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KEEPIN' IT IN THE FAMILY: CULTURAL RELATEDNESS AND HIP HOP CONSTELLATIONS IN KAMPALA, UGANDA

ABSTRACT

For hip hop activists in Kampala the notion of '*family*' is a significant idea forming the basis of interaction and endeavors in a growing informal music economy. The constellation of hip hop as a family challenges conventional analytical approaches to hip hop as globalization, or glocalization, and empowerment, as it is this constellation itself that comes to designate particular places and times and the distance between them, as well as relations of power. Borrowing from kinship studies, I suggest to see the conceptualization and practice of hip hop as family in Kampala as forms of cultural relatedness that not only designates social relations between close and distant others, but also shapes endeavors of young Ugandan hip hop activists to age as valuable social persons.

Keywords: Africa, Uganda, youth, music, hip hop, relatedness, globalization

> *Once again, when you talk about hip hop in Uganda it's a small family. That's gradually growing.*
> – Babaluku, founder of the hip hop foundation Bavubuka (interview, January 2007)

This article analyzes how young hip hop activists in Kampala like Baba conceptualize the relationship between family and hip hop.[1] In it, I follow the constellations (Schneidermann and Abraham in the introduction of this issue) of hip hop as family as they are created, maintained, and expanded: practices which confront actors with the difficult negotiation of placing themselves in the world as valuable individuals. Seeing these negotiations as a form of 'cultural relatedness', I argue, allows a view of how young people in Kampala theorize the global through hip hop.

In cultural studies the standard take on hip hop as a global phenomenon has been to map out the ways in which 'hip hop culture' is diffused from its cultural and historical center in New York city—or, more broadly, Afro-American and Jamaican underground music scenes—to locations peripheral to this center. The question seems to be how a 'global culture' is being transformed or adopted into local cultural expressions. Depending on regional histories and place-based relations, the analytical object of these investigations are 'westernization' (Ntarangwi 2009, 2010) or the less normative 'localization' (Pennycook 2007), 'glocalization' (Lee 2010) or 'transnationalism' (Nitzsche 2013),

as scholars set out to explain the agency of individuals and groups within a global world.

To try to grasp the meanings and practices of hip hop as family among young hip hop activists in Kampala, however, I must begin my enquiry elsewhere. Recent studies of contemporary youth cultures in Africa suggesting that 'the global' cannot be understood as a stable nor homogenous 'realm of external relations' (Weiss 2009: 17) to which local communities respond (see also Ferguson 2006). Rather, these studies delve into the experiences and histories of young people engaging and being constituted by cultural forms, music genres, and creative economies, embedding their aspirations within their specific contexts (Weiss 2009; Newell 2011; Perullo 2011; Shipley 2013). This inspires an investigation into the empirical particularities (Perullo 2014) of young Africans' lives with popular culture, as aspects of processes that effect cultural, financial, political, and environmental, world-spanning changes. Here, the relevant questions to ask about hip hop in Kampala city have to do with how hip hop takes form as particular constellations of relationships through which youths seek to fashion themselves and the world around them. This means approaching young hip hoppers themselves as cultural theorists (Alim 2009). Thus the aim of this piece is to place practices of hip hop as family among young hip hop activists within their everyday lives and histories rather than interpreting them as mere local variations of a global cultural phenomenon. In an ethnographic exploration of *family*[2] in young hip hoppers' everyday lives, I describe the processes and meanings that constitute but also destabilize these constellations. This family is at once specific to the social domain of hip hop, but also affects, and is affected by, other ways of imagining social life in the context of being a young person in Kampala.

Placing hip hop constellations of family in context, I am inspired by trajectories of kinship studies in anthropology. From the mapping of kinship systems (cf. Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950; Lévi-Strauss 1969), this field of inquiry has moved towards analyzing kinship as processes of 'relatedness', exploring actors' own definitions, practices, and changing experiences of kinship. Borrowing from Janet Carsten (1995: 224) I use the notion of relatedness to focus on 'indigenous ways of acting out and conceptualizing relations between people', suggesting that kinship cannot be analyzed as a collection of static systems or structures strictly concerned with biological relatives. Rather, kinship is a process of relatedness (Carsten 2000: 16; Bamford and Leach 2009: 10). The object of investigation here shifts from the formal properties and states of kinship towards the processes of creating, maintaining, and extending ties and their meaning. It is not immediately obvious that 'hip hop as family' should be understood in terms of conventional kinship, as it has been analyzed in anthropology. But here I wish to use the notion of relatedness in a wider, cultural sense. I do this this in order to follow and take seriously the worlds, words, and actions of my friends in Kampala, and in this way shed light on the simultaneously hopeful and tension-fraught efforts of artists who seek to create themselves as significant and valuable social persons. Elsewhere I have explored the way young hip hop enthusiasts in Kampala understood themselves to be intervening with different kinds of publics, implying a sort of hip hop nation (Schneidermann 2014), but here I adopt the term cultural relatedness as a heuristic to explore 'hip hop as family': the constellations of social relations that my interlocutors created and acted upon to establish hip hop as a central aspect of their lives.

