

**LET'S GO PARTY!  
DISCOURSE AND SELF-PORTRAYAL IN THE *BONGO  
FLEVA*-SONG *MIKASI*<sup>1</sup>**

UTA REUSTER-JAHN

**Introduction**

For over a decade now, *Bongo Fleva*<sup>2</sup> has been the dominant category of popular music in Tanzania, surpassing *Muziki wa Dansi* (dance music) and *Taarab* in terms of its presence in the media. Evolving in the 1990s, it was originally derived from American HipHop music, but in a process of recontextualisation, that “globally available cultural model” (Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2002:1) became creatively appropriated by local artists. Thus, *Bongo Fleva* has become diversified in the last years and at present includes elements of traditional music as well as popular dance music, both of African and Western origin (Raab 2006: 43 ff.). As a result, contemporary *Bongo Fleva* is stylistically complex. The lyrics of *Bongo Fleva* are specifically determined by 1) the use of Swahili youth language and slang expressions, 2) the representation of modern and young lifestyles, and 3) socio-critical contents with pedagogical and moralistic tendencies. Its contents have been described as oscillating between elucidating and didactical lyrics, and those which can be related to the “battle” tradition of HipHop which include elements of “boasting“ and “dissing“.<sup>3</sup> The latter are labelled by Tanzanian HipHop-artists themselves as “fleva“ (‘flavour’), while the former are categorised as “message” (Roch & Hacke 2006, Raab 2006: 100 ff.). The relation between *Bongo Fleva* and youth identity has been discussed by Remes (1999). The role of urban language in the shaping of youth identity has been investigated with regard to rap lyrics from Senegal and Gabun (Auzanneau 2003). The multi-lingual situation in these countries attributes meaning to the choice of languages. The linguistic situation in Tanzania differs principally from that of Senegal because the former colonial language, English, plays a minor role while many of its functions were taken over by one of the indigenous languages - Swahili. However, since the political liberalisation in Tanzania street language based on Swahili (*Lugha ya Mitaani*) has rapidly been evolving due to the fact that the linguistic norm is not as much controlled as it was during the *Ujamaa* era (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006). Furthermore, private media make use of street language, thereby spreading it over the whole country. However, the creators of this street language are urban youths. It is mainly characterized by morphological and semantic manipulation of the Swahili lexicon. In addition, elements from other languages, especially English standard lan-

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Afrikanistentag 2006, 11.2.-13.2.2006, Munich, Germany, and published in German in *Ntama – Journal of African Music and Popular Culture*, 13.11.2006 (<http://ntama.uni-mainz.de/content/view/183/39/1/0/>).

<sup>2</sup> For etymology and history of *Bongo Fleva* (also *Bongo Flava*) see Raab 2006.

<sup>3</sup> It must be noted, however, that competition has also been an element in older musical forms in Eastern Africa (Glassman 1994, Gunderson & Barz 2000, Ranger 1975, Strobel 1976).

guage as well as English slang, local languages, and Kenyan Sheng, have been incorporated.<sup>4</sup> Contemporary *Bongo Fleva* lyrics are marked by heavy use of this kind of speech. This sets them apart from more established forms of popular music, which are moderate in this respect. However, in the 1990s, according to Perullo & Fenn (2000: 1) there has been a linguistic dichotomy within Tanzanian rap, which was related to content:

“English rap tends to borrow heavily from American hip hop discourses and American culture. Songs are often about parties, friends, or self praise for the group and the individual rappers in the group. Rap in Swahili moves away from the more celebratory rap and focuses on topics pertinent to Tanzanians, such as AIDS, drug use, government corruption, lack of jobs, and the impossibility of attaining a visa to leave the country. [...] generally the two languages offer different avenues for rapping and reach different audiences within Tanzania.”

While in recent time almost no rap text has been released which was entirely in English, many texts are interspersed with English words or phrases that partly function as a kind of connective element to American HipHop culture. It seems that this overall use of Swahili has been crucial for the transition of Tanzanian HipHop to *Bongo Fleva*. As a result, the linguistic separation of “celebratory raps” and those on socially significant topics, which was observed by Perullo & Fenn, does not persist any longer. In addition, it seems that with the swahilization of the lyrics, the compositional techniques have moved away from the American model as well. The song *Mikasi* which will be analysed in this article can serve as an example of a text that combines traits of HipHop style with those of indigenous oral narratives.

*Bongo Fleva* is in the first place the music of young people in Tanzania, as is expressed in the formulaic label attached to it: *muziki wa kizazi kipya* (‘music of the new generation’). To be a youth in Tanzania means being between 15 to 30 years of age (or even older), and not having an own family yet. In addition, many youths do not have a job. Having been neglected by politics for a long time, they use *Bongo Fleva* as a mouthpiece to talk about their living conditions and to articulate their needs and desires, and make them listened to by the public. *Bongo Fleva* lyrics also provide templates for youth identities which transcend national and even African borders, connecting the youths to Jamaican and US youth concepts (Remes 1999: 1). A closer look at the texts makes clear that older values are not at all abandoned on the whole. Notably the notion of “nation” and the country’s first president Julius K. Nyerere who is considered as representing the idea of the “Tanzanian nation” are repeatedly referred to in an affirmative way.

The lyrics of *Bongo Fleva* are marked by youth discourse which is most important for the construction of youth identities. Linguistically, it is characterized by Swahili “street language” – locally referred to as *Lugha ya Mitaani* - which serves to exclude more established Swahili speakers from understanding what is being communicated. Like youth languages in general, the Swahili street language comprises 1) special forms of address, 2) special terms for persons

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed description and analysis of this “street language” (*Lugha ya Mitaani*) see Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006.

