

David Kerr

THUGS AND GANGSTERS: IMAGINATION AND THE PRACTICE OF RAPPING IN DAR ES SALAAM

ABSTRACT

Since the arrival of hip hop in Tanzania in the 1980s, a diverse and vibrant range of musical genres has developed in Tanzania's commercial capital, Dar es Salaam. Incorporating rapping, these new musical genres and their associated practices have produced new imaginative spaces, social practices, and identities. In this paper, I argue that rappers have appropriated signs and symbols from the transnational image of hip hop to cast themselves as 'thugs' or 'gangsters', simultaneously imbuing these symbols with distinctly Tanzanian political conceptions of hard work (*kazi ya jasho*), justice (*haki*) and self-reliance (*kujitegemea*). This article examines how the persona of the rapper acts as a nexus for transnational and local moral and ethical conceptions such as self-reliance, strength, and struggle. Exploring the complicated, ambiguous, and contradictory nature of cultural production in contemporary Tanzania, I argue that rappers use the practice of rapping to negotiate both the socialist past and neo-liberal present. Drawing on the work of De Certeau and Graeber, I argue that rappers use these circulating signs, symbols, and concepts both tactically and strategically to generate value, shape social reality and inscribe themselves into the social and political fabric of everyday life.

Keywords: hip hop, popular music, Tanzania, Ujamaa, value

INTRODUCTION

It is mid-morning in June 2011 and I am sat with two 'underground' rappers, Octavian Thomas and Richard Joseph Kizito, close to the grounds of the TCC club in Chang'ombe, Dar es Salaam.¹ As during our previous meetings, we are sat on wooden benches propped up against the wall of a local compound. We drink soft drinks from a nearby shop and discuss practices of rapping

as well as our individual hopes and ambitions. Octavian and Richard, who as rappers adopt the names O-Key and Kizito, are both students and live close to where we meet. Kizito is from Chang'ombe and O-Key is from the adjacent neighbourhood of Keko. Both rappers, as in our previous discussion, regularly use terms familiar from the lexicon of hip hop discourse to refer to themselves and their associates as 'thugs' and 'gangsters'. In this, O-Key and Kizito were not

unique; the symbolic figure of the 'gangster' or 'thug' regularly featured in lyrics, conversations, and discussions with rappers for the duration of my multiple stays in Dar es Salaam. As morning turns to afternoon our discussion moves to the contours of the category of the 'gangster'. What modes of behaviour does a gangster exhibit? How do the everyday comportment, style, and posture of a 'gangster' differ? O-Key described the 'gangster' as a 'man of the people who used to share ideas, to chill with "hommies" and share ideas with friends'. From the description outlined by Kizito and O-Key it is clear that their conception of the 'gangster' is one principally moored in moral and political values. The figure of the 'gangster' embodies a form of value which, as I will argue, was used by rappers to navigate the complexities of both the legacies of African socialism and the neo-liberal present.

African youth and its role in contemporary African societies, as both a potentially destructive and creative force, has sparked lively scholarly debate (Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Diouf 2003; Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006; Honwana and de Boeck 2005). One focus has been on the challenges of negotiating new neo-liberal regimes of meaning and in particular on the circulation of signs and symbols from transnational media forms (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Mains 2007; Weiss 2009; Shipley 2013a; Shipley 2013b). Drawing on the work of David Graeber, in this article I wish to shift the focus from the consumption of transnational media to the production of value and meaning (Graeber 2001; Graeber 2011). Moving the focus from consumption to production shifts the locus of our analysis from the attainment of desire to the production of meaning. I will explore how terms appropriated from the lexicon of hip hop are imbued with meaning by the young men that use them, and form part of their conceptual

life worlds.² My focus in this article is not on hip hop as an ideology, philosophy, and range of practices but as a set of signs and symbols which are appropriated and reanimated. Thus I examine the ways in which rappers mobilise socio-political concepts and how these in turn act upon rappers' social relations. Tanzanian rappers' conceptions of the 'gangster' are, I argue, intertwined with the political, moral, and discursive legacies of Ujamaa, and what Straughn has termed 'cultural repertoires' (Straughn 2009: 491). The figure of the 'gangster' comes to embody a specific form of value. I employ the concept of value as potentiality and creativity from Graeber for whom value is 'the way actions become meaningful to the actors by being placed in some larger social whole, real or imaginary' (Graeber 2001: 254). I read rappers' use of concepts from Ujamaa discourse not as a nostalgic longing for a return to the past but as the 'repetition, transformation, and reactivation' (Foucault 2002: 31) of concepts and values which enable forms of value creation, of ideational strategies in the present. Rappers' relationships with the conceptual legacy of Ujamaa are both complicated and at times ambiguous.

