

# Musical Figuring of Dar es Salaam Urban Marginality in Mbogo's Swahili Novel *Watoto wa Maman'tilie*\*

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## Summary

*Watoto wa Maman'tilie* (lit. Children of a Woman Street Food Vendor), a Swahili novel by a Tanzanian writer Emmanuel Mbogo, narrates the horrendous experiences of children who are forced to drop out of school and become street children. The novel also narrates their survival strategies in the periphery of the city. This article discusses how the novel uses musical figures including songs by renowned African popular musicians, Swahili local dances and music genres as semiotic resources to represent and criticise the urban forms of marginality and the resulting experiences of the urban underclass. It shows how the novel creatively uses the musical figures to construct the novelistic world and to offer a critique of urban marginality.

## Opsomming

*Watoto wa Maman'tilie* (oftewel *Kinders van 'n straatverkoper*) is 'n roman in Swahili van die Tanzaniese skrywer Emmanuel Mbogo. Dit handel oor die aaklige belewenisse van kinders wat noodgedwonge skool moet verlaat en straatkinders word. Planne wat hulle maak om aan die buitewyke van die stad te oorleef, word eweneens in die roman uitgebeeld. Die rol van musiekfigure, liedjies deur bekende popmusikante uit Afrika, plaaslike Swahilidanse, en musiekgenres word in hierdie artikel bespreek. Dit dien as semiotiese middele waarmee stedelike marginaliteit en die gepaardgaande belewenisse van die stedelike onderklas uitgebeeld en gekritiseer word. Die artikel toon aan hoe musiekfigure op 'n skeppende wyse aangewend word om die romanwêreld op te bou en die voorstelling van die stadsbestaan in die leser se verbeelding te bepaal.

## Exposition

“*Wote ambao hamjalipa ada na hamna sare, hakuna shule! Nisizione sura zenu bila ada na sare*” (There is no school for all of you who have not paid fees and do not have uniforms! I don't want to see your faces without fees and uniforms) (Mbogo 2008: 1). We read this statement in the opening paragraph

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of a Swahili novel *Watoto wa Maman'tilie* (lit. Children of a Woman Food Vendor) by a Tanzanian writer Emmanuel Mbogo.<sup>1</sup> Though this address by a school head teacher is made to all pupils of Mapepela primary school, for Zita (grade six) and her brother Peter (grade five), two of the central characters of the novel, this is a very devastating statement because their parents, Lomolomo (their father) and Maman'tilie (their mother, a name that identifies her as a social actor since throughout the novel she is represented as a woman street food vendor), have not been able to pay fees and buy uniforms for them. For them the statement means termination of their schooling and their efforts to escape the experience of extreme poverty. For them the statement means termination of their dreams for a prosperous future. Following this episode, a series of other events are narrated to depict the extreme poverty of Lomolomo's family, poor provision of social services in the place where they dwell known as Manzese, and the life hardships these children undergo as school dropouts. The family members are inflicted by diseases and they lack proper medical care. They also suffer from poor housing condition and lack adequate food and shelter, among other things. These children are, therefore, forced to roam around the city and fiercely fight for the leftovers they find in the city's dumping places. In other words, the family and the two children in particular, become "ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, [and] the thinkable", to borrow Julia Kristeva's description of the abject (1982: 1). However, the novel does not represent these children as passive victims of their condition. It also represents them as individuals who actively struggle to survive under these unbearable conditions.

The novel uses a number of songs and dances (*ngoma*) to represent poverty and the characters' experiences. In some cases, the characters in the novel sing the songs while in other cases, the characters play the music from a radio cassette player. At times the characters comment or discuss the songs they sing or hear while at other times no comment is given. Given the recurrence and centrality of musical figures in this novel, it is important therefore to study how the novel deploys musical figures for a more comprehensive understanding and a richer appreciation of the novel. For this reason, in this article I analyse Mbogo's novel *Watoto wa Maman'tilie* and examine the way music is used in tandem with other literary devices as figures to represent the

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1. Emmanuel Mbogo is a Tanzanian novelist and playwright. In addition to *Watoto wa Maman'tilie*, he is also the author of novels such as *Vipuli vya Figo* (Kidney Tissues) and *Siri za Maisha* (The Secrets of Life) and plays such as *Ngoma ya Ng'wanamalundi* (The Dance-ritual of Ng'wanamalundi), *Mailkia Bibi Titi Mohammed* (Queen Bibi Titi Mohammed), *Mtwumwa hadi Siti Binti Saad* (From a Slave to a Lady Siti Binti Saad) and *Nyerere na Safari ya Kanaani* (Nyerere and Journey to Canaan). He has taught at a number of universities including Maseno University (Kenya), University of Dar es Salaam and Tanzania Open University (Tanzania) as well as the University of Rwanda.

question of Dar es Salaam's urban marginality and to express and contest urban forms of marginality and the experiences of the urban underclass. The musical figures used in the novel include songs, traditional dance and musical genres.