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of the opposite sex, 3) ample use of metaphors and metaphoric expressions, 4) metonymies and synecdoches, 5) clipped words, 6) borrowed lexemes, and 7) special phrasemes. Swahili rap texts present youth discourse, which is otherwise difficult to obtain. Many songs narrate the encounters and experiences of the artists from a first-person perspective with or without addressing the listener, an imaginary interlocutor, or a real person, while others have the form of a statement. This conforms to American HipHop conventions, where most texts are narrative or even declarative monologues, from a first-person perspective, often directed towards the hearer. In *Bongo Fleva*, we additionally find dialogic and discursive as well as dramatic texts that render scenes directly, comprising different roles and dialogues.<sup>5</sup> Texts that contain dialogues had already been attributed to *Muziki wa Dansi*:

“A dialogic and discursive structure is generally characteristic of muziki wa dansi songs. Often we find direct dialogue within a song (often realized by different voices).” (Graebner 1995: 273)

While *Bongo Fleva* texts with dialogic structure seem to continue the older tradition of *Muziki wa Dansi*, the dramatic texts remind of the way folk narratives are told in Tanzania. Story telling performances are characterized by a lot of direct speech of characters, mostly without introducing the character who is speaking at a given moment, like in drama. The narrator can mark the character by modulation of voice, but often the audience has to deduce from the context, who is speaking (cf. Reuster-Jahn 2002: 177 ff.). As the dramatic *Bongo Fleva* texts make use of direct speech, often of several characters, and without introduction, it seems that traditional techniques of story-telling have an effect on *Bongo Fleva* rap lyrics. In live performances those songs are even enacted on the stage like drama (Roch & Hacke 2006: 9). In this article a rap text of that kind, *Mikasi* (‘Sex’), released in 2004 by *Bongo Fleva* artist Ngwair, will be analysed with regard to its form, content, and function. As it contains different roles and dialogues, it is suitable for the investigation of youths’ talk. A special focus will be put on the self-portrayal of the youths in the dialogues of the song, and on the question how boasting and dissing is performed in a dialogic text. But before going into the analysis some words will be said on the role of popular music for the development of Swahili in Tanzania in a historical perspective.

### Popular music and Swahili language development in Tanzania

Even in the *Ujamaa* era, music played a role in the creation and spreading of new terms. In the 1980s, Remmy Ongala contributed with a song to the popularity of the euphemistic term *soksi* (‘socks’) for ‘condome’, and the Vijana Jazz Band to that of the term *tapeli* (< French ‘tapeur’) for ‘crook, fraudster’ (Graebner 1995). But quite different from today, those were exceptions. Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam held more or less a monopoly in broadcasting music, and as a state radio station it observed the commendations of BAKITA, the National Swahili Council, which demanded the use of standard Swahili. The musicians felt that non-

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<sup>5</sup> Examples are *Kikao cha dharura*, *Zali la mentali*, *Promota anabeep* by Prof. Jay, and *Bosi* by Ferooz.

standard language sometimes was used as a pretext to dismiss unwanted songs, as Graebner (1995: 276) points out:

“Through their strong presence in Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam they are often in the forefront of new developments and help making them accessible to the audience. However, it is often not easy to bring in novelties, since RTD generally sticks to the recommendations of BAKITA (National Swahili Council). The musicians talk of censorship, because the pretext of non-standard language is mostly used in order to keep unwanted song-texts out”

Private radio and TV stations which were allowed by the “Broadcasting Services Act” in 1993 do not care much about the recommendations of BAKITA. Privatization of media therefore can be considered as a prerequisite for using colloquial and youth language in lyrics of popular music. *Bongo Fleva* and to a lesser extent *Taarab* are at the forefront of linguistic innovation and distribution of non-standard elements.<sup>6</sup> This is done in different ways. First, terms of colloquial and youth language are used abundantly in *Bongo Fleva*, and thereby are made known and spread throughout the country. Second, artists may create new lexical items or give a new meaning to old ones. *Bongo Fleva* songs in some cases have already contributed in this way to the linguistic development in Tanzania (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 63 ff.). For example, the expression *mtoto wa geti kali* (‘child of the fierce gate’) which is used to denote a rich girl who is very much controlled by her parents, was the title of a song by Gangwe Mobb. An example of onomastic synecdoche based on the name of a character in a song is *king’asti* ‘beautiful girl’, taken from a song of the same title by Mr. Nice (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 133). Third, the names of artists may serve as onomastic synecdoches. Thus, the name of *Bongo Fleva* artist Feruzi has become one of the terms for AIDS, since he had a song about the disease which became very popular. Fourth, styles of music or dance may serve as metonymies. For example, a big bottom is recently called *taarabu*, because in *Taarab* dance pelvic movements play a certain role. Even in the Ujamaa era styles of music and dance were used for metonymies and metaphors. Ohly (1987: 10) reports *kamanyola (bila jasho)* for ‘bribe’. *Kamanyola* was a relaxed dance style *bila jasho* ‘without sweat’ that served as a metaphor for having things going smoothly with the help of a bribe. The style was created in the late 1970s by the Orchestra Maquis Original (Graebner <http://hometown.aol.com/-dpaterson/muziki.htm>, last visited 15.1.2007).<sup>7</sup>

### The song *Mikasi*

*Mikasi* was released in August 2004 by Ngwair (also called MaNgwair), whose civil name is Albert Mangwea, featuring Mchizi Mox, Ferooz, and Rah P, the latter being one of the few female *Bongo Fleva* artists. It was produced by Khalfan Majani, also known as P. Funk, in the “Bongo Records” Studio, and was included in the album “a.k.a. mimi”. The song narrates,

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<sup>6</sup> *Muziki wa Dansi* does not seem to particularly contribute to this trend. However, I do not have enough data to make a clear statement.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the role of popular music, especially *Bongo Fleva*, in the development of *Lugha ya Mitaani*, see Reuster-Jahn & Kießling (2006: 63 ff.).