YOUTH, MUSIC, FAME: KAMPALA

In a population of about 34 million people, it is estimated that around 80% of Ugandans are younger than 30, making Uganda the youngest country in the world (UBOS 2012: 30). In this context many young people cannot easily access the resources needed to progress from the social roles of children, dependent on parents or other kin, to that of adults, providing and caring for a family and producing value in the wider society in the form of work and wages.[3] Young men and women, especially in urban areas, find themselves hustling, as they say, to get by. In this light hustling refers to their experiences of being in intermediary positions, and classified by the world around them as criminalized part-outsiders to society, as *lazy city youths* or *bayaye* (thugs). These negative categorizations characterize young people's lack of productive relations with kinship networks and the formal economy as internal traits and choices of young urbanites, which often contrasts with their own experiences of, and efforts towards, transitioning into positions of adulthood.

Since the 1990s the market for locally produced music in Uganda has grown rapidly through interrelated processes of liberalization and privatization of national media, the increased availability of affordable information technology hardware, and the advent of digital production and reproduction of music (Ssewakiryanga and Isabirye 2006). These developments have invited the dreams and work of young people, who have become the drivers of economies of popular culture as consumers as well as producers (Ssewakiryanga 1999; 2004). The emerging music industry hinges on informality, as the state does not enforce copyrights. This has kept international media companies at bay, while local entrepreneurs have created a thriving economy for the production, broadcast, and sale of music.[4] The primary source of income for musical artists in this economy is performing before an audience. Kampala's music scene offers a variety of live music shows throughout the week ranging from *karaoke* in small neighborhood bars to *unplugged,* acoustic performances at exclusive night clubs, and stadium shows with tens of thousands of fans (Wasswa-Matovu 2012). Typically, aspiring artists collaborate by going to performances together and in some way sharing the income from performances. In this way, being a member of a group offers youths in the music industry particular opportunity structures to perform and record music.

During 16 months of fieldwork in Kampala and beyond,[5] I followed musical solo artists and collaborative groups oriented towards the regional market for popular youth music, performing genres of *afro-pop* and dancehall-inspired music, as well as groups working within more activist frameworks of youth empowerment through hip hop. Across urban genres, many of my interlocutors compared musical groups with families. 'People join groups to have a family, to make it big collectively,' as a veteran afro-pop artist put it. Usually these groups were hierarchically ordered networks of young people, centered by a successful artist with a recording studio or, in a few cases, a manager.[6] They usually met and worked in places outside the domestic sphere—outside family compounds, outside kinship networks (though siblings and cousins could be part of the same crew)—and the more successful groups had a designated meeting place, a shared house, a music studio, or the residence of the leader of the group. There were similarities in the ways in which young artists organized their groups and in how they conceptualized their pursuits in the music economy. However, the notion of family took on a particular significance among groups

and individuals engaged with what might broadly be termed activist hip hop.

HIP HOP KINSHIP AND EXTENDED FAMILIES

Baba, whose words opened this piece, was one of the teenagers who participated in the new music scenes that emerged in Kampala in the 1990s around hip hop, dancehall, and R'n'B. Ten years on, in January 2007, he was telling me what he thought of Ugandan hip hop, as we were sitting in one of the quieter rooms of his family home in one of Kampala's suburbs. Somehow the relationship between his statement about the growing hip hop family in Uganda and his family of biological kin, whose voices and everyday sounds of cooking and washing reached us through the open window, struck notes that reverberated, as I tried to understand the motivations and everyday lives of young musicians in Kampala.

