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# T D R

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Tanzanian

National Erotica

*Laura Edmondson*

ZONE

*a performance text by*

*Rachel Rosenthal*



# Tanzanian Theatre

## From Marx to the Marketplace

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*Thomas Riccio*

The scene was the National Museum of Tanzania in Dar es Salaam on a hot and humid late November day, 1999. The event was a celebration to mark the 150 years since the first publication of the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*. Sponsored by the Finnish Embassy, the occasion included displays, cocktails, finger food, and pastries, a Finnish folk rock band, and speeches. The Finnish ambassador spoke about cooperation, a scholar talked about a recent translation of the epic into Kiswahili, and the Tanzanian Minister of Culture spoke about how the *Kalevala*, written and published in Finnish, was the spark igniting Finnish nationalism. He went further to say how the fragments of folklore were turned into an epic work and became a shared point of reference, validating a people, language, and national identity. The Minister saw that Tanzania was at a similar point in history. Like the Finns of the 1830s, the culturally nascent nation of Tanzania was identifying and recording its rich and disparate folk traditions. Like Finland, Tanzania had suffered under colonial rule, which feared folk customs and indigenous language as subversive. Finland, too, had thrown off its colonial rulers and unified its various folk traditions into a national culture.

The *Kalevala* celebration then moved outdoors under the shade of a large mango tree. There, two well-known (if not the best-known) Tanzanian troupes performed—the Parapanda Arts Company and the Mandela Theatre. Both groups were commissioned by the Finnish embassy to give presentations celebrating the *Kalevala*. The Parapanda Arts Company, wearing matching batik shirts and pants, presented a heroic recitation-styled poem with musical accompaniment<sup>1</sup> augmented by a variety of dance movements culled from traditional Tanzanian dances. Interspersed throughout their Kiswahili text they shouted in emphasis the word “*Kalevala*” several times. The Mandela Theatre was less concerned with including the *Kalevala* in its presentation, and gave instead an entertaining and action-packed sampler presentation of Tanzanian tribal dances. The Mandela performances were a collage stitching several tribal performance traditions together for no other purpose than to entertain. Some dances were ersatz adaptations, fusions, or remixes of the most accessible traditional dances into a new form. Unlike the self-conscious Parapanda, the Mandela Theatre presentation was rough-and-ready and in stark contrast to the posh event attended mostly by the embassy staff, international foundations, and business crowds and their families.

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1. & 2. (Above) Parapanda Arts Company performers participate in an event sponsored by the Finnish Embassy to celebrate the anniversary of the first publication of the Finnish epic, Kalevala. (Below) Members of the Mandela Theatre perform a traditional Makonde dance at the event. November 1999, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. (Photos by Thomas Riccio)



The bodies of the performers moved with the drum rhythms of Africa as the audience sat in neat rows as passive observers, served wine and beer by well-groomed African waiters. Sitting there I could not help but wonder how such a context and presentation evolved. I have seen hundreds of performance presentations throughout sub-Saharan Africa, but none compared to what I saw and felt that day. Intrigued by the combinations, interplay, and adapted manifestations of performance styles and forms I was also unsettled by what was driving the event, namely commerce. If performance is a reflection of a culture's self-identity then what I saw was a nervous face revealing the confluence of politics, tribalism, socialism, and a market economy.

These performances were a coded map revealing the journey of Tanzania from its tribal origins through colonial adaptations to Marxist socialism to capitalism, and on to the periphery of an emerging global culture. The unique, highly compressed, often forced, and dynamic transformation of Tanzanian performance was effected variously by nationalism, government-initiated programs, funding, tourism, and the increased, pervasive influence of Western



3. A member of the Mandela Theatre performs a reinterpreted traditional stilt dance. The performer is wearing a store-bought rubber mask and, using traditional praise singing, tells of the glory of the Kalevala. November 1999, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. (Photo by Thomas Riccio)

culture. Tanzanian performance responded to these interactions, searching for its own perspective. Drawing from its frayed memory, its adaptations reflected a search for a center, a form, an identity, a purpose, and most importantly, for relevance.

A study of Tanzanian performance and its journey is instructive not only in terms of understanding Tanzania, but also as a way to reflect upon many, if not all, world performance traditions that have gone through similar transformations. Every performance tradition, each in its own way, developed from locally integrated indigenous expressions that responded to and were conditioned by external cultural, political, and economic currents.