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initially from the first-person perspective, in a boastful way the everyday routine in the life of a group of young men from the *Bongo Fleva* scene. They enjoy their lives hanging around without having to work. The chorus makes clear that “enjoying life” in particular means smoking, drinking and having sex. It also stresses that in order to enjoy life you need money. The song has no message in the sense that it is explicitly critical on Tanzanian politics or society, and therefore falls in the less valued category of “fleva”. Despite this, it was very successful. Not only did it hold a position in the charts, but it was also awarded the Kilimanjaro Best HipHop Award in 2005. Its producer P. Funk got the Best Song Producer Award in the same contest (<http://www.ippmedia.com/ipp/guardian/2005/07/08/43881.html>). However, in November 2004, the National Arts Council (BASATA – *Baraza la Sanaa la Taifa*) called the song unethical and threatened to ban it. It blamed the artists for encouraging the use of marijuana and promoting prostitution. “The Guardian” commented: “The move is very good, but Basata is already late” (<http://www.ipp.co.tz/ipp/guardian/2004/11/13/24494.html>). The cassettes had already been distributed and had been sold in large quantities. Fred Ogot, the author of the article continued:

“We expect Basata to ask the artistes the meaning of the words used in the songs rather than threaten them. Mikasi talks about mitungi, mikasi and brandy, and may be Basata could have inquired the meanings of those words.”

Ogot is referring particularly to the chorus of *Mikasi*:

<i>Mitungi, blanti,</i>	Alcohol, marijuana
<i>mikasi -</i>	sex -
<i>ukitaka kuvinjari nasi</i>	if you want to enjoy yourself with us
<i>lazima mfukoni mwako nawe uwe safi</i>	you too gotta have something in your pocket

Obviously, Ogot perceived the word *blanti* as “brandy”. However, *blanti* is a word borrowed from American slang, where it is written “blunt”. It is derived from the cigar brand “Phillies Blunt” and originally denoted hollowed out cigars refilled with marijuana. Later it became generalized to denote marijuana itself (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=blunt>). In the case of “*mitungi*” and “*mikasi*” Ogot realized that these are Swahili lexemes which were assigned deviant meanings in the context of the song, although he apparently did not know them. This demonstrates very clearly one of the functions of youth language, namely the exclusion of certain groups of persons from communication. “*Mitungi*” in standard Swahili means “clay pots for storage of water and other liquids”. As such pots are also used as containers of beer the term became metonymically used to denote the content itself, i.e. beer or alcohol in general. Whereas *mitungi* ‘beer, alcohol’ had already been in use for quite some years when the song was composed, the term *mikasi* was used for the first time in the song with the meaning of ‘sex’. In standard Swahili (*mkasi, mi-*, cl. 3/4) this lexeme denotes ‘scissors’. In the song, the term is used metaphorically, the motivation being the movement of

scissors which is compared to the body movements while having sex.<sup>8</sup> Although the term was never openly explained, it was understood by the audience and became one of the expressions for ‘sex’ used by youths. Below, the full text of *Mikasi* is presented. The rhyming syllables are in bold characters, lexical items belonging to youth or street language are underlined.

**Verse I: Ngwair**

- 1 *Ni asubuhi naamka ninapiga mswaki*  
It’s morning, I get up and brush my teeth
- 2 *Kisha naenda kubath kuweka mwili safi*  
Then I go and wash myself, clean my body
- 3 *Narudi ghetto nafungua kabati*  
I go back to my room, I open my wardrobe
- 4 *Nachukua pamba, blingbling, kwa chati*  
I take stylish clothes, jewelry, only the best
- 5 *N’na t-shirt black n’na jeanz ya kaki*  
I’ve got a black t-shirt and khaki jeans
- 6 *Na chini nina simple white [waiti] chapa Nike [naiki]*  
And down there I’m wearing “Simple White”, trademark Nike
- 7 *Kisha, mzee, najipulizia marashi*  
Then, dude, I spray myself with perfume
- 8 *Aahhh, nanukia safi*  
Aahhh, I’m smelling nicely now
- 9 *Niko na machizi wa Chamber Squad na Darkji*  
I’m together with the mates from ‘Chamber Squad’ and ‘Dark’
- 10 *Tunapiga simu Rich Coast wako wapi*  
We call ‘Rich Coast’, asking where they are
- 11 *Tunakutana mitaa ya Chaga Bite [baiti]*  
We meet in the area around “Chaga Bite”
- 12 *Asubuhi tunapata zetu supu kwa chapati*  
In the morning we get our soup with chapati<sup>9</sup>
- 13 *Na mitungi ya kupotezea wakati*  
And alcohol, to waste some time
- 14 *Ukitaka fegi mezani kuna pakti*  
If you want cigs, there are packets on the table
- 15 *Iwe sports yaani SM au Embassy*  
Nevermind if you like “Sports”, “SM” or “Embassy”
- 16 *Hapa utakula raha mpaka mwenyewe utasema basi*  
Here you can chill out until you have enough
- 17 *Tunakamua mpaka ile mida ya lunch [lanchi]*  
We’re enjoying ourselves until it’s time for lunch
- 18 *Tunaagiza ugali mkubwa na samaki*  
We order a huge meal of ugali and fish
- 19 *Makamuzi yanaendelea mpaka night [naiti]*  
The chilling out continues, until it’s nighttime

<sup>8</sup> This explanation was given by informants in Dar es Salaam, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> A pancake made of flour, salt and water.

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- 20 *Watu wanaingia graveyard kwanza kupata nyasi*  
People go at first to the graveyard<sup>10</sup> to buy pot
- 21 *Tunarudi kila mmoja anajissachi {mmh}*  
We come back and everyone is checking
- 22 *Ni kiasi gani mfukoni kilichobaki {oouuhh}*  
How much is left in his pocket
- 23 *Kujicheki mi n'na kama laki*  
While doing this I realize I have got around hundred thousand
- 24 *Nikawaambia machizi kinachofuata MIKASI<sup>11</sup>*  
Then I tell my dudes what's coming up now is SEX

**Kiitikio (Chorus):**

- 1 *Mitungi-i-iiii, blanti-i-iiii,*  
Alcohol, Marijuana
- 2 *Mikasi-i-iiiiii{oooh yeeaaaaaaaaah}*  
Sex
- 3 *Kama ukitaka kuyinjari nasi*  
If you want to enjoy yourself with us,
- 4 *Basi mfukoni mwako nawe uwe safi*  
Then you too gotta have something in your pocket
- x2