The work of De Certeau on cultural users and the pursuit of 'relational tactics (a struggle for life), artistic creations (an aesthetic), and autonomous initiatives (an ethic)' offers us a lens through which we might view rapping in Dar es Salaam (De Certeau 1985: ix). De Certeau asserts that speech and discourses are 'systems of representations or processes of fabrication' which 'no longer appear only as normative frameworks but also as tools *manipulated by users*' (ibid.: 21). This notion of the manipulation of speech and discourse by users in their struggle, aesthetically and ethically, might prove instructive for our analysis of how concepts are appropriated by rappers in Dar es

Salaam. By contrasting strategy, the realm of the powerful, with the tactics of the marginalised, who ‘use, manipulate, and divert’ (ibid.: 30), De Certeau reads everyday activities as a form of resistance to the dominant order, a resistance whose primary technique is that of *la perruque*, poaching, the trick of taking time or resources from the dominant order.

This article will use this distinction offered between strategy and tactics to explore the complications and contradictions of cultural production in the liberalised music economy of Dar es Salaam. Examining the appropriation and reanimation of a cultural repertoire of concepts and values associated with Ujamaa can complicate the notion of hip hop in Tanzania as principally a tactic of resistance. Ideas and values associated with Ujamaa, I argue, represent a strategic means for young people to inscribe themselves into, while at the same time refashioning, social and political discourse. I argue, using Graeber’s concept of value, that drawing on the conceptual language of Ujamaa is a way of both creating and expressing value. The use of concepts associated with Ujamaa may not only be read as tactical and strategic but as ideational, as a means through which rappers conceptually make sense of the past, present, and future. As Weiss has argued of young men in Arusha, Tanzania, ‘the most compelling global signs and images of personhood—and especially of a public persona—are embedded in the world of rap and hip hop music and style’ (Weiss 2005: 113). Global hip hop, a cultural form containing the elements of break dancing, emceeing, and beliefs, has attracted considerable scholarship (Bynoe 2002; Morgan and Bennett 2011).³ Hip hop has been seen to operate, globally, as a community with shared beliefs acting through what Osumare terms ‘connective marginalities’ (Osumare 2001: 172) or what Alim has conceived of as ‘*translocal stylecommunities*’ (Alim

2009: 104). More recently, however, Morgan has argued that this notion of a transnational set of philosophies and practices is an ‘impossible ideology’ (Morgan 2016: 145). Appropriated from the circulation of signs and symbols associated with the transnational genre of hip hop, young men in Dar es Salaam use the figure of the ‘thug’ or ‘gangster’ to conceptualise their identities. I argue that attentiveness to the discursive practices of popular culture can offer insight into how the life worlds of young people in Dar es Salaam are conceptualised.

UJAMAA AND AFRICAN SOCIALISM

Re-evaluation of the legacies of Nyerere and Ujamaa have been the subject of a recent revival of scholarly interest (Fouéré et al 2016; Mazrui and Mhando et al 2012; Molony 2012; Shivji 2012; Saul 2012). Contestations of this legacy continue to be a hot topic of discussion in Tanzania (Becker 2013; Askew 2006). Since independence a single political party, TANU, which renamed itself Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) in 1977, has governed Tanzania. Following independence in 1961 Julius Nyerere became president of Tanganyika, later Tanzania and, with the Arusha Declaration of 1967, Tanzania began to follow a policy of African Socialism. Nyerere developed a distinct African socialist political philosophy called Ujamaa or African Familyhood, at the heart of which was a belief that socialism entailed a return to African ‘traditional’ values which were constituted of ‘features, such as democracy, human rights, egalitarianism, education for self-reliance and women’s liberation’ (Stöger-Eising 2000: 129). These principles were reflected in respect for each other, communal ownership, and hard work (Stöger-Eising 2000: 130). The Tanzanian Constitution still makes reference