Growing up as the son of a popular Evangelical pastor in Kampala, Baba told me how he and a handful of friends had started one of the first rap groups in the city while hanging out in the church's music room. They soon became popular performers at high school parties and daytime discos. When Baba's father died, the family relocated permanently to Canada, where Baba's mother continued her husband's ministries. Baba's life followed a different path, laid down in the early days with his friends in the music room. Reflecting on these experiences years later, Baba described this time as one of learning about *real* hip hop and becoming inspired by North American *conscious hip hop* and the multicultural activist music community in Vancouver. He realized that though he could rap in English with his friends, what made him stand out was his ability to rap in Luganda.[7] He told me:

> They be like: 'Hey, yo, who's that African brother?' Why? Because they heard a different tongue. They're not gonna say 'Who's that African brother?' while I'm trying to be like them [rapping in English]! 'Cause they' so many rappers in America, and everybody is a rapper.

Extending the last syllable into a long drawl, he broke into a contagious laugh untangling a couple of dreadlocks from his ponytail. He continued to unfold how these experiences had inspired him to think in new ways about how his own background could be part of being a hip hop activist and performer. Returning to Uganda for the first time in several years in 2005, he started the Bavubuka Foundation. Bavubuka, meaning 'youth' in Luganda, aims at 'empowering youth to create positive change in their communities and the world'.[8] One of Baba's hopes was to start the Lugaflow Movement, encouraging young hip hop artists to rap in Luganda or other native languages, rather than performing lyrics in English.

When I met Baba in 2006, he was working on fundraising and formalizing Bavubuka. He wanted to develop the talents and the motivations of young people in Uganda who had not grown up with the same opportunities and inspirations that he had. Reflecting further on the notion of family, Baba said:

> I grew up in a house of like 30 people, and these 30 people were not necessarily family. These were like street people that got squandered in the city that came by, and they would stay here for months. But you know in that sense of an environment, I learned that everybody was family.

Baba applied this notion of family as a leader of Bavubuka, with inspiration from his time with

hip hop activists in Canada. In explicit terms, his experiences of being a son and a brother in a prominent Baganda family entwined with the cultural relatedness and terminologies of brotherhood in hip hop, folding into how he envisioned his own group Bavubuka as a 'musical family'.

As I returned to Uganda for more fieldwork in 2009, Baba invited me to come and visit the Bavubuka Community House. He had secured two simple cement houses on the family land, not far from where we had been hanging out a couple of years earlier. The community house and the activities going on there were backed by financial support and collaboration with Baba's friends in North America, as young hip hop activists came to teach or do research with local youths. Baba himself often ended up covering expenses related to Bavubuka, and spent five to seven months of the year in North America performing and giving talks on his activism as well as fundraising for projects in Uganda. With the Bavubuka Community House as a base, Baba was working with a dozen young men and women in their teens and twenties to create positive social change through hip hop music, emceeing, poetry, break-dancing, visual arts, community journalism, and other talents and interests of the young participants. Coming from different parts of Kampala, they came to the house when they had free time from school or work. They identified with Bavubuka as youths: not necessarily in terms of their chronological age, but in terms of their social position in society (see Durham 2000; Christiansen, Vigh and Utas 2006). A handful of young rappers in their late teens and early twenties came to form the most active core of the organization. They were inspired by Baba's ideological stances on hip hop as a tool for social change, but were also hoping to make a name for themselves in what they called *the industry*. They would gather almost every day in the House, hanging out to see if any of the others had a plan for the evening, to listen to music and dream of fame and fortune, write new verses and try to find a path to a daily meal. They welcomed me to hang out and participate in whatever was going on. As I followed the everyday strivings of this group and their 'musical family' to get by, as well as their bigger dreams of future stardom, I began to understand constellations of hip hop as family within a wider world of intense activities towards becoming *a somebody*.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN HIP HOP

Sitting around the common-room at the House on a hot day in April 2011, with the emcees Foever MC, Burney MC, St. Nelly-Sade, Cyno MC and a couple of others, we discussed their common situation as youths and their relationships with parents. Among laughter and banter they described how they were tired of the restrictions of staying with their parents or other kin, as staying at home; *staying indoors,* also meant depending on family to get by. They needed to be in *the street* to practice their hip hop and realize their own hopes for the future. For this reason, St. Nelly-Sade and Foever MC usually stayed at the House some nights, and other nights stayed with friends. Shaking his head with a smile, Cyno MC intervened: 'Like, when I was with my parents, they educated me. I appreciated that, I appreciate that. But it's not that I was getting everything that a child is supposed to get from them.' This sparked off a more sober discussion about what kinds of obligations kinship ties constituted. The young rappers came to a consensus on what a family must provide for a child: food, medical care, and payment for education at least up to senior four (11th grade). But they also agreed that there was

more to growing up, and though their parents had struggled for their survival and education, Foever MC closed the argument: 'You know what? We started doing things for ourselves very early.' Discontented with staying *indoors*—within the hierarchies of kin relations—and in hopes of establishing their own families, having their own homes, and providing food and care for others, Bavubuka and the Community House seemed to become a place between *indoors* and the *street*. I asked what kind of place Bavubuka was, and Foever MC promptly answered: 'It's a hip hop place.'