**Verse II: Ngwair**

- 1 *“Kulewa tushalewa kilichobaki mikasi*  
“We are already drunk, what's missing now is Sex.
- 2 *Washikaji eh, milupo tutapata wapi?”*  
Mates, where are we gonna get chicks?”
- 3 *“Milupo, labda mitaa ya kati”*  
“Chicks – maybe in the city-centre.”
- 4 *“So tunaenda vipi, kwa miguu au kwa basi?”*  
“Okay, how do we get there, by foot or by bus?”
- 5 *“Usiku huu bora tuchukue taksi”*  
“It's night already, let's better take a taxi.”
- 6 *“Haya basi tusipoteze wakati”*  
“Okay, let's waste no time then!”
- 7 *--- Naita taksi*  
--- I call a taxi
- 8 *“Njoo utupeleke mitaa ya kati*  
“Come on, give us a ride to the centre,
- 9 *Tukacheki midudu ya kupiga mikasi*  
we want to look out for chicks to have some sex.
- 10 *Tuelewane kabisa itatucost shing' ngapi?”*  
Let's agree, how many shillings will it cost us?”

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10 This refers to a graveyard near the place where Ngwair is living, and where one can buy marijuana.

11 Capital letters are used in the version on the website: <http://www.darhotwire.com/dar/BongoXplosionLyrics-2004/11/08/639.html>

- 11 “buku nne tu” – “Aah, **wapi**  
“Only four thousand.” – “Oh no,  
12 *Kwani hapa na pale ni umbali wa hatua **ngapi?** “*  
why, how many steps is it from here to there?”  
13 “*Si mnachekeki wenyewe mko **wangapi.** ”*  
“But you can see yourself how many you are.”  
14 “*Usimaindi sana babake hatuko safi”*  
“Don’t ask for that much, man, we don’t have enough.  
15 “*Tuchangeni tusipoteze **wakati***  
Let’s put together, let’s waste no time.  
16 *Ludigo, **kwani** we una shing’ **ngapi?**”*  
Ludigo, come on, how many shillings do you have?”  
17 “*Buku tano” – “Venture?” – “**Bati**”*  
“Five thousand.” – “Venture?” “Hundred.”  
18 “*Sasa we una bati, usiku huu unaenda **wapi***  
“Well, you have hundred, where can you reach with that tonight?  
19 *Wakati hiyo bati hata soda tu **hupati***  
Especially as you don’t even get a soft drink for a hundred.  
20 *Bora uweke, kesho unywee chai na **chapati***  
Better keep them for yourself and have *chapati* for your tea tomorrow.  
21 *Asiye na kitu mi naona bora **akabaki***  
Who has nothing, I guess, should stay here,  
22 *Tusije mbele tukashikana **mashati**” (oooh)*  
just to prevent us from having a fight later on.”  
23 “*Suka eh! tuanzie Masaki*  
“Driver, eh! We want to go to Masaki<sup>12</sup> first!  
24 *Mchizi kapiga simu yaani kuna bongwe la party [pati]”*  
Our mate just called to tell us that there is an amazing party going on.”

Chorus x2

*ehe, one, two, cheki*

**Verse III: Ngwair and other artists in turn**

- 1 “*Dereva funga breki tushafika kwenye party”*  
“Driver, stop, we have already arrived at the party.”  
2 “*Eeh bwana eh, kumbe bongwe la party”*  
Oh man, eh, what an awesome party.”  
3 “*Cheki mademu kibao utadhani kitchen party”*  
“Look, tons of women, you could think this is a kitchen party.”  
4 “*Duh! Cheki lile anti lililovaa skintaiti”*  
“Hey! Look, the woman with the skin-tight dress!  
5 *Ee bwana eh! Liko safi sio mchezo, babake, unaweza ukahonga **laki**”*  
Eh man, eh! She is really fit, man, you can spend hundred thousand on her!”  
6 “*Aah **wapi** mtu kama mie **hanipati**,*  
“Never, she doesn’t get someone like me,

<sup>12</sup> A posh area in Dar es Salaam.



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- 7 *Usawa wenyewe huu wa kulenga kwa manati*  
that would be as difficult as aiming with a slingshot.”  
8 *“Haya basi tujichanganye katikati*  
“Well, let’s join the party,  
9 *Tukachekeki mitungi na mademu wa mikasi*”  
let’s look for alcohol and women for sex“

**(Bridge):**

- 10 *“Oyaa, brazu mwenye black unaitwa na yule anti*  
“Oyaa, brother in black, the woman over there is asking for you“  
11 *“Yuko wapi?”*  
“Where is she?”  
12 *“Yule aliyevaa suti ya kaki*  
“The one there in the khaki suit.”  
13 *“Anti vipi?”*  
“Auntie, what’s up?”

**(Rah P):**

- 14 *“Mmh, aah safi, samahani kwa kukupotezea wakati*  
“Mmh, ahh, it’s fine, sorry for taking away your time.  
15 *Nilikuwa naomba tuwe wote kwenye party*  
I just wanted to be together with you at this party.  
16 *Au unasemaje?” (Ngwair): “Mi naona safi*  
Or what do you think?” - “I like the idea.“

**(Mchizi Mox):**

- 17 *“Samahani wewe anti ambaye umevaa shati*  
“Sorry, auntie, you with the shirt”.  
18 *Hivi unaitwa nani eh?” – “Naitwa Bahati*  
Whats your name, eh?” – “My name is Bahati.”.  
19 *“Hivi anti nishawahi kukuona wapi?”*  
“Auntie, where have I seen you before?”

**(Rah P):**

- 20 *“Acha longolongo we sema una shing’ ngapi.”*  
“Stop yaking, just tell me how many shillings you’re having.”

**(Ngwair):**

- 21 *“Oya we vipi mpango wako vipi?”*  
“Hey, so, how are you going on with your plan?”

**(Mchizi Mox):**

- 22 *“Mbona mi, mazee, mpango wangu safi*  
“Why, dudes, everything is fine with me.”