## On Marginality and Musical Figures

I use the concept of marginality to refer to “a complex condition of disadvantage that individuals and communities may experience because of vulnerabilities which may arise from unequal or inequitable environmental, ethnic, cultural, social, political and economic factors” (Mehretu, Pigozzi & Sommers 2000: 89). In other words, social exclusion is multidimensional and broad in scope which does not only involve “material poverty” and lack of “access to social services” (Wang 2008: 695), but also various practices and discourses of social exclusion. In this sense, marginality is a product of human practices that are situated in and carried out by socio-political and economic institutions and are sustained by ideological discourses that justify social differentiation between the “haves” and the “have-nots”, i.e. the “normal” and the “marginal individuals”, to evoke concepts from Michel Foucault (1994: 336).

To be specific about Dar es Salaam urban marginality, for example, Sarah Smiley (2010) and Anne Lewinson (2007) show how the marginal areas (such as Manzese and Mbagala) are poorly organised and highly populated and they are characterised by inadequate provision of social services. These areas, commonly referred to as *uswahilini* (lit. the area of the Swahili people), are distinguished from the well-planned areas, places with well-spaced detached and big houses, such as Masaki or Oysterbay which are commonly referred to as *uzunguni* (lit. the area of Europeans or white people generally). In most cases people of high class such as expatriates, government officials and rich business persons dwell in these *uzunguni* places (see also Kironde 2007).

The terminologies *uzunguni* and *uswahilini* are by and large products of colonial racially motivated urban spatial segregation. The terminologies also hint to the continuation of colonial spatial segregation in a postcolonial urban city such as Dar es Salaam (Brennan 2012). According to Smiley, a series of building ordinances which were established during the German and British colonial rule in the then Tanganyika resulted in “the concentration of expatriates – those people living outside their home country – in two areas of the city: the City Center and the Msasani Peninsula” (Smiley 2010b: 327). In his discussion of colonial urban land policy prior to 1945, for example, Kironde writes that “urban land policy in the early colonial period was guided by the need to shape Dar es Salaam to serve the twin aims of colonialism, i.e. exploitation and domination” and it was characterised by “racial discrimination”. Consequently, “investment in infrastructure and services varied

according to the races occupying particular areas, on pretext that different races had different requirements” (2007: 97). Note that there was also a space in between these two *uhindini* (places reserved for people of Indian origin, people who occupied a middle status between the whites and the blacks in the colonial racial ranking). Smiley (2010b) shares the view with Kironde (2007) and Brennan (2007) that today's Dar es Salaam socio spatial segregation is largely a product of colonial class and racial spatial distribution. As she writes: “Even though colonialism ended over forty years ago and the postcolonial government attempted to integrate the city, legacies of colonial segregation strongly influence the everyday lives of Dar es Salaam's residents” (Smiley 2010b: 328).

There have been a growing number of music studies that grapple with the relationship between music and urban geography, social identities such as gender, class and race as well as people's experiences of the resulting social relations (see for example, Baker 2006, Krims 2007, Opondo 2008, Githiora 2008, Lukalo 2008 and Sanga 2013). This article contributes to this scholarship by specifically focusing on the use of musical figures in *Watoto wa Maman'tilie* to represent, construct or contest urban marginality and the appalling experiences of marginal individuals.

Drawing from Louise Meintjes (2003: 149-159), this article uses the concept of musical figures to refer to musical elements, songs, musical genres, musicians, or musical instruments that are creatively and imaginatively constructed and used to represent, enact or contest urban marginality and the associated social identities, relations, and experiences. Figuring, for Meintjes, is in other words, “a way of mediating aesthetics and social experience” (2003: 172). This article argues that the musical figures in *Watoto wa Maman'tilie* are semiotic resources that are deployed in tandem with other novelistic devices to create a simultaneous aesthetic experience that combines music and words, or sonic and textual experience. It also argues that the musical figures in the novel are devices through which critical commentary against urban marginality are voiced. The novel does this by focusing on the day to day experiences of individuals who dwell in *uswahilini*.

