

TRACK 5

From Da Bomb to *Bomba*

Global Hip Hop Nation Language in Tanzania

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Introduction

At first glance, the English found in Tanzanian Hip Hop culture shares much in common with the variety of English conventionally known as African American English (AAE). Many linguistic elements associated with AAE occur in casual conversations and electronic communications, and they also appear frequently in Tanzanian Hip Hop music, teen magazines, and certain advertisements that target young consumers. AAE forms typically occur as language mixing and codeswitching with Swahili, but examples comprised entirely of English can also be found. Symbols of urban Hip Hop culture such as clothing (see Figure 5.1), musical styles, and references to African American Hip Hop icons in rap lyrics also point to a strong affiliation with African American Hip Hop culture. Therefore, interesting questions about authenticity and identity are raised about their linguistic practices when Tanzanians use varieties of English that seemingly draw on AAE. Are these youth *crossing* (Rampton, 1995) from Tanzanian varieties of English into AAE, borrowing the linguistic and semiotic styles of another culture? Or, are they *appropriating* what may be better described as Global Hip Hop Nation Language to fit their local East African context, their language use resulting in a simultaneously localized, yet global, form of expression, such as a *raplish* (Pennycook, 2003)?

Drawing on examples from youth columns, shout-outs, online bulletin board postings, and Hip Hop lyrics, this chapter investigates the types of English commonly used in expressions of Hip Hop culture among Tanzanians. Like many contributions in this volume, the examples analyzed here treat the study of Hip Hop as “dusty foot philosophy” (Pennycook & Mitchell, this volume) by exploring

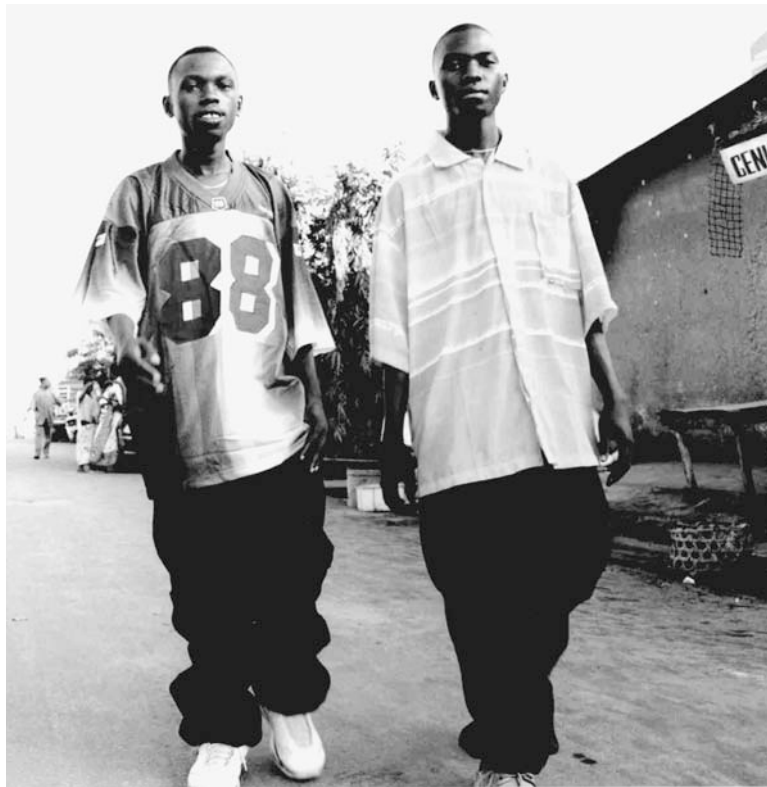


Figure 5.1 Rappers Inspekta Haroun and Luteni Kalama of Magangwe Mobb in Kariakoo, Dar es Salaam in 2001. Reproduced with permission of Dr. Alex Perullo.

how global aspects of Hip Hop intermingle with instantiations of localness in specific contexts. While Pennycook and Mitchell's chapter calls attention to the cultural aspects of indigenous Hip Hop, the analysis here focuses on how Tanzanians manage global and local aspects of Hip Hop linguistically.

Specifically, I analyze how youth use language to perform *glocal* identities that are the result of the “tempering effects of local conditions on global pressures,” characterized by the “simultaneity of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies” of African American culture and distinctly Tanzanian qualities (Robertson, 1997, n.p.). Taking up Pennycook and Mitchell's perspective, I move beyond a unidirectional analysis of global Hip Hop's influence on the local contexts of Tanzania, and I illustrate aspects of Tanzanian indigeneity that have produced localized Hip Hop language and culture. Within this two-way cultural flow, I show how Tanzanian youths perform a range of identities, as some draw on more local linguistic resources while others orient to more global frameworks in styling themselves as members of the Hip Hop nation.

Crossing or Appropriation?