### Tanzania

Tanzania is seven times the size of Great Britain and is essentially an agrarian society. Its geography includes Mount Kilimanjaro, Lake Tanganyika, Lake Victoria, Zanzibar, and one of the largest and most diverse game reserves in the world, the Serengeti. It borders Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, and Burundi. In addition to its 130 ethnic groups, of which 85 percent are rural, Tanzania is also host to thousands of political, ethnic, and economic refugees from Rwanda and the Congo.

Tanzania's industrial base is nearly nonexistent. Its economy is heavily dependent upon agricultural products and their processing; textiles, spices, tourism, and raw materials are also a source of foreign capital. It is a major recipient of foreign aid, grants, and loans from such organizations as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Fifty-one percent of its population lives below the poverty line. Like its neighbors Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia, Tanzania has a high incidence of HIV and AIDS. Its healthcare system is severely deficient; its infant mortality rate is high, as is its death rate from TB, dysentery, and malaria. It is estimated that nearly 70 thousand children die annually from malaria in Tanzania. The cost for treatment is U.S.\$3, yet even that is too expensive for many. Despite its low per capita annual income (U.S.\$730 in 1998) basic prices and inflation are high, making daily survival for the average person and family a struggle (Central Intelligence Agency 1999). Its currency, the shilling (which is emblazoned with the photo of the current president, Benjamin Mkapa), is not convertible and is essentially worthless outside of Tanzania.

Despite a government-initiated campaign against widespread corruption, Transparency International, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), listed Tanzania as one of most corrupt countries in the world in 1999 (Gicheru 1999). However, corruption is on the decline and public awareness on the rise; citizens and newspapers alike are vehemently outspoken against the "culture of corruption" that has gripped and stagnated the nation.<sup>2</sup>

Colonial Tanzania won its independence (as Tanganyika) from Great Britain in 1961. In 1964 Tanganyika united with Zanzibar to become Tanzania. Before British rule, Tanzania was a German colony known as Deutsche Ost Afrika. Before Germany, coastal Tanzania was controlled by a variety of Arabic sultans and, along with the island of Zanzibar, was a hub for the East African slave trade for centuries. Islam is predominant, especially along coastal Tanzania;

various forms of Christianity, a legacy of the colonial era, also have an influence. In the rural and inland areas traditional beliefs are still widely practiced, either separately or in conjunction with other non-indigenous beliefs.

Although English is widely spoken (especially in the urban areas) Kiswahili is the national language. Kiswahili is a polyglot language, its origins primarily Bantu but drawing heavily from Arabic, English, and other tribal languages. Tanzania's founder and first president, Julius K. Nyerere, a pan-Africanist, was a champion of this non-ethnic African language and was responsible for Kiswahili becoming the national language. Kiswahili has gone far to unify Tanzania, giving it a sense of a nationhood with little of the ethnic clashes and infighting characteristic of many of its neighbors. Today Kiswahili is the fastest-growing language in Africa, spoken throughout East Africa and growing in popularity in central Africa.

### *Arusha Declaration and Ujamma*

In response to political and economic unrest, Nyerere announced single-party rule for Tanzania in 1965. Once the political party he founded, Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), was firmly in power, the former teacher made his Arusha Declaration, named after a northern Tanzanian city, in 1967. The Declaration had far-reaching ramifications for Tanzania and a profound influence on an Africa struggling toward postcolonial identity and stability. The Declaration in effect transformed Tanzania into a Marxist state, instituting a broad range of social, economic, and political changes, the effects of which are still apparent. The Declaration was fashioned after Mao's teachings of revolutionary reform, and to a degree was supported by Communist China and the Soviet Union, which in turn used Tanzania as a proxy state during the cold war era. Tanzania's revolutionary transformation, including fundamental agrarian and economic policy adjustments, was inspired by the teachings of Mao. Culture, and in particular the performing arts, played a central role in conveying the new socialist doctrine to the people. In Tanzania—a poor nation with high illiteracy, unpaved roads, sporadic modern communications, and a history of tribal conflict—the arts were a way to achieve political, educational, and cultural ends.<sup>3</sup> Bringing the Declaration's message to the people was how performing artists “contributed” to the socialist state.

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These locally based groups were to keep cultural voices and heritages alive as well as provide a mouthpiece for Nyerere's social, economic, and political reforms. Funding these local groups was the first step towards remaking a tribally based culture into a “Tanzanian” culture.