To be specific, there are three main sources of songs used in the novel. There are those that are sung by Lomolomo, one of the characters (father of Zita and Peter); there is one song that is performed by a group people in an urban marginal space; and there are two songs that are played from a radio cassette player. The novel borrows these songs (or some of their parts) from already existing songs that, in most cases, are famously known in Tanzania and are regularly played on radio and television. In the following sections, I describe the context in which each song is sung or/and listened to and then discuss how each song is deployed to figure urban marginality and the resulting experiences of urban subjects.

## Lomolomo, the Drunkard Singer: Musical Figures of Privation and Poverty

We first encounter musical figures in the very first episode of this novel and the singer is Lomolomo, the father of Zita and Peter. Here is the context in which the first song is sung. It is late evening on the day Zita and Peter have been chased away from school, Lomolomo, their father, comes home late and drunk. He accompanies himself with his usual song whose genre is identified as *mdundiko*. His singing annoys everyone in the house and especially his wife because Lomolomo's singing, as she interprets it, wrongly accuses her to be a prostitute and a weed smoker. Appropriating the lyrics of the song and claiming them for his personal use (Askew 2002: 140), Lomolomo tells his rivals, who he alleges to have affairs with his wife, that he does not care if they have fun and good time with her because what matters for him is that he is the one who is the biological father of her children.

Original Kiswahili Version	English Translation
<i>Kuleni nae</i> <i>Hata bangi vuteni nae</i> <i>Lakini ni bure</i> <i>Mwenzenu nimezaa nae ...</i>	Eat with her You can even smoke weed with her But it is useless. I, your friend, have procreated with her.
Mbogo (2008: 9) my translation	

The drunkard Lomolomo also engages in some arguments with his wife, Maman'tilie. She tells him that she dislikes his singing of the song "Kuleni nae" because in doing so Lomolomo unfairly accuses her of being a prostitute and a weed smoker. She also tries to convince him to go into the house. Lomolomo insists that the words he sings are very true and he still wants to lie down on the ground outside. She forcefully lifts him up and takes him in. There is another argument when she gives him food to eat. He refuses to eat because, he complains, Maman'tilie always serves it with beans and he wants her to bring meat instead. The song that Lomolomo sings repeatedly as he comes home is taken from the traditional *ngoma* known as *mdundiko* which is practiced mainly by the Zaramo people of the Coastal and Dar es Salaam regions. A detailed commentary about this *ngoma* is given in the next section of this article. For now, let us examine the song's lyrics.

Let me note here the multiplicity and complex interconnectedness of meanings that the term *ngoma* evokes in various contexts in Tanzania's cultural life. First, it is used to refer to drum, a musical instrument. Second, *ngoma* is also used to refer to a dance and the music accompanying this dance may or may not involve drumming. The term is also used to refer to a broader ritualistic cultural event such as circumcision rite, pre-wedding celebrations, healing process or funeral event. Again, in most cases singing and dancing

are integral part of these social events but *ngoma* as a music instrument, drum may or may not be used (Askew 2003, Mlamba 1981, Campbell & Eastman 1984, Gearhart, 2005 Tsuruta 2008, Sanga 2018). In this view, Minette Mans (2000) theorises *ngoma* as a holistic phenomenon in which playing musical instruments, singing and dancing are intricately connected with the larger everyday life, work festive ritual occasions and religious beliefs in a society. Some more details of *ngoma ya Mdundiko* will be discussed in the next section. For now I want to focus on the song lyrics.

Lomolomo knows that, as a Tanzanian husband and father, he is responsible for taking care of his family: to ensure the availability of food, to pay school fees for his children and to buy school uniforms for them. However, because of poverty Lomolomo fails to fulfil this task. His wife raises some money by selling some food and manages to keep the family going, although the money is not adequate for school fees, uniforms and decent food. But Lomolomo suspects that his wife receives money from other men. The gendered nature of this suspicion should not escape us: he does not envision a fully independent woman able to raise money from her work. And Lomolomo is psychologically tormented for not being able to perform his duty as a man, husband and father partly because of this gendered ideology.