Much of the research on the use of AAE among non-Black speakers in North America has shown that this usage is substantially different from the “real” AAE spoken by African Americans (Bucholtz, 1999, 2004; Cutler, 1999; Newman, 2005; Reyes, 2005; Wolfram, 1973). Questions about authenticity have led to comparisons between what Bucholtz (1999) calls Cross-Racial African American Vernacular English (CRAAVE) and the AAE of African Americans, as documented in Baugh (1983), Green (2002), Labov (1972), and Rickford (1999). These studies show that although CRAAVE speakers may express a desire to affiliate with African American culture, their lack of linguistic mastery in using AAE marks them as inauthentic. In spite of their implied desire to “sound Black,” CRAAVE speakers typically display inconsistency in classic AAE features such as *r*-lessness, pitch, copula deletion, habitual *be*, and lexical items such as *aks* (ask). While a few case studies of non-Black but authentic AAE speakers have shown that is possible for such individuals to be legitimated as members of African American communities (e.g., Hatala, 1976; Sweetland, 2002), most CRAAVE speakers are not insiders in such communities, and many have little or no social contact with African Americans (e.g., Cutler, 1999). Consequently, most CRAAVE speakers’ behavior is best described as *crossing* (Rampton, 1995); that is, “code alternation by people who are not accepted members of the group associated with the second language they employ. [Crossing] is concerned with switching into languages that are not generally thought to belong to you... [and] in which there is a distinct sense of movement across social or ethnic boundaries” (p. 280).

Of course, whether crossing leads to inauthenticity or not depends on the interpretation of the linguistic performance by members of situated linguistic communities. Among African Americans, Tanzanians who use terms like *nigga* as a way to refer to their friends may well come off as inauthentic poseurs. However, Tanzanian youths who are greeting one another in shout-outs, or who are attending a rap concert in Dar es Salaam, use this same word to establish a claim to a particular Tanzanian identity. Therefore, speakers can be seen as fashioning selves through language by styling themselves as the other (Rampton, 1999) in order to achieve a particular local identity. Tanzanian youth who import AAE to fashion themselves are therefore creating cosmopolitan, yet very Tanzanian, identities by associating themselves with outside elements. In this view, the use of historically AAE forms among Tanzanians may better be understood as a form of *appropriation* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989) in which local and global forces intermingle, producing hybrid forms of a new local (and global) order.

Local Identities and the (Imagined) Hip Hop Nation

In his study of urban youth in England, Rampton (1995) found that non-Black youth in England who employ Afro-Caribbean Creole in their daily speech are

sometimes treated as speakers of a multiracial youth code.¹ Similarly, in taking up linguistic forms and cultural references associated with street conscious urban African American culture, crossing into AAE can be seen as a means of claiming membership in a multiracial, multinational Global Hip Hop Nation (GHHN) (Alim, 2003, 2004, 2006, this volume), a transcultural, multilingual, and multiracial community. In many ways, the GHHN is an *imagined community* (Anderson, 1991) because of its sheer size: “The members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). For those with access, the Internet and other forms of globalized media such as MTV have also greatly increased the realness of this nation for youth as well. In Dar es Salaam, Hip Hop fans follow the details of American rapper 50 Cent’s career to the same degree as young people in New York, Lagos, and London. Whether or not this community is “real” or “imagined” does not seem so salient in the end; instead, these youths’ identities reflect a poststructuralist understanding of *authenticity* as a discursive accomplishment, rather than as a preexisting quality inherent in any individual speaker (Coupland, 2003). As Anderson writes, “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (1991, p. 6).

Hip Hop Nation Language

In his discussion of Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) among African American artists, Alim (2003) identifies HHNL as the linguistic expression of a street conscious identity that offers speakers a way to “connect with the streets as a space of culture, creativity, cognition and consciousness” (p. 54). Alim explains that HHNL includes all of the features of AAE, but HHNL employs these features with much greater frequency. To illustrate these ideas, Alim presents data from his interview with Juvenile, a well-known African American Hip Hop artist. Alim found copula absence to occur at a rate of 56.60% in the interview, while it rose to 75% in an analysis of lyrics from one of Juvenile’s full-length CDs. Similarly, in an analysis of African American Hip Hop artist Eve’s copula usage, Alim found absences of the linking verb at the rate of 5.95% in her interview, but in her lyrics, the rate climbed to 56.70%. Alim explains that the increase in copula absence and other classic features of AAE are “the strategic construction of a street conscious identity” through which the artists “claim authenticity as members of the HHN through performing their own street credibility” (2003, p. 51). Similar findings have been reported by Edwards and Ash (2004) in their analysis of Tupac Shakur’s rhymes.

As the chapters of this volume illustrate, HHNL has expanded far beyond the dominion of African American Hip Hop artists in the United States. Alim (2004) notes that HHNL “is widely spoken across the country, and used/borrowed and adapted/transformed by various ethnic groups inside and outside the US” (p. 394). Speakers of what may better be termed *global* HHNL (GHNNL) include

Anglo and Asian youth in North America and Britain who style themselves using AAE (Bucholtz, 1999, 2004; Cutler, 1999; Rampton, 1995; Reyes, 2005), as well as African immigrants and Puerto Rican newcomers who learn (B)ESL, rather than the English typically associated with the Anglo middle class (Goldstein, 1987; Ibrahim, 2003; Wolfram, 1973). Beyond North America and Britain, musical artists in Turkey (Solomon, 2005), Japan (Pennycook, 2003) and South Korea (Lee, 2004) use their own versions of GHHNL in their musical performances, some of which differ from the HHNL used in the United States. Mitchell (2001) provides an international array of varieties in hybrid codes introduce new forms of locally situated content to the genre, as illustrated by Islamic rap in the U.K. and France, and rap used for political dissent in Mainland China.