to Ujamaa as a founding principle of the state, with its object being to foster a 'nation of equal and free individuals enjoying freedom, justice, fraternity and concord, through the pursuit of the policy of Socialism and Self Reliance which emphasizes the application of socialist principles' (United Republic of Tanzania 1977: 13). Many of the important principles of the Ujamaa project continue to play an important role in contemporary Tanzanian social and political discourse. Concepts such as *kujitegemea*, or self-reliance (Sanders 2008: 117), *baki* or justice (Dancer 2015: 103) and *kazi ya jasho* or hard work continue to be important markers of moral value in Tanzania's contemporary social-political discourse.

In the late 1970s Tanzania experienced a series of economic shocks and exports fell by 50% between 1970 and 1980, with a consequent fall in real wages (Tripp 1997: 3). From the early 1980s onwards, the state adopted a number of programmes aimed at liberalising the economy, including the National Economic Stabilization Programme (1981), the Structural Adjustment Programme (1982), the Economic Recovery Programme (1986), and the Economic and Social Action Programme (1989–1991). In 1985 Nyerere resigned as Tanzanian president in part over his unwillingness to accept further re-structuring of the economy. While Tanzania may have 'jettisoned' (Kaiser 1996: 231) Ujamaa in favour of more market-orientated policies, the values of Ujamaa continued to play a significant role in social and political discourse. In Tanzania, as the studies of Caplan (2007) in Mafia island, and Lal (2012) in Mtwara, have shown, the history and discourse of Ujamaa are constantly being reinvented, revaluated, and reinterpreted by Tanzania's citizens. While economic policies in Tanzania have altered following the neo-liberal reforms of the late 1980s and 1990s, the state has continued to

praise Nyerere as *Baba wa Taifa* (father of the nation) (Becker 2013: 253). Nyerere continues to be an important moral symbol in Tanzania which can be invoked both as a symbol of national unity and as a spectre to critique the present. The interest of this article is in the complex and at times ambiguous re-animation of concepts associated with Ujamaa as forms of value in contemporary society.

CULTURE AND THE TANZANIAN STATE

During Ujamaa the state was to play an active role in national culture. Nyerere emphasised the important role of culture in the building of the newly independent nation in his inaugural Presidential address:

I believe that its culture is the essence and spirit of any nation. A country which lacks its own culture is no more than a collection of people without the spirit that makes them a nation. (Nyerere 1966: 186)

The notion of a 'national culture' was to influence Tanzanian national policies profoundly over the next forty years. Musical genres were classified as either national or foreign. *Kwaya*, *ngoma*, *dansi*, and *taarab* were designated national genres by the state, while others, such as funk and soul, were considered foreign (Askew 2002: 276). State and para-state organisations were the most prominent patrons of musicians, and the state, to a large extent, dictated what was recorded in the state-owned recording studios and played on the state-owned radio. Political actors, in particular the youth wing of TANU/CCM, were active in contestations over what was appropriate behaviour for Tanzanian citizens (Ivaska 2002: 584). In the 1960s and 1970s there were conflicts between youth in Dar

es Salaam over the playing of soul music and the wearing of mini-skirts. This contestation over the notion of national culture was, as Ivaska argues, 'as much a vehicle for negotiating anxieties about urban order, gender chaos, and undisciplined youth in a cosmopolitan capital as a tool for overcoming a colonial past' (Ivaska 2011: 38). Popular culture was a space in which the new nation of Tanzania could be imagined, as well as a site of contestations over the national, moral, and political order. Removal of state control and liberalisation of the media, as we shall see, has continued to situate popular culture as a locus for negotiating gender, moral and socio-political values.