Through this song, Lomolomo claims that he does not care if other men have affairs with his wife because he remains the biological father of her children. In other words, he has given up his efforts to preserve his symbolic status as a husband and a father (i.e. being a provider of family needs) and holds that which cannot be taken away from him: the biological fact of his fatherhood as the Kiswahili words used, *nimezaa naye* (lit. I have procreated with her), clearly indicate. Lomolomo's singing, therefore, illustrates what in psychoanalytic terms we may call "privation", referring to the subject's real lack of "a symbolic object" (a symbolic phallus), a lack that is caused by an external agent, i.e. an imaginary father (Evans 1996: 150-152). Lomolomo sings about his being deprived of, and therefore lacking, the symbolic object or symbolic fatherhood: wealth or money. It is money that would make him a "father" who is able to take care of his wife and children. It is money that would make him a "father" who pays school fees and buys uniforms for his children. It is money that would make him a "father" who buys nice dresses for his wife and buys enough food for his family. Since he lacks this symbolic object, Lomolomo is worried that his wife and perhaps even neighbours, relatives and society at large no longer consider him to be Maman'tilie's husband and father of Zita and Peter in this symbolic sense. His allegation that other men are having an affair with his wife connotes his fear about other people's attitude about his inability to be a "real man" or to lack the symbolic phallus, money. His only hope, thus, is on his biological fatherhood, a fact that privation cannot take away from him.

It should be noted that privation is always caused by an external agent. In Lomolomo's case, this agent is revealed in an episode in which Lomolomo

sings the second song. The song is entitled “Hapo Zamani” (In Those Old Days) and was sung and recorded by a South African female singer, Miriam Makeba. The song was written for her by her friend, a Zimbabwean born female singer Dorothy Masuka.<sup>2</sup> The first section of the song which also serves as a refrain of the song hence repeated several times after each stanza is sung in Kiswahili and it is this section that we, the readers of the novel, hear Lomolomo sing.

Original Kiswahili Version	English Translation
<i>Hapo zamani mama, sikuwa hivi</i>	In those old days, mother, I was not like this
<i>Iyo-iyoo-imamaa</i>	<i>Iyo-iyoo-imamaa</i>
<i>Lakini sasa niko hivi</i>	But now I am like this
<i>Shauri ya pombe</i>	Because of beer
<i>Iyo-iyoo-imamaa ...</i>	<i>Iyo-iyoo-imamaa ...</i>
Mbogo (2008: 13) my translation	

Lomolomo sings this song after he has refused to eat and when his wife has given up and goes to bed. As if reflecting on his condition, Lomolomo remembers a time when he had money and hence could perform his duties as husband and father. The reason for the change into his present condition, according to the song, is alcoholism. However, it seems that the narrator finds that either Lomolomo is blind of the real cause of his situation or the song he adopts to tell about his situation is not quite adequate. Hence, the narrator adds a brief description before presenting Lomolomo’s song, a description that explains that Lomolomo became alcoholic because he was retrenched from his job at the port and could not get other employment elsewhere. It is this description that points to the external agent of Lomolomo’s privation, the imaginary father who deprives him his symbolic phallus. His alcoholism is, therefore, only a surface symptom of the violence done to him by this agent.

The Kiswahili word used here, a word that I have translated as retrenchment, is *kupunguzwa kazi*. The narrator does not use words such as *kufukuzwa* or *kuachishwa kazi* (to be fired or dismissed from work), in which case the reasons for becoming jobless would probably be the worker’s own misconduct or inefficiency. But the concept of *kupunguzwa kazi*, retrenchment, or better, becoming redundant is clearly captured by the image of an act of pruning a plant (a flower or a tree), an act that makes that plant grow even healthier. The history of mass retrenchment of workers in various sectors of Tanzania’s economy is very much linked to Tanzania’s forced adoption of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) from the IMF and World Bank especially in the 1980s and 1990s (Shivji 2006: 8-12). These programmes

2. Dorothy Masuka was born in 1935 in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) by a Zambian father and a South African mother.

resulted not only in retrenchment of thousands of workers in parastatals but also in changing the financing of social services such as education and health from government to private (see Hodgson 2011: 68). And thus Lomolomo represents thousands of victims of these socio-economic changes in multiple and complex ways. He is not only one of thousands workers laid off from their income-generating jobs but education has also been commodified and hence he has to pay fees for his children to be able to go to school. Towards the end of the novel we also learn that his family cannot afford paying for health services which have also been commodified.