Localized versions of GHHNL have also been reported in African nations such as Tanzania and Malawi (Perullo & Fenn, 2003), Nigeria (Omoniyi, 2006), and South Africa (Steingo, 2005). These studies reveal a high degree of linguistic, cultural, and musical hybridity involving local languages alongside global tropes of AAE such as *yo* and rap aliases involving acronyms similar to Chuck D and MC Lyte. Importantly, these studies reveal a strong claim to membership in a GHHN alongside established Hip Hop artists from the the United States. Coming from sub-Saharan African artists, this claim is particularly interesting for questions of authenticity because of the historically racialized nature of Hip Hop and the use of terms such as *wangster*, *wigger*, and *wannabe* (Kitwana, 2005). It might be the case that race and language become reunited when Black Africans use it; on the other hand, African artists may also be treated as wannabes by their African American counterparts, in spite of their skin color.

Language in Tanzania

The interpretation of GHHNL in Tanzania is complex because of the historically ideological relationship with standard varieties of (British) English. Previously ruled by the Germans, Tanzania (then Tanganyika) was handed over to the British in 1919 as a mandate territory under the League of Nations. Since independence from Britain in 1961, Tanzania has shifted from socialism, economic autonomy, and a language policy designed to bolster Swahili to capitalism, economic liberalization, and institutionalized Swahili-English bilingualism (Blommaert, 1999, pp. 93–98). Swahili officially became a national language in 1967 under the rule of Julius Nyerere, the first president after independence. Nyerere championed the use of Swahili in education, arguing that it was a transmitter for Tanzanian and Pan-Africanist values. Since the 1980s, however, the political economy of English has been steadily growing stronger and currently, English is seen as one of the primary means for achieving success in a globalizing world. This view is especially strong among many Tanzanians who have witnessed structural adjustment programs and the liberalization of the economy (Blommaert, 1999; Higgins, 2004; Neke, 2003; Vavrus, 2002). Increasing reliance on aid from Western donors has required the Tanzanian government to privatize its many previously

government run industries, and these economic transformations have increased the perceived importance of English as a tool for success.

English is seen as a link to global opportunity, and standard (British) English remains the idealized medium of instruction in schools; however, it is more often the case that English is used in hybridized and localized ways in Dar es Salaam, rather than in globally comprehensible forms. The variety of language labeled *Kihuni* (tough talk) by Blommaert (1999, 2005) provides a clear example of such localization in Tanzania, as it is a street variety of English-interfered Swahili that involves a great deal of relexification, borrowings, and language play. *Kihuni* is the sociolect of Swahili spoken by self-ascribed *wahuni* (hooligans, gangsters), living in Dar es Salaam who are largely frustrated with their marginalized positions in the world and who generally lack economic opportunities in their lives. Blommaert (2005) explains that the linguistic development of *Kihuni* began in the context of Swahili Hip Hop culture, but was to some degree “superimposed by transnational (but essentially African American) ‘Gangsta’ culture notably focused on international stars such as Tupac” (2005, p. 406). He proposes that *Kihuni* allows the *wahuni* to imagine themselves in another space: “it is a repertoire that allows them to ‘get out’ of Dar es Salaam culturally, to culturally relocate their local environments in a global semiotics of class, status, blackness, marginalization” (p. 408). Blommaert’s discussion of this cultural relocation is tinged with tones of disempowerment, for he describes *Kihuni* and other varieties of Tanzanian English as having limited relevance since they are linguistic codes that “do not count as ‘English’ as soon as translocal norms are imposed on them” (p. 410). Illustrations of *Kihuni* appear in Table 5.1.

Kihuni is comparable to *lugha ya mitaani* (street language) a term used by Tanzanians to refer to nonstandard Swahili. In their comprehensive sociolinguistic description and 1100-word dictionary of *lugha ya mitaani* (LyM), Reuster-Jahn and Kießling (2006) make it clear that LyM should not be understood as a variety of English or as a mixed language based on English, even though it is characterized by many appropriations of English idiomatic expressions. They explain that LyM is a sociolect used among youth and is “part of a threefold paradigmatic relationship” in relation to Standard Swahili and English (2006, p. 68). LyM is characterized by unmarked switches between English and Swahili, violations of the grammatical norms of Swahili and English, and semantic shifts which make it difficult for English or standard Swahili speakers to follow. Given

Table 5.1 Examples of *Kihuni* (from Blommaert, 2005, pp. 406-407)

a. <i>kukipa</i>	to leave, to take off (< Standard Swahili ‘ku’ (infinitive), ‘to keep’)
b. <i>macho balbu</i>	eyes wide open in amazement or fear (Standard Swahili macho ‘eyes’ and balbu< ‘[light] bulb’)
c. <i>unga</i>	cocaine (< Standard Swahili <i>unga</i> , ‘maize flour’)
d. <i>kupiga bao</i>	to have sex (< Standard Swahili <i>kupiga bao</i> , ‘to overtake a vehicle’)
e. <i>mwela:</i>	police (<Maasai)

its similarities with Kihuni, I will use the umbrella term *street Swahili* to refer to both LyM and Kihuni.