The Bavubuka Community House was open to all who were interested in learning about hip hop, according to members of Bavubuka. In practice, new people most often came to the community house when invited by Baba or one of the active members at hip hop events in town, but physical proximity did not determine membership status alone. There were no formal rites of initiation to become a member and no membership records as such. Some members took on specific tasks, but there was not a fixed set of formal positions in Bavubuka. Baba himself did not think of Bavubuka as a hierarchical structure, and actively sought to discourage patrimonialism. Though Baba spoke of Bavubuka as a family, it was organized in way that seemed to oppose the hierarchical social orderings in conventional families, as Foever MC and the others described them. Baba often referred to the younger members as his brothers and sisters. They in turn addressed as him brother, especially in more formal settings like meetings and workshops. In this way the hierarchical orderings of conventional forms of relatedness, based on biological kinship, were discouraged, and both the leader Baba and others tried to express internal relations of equality and similarity within Bavubuka.

On Sunday afternoons the Community House hosted the Hip hop Fellowship Sunday Meeting, where 10–20 members usually convened. When Baba was in the country, he led the meetings. Sitting in a circle on wooden benches, plastic chairs, or on the floor, participants took turns to *share,* meaning to talk about the week that had passed and how to run Bavubuka, or plan upcoming events. Sometimes a meeting meant taking several rounds where everyone in the room was encouraged to speak about their experiences and their hopes for the future. Baba usually spoke for longer than the others when it came to his turn, reflecting on the theme being talked about and relating it to his visions of hip hop activism. Even though Baba himself did not embrace the role of a family patriarch in the group, he did appreciate that fellow hip hoppers had given him the additional name Jajja wa Lugaflow (Grandfather of Lugaflow). The younger members sometimes spoke about Baba as 'our boss', or 'the big guy'. He was their elder, and was well known as a pioneer of hip hop in Uganda. But in Hip hop Fellowship Baba and the others usually addressed each other as siblings. The expressed focus on participating as brothers and sisters in the Hip hop Fellowship was a particular articulation of hip hop as family, which pointed to forms of relatedness that emphasized equality and similarity. If everyone in Bavubuka was family, an important aspect of family life was that everyone in the room was part of the conversation on equal terms through the practices of *sharing*.

I suggest that it was not a coincidence that the hip hoppers in Bavubuka articulated hip hop as family in terms of brotherhood and sisterhood. First, among young people in Kampala, the terms brother and sister can cover a range of categories, and not all

designate a relation of direct, biological, shared descent. When mapping kinship relations with my interlocutors, they usually restricted the kinship categories of brother and sister to kin born of same father and same mother. In daily speech, however, brother and sister also referred to kin with whom they shared one biological parent or, in cases of polygamy or polyandrous motherhood, children of parents' spouses. Further, the young people with whom I shared time and space during fieldwork also at times referred to as brothers or sisters those kin with whom they shared generational position: for instance father's sister's son could be called a brother. Extending kinship terms for siblings to non-biological kin who share social age or generational position, and with whom one experience social proximity—for instance by sharing accommodation or working closely together—is fairly common as well. When the aspiring artists in Bavubuka called each other brother and sister, they effectively bridged social distance and called attention to aspects of their shared dependencies in their everyday life at the House.