HIP HOP IN DAR ES SALAAM

As a consequence of state cultural policies it was through the soundtracks of films such as *Wild Styles*, *Breakin'*, *Breakin' 2*, and *Electric Boogaloo*, shown at the Saba Saba grounds in Dar es Salaam in 1984 (Perullo 2007: 254), rather than via the radio, that hip hop arrived in Tanzania. Access to imported music was limited largely to the children of wealthier families (Englert 2003: 77). Consequently many of the first rappers in Dar es Salaam had high levels of education and were able to replicate the English-language verses of their favourite American rappers. Schools also provided important locations for early rap competitions. By the early 1990s a significant local hip hop scene had developed and, in 1991, the first major rap competition, 'Yo Rap Bonanza' (Lemelle 2006: 235), took place, and the first Tanzanian rap recording in Swahili was released: 'Ice Ice Baby—King of Swahili Rap' (Charry 2012: 15). Liberalisation of the economy had a profound impact upon the production of popular culture in Tanzania. The Broadcasting Services Act June 11 1993 allowed private individuals and businesses in Tanzania

to purchase licenses to broadcast radio and TV. Under the new regime of liberalisation, private media proliferated, in particular FM stations not controlled by state cultural policies, while the liberalisation of import duties in the early 1990s enabled individuals to import studio equipment from abroad. In 1991 the Don Bosco studio opened in Dar es Salaam and was followed in the early 1990s by Mawingu, P Funk's, and MJ Productions' studios. These studios and the producers who worked in them, P Funk, Master J, and Bonnie Luv, were central to the recording of early rapped records in Tanzania including those of seminal groups such as Kwanza Unit, GWM, the Villains, KBC, Hardblasters, and Mr II. This form of rap, delivered in Swahili, came to be referred to as Bongo Flava. Bongo is derived from the Swahili word *ubongo* or brain, and *bongo* has become shorthand in Tanzania for Dar es Salaam—a city which requires the use of the brain, and cunning, to survive. It is the combination of the use of Swahili, the liberalisation of the media, and the development of new studios that enabled what has been called a 'Bongo Explosion' (Reuster-Jahn and Hacke 2011: 8).

Much of the early rapped music in Tanzania was characterised by the socio-political or 'conscious' nature of its lyrics.⁴ Rap music of this period focused on issues such as 'Aids, drug use, government corruption, lack of jobs, and the impossibility of attaining a visa to leave the country' (Fenn and Perullo 2000: 24). As the rapper Mr 2 / Sugu has described, 'there was real Bongo Flava like *hali halisi*, we were rapping for the people, we were rapping real life you know'. The term *hali halisi*' (the real situation) has become a reference point for conscious hip hop in Tanzania, used in albums, videos, and song titles. The normative value of the role of an artist as social commentator is reflected in the ubiquitousness of the term *kioo*

cha jarii (the mirror to society) to describe the role of artists in contemporary Tanzania. The release in 2002 of Professor Jay's album *Machosi, Jasho na Damu* (Blood, Sweat and Tears) was frequently referenced by rappers, producers, and fans as a significant moment in the increasingly widespread recognition and popularity of rapped music. A combination of socio-political commentary, humour, and narratives of the everyday experiences of Dar es Salaam's residents meant that it could appeal to a wide audience.

As rapped music has moved from the margins to the mainstream in Tanzania, a heterogeneous range of genres and sub-genres have incorporated rapping into their forms. Rapping can be found in the Tanzanian genres of bongo flava, hip hop, dancehall reggae, and RnB. These genres have spawned an expanding and shifting range of sub-genres, which Omari outlined in 2009 as rap katuni (cartoon rap), gangsta (hardcore rap), message rap, and playa (party or commercial rap) (Omari 2009: 4). The boundaries of, and meanings ascribed to, these genres and subgenres are contested by artists, popular culture commentators, and fans of Tanzanian rapped music. Genres and sub-genres are ascribed ideological, gendered, and symbolic meanings and come to embody a set of social and gendered values.

A common trope among hip hop fans in Dar es Salaam is contrasting the 'realness' of hip hop with the 'fakeness' of Bongo Flava. For some performers, cultural intermediaries, and scholars, Bongo Flava has become a 'hybrid culture that is based on "extravagant consumption" and consumer capitalism, ripe with imitations of American pop culture' (Kibona Clark 2013: 8). For many rappers the 'realness' and masculinity of the act of rapping, and of hip hop, is contrasted with the 'fakeness' and femininity of singing and Bongo Flava. The rapper D-Knob

expressed the distinction between the two genres thus:

A rapper is considered more powerful than the one who sings in Tanzania. You rap, you talk about lots of things, about street things, and this guy talks about 'oh I love you baby'. I talk about I'm a bad man; I talk about how politicians use us like this.