The pruning of workers in various industries and companies, according to these neo-liberal economic programmes, was a rational means of making these industries and companies perform more efficiently and generate more profit because they would be expending for only the necessary labour. To be sure, this is one side of the modernisation story. As Zygmunt Bauman writes in his *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*, this side of the story does not tell about the horrendous life experiences of the pruned individuals, the waste.

The story we grow in and with, has no interest in waste. According to that story it is the product that matters, not the waste. Two kinds of trucks leave factory yards daily – one kind of truck proceeds to the warehouses and department stores, the other to the rubbish tips. The story we have grown with has trained us to note (count, value, care for) solely the first kind of truck .... Waste is the dark, shameful secret of all production. Preferably, it would remain a secret. Captains of industry would rather not mention it at all – they need to be pressed hard to admit it .... [However], [t]he sheer mass of waste would not allow it to be glossed over and silenced out of existence.

(Bauman 2004: 27)

This novel is not about the industries and companies that pruned their workers like unwanted branches and it does not assess their efficiency or growth. On the contrary, the novel focuses on the misery that the pruned workers face on daily bases. It focuses on the dying experiences of the pruned branches or the waste of neo-liberal economy in a third-world country such as Tanzania. And Lomolomo's psychological loss of his symbolic manhood and fatherhood epitomises this dying process.

There is another song that Lomolomo sings which illustrates further the psychological effects of privation. Again, he sings it while drunk as he comes back home. Zita and Peter, who have just started eating their dinner, laugh when they hear him. The song is "Shauri Yako" (It is your Decision) by a famous Congolese band, Orchestra Super Mazembe, which since the 1970s until mid 1980, when it disbanded, resided in Kenya. Only the refrain is quoted in the novel.



Original Kiswahili Version	English Translation
<i>Siwezi kuuwa mtu mama</i>	I cannot kill someone (a human being), dear
<i>Dhambi kwa Mungu, mama wee</i>	That is a sin before God, dear.
<i>Shauri yako, shauri yako wee</i>	It is up to you, It is up to you
<i>Siwezi kuuwa mtu mama</i>	I cannot kill someone (a human being), dear
<i>Dhambi kwa Mungu mama, wee</i>	That is a sin before God, dear.
Mbogo (2008: 69) my translation	

The connection between the lyrics of this refrain and Lomolomo's poverty is difficult to be established without knowing the rest of the song. Only when one recalls the stanzas that precede this chorus in the actual song does one clearly see this connection. In these stanzas, the singer (a male character) complains that his wife or lover demands nice dresses and food but he is unable to meet these demands. Since the man does not have money he understands these demands as forcing him to engage in thievery and killings. Thus he refuses the temptations to engage in these sinful acts before God even if his refusal would make his wife leave.

There are a number of levels of musical figuring here. First, the refrain is only a figure that represents the whole song. It is a sign that stands in for the song "Shauri Yako" by Orchestra Super Mazembe and the reader's prior knowledge of the whole song is presupposed and is indispensable in understanding the point of this episode. Second, the song as a whole is a figure of Lomolomo's soul which is tormented by privation and the resulting hardships of living in poverty in urban marginal space, Manzese. And Lomolomo, the singer, is used in the novel as a figure that represents many poor people who are victims of various forms of urban marginality.

There is a paradox that is worth noting. There is no place in the novel where Lomolomo's children ask him for any of their needs. There is no place in the novel where his wife complains that he does not buy clothes or food for her and other members of the family. Ironically, it is Lomolomo who complains that his wife cooks for him only *ugali* and beans. It is he who, on many occasions, demands that his wife serves him food with *nyama* (meat). The point is that Lomolomo understands his responsibilities to his family which include buying clothes and food. And we imagine that in those days, when he had not yet lost his job, he used to provide these needs. The voice that torments him with these demands that he cannot meet is not from the real wife (Maman'tilie) but from the internalised cultural norms which in psychoanalytic terms may be referred to as "*object petit a*". A small, lower case *a*, the first letter of the French word *autre*, for other, denotes a little "other" which is opposed to a big Other that "represents a radical and irreducible alterity" (Evans 1996: 125). In the case of Lomolomo, the big Other would be either the actual voice of his wife making such demands, i.e. the voice would be coming from outside the subject or the law enforcing organs (court or police) who force him to fulfil his duties as a husband and

father. On the contrary, *object petit a* is a voice heard by the subject from within the subject itself but it is not the subject's own voice. A Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, describes it as "something in me more than myself on account of which I perceive [and structure] myself as worthy of Other's desires" (1997: 9). An *object petit a*, in this case, is the internalised law that a subject hears from within itself although this law is originally from the big Other. The torments that Lomolomo experiences are a result of the mismatch between what he takes to be his responsibilities and the naked actuality of his inability to fulfil them.