Second, the 'brotherhood' in Bavubuka was formulated almost as a strategy for avoiding hierarchical orderings and emphasizing equal relations of power between those who became part of the group. Ethnomusicologist Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamuzusa describes the fluidity, ambiguity, and situational construction of gendered categories and power in relation to traditional dances among the Baganda. She argues that male and female categories among the Baganda are relational and contingent on hierarchies of power and class in Baganda cosmology, based on clanship and descent. However, Catholic missionaries introduced an 'other' gender category, as they settled and began converting the local populations into Christians: 'new genders emerged, namely, *faaza* (reverend father), *siista* (reverend sister), and *bulaaza* (reverend brother)' (Nannyonga-Tamuzusa 2005: 17). These new genders, though designating terms of kinship, stood beside the conventional hierarchies based on clanship. In this sense, Christianity introduced terms of kinship as alternative forms of relatedness and social organization to conventional forms of kinship among the Baganda. The impact of the introduction of Christianity to central Uganda lies beyond the scope of this text. But perhaps there was in the young hip hop activist' uses of 'brother' and 'sister' a similarity to the *siista* and *bulaaza* of colonial Christianity. In both cases the use of these terms of relatedness challenge and subvert conventional kin-based hierarchies and forms of social organization (c.f. Nannyonga-Tamuzusa 2005: 20). The subversive strategy of negotiating alternative kin and gender categories also represents shifts in the base of relatedness from clanship to other forms of relatedness. The use of kinship terms in hip hop to signify cultural relatedness ties in with both conventional family life among the Baganda, as well as colonial histories of social change, resistance, and conquest.

A GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED FAMILY

So far I have explored cultural relatedness among one hip hop group in Uganda, conceptualizing and practicing 'hip hop as family'. This raises the obvious question of how these forms of relatedness extend beyond the present of the members of musical families in Kampala.

Back in 2007, Baba elaborated on what family meant to him:

> I feel like the whole Uganda is my people, and I'm wanting to be friends with everybody that understands what we're

> doing. (…) Like, I'd I meet you today and you inspire me; I see you as my brother. (Interview, January 2010)

All of Uganda was already Baba's people, in so far as they understood and shared the ideological foundation that was his own vantage point: youth empowerment and conscious hip hop. This was a diverse, geographically dispersed family that also existed beyond the Community House and what went on there. Later in 2010, when Baba had been working with hip hop activism in both Uganda and North America for half a decade, he remarked that what tied hip hoppers together and made them family was a shared hip hop ideology or a 'conscious element' as he put it:

> Actually it's a global ideology, you know; it don't matter where you're at or what space you're given: the conscious element of it keeps you connected to the like-minds that are everywhere in the world. (Interview, January 2010)

Baba here envisioned a musical family that did not necessarily share the physical or temporal space of the members of Bavubuka—or the Community House—at all. This sense of membership in the hip hop family was also reflected in the stories of some of the aspiring artists hanging out at the House.

Burney MC told me about how he became part of Bavubuka. He had started organizing hip hop club nights at a music hall in the city when he was seventeen, and here met Baba. The two started talking every time they coincidentally met in the streets of Kampala. At the time, the Community House was located far from Burney's home, and he did not have money for transport to go there on a regular basis. But he became a member of the Bavubuka family nonetheless. Burney explained this to me as a feeling inside of '*being Bavubuka*'. He added: 'I joined Bavubuka before even coming to the property.' Burney's sense of belonging underlines how people could be part of the hip hop family without having been to the Bavubuka Community House or even having met its members; in Baba's words: 'Everyone is family.' What constituted relatedness here seemed to be located within individuals, and did not necessarily depend on shared time and space.

For members of Bavubuka, hip hop itself at once both channeled and generated the relatedness between individuals and groups across time and place. This was apparent in their interactions with the many foreign activists, researchers, and journalists that came into contact with Bavubuka. They too used terms like brother and sister to emphasize ties when they were talking with the young Ugandans they met there. Members of Bavubuka sometimes called this their *global family* or *global fam*. When these global family members came to visit, to witness, to film, to write about, or to teach youth empowerment and hip hop culture, members of Bavubuka gathered at the Community House. The visitors were invited to participate in meetings like the Hip Hop Fellowship on equal terms with their local brothers and sisters. At times the most active Bavubuka members' time was booked for weeks on end by visitors who came to teach or document the empowerment of Ugandan youths. These events were documented in digital photos and films, and members frequently posted photos, videos, and comments on Facebook, Youtube, and other social media as a way of both sustaining and performing ties with the *global family*. Becoming part of the musical family of Bavubuka was a process of discovering and actualizing ties that already existed as a potentiality within people. The sense of relatedness extended in time and space in the

social media worlds of the hip hop family as the members of Bavubuka became 'friends' with other activists and posted in groups and events with participants from across the globe.