Definitions of the two genres are contested and ambiguous. Space provided by private media has enabled the articulation of new models of contemporary Tanzanian identity. Gendered identities and moral values are performed and contested in contemporary Tanzanian popular culture. The changing nature of public and economic life under the new liberalised regime has engendered new opportunities and anxieties. The celebrity identities of musical stars, for instance, disseminated through the liberalised media, both challenge and conform to normative moral values. Notions of the artist as serving a socio-political role, framed by the idea of the artist as the mirror of society, remain a significant part of the rapped music oeuvre in Dar es Salaam.

In his song 'Tanzania', which was being played on the radio in 2010 and 2011, another Dar es Salaam rapper named Roma delivered a strident and outspoken critique of the current state of Tanzania, taking the very unusual step of naming both a politician and a religious leader in the song. Roma was careful to place his song within the mainstream national political discourse, beginning it by referencing both the name of Nyerere and the date of Tanzanian independence. In another song, 'Mr President', Roma began with a voice recording of one of Nyerere's speeches. These invocations of Independence and Nyerere, who operates as both a symbol of the dominant political

order and an evocation of moral authority, can be read as a means to metamorphosing 'the dominant order' in order to make 'it function in another register' (De Certeau 1985: 32). The use of a register from political discourse helps to legitimise the rapper's voice, to place him as someone who speaks both to, and for, the nation. Socio-political commentary, in fact, represents a normative space for popular music performance in Tanzania; the commentator on society has a long established and accepted role within Tanzanian society. Political commentary might, in fact, be read as a conservative adherence to societal norms, and songs which foreground consumption and wealth as a more radical departure.

PERFORMANCE, PUBLIC SPACE AND UNDERGROUND RAP

As well as rap stars, the visibility and popularity of Tanzanian rapped music has also produced *mandagraundi* or 'underground' rappers. *Mandagraundi* are defined as 'rappers who have not yet released an album' (Reuster-Jahn 2008: 56) or 'those who have not yet experienced success on a larger scale' (Englert 2008: 75). These are largely young men without the financial or social capital necessary to access studios or to record (Kerr 2015: 68). Excluded from the formal, commercial spaces of performance, underground rappers congregate at sites of male socialising called *maskani* (base, dwelling, or abode);⁵ they occupy public space, street corners, or open spaces where covering affords some protection from the sun. As Bayat has argued, the street is the public space '*par excellence*' for those excluded from the institutions of public life in which people can 'assemble, make friends, earn a living, spend their leisure time, and express discontent'

(Bayat 2013: 52). The majority of *maskani* I attended during my research were situated in unplanned settlements commonly referred to as *uswabilini*.⁶ It is at *maskani* that underground rappers are able to practice, and principally where their status as rappers is recognised. During my two lengthier periods of fieldwork in Dar es Salaam I spent time with a number of groups of underground rappers at *maskani* in the neighbourhoods of Msasani, Kiwalani, Kinondoni, Mwananyamala, Keko, Buza, and Mikocheni, all of which were in many ways heterogeneous. Msasani and Mikocheni were largely planned settlements with pockets of *uswabilini*, informal settlements, within them. Keko, a three-kilometre journey from the city centre is one of the oldest *uswabilini* areas of Dar es Salaam (Brennan and Burton 2007: 54). Buza is a peri-urban area on the outskirts of the city, close to the larger planned area of Mbagala in which livestock and small farming plots are interspersed between the houses.

On occasion members of *maskani* organised larger musical and dance performances called *kampu* or *vigodoro* (small mattress). These events are held in *uswabilini* and with the hire of speakers and building of stages these events dominate informal neighbourhoods spatially and sonically. As I have argued elsewhere, *kampu* act as a means for young people to gain recognition and to contest their marginality in the local music economy (Kerr 2016: 10), and contravene the conventional order with their domination of physical, social, and sonic space by younger people; on occasion this may take the form of physical violence (Kerr 2016: 9). These performances might well be read as a form of tactical trickery in which 'there is a certain art of placing one's blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space' (De Certeau 1985: 18). Underground