In all the three cases, the songs not only serve as musical figures that represent and express Lomolomo's experiences of poverty, but also as figures through which the novel mounts a social critique of the various structures and relations that give rise to such experiences.

### ***Ngoma ya Mdundiko: Mdundiko and the Figuring of Poverty and Urban Marginality***

While one of Lomolomo's songs is described by the narrator as *mdundiko* song, only in the second chapter of the novel do we encounter an episode with a fully-fledged performance of *ngoma ya mdundiko* (*mdundiko* music and dance). We witness this *ngoma* through Peter's eyes and ears. One morning, after taking a cup of tea and a piece of cooked cassava, Peter hears and sees a group of people performing *mdundiko* and they pass nearby their house. As mentioned earlier, *mdundiko* is a traditional dance of the Zaramo who dwell in the Coastal and Dar es Salaam regions. It was originally performed for young people's initiation rites but now it is performed even for other entertainment purposes. And because Dar es Salaam is increasingly populated by people of other ethnic groups in addition to the Zaramo, *mdundiko* has become a *ngoma* of *uswahilini*. One of the interesting features of this *ngoma* is the way different people are involved and the novel depicts it in some detail. A group of singers, dancers and drummers go around the streets playing, singing and dancing. Apart from the core group who may include close relatives of the initiated person (if the *ngoma* is performed for initiation purposes), many other interested persons, in the streets where this group performs, will join and leave the performance as their energy and time allow them. Other people, especially children, may just follow the performers as spectators. In this occasion, Peter is a spectator but he doesn't follow the group.

The lyrics of the song which is sung as part of this *ngoma* explicitly addresses the problem of poverty. First, there is a brief introductory segment in which we hear some shouts and the sound of drums represented as onomatopoeia: *"/ndi-ndi-ndilii!/ndi-ndi-ndi/"* (Mbogo 2008: 15). Then the stanzas that follow represent a conflict between two women. The first woman, who is the focaliser of the narrative, the focaliser from whom we hear the

story as she sees it, is being accused of having an affair with the husband of the second woman. The words in these stanzas are those of this accused woman telling the second woman that she is innocent because she is not the one who called the man. She says, the man himself was attracted by the design of her dresses and the shape of her body.

Original Kiswahili Version	English Translation
<i>Mume wako sikumwita</i> <i>Kanisimamisha mwenyewe</i> <i>Kaiona dizaini na</i> <i>Hii shepu yenyewe</i>	I did not call your husband It is the man himself who stopped me He saw this design And this shape of mine
Mbogo (2008: 15) my translation	

The woman also complains that people in her neighbourhood in Manzese Street do gossip about her and she wants them to stop the gossip. She also accuses the second woman to be one of gossipers. She cannot even understand the reason for the gossip because she eats ordinary food just like any other person in the neighbourhood. The term used here also evokes some sexual innuendos common among the Swahili speakers especially in the coastal Tanzania. With this in mind, the phrase “*kula kwa kaya*” (lit. eating communally) might also signify sharing a lover.

Original Kiswahili Version	English Translation
<i>Mtaa wa Manzese</i> <i>Kuna mgome-mgome</i> <i>Na huo umbea wenu</i> <i>Shoga yangu mkome</i>	In the street of Manzese There is a <i>gome</i> tree And that gossiping habit of yours You must stop it, my dear
<i>Nipeni shilingi yangu</i> <i>Nikanunue kibwaya</i> <i>Ninasimangiwa kula</i> <i>Kula kwenyewe kwa kaya</i>	Give me my shilling (money) I want to buy a raffia dancing skirt I've been the subject of gossip because of eating My eating itself is just communal (or sharing a lover)
Mbogo (2008: 16), my translation	

The woman summarises her point in the last stanza in which she says poverty is a bad thing that causes embarrassment and she wishes she were rich.