**(Ngwair):**

- 23 *“Kuna usiku twenzetu tukachukue taksi,*  
“It’s night, lets go and get a taxi,  
24 *Twenzetu tukapige mikasi*”  
lets go and have sex.”

Groaning of a woman

**Chorus x2**

*come on, come on*

*Halo*  
*We*  
*Ee bwana eh, niko 'round mazee*  
 Eh man, I'm around

(Source: <http://www.darhotwire.com/dar/BongoXplosionLyrics/2004/11/08/639.html>, modified and translated by URJ).

### Formal analysis

The song comprises three verses of 24 lines separated by a chorus of four lines, which is repeated twice each time. There is a 4/4 beat throughout, the speed is within the normal range of HipHop music (about 90 beats/minute). The number of syllables per line is not fixed. There are lines with many syllables and others with relatively few. This results in variation of the speed of speaking, something that is considered skilful in rap music. The last syllable of a line always falls on the beat of the snare drum. Each phrase of the melody spans two lines. The two last syllables of each line rhyme on CaCi (C = consonant) throughout the song, the rhyme pattern thus being aaaaa...a. There is a small variation in lines I 6, I 11, I 19, and III 4 where we find CaiCi. Other rhyme words are *taksi*, *pakti*, and *blanti*. The words *dark* and *party* are pronounced [daki] and [pati]. The last two syllables of lines III 13 and III 21 differ a bit more from the rhyme pattern, as these lines end on *vipi*. In a number of lines, for example in II 16-19, internal rhyme on CaCi occurs. The same can be said about line II 21-22, where we have the near rhyming words *gani*, *baki*, *cheki*, and *laki*. Internal rhymes or near rhymes like these contribute to the flow, i.e. the skilful delivery of the rap.<sup>13</sup> The same can be said with regard to assonance, which seems to be of overall importance in *Mikasi*, as the vowel “a” is very dominant, followed by “i” and “u”. The vowel “o” is rather rare (9 in verse I, 19 in verse II, and 24 in verse III), and there is also relatively little “e”. The predominance of front vowels over back vowels gives a special quality of sound to the lyric.

It is worth noting that the formal composition of *Mikasi* is quite regular with regard to rhyme and verse, and in its regularity it reminds on traditional Swahili poetry (*mashairi*). However, the rhyme pattern here, as well as in many other *Bongo Fleva* pieces, is more in line with HipHop conventions and Western poetry: the rhyming units are defined by vowels, while consonants are not much important, whereas in *mashairi* we have whole syllables, i.e. in most cases consonant plus vowel. These rhyming syllables are called *vina* (sing. *kina*). The rhyme pattern of *Mikasi* is not the general rule in *Bongo Fleva*. In *Kikao cha Dharura* (‘Emergency Meeting’) by Prof. Jay, or in *Niko Bize* (I’m Busy’) by Jahffari, for example, the rhyme pattern is aabbccdde...xx.<sup>14</sup> However, there is also free verse in *Bongo Fleva* lyrics, like for example in *Nilikupenda* (‘I Loved You’) by Abby Skills ft. Dully Sykes (around 2004). A more

<sup>13</sup> Rap delivery, or flow, is defined by prosody, cadence, and speed (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapping#Flow>)

<sup>14</sup> The lyrics of both pieces can be found in Englert 2004: 86 ff.

detailed analysis of rhyme and rhythm in *Bongo Fleva* with respect to the conventions of rap music from the US and elsewhere would be desirable.

### Discourse analysis

The text consists of complex dialogues embedded in a frame of first-person narrative. In fact, the first-person perspective is getting replaced by direct speech of various characters in the course of the second verse. The first verse is entirely made up of first-person narrative. It reports the activities of the narrator from the time he wakes up until it gets dark. The narration is directed towards the hearer, who is addressed three times (line 7, 14, and 16). In line 7 he is called “*mzee*” (‘dude’, in standard Swahili ‘old man’), one of many terms of address used in contemporary youth language among mates. This creates the illusion of the hearer being part of the artists’ group. In the course of the first verse the social situation is expanding. At first Ngwair is alone, washing himself and dressing in stylish clothes, jewelry, and making use of perfume. From line 9 he is together with friends from two HipHop crews, and in line 11 they meet again another crew. By referring to certain localities and personalities playing a role in Tanzanian HipHop the text is anchored in real space and time, a fact that adds to its authenticity or realness. As Androutsopoulos & Scholz (2003: 14 ff.) have pointed out, references to real place and time are speech acts typical of HipHop in general. The friends chill out, eat, smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol. In the evening they go to a nearby graveyard to buy marijuana. After having consumed it, the first-person narrator proposes to go to town in order to find women to have sex with. Since women cost money, only those having enough of it left in their pockets should go.

The second verse consists of the direct representation of events and dialogues. The speakers are not in each case introduced, and therefore the hearer has to deduce from the context who is speaking. Different speakers and the modulation of voice help to identify the roles. The young men discuss the proposal to go to town and find women. They agree that they should not lose time and therefore call a taxi. After that they discuss the price with the driver (line 8 to 14). In the course of the negotiation it becomes clear that the excursion to town will be a costly enterprise. As no one is willing to pay for the others, only those who have enough money to pay for themselves are allowed to join the ride, in order to avoid possible conflicts (line 21-22). The second verse ends with the ride in the taxi to the place where a party is reportedly going on.