With time, Burney MC became a central member of Bavubuka as an emcee and event organizer. Through Bavubuka in 2011 he came into contact with a group of hip hop activists from the Czech Republic producing documentary films. The project 'One Blood' featured Bruney MC as one of four portraits of global hip hop culture and social change from Gaza, Iraq, Cambodia, and Uganda. The aim of this was to show 'that even in countries associated with war or poverty, there are people who think in a similar way, with a similar ambition to create like we have in our western world'.[9] The project of the Czech activists quite literally defined what was shared by hip hop activist across the globe in terms of kinship, as *one blood*, as a particular way of thinking and an approach to creativity. The shared *blood* of hip hop ideology allowed persons of disparate geographical and social background to place themselves within the same world. The year after the documentary crew had recorded with Burney MC in Kampala, the documentary film came out, and Burney was invited to the Czech Republic to perform with native artists at a major hip hop festival. In this way, internal states of being hip hop and one blood with geographically distant relatives could, if nurtured and elucidated, be made manifest in material terms bonds of mutual help and exchange.

Following the brotherhood and sisterhood of Bavubuka and some of the projects which engaged their *global fam* over time, I came to think of their hip hop family as a 'consanguine' form of cultural relatedness (Radcliffe-Brown 1950: 8; Sahlins 2011: 235). These ties become significant by emphasizing similarity between kin (Viveiros De Castro 2009: 152), and for Bavubuka the 'shared substance' was hip hop.[10] But while there seemed to be the idea that hip hop itself constituted relations between people—one blood—the ties of hip hop as family were not given. Rather, the cultural relatedness was a process of continued work on identifying, maintaining, and expanding relatives and ties. When my interlocutors practiced and articulated hip hop as family, they in rather subtle ways theorized and constituted 'the global' as particular forms of cultural relatedness.

The consanguine understanding of relatedness as *one blood* and shared descent through hip hop lineages in Bavubuka generated a world where members of the group could find brothers and sisters, musical relatives, across the globe. As members of Bavubuka sought to draw in resources from this relatedness, they also sought to establish a livelihood and extend their own renown through these hip hop relatives. The quest for recognition and livelihood among the young emcees in Bavubuka came to focus on how to make distant family members into connections through a kind of 'interior swelling' up of musical kin relations (see Nielsen 2012).

LINES OF SHARED DESCENT

If hip hop as family offered activists a way to constitute and theorize the global as networks of cultural relatedness, the intense debates about history and authenticity among hip hop enthusiasts—and scholars—emerge as key to legitimizing belonging, and to placing oneself in shared lines of hip hop descent. In 2011 Baba described contemporary youths in Kampala as 'the hip hop generation', but at the same time emphasized the need for this generation to be educated about hip hop:

> The hip hop generation is the youth culture, the urban youth culture in Uganda. (…) and I was like: 'We can't have kids walking around saying I'm a rapper, or I'm MC such-and-such.' But they have to know the definition and have an understanding of what it takes to be an MC. (Interview, January 2011)

This stance was echoed by Foever MC who, among his friends in Bavubuka, was counted as the most knowledgeable on hip hop history. Hanging around in the bunk beds in the 'Emcees' Room' at the Community House, I asked him why it was important to know about these things.

> Foever MC: I love—I love hip hop so much that I don't want to just rap. I wanna find out the roots, I wanna go deep, and know what I am doing. (…)
> Nanna: So (…) to your best knowledge, what *is* the root?
> Foever MC: The roots of hip hop? Okay, people have different theories. You know, it started from here, it started from there. But the real roots that everyone talks about is like from Bronx, from Bronx, America. (Interview May 2011)

Foever then recounted his history of hip hop, citing names and places in New York, and in Los Angeles, speaking of events that took place in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, most of them before he was born. He then explained that he was also interested in hip hop in Africa, and had been studying Tanzanian hip hop as, since the 1990s, the genre had been much more popular there than in Uganda. He concluded:

> And in Uganda, it's kinda been a hustle. It's even hard for you to tell someone: 'This is not hip hop, and this is hip hop.' Some people just hate you for you telling them: 'That's not hip hop you're doing!' (interview, May 2011)