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A central component of Nyerere's socialist policy was his idealistic notion of *Ujamma* (familyhood). The Kiswahili word “ujamma” is derived from a set of related words involving collectivity, assembly, family, and association. Nyerere's Ujamma program sought socio-economic collectivism, national unity through non-tribal egalitarianism, and the eradication of poverty, illiteracy, and disease. Ujamma rallied postcolonial Tanzania into peaceful nationhood and remains a living philosophy and testament to the courage and vision of “Teacher” Nyerere. Despite all of the potential for turmoil and conflict, Tanzania has, remarkably, avoided internal ethnic clashes and war since inde-



pendence. For a postcolonial African country of the size and ethnic diversity of Tanzania, this fact is astonishing. The idealism of Ujamaa, imbedded within its concept of nationhood, was made manifest in Tanzania's war against Uganda and Idi Amin's reign of terror in the 1970s and the country's unhesitant willingness to provide camps for fleeing war refugees of the Rwanda and Burundi tribal conflicts of the mid 1990s. The spirit of Nyerere's Ujamaa cast Tanzania as an anchor of political stability in East Africa.

Soon after the Arusha Declaration, Nyerere established the National Arts Group (NAG). NAG's mission was to invigorate the arts by establishing community and school-based theatre and performance groups. NAG was laden with a political agenda. In Nyerere's own words: "I have set up this new ministry to help us regain our pride in our own culture. I want it to seek the best of the traditions and customs of all our tribes and make them part of our national culture" (in Lange 1995:32). To this end several theatre and performance troupes were established. These locally based groups were to keep cultural voices and heritages alive as well as provide a mouthpiece for Nyerere's social, economic, and political reforms. Funding these local groups was the first step towards re-making a tribally based culture into a "Tanzanian" culture.

In the low-tech, communication- and transportation-challenged Tanzania of the 1960s and '70s (which is still much how it is today) arts activism was an important medium for the explanation of government programs. In 1972, to augment the local community groups, the National Drama Troupe was formed (there was also a National Dance and a National Music Troupe). This troupe was an urban-based touring group, and despite the idealism of establishing a national performance identity, faced the formidable obstacle of an inefficient road and rail system.

Unlike government-supported community groups, the National Drama Troupe adopted Western dramaturgical models. Haji Ahmad Malda—actor, mime, and traditional dancer—describes the sentiment of the time: "The belief was that theatre did not exist before colonialism. We were in search for African theatre and didn't know where to begin. So we looked at those places that already had theatre traditions" (1999). Western artists were brought from Britain and the Soviet Union to train Tanzanians in acting, playwriting, and directing. Tanzanians also went abroad for training, mainly in Britain and the Soviet Union.

Tanzania's international debt crisis of 1979, coupled with its expensive war with Uganda made for difficult economic times. In 1979, the National Drama, Music, and Dance Troupes were disbanded. However, the National Drama Troupe experience was instructive, clarifying values, objectives, and future direction. The contradiction between the National Drama Troupe's Westernized basis and the values of Ujamaa had not gone unnoticed. Tanzanians recognized that their indigenous performances were a totality of elements—storytelling, dance, and music: "We recognized we had to create a Tanzanian theatre form through experiments. We needed to have a laboratory to put together the traditions to create a new tradition. It took us awhile to appreciate what we had and what we had to do" (Malda 1999). The philosophy of Ujamaa, along with rising pan-African awareness, was a catalyst for the transformation of Tanzanian theatre. However, as in any nation-building there were growing pains, contradictions, fits and starts. Tanzania's performance was both a mirror of and a participant in the nation's growth and development.

### *Villagization*

Nyerere's idealistic vision for Tanzania included a program called "Villagization." Inspired by socialist doctrine and responding to the need for bold initiatives, the Villagization program nationalized land and forced 13 million rural

people in 1977 to relocate to villages near main roads. The Soviet-styled, centrally planned consolidation of villages was supposed to facilitate efficiency in communications, roads, schools, clinics, and in getting crops to market. The objective of this compulsory relocation was to make organized villages with uniform characteristics. But for the most part, roads, schools, and clinics were not built; where they were built, they were built poorly, and communications lines were not laid due to inefficiency, lack of expertise, and corruption. Villagization was planned and administered from the top down without respect to the land rights of indigenous people. No effort was made to consult the traditional owners of the land or those being moved. Disputes and antagonisms were inevitable. Villagization ultimately proved ruinous for the Tanzanian economy; its scars are still apparent today.