In the next section, I extend Blommaert's discussion of the value of localized languages by examining the glocal elements of GHHNL as it has emerged in Tanzania. Even though Reuster-Jahn and Kießling (2006) are careful to distinguish street Swahili from varieties of English, the data below reveal that in domains strongly oriented to Hip Hop, street Swahili appears alongside English, unmarked mixed and codeswitched forms, and Tanzanian appropriations of AAE. In other words, the data demonstrate (at least) a four-way paradigmatic relationship for language users. In my discussion, I first illustrate how Tanzanian youth reveal imagined connections to the GHHN in locally published shout-outs, nearly all of which are produced in 'errorful' AAE. Next, I examine advertisements which exploit popular music and Internet billboards which discuss popular music to show how GHHNL becomes localized and (re)contextualized through the juxtaposition of AAE, street Swahili, and African American cultural references. Finally, I examine Hip Hop lyrics recorded by Tanzanians that show a high degree of global identification.

Imagining the Hip Hop Nation In Tanzania

Shout-Outs

Shout-outs are a popular form of public communication among young people in Tanzania that appear in daily newspapers. In a typical shout-out, the contributor provides a passport-sized photo, an initial greeting, several sentences about herself or himself, a listing of favorite musical artists, and a message that she or he would like to share with the readers. In the past several years, shout-outs have increasingly been sent to newspapers as text messages via cell phones. The vast majority of contributors are male. Illustrative examples in (1) are taken from newspapers I collected between 2001 and 2005. Street Swahili is in bold italics, standard Swahili appears in italics, and all original spellings and punctuation conventions are preserved.

- (1) Shout-outs in Tanzanian newspapers
- (a) ***Kisa Kisangweli ('hey/wassup')***! all da niggaz in da globe. Ma' name
 Is E_____ M_____ a.k.a. 'Eddy'. Born 22 yrz ago. Ma'
 Hobbies are studying an' cultivating small gardens an'
 Listening 2 music. Ma' favourite artistes are Toni
 Braxton, Celine Dion, Mariah Carey an' P'Diddy.
 DEDICATIONS: I'd like to dedicate da' song "Ma
 Heart Will Go On" by Celine Dion to ma' lovely daddy
 of Iringa, [6 more names listed].
 MESSAGE: Don do anything b'coz ya friend has done.

- (b) How life is it all ladies an' gents around da world.
Ma' name is J_____ K_____ alias 'Figo'. Born one
Decade an' eight yrs went off. Ma' hobbies are playing
Basketball, football an' listenin' 2 music. Ma' best
Artistes are Joe, R. Kelly, Lady JD, EPMD an' Outkast.
DEDICATIONS: I'd like to dedicate da' song "I Believe
In U" by Joe Thomas to [5 names listed]. Also da song "Rise"
by Gabrielle to ma' friend [name listed].
MESSAGE: Education first. Beware of AIDS, it will kill ya men!
- (c) HEY! Niggaz an' ladies! Ma' name is V_____ M_____
a.k.a. 'Black Vam'. Ma' hobbies are working hard, exchangin'
ideas, reading novels an' listening 2 music. Ma' best entertainers
are Joe Thomas, Celine Dion, Boyz II Men an' R Kelly.
DEDICATIONS: I'd like to dedicate da' song "*Jiwe
Walilolikataa Waashi*" by Kibasa G to [3 names listed]. An' also da
Song "Stutter" by Joe Thomas 2 [4 names listed].
MESSAGE: Golden chance never come twice.

The first shout-out targets "all da niggaz in da globe," the second aims at "all ladies an' gents around da world," and the third greets "niggaz an' ladies!" These greetings are very representative of the many dedications published in Tanzanian newspapers. Here, the contributors are invoking an imagined global community of readers in a weekly magazine whose circulation is limited to East Africa. The use of "*Kisa Kisangweli*" in (a) identifies the readers as street Swahili speakers; however, because this Swahili-medium greeting is written as part of a GHHNL discursive practice (shout-outs) and is juxtaposed with GHHNL features, the greeting becomes (*re*)*entextualized* (Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Blommaert, 2005; Silverstein & Urban, 1996) here as a hybrid form of global street consciousness. In the process of (*re*)*entextualization*, the contributors "take some fragment of discourse and quote it anew, making it seem to carry a meaning independent of its situation within two now distinct co(n)texts" (Silverstein & Urban 1996, p. 2). Conversely, the AAE features are (*re*)*entextualized* as local by virtue of the street Swahili, and through their juxtaposition with references to local practices such as cultivating small gardens and listening to Tanzanian artists such as Lady JD and Kibasa G.