From watching hip hop documentaries and talking about them, to discussing the origins of hip hop in workshops aiming at developing hip hop skills, hip hoppers in and around Bavubuka attempted to trace their shared substance in the history of hip hop, as 'brothers' and 'sisters'. These local narratives of hip hop culture were both a significant basis and the performance of relatedness. From its point of origin to a state of global encompassment, the histories of hip hop that were traced in Bavubuka presented 'hip hop as family' as ties that exist between people who may not know each other, who are perhaps not even aware of each other's existence. Although they promoted an expressly Ugandan hip hop with their emphasis on Lugaflow, their relatedness was articulated in the meticulous tracing of shared 'descent lines' from early hip hop culture in 1970s New York. Whether legendary hip hop activists in 1970s New York or contemporary hip hop or youth-empowerment organizations across the world, particular actors were articulated as brothers and sisters among the most active participants in Bavubuka. The consanguine understanding of relatedness as *one blood* and shared descent through hip hop lineages articulated a world where members of the group could find musical relatives across the globe. The discussion and intense investment in the construction of these narratives that categorize *real* and *fake* hip hop, and thereby established who and what

belonged to the family, resonates with aspects of conventional family life in central Uganda. Though not all of my Kampalian friends lived up to these ideals, they suggested that in order to become a *real person*, a respected member of society among the Baganda, knowledge of lineages and ancestry, and the ability to recite these in clan meetings, was important. Not knowing the roots of one's biological kinship basically made one less of a person, they seemed to suggest. In this light the narratives of hip hop history among Kampalian hip hoppers and their visitors should be seen as processes of cultural relatedness, which enabled specific persons to interact and collaborate through the articulation of similar ties of belonging. These narratives and debates enabled them to explore the legitimacy and strengths of such ties, and it allowed them to imagine—and imagine themselves as part of—events distant in time and place from their own everyday lives.

THE LIMITS OF CULTURAL RELATEDNESS IN HIP HOP

Yet the conceptualization and practice of hip hop as family also obscured other aspects of the relations between the hip hop activists I met in Kampala. Exploring this further indicates the experienced limitations of these forms of cultural relatedness, and the tensions to which they give rise.

On a Tuesday in April of 2011, the young emcees from Bavubuka attended a workshop about hip hop organized by an American hip hop charity in a cultural hall at the center of the city. The day started with the local contact person welcoming all the brothers and sisters, both from Kampala and from the US. He introduced the group of visitors, and said that the day would be one to 'share' and to 'learn' about the central elements of hip hop, to empower the participants. About 35 young hip hop enthusiasts, mostly young men in their twenties, who were not in school and not at work, had turned up for the event. Some went off to a session on breakdance, while I followed Burney MC, Foever MC, and the others to a session about freestyling. After the workshops, back in plenum, both the instructors and the participants thanked each other for the day that had passed. One of the visitors urged the participants to continue their work by creating their own hip hop initiatives, rather than simply waiting for the next workshop. After sitting uneasily in his chair for a while, Foever MC spoke up, asking exactly how they were to create their own initiatives. They could not afford to record their music, and he had heard that the visiting organization had promised to fund the building of a recording studio. But instead of a music studio, the young emcees were now invited for yet another workshop. 'We could have so many things going on now, but I don't see them (…)' he said. Some awkward words and glances were exchanged before the host of the workshop ended the day by giving t-shirts to the participants with the visiting organization's logo printed on them in bold type. A couple of days later, I asked Foever about his intervention at the workshop. 'I was speaking my heart,' he said, 'so I expected maybe that they would—uh, but they didn't even, they kind of, like, ignored me.'

Talking to some of the facilitators at the workshop, it became clear that they had noticed Foever's intervention, but had decided not to address it directly. Sharing their experiences from Uganda, they suggested that while rural youths were in general enthusiastic and grateful to receive fellow hip hoppers from abroad, urban youths suffered from 'dependency syndrome', demanding too much from outsiders in terms of economic and material support. Inadvertently,

they began to speak into the local discourses on urban youths as lazy, and responsible for their own marginalization with regards the economy and social networks.

Phrased as a problem of cultural relatedness, the issue on that Tuesday at the hip hop workshop seemed to be one of obligations and reciprocity between kin in the hip hop family. Workshops and visits were articulated in the idioms of hip hop as family, of brothers and sisters learning and sharing together. But the sharing was to a large extent controlled by the comparatively affluent and well-established visitors, who were further positioned as carriers of legitimate hip hop knowledge to be 'given' as a form of empowerment to the Kampalian youths. When the young emcees acted as guides and hosts for journalists and filmmakers, when they participated in the workshops planned by American and European activists, they counted as long-term future investments in the hip hop family. However, the youths' need to find food and shelter in their everyday lives was at times difficult to encompass in the learning and sharing of this family, and intermittent demands for monetary compensation for time and work by the Ugandan activists was often problematic. Foever MC's interjection somehow questioned the basis of these exchanges, suggesting that though there was sharing among brothers and sisters in hip hop, there were also differences and inequalities that threatened to destabilize these ties. 'Why are we okay to just go on the workshop and get a t-shirt?' he later commented. 'They should be wearing our t-shirts.'