rappers' temporary control over space (physical, sonic, and social) represents a subversion of the conventional order. Networks of *kampu* are held throughout the city, with *maskani* inviting each other to perform. This offers opportunities for underground rappers to become local celebrities. Social recognition by their peers, and the opportunity for local kinds of 'fame' in which their names and reputations travel through space and time, grant rappers a form of value that is social rather than economic. *Kampu* and *maskani* also act as space for collective action, means whereby money is raised and events organised, and on occasion have a wider role in member's lives by contributing to celebrations and funerals. A large collective of rappers from the KGM *maskani* in Mburahati and Kigogo area of Dar es Salaam described their goals as a form of *kujitegemea* or self-sufficiency, with the ultimate aim of being to be able to record their own music. Members of the *maskani* would contribute money, expertise, space, and equipment towards the establishment of a functioning recording studio. *Kujitegemea* is a guiding principle Ujamaa used in reference not only to the self-sufficiency of the nation, but also that of the individual. Self-sufficiency begins with the individual's struggle to provide for themselves and their family. As the Arusha declaration of 1967 stated:

If every individual is self-reliant then ten-house cell will be self-reliant; if all the cells are self-reliant the whole ward will be self-reliant; and if the wards are self-reliant the District will be self-reliant. If the Districts are self-reliant, then the Region is self-reliant, and if the Regions are self-reliant, then the whole nation is self-reliant and this is our aim. (Nyerere 1968: 248)

Through their forms of collective activity rappers put into action some of the collectivist values associated with Ujamaa.

THUGS AND GANGSTERS, MASCULINITY AND POST-SOCIALIST IDENTITY

By virtue of their performances at *maskani* and *kampu* underground rappers in Dar es Salaam also forge masculine identities. By adopting a set of corporeal poses, movements, and gestures underground rappers seek to embody the masculine identity of the rapper and gangster. These corporeal practices include hand gestures which emphasise the rhythm of their performance and allow rappers to dominate the space surrounding them. Heads rock back and forth nodding in time with the rhythm, in something of a 'classic' hip hop pose. The very act of rapping is both imaginative and corporeal: rapping involves physical exertion as the voice is projected in time to the rhythm and with sufficient volume to be heard. At *kampu*, or when performing to large groups in a *maskani*, rappers regularly adopt a masculine pose of bending their knees and using a hand to grab the crotch of the trousers. This pose, as well as placing emphasis on the masculine body of the performer, has become something of a trope in Tanzanian rap performance. Sartorial style associated with the transnational genre of hip hop, including baseball caps, large t-shirts, and Timberland boots, are appropriated by rappers. Through the adoption of clothing strategies rappers further emphasise their personas as rappers and gangsters.

The aesthetic and physical constructions of masculinity are reinforced through the frequent use of the masculine terms *msela* and *mchizi* to denote each other. *Msela* is derived from the English word sailor (Suriano 2007: 218) and is

frequently used by young men in Dar es Salaam to refer to each other as a friend. Being *msela*, however, denotes a particular masculine mode of being in the world: a *msela* is 'ready for anything' and 'depends upon himself'.⁷ The notion of *msela* in reference to young men draws on ideas of the camaraderie and independence of sailors who set off from Tanzania's shores during the colonial period. *Mchizi* is translated as crazy or 'foolish' (Higgins 2009: 103) and denotes a particular form of masculine identity and masculine friendship (Omari 2011: 76). Both terms are equated with the terms gangster or thug (Reuster-Jahn and Hacke 2011: 5) and are not unique to the underground rapper; rather, they circulate widely through popular culture, rap music in particular.⁸ However, being a rapper enables a particular mode through which young men can perform these masculine identities.

Underground rappers appropriated a stylistic and discursive framework from the genre of hip hop and referred to themselves, their practice, and musical output as 'thugs' and 'gangsters'. The term 'gangster' circulated in various forms; for instance, Ally Mohammedi, an underground rapper from Msasani, adopted the artistic title of 'Gang Star'. Rappers frequently used the term 'gangster' not only in reference to themselves but to their forms of musical practice. Salim Muba, a rapper from Kiwalani during a freestyle⁹ performance described the language in which he had just performed as 'the gangster language, Kiswahili'. The term gangster was written upon walls adjacent to the sites of several of the *maskani* I attended. O-Key described the genre of music that he made as 'the kind of music we call gangster music'. Being a 'gangster' represents a distinct mode of being in the world for rappers in Dar es Salaam, one that embodied, as I shall show, not only masculine, but social values.