Linguistically, membership in the GHHN is claimed through high use of AAE forms, including the positive use of the word *niggaz* (friends) and the orthographic representation of consonant cluster deletion in "listenin'," "an'," and "don," as well as the use of "da" (for Standard English "the") and "ma" (for Standard English "my"). While these features do occur in AAE, a survey of 24 shout-outs reveals highly formulaic language; moreover, the shout-outs are lacking in several important features of AAE including copula absence, habitual *be*, resultative *done*, and multiple negation. Because the shout-outs are submitted

on a preprinted form, it is likely that the formulaic quality is due to the fact that the contributors copy existing models while filling out the forms.

If we move along the spectrum toward higher degrees of localization, other shout-outs that are received in the form of text messages and then published by newspapers exhibit more street Swahili. The result is an indexing of street conscious Swahili with street conscious AAE. Example (d), published in 2005, illustrates the resultant new form of HHNL; the words in bold print are street Swahili vocabulary.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(d) <i>Whatzzup</i> Mchizi Mox?
 Shalotina tina mzee.
 <i>Mambo yako ya Tucheze</i>
 <i>na Klynn yametulia</i>
 kinoma babu kamua basi
 <i>albam masela. Tunaisubiri</i>
 <i>kwa hamu</i></p> | <p>Wassup Mchizi Mox?
 Everything's alright, friend.
 Your activities of [the bands] Tucheze
 and K Lynn have slowed down
 a lot friend, squeeze out already
 the album, homies. We are awaiting
 with eagerness</p> |
|---|--|

It is important to recognize the very local street conscious qualities of the bolded words in the original text. The message is a shout-out to Mchizi Mox, a Hip Hop artist whose name contains the street Swahili “*mchizi*” (fool). Though it started out as a vocabulary item used among streetwise, typically poor youth, *mchizi* is now well known to Tanzanians of various backgrounds as “silly” or “foolish.” Both “*kinoma*” (literally “in a bad way,” i.e., “a lot”) and “*masela*” (< sailor), meaning “homies”² are somewhat more established as street Swahili, and are often understood by nonstreet Swahili speakers, though not typically used by them. The phrase “*shalotina tina*” (all right) is relatively new usage in Dar es Salaam, and is apparently not derived from English. In interviews I carried out with five college educated Tanzanians over the age of 40 in 2006, no one knew the meaning of this term.

As the examples above indicate, a strong affiliation between the linguistic forms used and a Black racial identity are rare. The only examples are the GHHN term *niggaz*, used in (1a) and (1c), and the nickname provided by “Black Nam” in (1c). Here, Blackness appears heightened for a young man whose race is typically treated as irrelevant in his local context. This particular example shows how one particular youth makes use of a transcultural resource (the notion of Black as minority) to fashion a local identity. As Bucholtz (1999) suggests, gender may also play a role here since Hip Hop is often ideologically connected to masculinity and Blackness.³

Advertisements

The indexicality of street Swahili and Hip Hop culture emanating from the United States is apparent in advertisements aimed at urban youth as well. In a 2005 advertisement for ring tones that can be downloaded to cell phones, standard

Swahili, street Swahili, and the name of a popular rapper from the United States, 50 Cent, become fused into a single context.

- (2) Ring tone advertisement that indexes street Swahili with Hip Hop
- | | |
|---|--|
| <i>Pata mlio</i> | Get a ring(tone) |
| <i>bomba</i> | awesome/da bomb |
| <i>wa simu wa</i> | of the phone of |
| <i>50 Cent</i> | 50 Cent |
| <i>na mingine kibao kutoka Buzz!</i> | and many other (ringtones) from Buzz! |

Here, the street Swahili forms “*bomba*” (awesome) and “*kibao*” (many) are relatively well-known forms of street Swahili, though interviews with well-educated adults often revealed that their usage was limited to more streetwise speakers. The word *bomba* was originally a borrowing from Portuguese *bomba* (pump), but it is quite possible that the AAE turn of phrase, *da bomb* (the best) is having an impact on the semantics of this word for GHHNL speakers. The usage of this word offers an example of what Pennycook and Mitchell (this volume) describe as the multiple and copresent origins of Hip Hop language. Rather than appropriating an English word for the Tanzanian context, it may be the case that a Swahili word (albeit of borrowed origin) is being appropriated for the local Hip Hop context.

Newspaper Columns

Varieties of street conscious Swahili which contain a mix of African American HHNL and localized HHNL appear in special columns of daily and weekly newspapers and magazines as well. The otherwise-mainstream daily paper *Mwananchi* publishes a weekly column titled *Kijiwe Shega*, (“the cool street corner”), a title comprised entirely of street Swahili. On one occasion, the column’s headline was “*Sugu angalia masoja wanakumaindi?*” The title alone would mystify many non-street Swahili speakers since “*Sugu*” is one of several aliases for Tanzanian rapper Joseph Mbilinyi (a.k.a. Mr. II, 2 Proud), and only Hip Hop aficionados would have the requisite Hip Hop literacy to decipher the headline. Here, “*masoja*” (<soldier, with Swahili plural marker *ma-*) refers to other (Tanzanian) artists; for those with ties to the GHHN, it recalls the use of the word *soldier* in many American Hip Hop lyrics, including those in Master P’s (1998) compilation *No limit soldiers* and more recently in 50 Cent’s 2006 single “Soldier.”