Tanzania's numerous traditional performance expressions also suffered. There are numerous instances of village drummers being sent to one village while the dancers were sent to another. The people thought Villagization was temporary and saw themselves as temporary immigrants who would someday go back home. So they postponed cultural practices—rituals, initiations, first fruit ceremonies, etc.—thinking they would return to their lands of origin. But this seldom happened. As a consequence many transplanted groups forgot a substantial number of their cultural practices or adopted and incorporated performance and ritual practices from their new locations.

### *Traditional Performance*

Prior to Villagization, relative isolation helped preserve traditional societies and their performances. Villagization set into motion the irrevocable transformation of traditional performance, changing where, how, and why traditional performance was presented.

Traditional performance essentially relates to (1) *life events* such as birth, initiation rites, marriage, first



4. & 5. A Wamakonde mask dance is performed by and for members of the Wamakonde community near Morohoro, Tanzania, 1985. (Above) A comic figure entertains and dances "badly." Note the mask's expression and teeth. (Below) An ancestor mask enters asking for directions to the community. (Photos courtesy of the University of Dar es Salaam, Department of Art, Music, and Theatre)

fruits, funerals, catastrophes of nature, and exceptional community events, and (2) *occupational events* such as hunting, farming, and healing. Everything, every life and every occupational event, birth, sickness, and death relates to an ancestral or spiritual belief system. Spiritual and ancestral context provides the basis for indigenous culture and its performances (Nyoni 1999). Traditional performance is also its language of expression. Dance steps, drumming rhythms, songs, sounds, and the performance structures themselves, along with accoutrements and regalia, are directly related to and reflective of place. Geography, climate, seasons, and the local animal life shape the imagery, rhythms, and calendar of indigenous performances. The confluence of the spiritual/ancestral and human realities provide the text. Some of the text is structured and carried on from previous times, and some is flexible, improvised to suit a given situation.

The meaning of traditional performances is derived not only from what is spoken or sung, but also from a combination of all related conventions that come into play before, during, and after the performance. For example, when Makonde masked dancers represent the spirits and express the solidarity of the ancestors with the initiated they are bringing together the living and dead. When traditional performers dance they become the spirit/ancestors.

Françoise Grund-Khaznader explains how the Wamakonde of southern Tanzania transpose human and spiritual realities during the Midimu initiation ceremony:

During the Midimu, the micro-society gives itself over completely to the dramatic play. However, although this ritual exorcises epidemics and other disasters, its primary focus is on the coming together of the world of the living with the world of the dead. The masked dancers represent spirits and express the solidarity of the ancestors with the young initiates. The spirits join with them at the joyful time of their entrance into adult life and, therefore, into society. (1981:26)

When traditional performances were adopted by outsiders (a process abetted by the formation of the National Drama Troupe and Villagization) inevitable adjustments, abbreviations, and dilutions of meaning took place. Taking traditional dance and performance out of its original context alters its function and objectives. Unfettered from their places of origin, traditional performances in Tanzania were aesthetized at the expense of specific, local meanings. The government-initiated altering of traditional performances was well-intended, motivated by a desire for national unity. The government was successful in creating a stable Tanzanian culture as opposed to an uneasy collage of competing tribal identities.

### *Traditional Adaptations*

Villagization required a practical way of communicating issues across tribal cultures and performance was obviously the most efficient medium. Theatre (because radio was limited and television nonexistent) became an essential expression of the nation's political, social, and cultural aspirations. Villagization, coupled with the idealism of Ujamaa, sought to create a national culture bereft of tribalism. However, it resulted in the homogenizing of existing performance expressions.

Traditional performance genres such as *ngonjera* and *vichekesho* were adapted to serve the goals of the new socialist reality. A new form of dance and drama evolved to serve educational and propaganda needs. Introduced during the latter



part of the 1960s and popular throughout the 1970s, these reworked traditional styles were also offered as a replacement for the colonial (i.e., Western) theatre.<sup>4</sup> Ngonjera became a politicized syncretic popular theatre. Ngonjera's poetic recitation, usually in verse and arranged in dialogue with opposing parts to create a debate, was adapted into a question-and-answer patter to disseminate political and social knowledge. As in its traditional forms, one character was wiser. This protagonist became the politically correct disputant. A misinformed or foolish character provided the counterpoint. A narrator was also introduced and positioned as a joker or trickster character. The joker participated in the action, providing humor and commenting on the issues.