At the beginning of the third verse the young men arrive at the party, and interaction and dialogues become even more complex. In the first line the taxi driver is told to stop since they have arrived. Lines 2 to 9 render the dialogue of the young men in which they comment on the women present at the party. Their focus moves from a general assessment to that on particular women. Their appearance is discussed in connection with the money which supposedly has to be spent on them. The dialogue among the young men is concluded by the call to join the party (lines 8 and 9). Following this, two typical sequences of interaction between men and women at a party are depicted, one being more successful than the other, from the men’s

perspective. The first sequence is opened by a man acting as messenger for a woman present at the party, who is interested in Ngwair. He asks him to come to that woman and directs him towards her afterwards. When Ngwair approaches the woman he asks her about her intentions. She tells him that she would like to be together with him at the party, and he agrees. Then the two are out of focus and another dialogue is rendered (lines 17 to 20). This time Mchizi Mox, one of the group, tries his luck with a woman. His opening question is rather conventional, as he asks for her name and then claims to have already seen her somewhere. However, she cuts him short and directly comes to the point by asking him how much money he has. The roles are distributed differently in this case. The woman does not ask for the man's company but makes clear that her own company has its price. After these two dialogues the song continues at a later point in the evening. Ngwair comes to Mchizi Mox to ask how things are going on. Mchizi Mox replies that his plan has been successful. This means implicitly that he has found a woman to have sex with. Therefore, Ngwair proposes to leave the party in order to proceed to having sex (lines 23 and 24). The last chorus is mixed with the groaning of a woman, and the last line of the song consists of the expression *Niko 'round, mazee* ('I'm around, dudes'), which is much used by Tanzanian youths as a way of saying good-bye.

All in all, there are many roles in the song. Ngwair is the most active speaker with turns in line II 1-2, II 8-10, II 14-16, II 18-III 1, III 4, III 6-7, III 11, III 13, III 16, III 21, and III 23-24. He is followed by Mchizi Mox with turns in line III 17-19 and III 22, anonymous members of the group (line II 3, II 4, II 5, III 2-3, III 5, III 8-9), the taxi-driver (line II 11, II 13), the messenger (line III 10, III 12), the woman with the khaki suit (line III 14-16, spoken by the female rapper Rah P.), the woman with the shirt (line III 18, III 20, spoken by Rah P.), and the group members Ludigo (line II 17) and Venture (line II 17). Among these roles the taxi driver represents a member of an out-group. However, it must be noted that Ngwair talks to him much in the same way as he does to his mates, i.e. he uses the same code, as can be seen in line 14. It could be assumed that this use is intentional, i.e. that Ngwair acts as a youth who is using street language as a sociolect and not as a register – or even that this is his own habit. Somebody who uses street language irrespective of the social status of his interlocutor would be considered as a “*mhuni*” (hooligan) in Tanzanian society (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 16). This could be meant to express that Ngwair does not care about what established people could think of him, that he is an individualist. On the other hand, the items of street language which are used by the taxi driver, like for example *buku* ‘thousand shillings’ or *cheki* ‘see’, are widely used in colloquial language and therefore have become almost unmarked. The women in the song use standard Swahili. The first one (line III 14-16) speaks in a very polite way. The second woman seems to be a bit tougher, as she cuts her interlocutor short and uses the street word *longolongo* ‘empty words’. However, the speech behaviour of the women reflects the fact that street language is gendered, being more commonly used by male speakers. Additionally, there could be a distinction of class, as the women at the party might have an upper class background.

The “dramatic structure” is a prominent feature of *Mikasi*. It might be special in its extent, but, as has been mentioned earlier in this article, there are other pieces of *Bongo Fleva* that have basically the same form. It might be considered as a truly local form which has been evolving in the process of the appropriation of American HipHop. However, it is interesting to note that in the local appropriation of HipHop in Germany a similar form has been developed, especially by the group “Blumentopf” (engl. ‘flower pot’).<sup>15</sup>

### **Boasting and Dissing**

Boasting and Dissing are two global features of HipHop lyrics. Boasting, i.e. praising and glorifying oneself and one’s group, is normally communicated through self-referential speech. Dissing (etymologically a clipped form of ‘disrespecting’), i.e. verbal humiliation of others, normally makes reference to third parties without naming them personally (Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2003: 16). The way Ngwair presents himself in *Mikasi* can be called “indirect boasting” since he boasts implicitly through the dialogic interaction with his friends. He dominates the dialogues, he takes initiative, he proposes what the group should do, he negotiates with the taxi-driver, and he decides who should come to the party and who should stay behind. By doing so he puts a limit to the solidarity within the group. He exposes rhetoric ability as he makes clear that the measure is taken in order to prevent conflicts within the group. At the same time he patronizes the group members who have only little money left, as he recommends to them to keep the money in order to buy a *chapati* for breakfast on the next day. This could be called a subtle way of dissing. The implicit boasting is continued after the men have arrived at the party. They assess a woman wearing a skintight dress by discussing the sum of money that probably has to be spent on her. However, Ngwair responds by saying that on the contrary the woman could hardly get somebody like him. After this dialogue Ngwair is called by a girl present at the party, who invites him to be together with her. This is contrasted to the efforts of his friend Mchizi Mox who tries to make an advance to a girl but in turn is boldly asked by her how much money he has. The dialogues and scenes are instrumental in making Ngwair appear as a leading figure within the group.

### **Linguistic analysis**

The song *Mikasi* makes ample use of non-standard linguistic elements. An audience without knowledge of it would hardly be able to understand the song. The analysis presented here is based on field research on the young urban style of speaking in Tanzania conducted between 2000 and 2006 (cf. Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006).

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<sup>15</sup> For example in the pieces “Block und Bleistift” (‘book and pencil’) or “Der Frauenflüsterer” (‘the women whisperer’)..

*The lexeme “mikasi”*

As already mentioned, *mikasi* means ‘scissors’ in standard Swahili. In the song it is used as a metaphor for sexual intercourse, the cognitive motivation being similarity of movement. The listener has to gather the meaning from the word’s context in the song. *Mikasi* has become popular and has been incorporated in the lexicon of youths in Tanzania. In 2005 it was known by a great number of young people, and was also used in phrasemes. Thus, the male activity in the sexual act is called *piga mikasi* or *kula mikasi*, denoting the active role. If the act is seen as a common activity of man and woman, the phraseme *fanya mikasi* is used.