The final word of the title, “*wanakumaindi*,” employs the historically British English “mind” inside of Swahili morphology (“Are they minding you?”), but now with a semantic shift to “are they liking/respecting you?” in street Swahili usage. In short, the column, published in 2001, was about whether or not Sugu’s fellow rappers were giving him the respect he deserved. Respect is an aspect of AAE that has been studied as a discursive phenomenon with unique importance

among African Americans (e.g., Abrahams, 1975), and it is a common theme in American Hip Hop music as well, as exemplified in many song titles such as “Respect” by Notorious B.I.G (1994), “Respect” by Fabolous (2003), and most recently in the titles of Missy Elliot’s 2006 album and Hip Hop-inspired clothing line, both called *Respect ME*. The body of the column contains many similar forms (in bold type) that demand a high street Swahili literacy level for comprehension. While I recognize that the choice to translate street Swahili into AAE misrepresents the very hybrid and situated language practices that I am analyzing here, my translations are motivated by suggestions made by consultation with East African sociolinguists and by the indexicalities that are achieved between street Swahili, GHHNL, and Hip Hop cultural references.⁴

- (3) Youth column: **Kijiwe Shega** (‘cool streetcorner’)
 “*Sugu* angalia **ma-soja** wa-na-ku-**maindi**?”
Mr. II look.at **pl-soldier** they-pres-you-**mind**
 ‘Mr. II, are the other **rappers** giving you **respect**?’

Ai nou ma-chizi wangu hapo **ki-stoni** lazima m-ta-kuwa
 m-me-bayi
I know pl-cheesy my here **dim-stone** necessary you-will-have
 you-have-buy
 ‘**I know my dawgs** here in the **hood** that you will have bought’

pepa la Mwananchi ili **m-ki-cheki ki-jiwe** chenu. No probl-
 emu.
 paper of Mwananchi in.order you-if-**check dim-stone** your no prob-
 lem
 ‘Mwananchi in order to **check out** your **hood**. No problem.’

Like other youth columns, *Kijiwe Shega* makes use of specialized street Swahili orthography through spelling conventions that make English words appear Swahili, as in “*Ai nou*” (I know) and “*No poblemu*” (No problem). Furthermore, well-known street Swahili words such as *kijiwe* (literally “small stone,” meant to refer to the street corners where jobless youth congregate) are “translated” into more hybrid street Swahili forms such as “*kistoni*,” utilizing the English “stone,” and thereby increasing their opacity for the uninitiated.

Internet Billboards

Not surprisingly, the Internet also provides a rich array of appropriated forms, especially on sites related to popular music such as <http://www.Darhotwire.com>, a website maintained in Dar es Salaam. On the site is *Darhotboards*, a service that allows people to post a topic and respond to others using threaded messages which often incorporate a great deal of HHNL. While some can be viewed as a

straightforward mimicry of AAE, other examples employ standard Swahili and street Swahili in more localized manners. On one hotboard posted in April of 2006, the initial posting looks a lot like AAE (all spellings, capitalizations, and emoticons are preserved):

- (4) Darhotboard Postings
- (a) Yes! Yes! ama abt To Get ya Heads Spininin wit some Swahili Rap Trackz up in this Thread.... Trackz that u never heard b4... the good thing is: U can even request the track 🎧 Praise if u down wit this...

Here, in addition to the abbreviated and specialized language used for Internet and text messaging, we also see pronunciations representing AAE such as “ama” (I’m). This is a representation of AAE that is used in a very localized way, however, since “ama” in the AAE context would be the equivalent to “I’m gonna,” and hence would not be followed by “abt” (about). Other approximations of AAE here are the deletion of auxiliary verb *have* in “Trackz that u never heard b4,” the use of ‘z’ to mark plurals, and the representation of AAE consonant substitution as in ‘t’ for ‘th’ in “wit.” Follow-up postings reveal even more localization.

- (b) Yo!!!! A_____ can I get this songs:
 “Mauza Uza” GANGWE MOBB
 “Hukumu Ya Ndotoni” USO WA MBUZI
 “Ana Miaka ya Chini 18” 2 PROUD a.k.a. Mr 2 a.k.a. SUGU
 “Shadow of Dark Destiny’s” HASHIM DOGO
 “The Sickers” CHENTO
mimi hizi ni classic za bongo
 amma try to remember some otha cuts, **bongo** Hip Hop has been played out nowadays no
 f**kin’ grimy a** joints like back in the days nah’ mean ☹?