The following dialogue gives some idea of how the genre functioned. This extract is from a performance by Matthias Mnyampala's theatre group Ngonjera-Chama Cha TANU (which is supported by Nyerere's ruling party), in which a wise political cadre explains TANU's policy to a conveniently curious citizen:

CITIZEN: I am asking so that you give me wisdom  
Give me the meaning to console my heart.  
I want to hear the truth about the policy of this party  
Tell me TANU's policy, whose Party is it?

POLITICIAN: Listen to me and keep what I tell you  
Keep everything that I will tell you  
Then use what I tell you to avoid blame  
It is the farmers' Party and also that of the workers. (in Kerr 1995:188)

The tradition of praise songs flourished and was likewise adapted to propaganda purposes. The following is by the Makongero group, a professional troupe attached to the Chama Cha Mapinduzi headquarters.<sup>5</sup> Note the exhortatory praise of President Nyerere, which is applied much like it would be in traditional times, invoking an ancestor or spirit:

The second Five Year Plan  
Tells us that we should eat chicken, eggs,  
Vegetables, fish, and also drink milk.  
It tells us that we should eat bodybuilding  
Foods, it tells us that we should build better houses.  
The party has lit the torch.  
Praise to Nyerere. (in Kerr 1995:188)

An additional feature of ngonjera was its ability to assimilate nontheatrical media. Visual aids like charts, photographs, maps, and posters were included for demonstration purposes. Such pedagogic flexibility was useful in assisting an adult education system keen on finding indigenous forms of communication outside the formal education framework. (Kerr 1995:188–89)

Another adapted and politicized entertainment was vichekesho, a satirical form that developed at the beginning of the 20th century in Zanzibar, where it was known as *tarabu na vichekesho*. The form evolved from street vendors selling water and peanuts during colonial times. These people were usually from rural areas and illiterate, and in order to attract customers they exaggerated their dress and behavior. At its origin, vichekesho was a syncretic Kiswahili-language musical farce, which used a combination of improvised sketches and tarabu, the Arab-influenced, neotraditional, Swahili music. Vichekesho applied satirical dialogue and slapstick action derived from current social and political issues. Its major themes were greed, ignorance, envy, and jealousy.

Laughter was the original and main objective of vichekesho, but the socialist government shaped the form to accommodate educational and anticapitalist propaganda. In its original form vichekesho included stock characters that may have developed out of earlier colonial attempts (in the 1920s and '30s) to provide schools with accessible entertainment. The British used the popular plays of Shakespeare and Molière, reducing the characters to stock characters, which further influenced the evolution of the satirical form. Vichekesho's stock characters bore a similarity to *commedia dell'arte* and, like Molière's, served as social commentators. The stock characters evolved by the socialist government included the "capitalist," replete with big belly and buttocks, and the "socialist," a poorly dressed lean figure. Vichekesho was presented as 15-minute playlets interspersed with and including acrobatics, drumming, dance, singing, and praise singing. When the government later pulled its support from theatre groups, performances developed a nonpolitical sensibility, with the day-to-day concerns of love, family, and money becoming predominant. Today vichekesho is performed in bars where people gather not for the performance, but primarily for drinking and socializing. In addition to satire, groups now provide eight to ten variety show acts, such as singing, traditional dancing, pop music, and acrobatics. Women cast members are also a part of a group's attraction.

The process of Villagization changed traditional performance in the rural areas in different ways. The June to October dry season in subequatorial Africa is the time for performance. With traditional performance adaptations, socialist interventions, and the growth of Popular Theatre, which I describe below, many village groups adjusted and abbreviated traditional rites and ritual performances to suit modern rather than indigenous timetables. Out of necessity troupes began performing during nontraditional times of year, providing entertainment and charging a fee for individual celebrations such as baptisms, marriages, anniversaries, and other personal auspicious occasions. However, for community-based activities, such as initiation and funerals, they did not charge (Nyoni 1999).