American hip hop stars, such as 50 cent and Tupac Shakur, have become ubiquitous figures in Tanzanian popular culture, figuring on TV, radio, and barber shop walls (Sanga 2010: 152; Reuster-Jahn and Hacke 2011: 2; Perullo 2011: 108; Weiss 2009: 126). For a number of rappers including O-Key, Tupac represented an inspiration and an idea. As O-key said:

The only one who inspired me to do music in this world is Tupac, because I get the tape of Tupac, so when I went to school I used to listen him. So he inspired me too much to do this game. I do want to do like him so it make me to like hip hop and go in hip hop.

Tupac represents an important symbolic reference for many of the underground rappers that I interviewed. I argue that Tupac's representation of 'Thug Life' as based upon 'hyper-masculine values (gang values of toughness, fighting ability)' (Iwamoto 2003: 46) is recast in Tanzania. The majority of the rappers that I interviewed were only able to understand fragments of Tupac's lyrics and had picked up stories about his life and untimely death from his songs, magazines, or other rappers. Freed from being read solely through his lyrics Tupac has become a symbol for a particular masculine mode of being which is the embodiment of a set of values. As a symbolic presence Tupac represents for underground rappers a form of masculine struggle against poverty and the fight for equality and justice. During a discussion with Uthman Issa, an underground rapper from Kijitonyama, he described Tupac as having similarities with former president and father of the nation Julius Nyerere. Uthman suggested that both Tupac and Nyerere sought to represent the poor and marginalized, both

spent time with the excluded and deprived, and both articulated a moral position on justice and equality. I am not suggesting that Tupac or Nyerere represent empty signifiers, but rather that their lives are read in particular ways by underground rappers. The symbol of Tupac, I would argue, in this context comes to represent a form of value which embraces a number of the principles of Ujamaa: self-sufficiency, hard work, and the fight for equality and justice. As Pitcher and Askew have argued, socialism in Africa ‘has left institutional, aesthetic, psychological and discursive legacies’ (Pitcher and Askew 2006: 11). These sets of values become for some, as Uthman Issa suggested, emblematic of the ‘original people involved in hip hop’ (in Dar es Salaam); the hip hop community ‘implemented Ujamaa among themselves’. Emphasising what he considered behaviour whose origins lay in the ideas of Ujamaa, Uthamn said, ‘Hip hop is real; someone like Mbaya Wao would buy a soda and offer everyone; fake person would buy a soda and drink it by himself.’ Graeber’s theory of value, which builds upon Mauss’ work on the gift, views it as the creative power of action and, as such, fundamentally social. For Graeber creativity and power are

the result of an ongoing process whereby structures of relation with others come to be internalized into the very fabric of our being, and even more, because this potential cannot realize itself—at least, not in any particularly significant way—except in coordination with others (Graeber 2001: 260).

For rappers in Tanzania, their creative potential is not only exhibited in their ability to create texts but in the power to form and shape social relationships.

This use of ideas associated with Ujamaa and the figure of the ‘gangster’ do not only circulate as concepts but as forms of practice. Through financial contribution to the arrangement of *kampu*, as well as wider financial involvement in each other’s lives, underground rappers seek to put some of these ideas into practice. Members of the KGM *maskani* used the concepts associated with Ujamaa—*kazi ya jasho, haki, kujitegemea* and equality—as lenses through which to critique contemporary Tanzanian society. Their invocation of these concepts is, however, multifaceted; although invoking ideas from the legacy of Ujamaa they explicitly disavowed the Ujamaa project itself. Underground rappers’ engagement with the legacies of Ujamaa is complicated and critical and for the most part they are not nostalgic about it. Uthman Issa, though suggesting a connection between the figures of Nyerere and Tupac, stressed that this did not necessitate a belief in Ujamaa. Indeed, when discussing the achievement of Baba wa Taifa Nyerere and President Kikwete, the current incumbent, he suggested that both could be evaluated as ‘*nusu kwa nusu*’ or fifty-fifty.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have engaged with the complications, contradictions, and ambiguities of contemporary cultural production in Tanzania through the medium of rapping. I have shown how neo-liberal economic changes have enabled new possibilities for the production of popular culture and for the circulation of practices, signs, and symbols from the global mediasphere which have been appropriated and reanimated by rappers in Dar es Salaam. The figure of the ‘gangster’ has, I have argued, become a space for the transformation and reactivation of