 Yo!!!! A_____ can I get this songs:
 “Illusions” GANGWE MOBB
 “Wisdom of a dream” USO WA MBUZI (‘face of a goat’)
 “She’s younger than 18” 2 PROUD a.k.a. Mr 2 a.k.a. SUGU
 “Shadow of Dark Destiny’s” HASHIM DOGO
 “The Sickers” CHENTO
 To me these are classic **bongo** (‘Dar es Salaam’) songs
 amma try to remember some otha cuts, **bongo** Hip Hop has been played out nowadays no
 f**kin’ grimy a** joints like back in the days nah’ mean ☹?

In (b), though AAE predominates, as in “yo, amma, otha, played out, grimy,” and “nah’ mean,” English-interfered Swahili (e.g., “*mimi hizi ni classic za bongo*”) is also used to express opinions about which Tanzanian songs are worthwhile.

Another follow-up posting (c) contains switches from Standard Swahili to abbreviated Internet Swahili (e.g., “*E bwa*” < *eh bwana* ‘hey friend’),⁵ to approximations of AAE, as in “let me start lil’ som’ like dis.” Also included is some lesser known street Swahili, “*mukide kino*” (“all good,” or “all gravy”).

- (c) *sawa sawa Mkubwa! E bwa mi list yangu kubwa kwa hiyo nitakupa kila ninapo kumbuka;*
let me start lil’ som’ like dis;
Wagumu Weusi Asilia --> kama unayo tha whole album itakuwa mukide kino . . . !

okay okay big-one! Hey bwana (friend), my list is long, so I will give you each that I remember;
let me start lil’ som’ like dis’
Wagumu Weusi Asilia (album name) --> if you have tha whole album it will be
really all good

The final posting continues the practice of blending AAE with street Swahili and references to youth culture to produce a claim to GHHN membership. In (d), we see the traditionally AAE use of “props” in combination with Standard Swahili (in regular italics), street Swahili (in bold italics), and a reference to a unified youth culture, signified here through “*moja!*” (one), appearing as “*pamoja!*” (together) at other times, as reflected in (e). This use of *moja* or *pamoja* to sign off has the same function as the AAE use of ‘one’ in shout-outs produced in the United States. In Tanzania, this sign-off has another possible (and copresent) origin as an echo from the socialist period of independent Tanzania, in the slogan “*Twende Pamoja!*” (“Let’s do it together”), often used to encourage cooperative social welfare projects.

- (d) *halafu props sana kwa kuanika ile link ya kwanza, , , naona yamenikuta iko nusu lakini dah!! Fresh tu!! Tupe vitu mwenetu!! masela wako vagalanti!!!moja!!*

so a lot of props for posting that first link, , , I think I had already seen half of them but, dah!! It’s fresh!! Give us more our friends!!
your **vigilante gangstas!!! One!!**

(e) *Kuna Jamaa hawaachi Kunipigia simu Hapa wanataka Ni-stop hii kitu...*

Pamoja!

 There are people who won't stop calling me here, they want me to stop this thing (uploading music).... **Together!**

Hip Hop Lyrics

Finally, I provide a few examples of Hip Hop lyrics produced by Tanzanian artists to illustrate how artists localize Swahili rap while claiming membership in the GHHN. First is a stanza from King Crazy GK, featuring East Coast Team, a group whose name is strongly associated with the rap aliases common in the GHHN. The use of “Crazy” as part of the name relates to the AAE usage “silly, fun, wack”; it is no coincidence that an African American rap artist named Krazy exists. The featured group, East Coast Team, creates a globalized indexical tie to the much-publicized tension between the East Coast and West Coast Hip Hop scenes in the United States. As Tanzania is on the East Coast of Africa, this reference is another example of the double identification of Hip Hop pointed out by Pennycook and Mitchell (this volume), and it compares well with Wire MC’s double identification of Hip Hop as both African American and as part of Australia’s local relations of racial discrimination. Other aspects of the lyrics establish strongly singular identifications with Hip Hop as an American phenomenon, however. In the examples below, underlining is used to mark linguistic and cultural references that are only indexical in the United States (e.g., dialing 9-1-1 will not connect to the police in Tanzania).

(5) Tanzanian Hip Hop lyrics

(a) King Crazy GK feat. East Coast Team “Ama Zao ama Zangu” (“Theirs or mine”)

<p><i>Amiri Jeshi Mkuu sasa naitangaza vita</i></p> <p><i>sio ile kuu ya tatu</i></p> <p><i>bali hii ni ya <u>kivietnam</u> yaani mtaa</i></p> <p><i>kwa mtaa</i></p> <p><i>mmoja mmoja nawakamateni afu</i></p> <p><i>nazaa nanyi</i></p> <p><i>utaponiona ita <u>polisi 911</u></i></p> <p><i>la sivyo</i></p> <p><i>jua umekwisha</i></p>	<p>As an Army commander now, I order a war, not the third world war rather, this is like <u>Vietnam</u>, meaning, street by street one by one, I capture (fans) and then breed more when you see me, call the <u>police at 9-1-1</u>, otherwise realize that it’s over</p>
--	--