*Terms of address*

Special terms of address distinguish between in-group and out-group, as a number of terms are reserved for the members of the in-group. They are therefore typical for youth language. In the song *Mikasi* some of these terms occur (see below 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). The terms *anti* (III 13, III 17, III 19) and *suka* (II 23) are not confined to youth language. *anti* (from English ‘aunt’) is a respectful term of address towards women, *suka* means ‘driver’ (derived from *usukani* ‘steering wheel’). In addition, it can also be noted that in addressing unknown persons reference is made to their appearance (6, 7).

- 1) *mzee* (I 7): ‘dude’, from standard Swahili ‘old man’. Used by young men to address male friends.
- 2) *mazee* (III 23, last line), prefix of class 6 (augmentative): ‘dudes’. Used towards a group of addressees. The prefix of class 6 is used as an augmentative, expressing a more or less jocular self-heightening of the members of one’s in-group.
- 3) *washikaji* (II 2), derived from the verb *shika* ‘hold’. Relatively gender-neutral, used towards a group of addressees.
- 4) *babake* (II 14, III 5), ‘his/her father’. Relatively gender-neutral. Interestingly, this term is used in addressing an interlocutor, despite the third person possessive.
- 5) *braza* (III 10), transfer from English ‘brother’. Used among male youths, especially by younger ones towards older ones.
- 6) *braza mwenye black* (III 10) ‘brother in black’.
- 7) *wewe anti ambaye umevaa shati* (III 17) ‘you, lady wearing a shirt’.

*English lexemes*

The English lexemes in *Mikasi* can be put in three groups: Firstly, English lexemes that have become part of common street language in Tanzania (see below 8, 9, 10, 11, 12). Secondly, terms connected to HipHop culture (see below 13, 14, 15), and thirdly, English lexemes that are predominantly used in codemixing (see below 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21). The use of lexemes from these three categories helps to express the speaker’s membership in different groups, i.e.

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Tanzanian youth, HipHop culture, and modern, educated, cosmopolitan Tanzanians. With regard to English lexemes it is the question of choice that is most relevant, since in many cases there are Swahili equivalents at hand. As Ngwair uses lexemes from each of the three categories, he portrays himself as versatile personality who is a HipHopper as well as an educated young man. English lexemes occur in the form of verbs, nouns and adjectives. Some of them are used with a different meaning than in English. These have already become fully integrated into Swahili street language (9,10, 15).

### Category 1:

- 8) *sachi* (I 21) ‘check, search, look for’. Could be replaced by standard Swahili (SS) *tafuta, angalia*.
- 9) *cheki* (II 13, III 3), from English ‘check’: ‘see, look at’, (in some contexts also ‘check’). Could be replaced by SS *ona, angalia, or tazama*, depending on context. This verb is widely in use. For example, in the song it is used by the taxi-driver in II13.
- 10) *maindi* (II 14), from English ‘mind’: ‘like, want, demand, care’. Could be replaced by SS *penda, taka, dai*.
- 11) *kitchen party* (III 3). This term is used to denote a gathering of women. This meaning is derived from a certain ceremony within wedding ceremonies where only women are admitted. No direct Swahili equivalent.
- 12) *skintight* (III 4). No direct SS equivalent.

### Category 2:

- 13) *party* (II 24, III 1, III 2, III 15). No direct SS equivalent.
- 14) *blingbling* (I 4): like in American HipHop-culture this term denotes jewelry, especially chains.
- 15) *ghetto* (I 3). In contrast to the original meaning in American HipHop-culture, where this term denotes the area where the HipHop groups live, in Tanzanian youth language it has come to denote a room in which young people live together or meet regularly. Therefore, it denotes a room rather than a neighbourhood. In *Mikasi* it seems to refer to the narrator’s bed-room.

### Category 3:

- 16) *lunch* (I 17). Could be replaced by SS *chakula cha mchana*.
- 17) *night* (I 19). Could be replaced by SS *usiku*.
- 18) *graveyard* (I 20). Could be replaced by SS *makaburini*.
- 19) *bath* (I 2) ‘wash oneself, take a shower’. Could be replaced by SS *oga*.
- 20) *cost* (II 10) ‘cost’. Could be replaced by SS *gharamia*

21) *black* (I 5, III 10). Could be replaced by SS *-eusi*

### Semantic domains

Like in youth languages in general, the lexemes of Tanzanian *Lugha ya Mitaani* cluster in certain semantic domains (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 18 ff.). This is reflected in the lyrics of *Mikasi*, where we find special terms in the domain of clothing, drugs, women, the in-group, money, enjoying, and communication.

#### *Clothing*

It is very important for youths in contemporary Tanzania to be dressed in a fashionable and stylish way, since clothing serves as expression of group-membership. This is reflected by the multitude of special terms that denote certain styles, materials and kinds of clothes. As has been noted above, in the identification and address of unknown persons, reference is made to their clothes.

22) *pamba* (I 4): noun cl. 9 ‘fashionable, stylish clothing. Metonymic extension of *pamba* ‘cotton’.

23) *t-shirt black* (I 5): anglicism; the word order is Swahili.

24) *jeanz ya kaki* (I 5): the English lexeme ‘jeans’ is treated like a Swahili noun of class 9.

25) *simple white* (I 6): simple white trainers. These shoes were most fashionable in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

26) *chapa Nike* (I 6): trademark ‘Nike’

27) *skintaiti* (III 4): noun cl. 9 ‘skintight dress’

#### *Drugs*

Names for beer and other alcoholic drinks, as well as for drugs abound in Tanzanian *Lugha ya Mitaani* (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 28). In *Mikasi* alcohol and marijuana are presented as being part of the lifestyle of the artists. This accords to American HipHop culture.

28) *fegi* (I 14): noun cl. 9/10 ‘cigarette’. Transfer from English ‘fag’.

29) *nyasi* (I 20): noun cl. 9/10 ‘pot, grass, marijuana’. Calque of English slang ‘grass’.

30) *mitungi* (I 13, chorus): noun cl. 4 ‘beer, alcoholic drink’. Metonymic extension of Swahili *mitungi* ‘clay water pots’.

31) *blanti* (chorus): noun ‘joint of marijuana’. Transfer from American slang ‘blunt’.