Here the young conscious rappers depended on their musical relatives for their livelihoods, but not the other way around. Again, they found themselves getting by on the mercy of others To the young people I met in Kampala, the promise of many hip hop NGO programs and workshops seemed to be that youth empowerment and conscious hip hop offered not only belonging, but also a livelihood. In practice, I saw the young activists in Bavubuka trying to adapt forms of cultural relatedness to the expectations of possible sponsors and well-wishers, hoping to be able to transform these into material support and changes in their own social situation and status. But this work of swelling up cultural relatedness was far from a straightforward process. The emphasis on hip hop as family not only extended relatedness, but also posed some messy problems when it came to sorting out the kinds of rights members of this family had in each other.

CONCLUSION

With time, Foever MC and the other young rappers broke away from Bavubuka to form their own groups and pursue other paths. Baba continued his work with children and youths in Uganda, and the organization came to reflect its role as a living legacy in Ugandan hip hop when it changed name to Bavubuka Dynasty. The notion of hip hop as family, quite literally, remained central for the hip hop activists' self-identification and practice.

I have offered here the notion of cultural relatedness as a heuristic to explore how the efforts of young hip hop activists in Kampala, collaborating around youth empowerment, give rise to particular forms and concepts of family. These hip hop constellations are the basis of swelling up relations between otherwise socially or geographically distant others. For the activists I worked with in Kampala, hip hop as family is a theory about the global. In important ways it becomes a vehicle for young people's experiments with placing themselves within their immediate world as valuable social persons, in a context where this is not a given. Yet, the *global fam* of hip hop also

encapsulates problematic tensions of power and value as people of disparate places, positions, and interests negotiate the obligations and material nature of these ties. There were great differences in how musical groups identified and organized linkages based on music among my interlocutors in Kampala (see Schneidermann 2016). Hip hop as family was but one way that one particular group was attempting to relate people, sounds, genre, style, places, and times in a particular way through hip hop. The notion of cultural relatedness here facilitates taking seriously the ties and meanings that are enacted in conceptualizations of musical practices, and invites further exploration of other constellations of music in everyday life.

NOTES

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2 Emic terms are marked with italics. The main language of the fieldwork was English, which is the official language of Uganda, while the lingua franca of everyday life in Kampala is Luganda, traditionally spoken by the Baganda of the central region of Uganda.

3 Similar situations for urban youths in African cities are described by anthropologists exploring youth as a 'social moratorium' (Vigh 2006) or 'waithood' (Honwana 2012), terms which capture drawn out periods of struggle towards uncertain futures (De Boeck and Honwana 2005; Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006).

4 Over the past decades preferred media have changed rapidly, from cassette tapes to CDs, to mp3 files and other formats easily shared via USB memory sticks, Bluetooth, or the internet.

5 My fieldwork in the Ugandan music industry was carried out in Uganda when time and funds permitted during my MA studies (2006/2007), during a short period of employment at a film production company (2008) and during PhD studies (2009–2011), as well as in northern Europe when interlocutors visited for work or leisure (especially after 2011). I draw on interviews from both 2007 and 2009–2011 in this article. The consistency in claims about hip hop as family over time in my data may suggest a certain inertia in the forms of cultural relatedness among the hip hop artists, even if they are operating in a rapidly changing music economy.

6 Gender also played a role in musical groups. Most of the crews I encountered were made up of young men, with women in roles as makeup artists or dancers. Yet groups operating as hip hop projects were of mixed gender and encouraged girls and women to participate as performers. All-girl groups also emerged, inspired by successful American all-girl R'n'B groups.

7 Luganda is the language of the Baganda of central Uganda, the largest ethnic group in the country. The traditional cultural and political center of the Baganda is the kingdom located in Mengo, today part of Kampala city.

8 bavubukacommunity.blogspot.com <accessed July 2016>

9 onebloodproject.com <accessed July 2016>

10 Consanguine here refers to ties of kinship through shared substance—commonly blood—and descent, for instance between parents and children, or brothers and sisters (Radcliffe-Brown 1950: 8). By contrast affinal kinship refers to ties between individuals and groups that are based on their difference; the creation of alliances between disparate entities, for instance in marriage (Lévi-Strauss 1969). Thus affinal kinship is about exchange and the transformation of persons of categories of people from 'outsiders' to become members of the kin-group.

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