbenih vrsta i stilova, od rapa i hip hopa do rumbe i reggae, od kongoanskih soukoua do tanzanijske *Muziki wa Dansi* (plesne glazbe). Uz pomoć tekstova za svoje pjesme, vlastitim stvaralačkim odabirom i uporabom raznih globalnih i tanzanijskih lokalnih glazbenih elemenata, Mzunga Kichaa sudjeluje u zamišljanju, izražavanju i stvaranju tanzanijskog i afričkog identiteta.

U ovom se članku polazi od pojma refrena Gillesa Deleuzea i Felixa Guattarija te pojma glazbene figure Louise Meintjes, a ispituju se različiti načini na koje Mzungo Kichaa upotrebljava glazbene figure za konstruiranje afričkog i tanzanijskog identiteta. Također se ispituje kako upotrebljava te figure kako bi se izborio za svoj položaj u odnosu na te identitete. Da bi se pokazalo kako izvedbeni efekti glazbenih figura djeluju na čovjekove identitete, ispituje se kako uporaba glazbenih figura služi u dvostrukoj funkciji: potvrđivanju nečijeg tanzanijskog ili afričkog identiteta i objavljivanju nečije različnosti od drugih identiteta (npr. europskog ili engleskog), barem s obzirom na glazbeni ukus. Posljedica je ovih procesa i situacija da pokušaji Mzungua Kichaae da uđe u glavnu struju glazbene industrije u Velikoj Britaniji i Danskoj nisu bili uspješni, jer glazbene figure koje je upotrebljavao – figure koje su potvrđivale njegov identitet kao Tanzanijca ili Afrikanca – zauzimaju marginalne prostore u europskim kontekstima.

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