#### *Mates*

There are not only a great number of different terms of address, but also terms to denote members of the in-group when referring to them. In *Mikasi* we can find three terms:



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32) *washikaji* (II 2): noun cl. 2 ‘friends’. Relatively gender-neutral.

33) *machizi* (I 9, I 24): noun cl. 6 ‘friends, mates’. Mainly used among male speakers.

34) *mchizi* (II 24): noun cl. 1 ‘friend, mate, cool guy’. Mainly used among male speakers.

### Women

The large number of terms used to denote women, many of which are evaluative, reflects the fact that Tanzanian street language is gendered in some respects. In fact, the creators of *Lugha ya Mitaani* are mainly male youths. In *Mikasi* women are exclusively presented as sex objects. Therefore it is not surprising that they are referred to in the plural, not as individuals. The noun phrase in (36) is a special case as it is not commonly used and very pejorative. The noun stem *dudu* denotes something like an insect or other small creature. The prefix *mi-* (cl. 4) adds to it the meaning of “powerful, dangerous” (Contini-Morava 1997, Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 49). Contrary to this, *anti* is a respectful term (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 21). The expression of respect or appreciation can be heightened by the use of the augmentative, as example 50 (below) shows.

35) *milupo* (III 2, III 3): noun cl. 4 ‘women easily laid’.

36) *midudu ya kupiga mikasi* (II 9): noun phrase ‘things to have sex with’.

37) *mademu* ((III 3): noun cl. 6 ‘women’. Transfer from English ‘dame’.

38) *mademu wa mikasi* (III 9): noun phrase ‘women for sex’.

39) *anti* (III 4, 5, 10, 19): noun cl. 5 ‘woman’. Transfer from English ‘aunt’. This is a respectful term. Concord can be to class 1 (III 10), or to class 5 (III 4, 5) to express augmentation.

### Money

Street language in Tanzania has a lot of terms that denote money in general as well as kinds of notes and coins. In *Mikasi* we find the following:

40) *buku* (II 11, II 17): noun cl. 9/10 ‘note of 1000 shillings’. Metonymic extension of English ‘book’.

41) *bati* (II 17, II 18, II 19): noun cl. 9 ‘coin of 100 shillings’. Metonymic extension from SS *bati* ‘white hard metal’.

### Enjoying

Enjoying is at the core of *Mikasi*. Its message is that youths want to enjoy their lives, that enjoying comprises alcohol, drugs and women, and that in order to obtain all this one must have money. Youths are using new terms to denote ‘enjoying’ instead of the standard Swahili terms *anasa*, or *starehe*. However, in *Mikasi* we find also the standard expression *kula raha* ‘be comfortable’ (I 16).

42) *kamua* (I 17): verb ‘enjoy, profit’. Could be replaced by SS *furahia, pata faida*.

43) *makamuzi* (II 19): noun cl. 6 ‘enjoyment’.

44) *vinjari* (chorus): verb ‘enjoy, loaf around’.

### Communication

The field of “communication” is one of the most elaborated in modern Swahili street language. The lexemes accumulate in the fields of chatting, gossip and spreading of news, telling lies and cheating, keeping quiet or concealing something, and not being able to speak well (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 24 ff.). In *Mikasi* the mobile phone plays a role in communication (I 10, II 24). Only one special “street language” term from the domain of “communication” is used in *Mikasi*.

45) *longolongo* (III 20): noun cl. 9/10 ‘empty words, false words’.

### Colloquial language not specifically used by youths

In *Mikasi* we can find lexical items that have since long been used in colloquial speech. These are, for example, the clipped forms *we* instead of *wewe* and *mi* instead of *mimi*. *Shilingi* is shortend to *shing*. Others are words, like *kibao* (49), and phrases, like *kuwa safi* (46).

46) *kuwa safi* (chorus, II 14): verb phrase ‘have money’. SS ‘be clean’.

47) *shing* (II 10, III 20). Short form of *shilingi*.

48) *bonge la party* (II 24, III 2). *bonge* (noun cl. 5) is colloquially used to denote something big, huge.

49) *kibao* (III 3): adverb/adjective ‘lots of, very many, in abundance’

50) *cheki lile anti liliovaa skintight* (III 4), *liko safi sio mchezo* (III 5): Agreement to class 5 in phrases where the prefix of class 5 is used as augmentative.

51) *tushalewa* (II 1), *tushafika* (III 1), *nishawahi* (III 19). In colloquial speech the standard form *-mesha-* is often shortened to *-sha-*.

### Conclusion

*Mikasi* is a piece of *Bongo Flewa* which portrays the artists’ lifestyle, a topic typical for HipHop. This lifestyle emphasizes appearance and enjoyment. First of all, it shows the artists as living in an exclusively male group-network. During the day they enjoy their life by dressing well, eating opulent meals, smoking cigarettes, and drinking alcohol. Most of this is done in the company of friends. When it is getting dark, illegal drugs (marijuana) are consumed. Then it is time for having sex, and this is the point where women come in. In the song, the first verse is dedicated to activities during the day, and the third to those of the night. In the second verse, the prerequisite for all the enjoyment, money, is discussed. *Mikasi* does not have a critical message. It is nevertheless provoking as it thwarts official discourse on the role of

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youths in society, who should be subjected to the needs of the nation instead of being self-absorbed. It must also be noted that on the album “a.k.a. mimi” *Mikasi* is followed by a song about AIDS, which could be read as a critical comment on the party lifestyle. *Mikasi* demonstrates the interdependence of *Bongo Fleva* and street language, as it not only makes use of it but also adds to it new items. Regarding its structure, *Mikasi* represents the “dramatic form” of *Bongo Fleva*. This locally developed form of HipHop is rooted in oral story-telling performance, and, to a lesser degree, in *Muziki wa Dansi*. In American HipHop this form is rarely found. Therefore it can be considered as a locally developed form. Global attributes of HipHop like boasting and dissing have become adapted to the dramatic structure. Thus, *Mikasi* and other pieces of *Bongo Fleva* with the same structure can be regarded as an instance of localisation of a global phenomenon.

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