concepts associated with Ujamaa. My primary locus for this analysis has been the practices of underground rappers, whose performances represent a politics of presence, an assertion of identity, and a strategic inscription of young men into public space. Young people adapt to their surroundings using the tools available to them—including their voices, space, and the circulating concepts and symbols—to constitute themselves. One lens through which this might be read is as the ‘clever tricks of the “weak” within the order established by the “strong”’ (De Certeau 1985: 40). This reading might lead us to view rappers’ borrowing of mimetic language, gestures, and style from the global genre of hip hop as users’ subverting the signs and symbols of the national political, and the transnational musical orders. However, I would suggest that the situation is more contradictory and ambiguous. To read the young men who rap as simply marginalised figures capable of tactical action does not account for the full complexity of their practice.

Through their mobilisation of concepts associated with Ujamaa, underground rappers make themselves legible to wider society. Here it seems to me that what underground rappers do is more ambiguous than justifies its being read solely as a tactic of resistance. This is not a practice simply of poaching, of taking ‘advantages of “opportunities” (...) seized on the wing’ (De Certeau 1985: 37). Rappers situate themselves strategically, in relation to mainstream social and political discourse. While Ujamaa policies in Tanzania may largely have been abandoned by the state, the chief architect of Ujamaa, Julius Nyerere, remains an important legitimising force for the state, and for the governing party, CCM, while conceptions and values associated with Ujamaa remain part of a legitimating discourse in Tanzania more broadly. I would further argue that the appropriation of concepts

associated with Ujamaa represents a means of creating value, not only in terms of creating texts but in forging social relations, shaping social reality, and animating values and concepts. Here I think we should be attuned to the complicated and contradictory nature of popular cultural production. As I have suggested earlier, embodying a socio-political role as commentator can be read as the normative position for an artist to adopt in Dar es Salaam. Displays of consumption and wealth may therefore be read as a more revolutionary challenge to the norms of everyday social and moral discourse. The legacy of Ujamaa—conceptual, aesthetic, and ideational—is constantly being reanimated, reinterpreted, and reconfigured. Our analysis should account for the role that these legacies have in young people’s conception of their moral and social lives, not only as tactics of subverting strategies of legitimacy, but also as a form of value held by rappers themselves.

NOTES

- 1 This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during three trips to Dar es Salaam in 2006, 2009, and 2011, with follow up research conducted via electronic communication.
- 2 While there have been a number of notable female rappers in Tanzania, such as Witness, Zay B, Sista P, and Stosh, this article explores how rapping acts as a space for the performing of a particular type of masculine identity.
- 3 There have been numerous studies of the development of hip hop (Rose 1994; Keyes 2002) including studies of ‘global’ hip hop (Toop 1991 and Mitchell 2001), Francophone hip hop (Durand et al. 2002), hip hop in Africa (Charry 2012b; Osumare 2012 and Shipley 2013; Ntarangwi 2009 and 2016; Arthur 2013).
- 4 See Schneidermann for an overview of the literature on conscious hip hop (Schneidermann 2014: 91)
- 5 The term *maskani* denotes a particularly masculine space, a base, which has military connotations. This is not to say, however, that

women are never present in *maskani*, but they do not become members.

- 6 The term *uswabilini* (the area of the Swahili people) has its origins in the racial colonial division of the city (Smiley 2009: 180) though more recently the distinction between *uswabilini* and *uzunguni* draws on the provision of services 'such as schools, roads, clinics, electricity and piped water' (Lewinson 2007: 206), and class 'segmentarity' (Sanga 2013: 389–90).
- 7 Interview with Mbaya Wao.
- 8 These terms are not the preserve of underground rappers and have been used by commercial rappers, for example, TMK Wanaume's and Mangwair's song 'Msela Msela'.
- 9 A form of oral performance without recourse to written lyrics, these draw on memory and invention.

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DAVID KERR
POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHER
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES,
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG
d.kerr@bham.ac.uk