Original Kiswahili Version	English Translation
<i>Umaskini mbaya</i> <i>Tena unatia haya</i> <i>Ningelikuwatajiri</i> <i>Mbona ningegaragara</i>	Poverty is a bad thing And it is embarrassing Had I been rich I would have joyously rolled on the ground
Mbogo (2008: 16) my translation	

Given that the song is performed not by an individual person but by a group of people who live in a particular urban locale, the song and its performance are ways of creating, cultivating, sharing and expressing their group consciousness. It is a way of staging, figuring and even contesting their condition of urban marginality musically. Poverty is shown to cause not only individuals' lack of human basic needs such as food and shelter but also breaking down of social relationships. Little signs of inequities in dressing and eating habits generate strong grievances, gossips and interpersonal conflicts. The performance of *ngoma ya mdundiko*, which includes the sing-ing of the above quoted lyrics, is not only a way of revealing the problems of urban marginality and its effects on social relations. It is also a means through which the members of these *uswahilini* communities negotiate and resolve such interpersonal conflicts. Similar ways of negotiating and resolving conflicts have been observed in *taarab* performance where disputants also adopt the already creatively constructed and packaged words, "words they cannot voice while abiding to proper, respectful behaviour" (Askew 2002: 140 141).

The performance of the above quoted *mdundiko* song suggests that the practice of addressing and negotiating conflicts musically might be a common practice among the Swahili even in their other musical genres such as *ngoma ya mdundiko*.

### **Musical Prophecy from the Radio: Musical Figuring of Danger and Death**

The final set of musical figures we encounter in the novel are the two songs played from the radio cassette player and the characters in the novel listen attentively and discuss amongst themselves the contents of the songs. The first is a song called "Nadina" by a Congolese female singer Mbilia Bel and the second is called "Kifo" by Remmy Ongala, a famous Congolese-Tanzanian musician and a pioneer of *muziki wa dansi*, a Tanzanian popular dance music that employ rhumba, twist and other related styles.

The scene for the first song is in Musa's room. Peter and Musa have been classmates and long-time friends at Mapepela Primary School before Peter dropped out and this is the first time Peter has visited Musa. Peter is astonished by Musa's material possessions: good furniture, expensive music

system, carpet, cooking utensils and a modern cooking stove. And hence inquisitively asks: *Mzee vitu vyote hivi umevipata wapi?* (Boss! where do you get all these things?). Musa's answer reveals his involvement in drug business. But Musa gives his answer only after he has inserted a cassette in his radio cassette player and they both listen to the song "Nadina", a song that fills the air in the room. Musa informs Peter the name of the artist they are listening to as they contemplate the music and especially its lyrics.

Original Kiswahili Version	English Translation
<i>Jua ni motoo</i>	The sun is fire
<i>Tena ni mwangazaa</i>	It is also a light
<i>Wa duniaa</i>	Of the earth
<i>Nadina yoo lyoo</i>	Nadina yoo lyoo
<i>Nadina mamaa</i>	Nadina, dear
<i>Tumwombe Mungu baba</i>	Let's pray to God the father
<i>Yoyooo</i>	Yoyooo
<i>Atuhurumie dhambi</i>	That he forgives us
<i>Zetu mamaa.</i>	Our sins, dear.
Mbilia Bel as quoted in Mbogo (2008: 76) my translation	

The song appears to be used here to pre-empt their conversation and, like an index, to point to the *Janus*-faced nature of drug business. First, Musa tries to convince Peter to join him in the business if he also wants to prosper and escape from all the life hardships. In this case, the business is like the sun in Mbilia Bel's song that brings light or prosperity in terms of material possessions. But Peter is worried about the risks associated with the business. Although Musa tries to show only the bright part of the business, at times, he too seems to be troubled by the risks. In other words, they both realise that this sun also burns like fire in Mbilia Bel's "Nadina". In the end, however, Musa succeeds to convince Peter to join him. He makes Peter recall all the hardships he and his family are going through and compare them with Musa's life. Therefore, Peter enters into this business fully aware of its two sides: prosperity and danger, light and fire.