*watoto wa mama siku hizi
mnachonga sana*

yaani nyimbo moja

*hewani
mkisifiwa mnajiona wakina P-Diddy*

children of today,
you all think too much of
yourselves
in other words, if you get one
song
on the air,
you are praised as if you were
P-Diddy

King Crazy GK's cultural references are oriented to African American Hip Hop while his language is mostly standard Swahili, and hence arguably local. Other Hip Hop artists such as Ngwair use AAE references in ways that are also arguably local due to their Tanzanianized forms. In "She gotta Gwan," the song title alone evokes the AAE expression "She got it goin on," referring to a young woman's physical attractiveness. Ngwair's song title is "inaccurate" as AAE because of its spelling and implied pronunciation, but it carries a great amount of cultural capital in the Tanzanian context. In fact, as of April 2006, it had been one of the top 10 singles for longer than a year. Also of note is Ngwair's use of "masista" ("sister" with Swahili plural marker *ma-*). Similarly to the example of "bomba" and "da bomb" discussed above, *sista* has experienced several semantic shifts in Tanzania. While *sista* originally came into Swahili as an English borrowing to refer to a nun, it has since shifted among the general population to refer to a young woman. More recently, its meaning has narrowed even further in the form of *sista du*⁶ among young males who use it to mark their street credibility and GHHN membership.

(b) *Ngwair, "She Gotta Gwan"* ('She got it goin on')

Tukianzia uzuri tu she gotta gwan

Tabia, heshima ndio duh she gotta gwan

Mpaka kwa masista du yeeh

nabaki tu kusema

uuh she gotta gwan

If we start with the best, she
got it goin on

Personality, respect, yes, she
got it goin on

Of all the sisters yeah

I still say

uuh she got it goin on

Conclusion

Within the domain of Hip Hop in Tanzania, the mixing of street Swahili with AAE and other language varieties creates opportunities for the performance of indigeneity alongside transglobal identification. Language in this domain appears to create a largely empowering relationship between the local and the global due to the indexical ties with an (imagined) GHHN. Rather than identifying themselves as marginalized, or as inauthentic wannabes, youths who style

themselves by making use of these codes are not (only) trying to escape their marginalized positions, as described by Blommaert (2005). Rather, it seems that they are redefining their local environments in transcultural terms associated with the cultural capital of global Hip Hop, and at least some of the time, they are using mostly local linguistic resources to fashion themselves for this imagined yet locally salient context. In this regard, then, they are no different from other such youth around the world who do the same, including privileged, White teenagers, such as Mike in Cutler's (1999) study, and Asif and Kazim, South Asian teens in Rampton's (1995) study who use Afro-Caribbean Creole in the South of England. Of course, pervasive socioeconomic divisions in Tanzania between the small middle class and the large number of the poor raise a number of issues to address in future examinations of HHNL in Tanzania (and elsewhere), including how access to the Internet, cell phones, and other media regulate the flow of global Hip Hop among consumers and performers and how the economic opportunities associated with Hip Hop in Tanzania affect the linguistic and cultural forms of HHNL.

It is not surprising that young people in many contexts around the world are turning to transcultural resources in the 21st century to style themselves, especially in view of the increased consolidation of global media and the effects of economic liberalization all over the world. Transcultural elements are increasingly present in Tanzania year after year: MTV is now available on Tanzanian cable networks, and in 2006, American Hip Hop artists Ja Rule and Jay-Z gave concerts in Dar es Salaam. The flow has started to trickle in the opposite direction as well. Tanzanian rappers such as Xplastaz, a group that incorporates Masaai lyrics and dancing into their music, have traveled to Europe frequently to record music and perform with other Hip Hop artists from around the world, and events such as B-Connected, an annual concert involving Tanzania and four other countries, offers global connections among Hip Hop artists and audiences. If the trends in Tanzania are any indication of what is to come, what started off as an imagined community loosely bound by a common interest in music and a common language will likely evolve into a much more tightly interconnected global Hip Hop culture.

Notes

1. Sebba and Tate (2002) discuss a parallel phenomenon involving Afro-Caribbean Creole, which has global capital partly due to the worldwide popularity of reggae.
2. My translation of "*masela*" as "homies" is partly motivated by the dictionary of Swahili slang on <http://www.darhotwire.com>, a popular website based in Dar es Salaam that hosts Tanzanian music videos, song lyrics, gossip, chatrooms, and more.
3. Based on the photos and names published in the shout-outs, all participants were male. Very few female Hip Hop artists have produced albums in Tanzania, so I focus on lyrics composed by male artists only.
4. I am grateful for suggestions made by Mungai Mutonya and Mokaya Bosire at the Annual Conference on African Linguistics in Eugene, Oregon in 2006.
5. An anonymous reviewer suggested that *bwa* could also translate as "dawg" given its alternative reading as a shortened version of *mbwa* (dog).

6. *Sista* is a term widely considered to show respect for women. The addition of the Swahili particle *du* alters the meaning of *sista* to something more like street Swahili *demu* (<dame), a term widely recognized as lacking respect for young women (similar to “chick” or “broad”).

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