The song and the scene in which it is played do not only highlight the precariousness of the actions that Peter agrees to be involved in and the rationale for such involvement. As people whose lives are engulfed in the darkness of poverty and marginalisation, they always try to find ways to improve their situation however risky or unethical their efforts may be. Achille Mbembe (2001) shows that people who are stricken by poverty, exclusion and suppression, engage themselves in underground acts that can be described as "reciprocal antagonisms" or "manoeuvrings". These manoeuvrings can be expressed by using a Kiswahili word, *bongo*, which is etymologically related to another Kiswahili word, *ubongo* (pl. *bongo*), which means brain. The word is usually used to refer to Dar es Salaam (and

increasingly applied to Tanzania and Africa, more generally). In order for one to be able to live and survive in such a challenging city like Dar es Salaam, one is required to tactically use one's brain by engaging in "manoeuvring" acts (see also Stroeken 2005: 488, Sanders 2008: 156, and Perullo 2011: 89). For Peter, a poor urban and a school drop-out whose father has been "pruned" from his job and has become one of the thousands "wasted lives", "human waste", "outcasts of modernity", or "waste of economic progress", to borrow phrases from Bauman (2004: 5, 34). His survival manoeuvres are very risky and involve engaging in the drug business. For these street children drug business has become what Joe L.P. Lugalla and Jessie Kazeni Mbwambo call "urban subculture of surviving" (1999: 329-344).

The scene for Remmy's song "Kifo" (Death) is very sad. It begins very early in the morning when Peter wakes up at home and goes to look for Musa. His sister (Zita) and his father (Lomolomo) are very sick and hence they are still sleeping when he leaves. We are also told that there is no food in the house for breakfast, perhaps a reason for Peter's early departure. After a long passage about the sicknesses of these two characters, we again encounter Peter and Musa in Musa's room. They have just returned from their business, a first experience for Peter. He does not feel well because his stomach is not used to carrying drugs as it did today and so Musa, his friend, gives him a lemon to prevent vomiting. And at this moment, Peter becomes aware of Remmy Ongala's song which is being played by Musa's radio cassette player.

Original Kiswahili Version	English Translation
<i>Siku ya kifo</i>	On the day of death
<i>Siku ya kifo</i>	The day of death
<i>Siku ya kifo</i>	The day when one dies
<i>Wandugu kwa heri ee!</i>	Comrades, goodbye!
<i>Wakina mama kwa heriooo!</i>	Mothers, goodbye!
Remmy Ongala as quoted in Mbogo (2008: 93) my translation	

The song irritates Peter and hence he asks Musa to change the cassette. But Musa insists that they should let it run to the end: *Wacha uishe! We unaogopa kufa* (Let it go up to the end; Are you afraid of death?). Like "Nadina", this song too is used here as a prophetic musical figure that pre-empted and points to two kinds of deaths that are not yet known to Peter and Musa. First, there are deaths of Zita and Lomolomo, about which the reader is already informed. While Peter and Musa are still listening to the song, they hear a knock from the door and Kulwa, another street child who has been staying in Lomolomo's house with Peter and Zita since Peter found her at the Tabata dumping site, enters in order to take Peter home to join his family in moaning the death of his sister and father. While she still struggles to persuade Peter, they hear another knock at the door and this time police officers enter and arrest all of three children in the room as they allege them to be thieves and drug dealers.

In this case, the song “Kifo” that was tormenting Peter in the room was a harbinger of these two kinds of deaths: the actual deaths of Peter’s sister and father as well as the metaphorical death of their being arrested.

Taken together, the two songs are figures that highlight the dark side of urban structure and the institutions that maintain it. To keep itself safe and secure, the city disposes “its” street children, beggars and other marginal individuals. The scare quoted pronoun “its” here serves to highlight the fact that these marginal individuals or others are products of the city’s own marginalising or othering mechanisms. Imprisonment or, to use the figures from the songs, death and fire, are ways of taking these poisonous, contaminating and disturbing human waste to the “dumping sites” (Bauman 2004: 86). As Bauman eloquently writes:

In a nutshell, prisons, like many other social institutions, have moved from the task of recycling to that of the waste disposal. They have been relocated to the front line of the battle to resolve the crisis in which the waste disposal industry has fallen as a result of the global triumph of modernity and the new fullness of the planet.

(2004: 86-87)

## Conclusion

This article has examined ways through which musical figures especially songs and music genres are used in the novel *Watoto wa Maman’tilie* as semiotic resources through which the problem of Dar es Salaam urban marginality is constructed, enacted and contested. In most cases, characters appropriate existing songs and musical genres and use them to express and communicate their condition amongst themselves and to the other people. The songs played from radio cassette player have been used as indexes or harbingers of the dangers that the characters face due to their actions, the dangers that at the time of playing-listening to the songs these characters do not yet know. Succinctly, these musical figures are used to offer a critique of urban realities and represent the experiences of poor people who encounter these realities.

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