In rural areas poverty also played a role. Mama Molide, leader of Mheme Dancers describes her troupe's predicament: "In the past we could perform together, but now, due to famine we cannot. We only perform together when the village leadership wants us to perform for visitors" (in Nyoni 1999). As the nature of the events, dances, and objectives changed, new values, contexts, and audiences emerged. The pressure of economic survival has severely handicapped the generational transference of traditional performance and the meaning it encodes, redefining the relationship of performance to its community.

Up through the colonial era, performance served as a tradition bearer, a community signifier, and a way of passing values from generation to generation. Formerly, mentors and elders were drawn from the entire community to conduct traditional initiations. Pubescent boys were taught stories, dances, and songs that encoded their culture and their responsibility to it. The young men were sequestered and participated in a series of rites for the entire initiation period of a few months. Today, rather than the traditional seclusion, an enclosure is erected near the village, in full sight of the village and only a few meters from the initiate's home. The initiation, rather than a few months, takes a few weeks with the boys returning home at night. Family mentors, rather than community mentors or elders, carry out the initiation rites with everything shortened, including the performances of "coming out." During a recent ceremony, the initiates were as young as six years old because it was not known when or if another initiation ceremony would take place (Nyoni 1999).

### Popular Theatre

Pan-ethnic African theatre forms evolved, out of necessity, from traditional performance forms because of the need to communicate social, political, and economic reform in familiar terms. With the development of Popular Theatre, indigenous traditional performance moved definitively from its local contexts into an expanded context and identity defined by national politics and economics.

Opiyo Mumma, a practitioner and scholar of African theatre at the University of Nairobi, best describes the differences between “Community Theatre” (i.e., traditional and indigenous) and “Popular Theatre”:

Community Theatre involves actors working in and performing to a particular community. The work is normally performance based [...and] community members often perform for themselves for entertainment and learning purposes. The product is normally folk culture through song, myth, or dance. Community Theatre has no individual author, and is presented in oral, aural or visual modes. [...] Community Theatres do not tour much, but perform very much in their area of residence.

Popular Theatre as currently practiced in Africa involves the participation of amateur players and the whole community and what are seen to be their problems. Problems are analyzed in individual and group discussions and are then made into concrete theatrical performances using artistic forms popular or familiar to the community. Public performances for the community are staged to present discussion by the performers and audience then chart out what action is to be taken by the community. Popular Theatre is unique in that it uses popular traditional art forms. It transcends Community Theatre by the very nature of its process. (Mumma 1997:10)

The evolution of Community to Popular Theatre took place throughout sub-Saharan Africa at around the same time. The catalyst was the struggle for a postcolonial identity and nationhood:

Using popular theatre is therefore not an attempt to look for new content in old forms, but new content in current popular forms, some of which have evolved or have been syncretized from old forms. These cultural vehicles are the most effective carriers of political and social messages simply because they are forms of artistic expression with which the people are most familiar, since they are part of their everyday experience. (Mda 1993:48)

As a component of the National Arts Group's Cultural Program, cultural officers were sent to all of Tanzania's regions to organize competitions at the village, district, regional, and national levels. Most NAG artist-workers were traditional groups specializing in one of two predominant genres: *ngoma*, which is essentially traditional song and dance; and *kwaya*, modern, popular music popularized by and named after the Kwaya people near the Congo border. However, the Cultural Program initiative did not provide troupes with the skills necessary to sustain them and make them relevant to their own communities. Instead, their politically motivated methods mimicked NAG teachings. Tanzania was under one-party rule and though censorship was not imposed, self-censorship, practiced in response to political expediency, influenced artistic expression.

The financial self-interest of performing groups, along with political and community pressures, still shapes the nature of Tanzanian performance. Frowin Nyoni, Professor of Theatre at the University of Dar es Salaam, cites a recent example of self-censorship:



Pressure from the village council or local political chief forced groups to avoid singing subversive songs. By subversive I mean songs that criticized the government or made a complaint about corruption and how bad things are. I have personally seen village political chiefs warn dance groups to “behave themselves.” (1999)

The Cultural Program imposed the condition that each of the participating NAG groups must include in its repertory a variety of performance expressions from another ethnic group. As a result many groups throughout the country performed audience-pleasing traditional dances that were from outside their own group. However, because groups were learning dances at a remove and without an understanding of the dances’ tradition, significance, or detail, the aesthetic quality of these performances was generally very low and they were mostly irrelevant to the local communities for whom they were performed. Governmental agencies and organizations like the National Bank of Commerce, National Insurance Company, the police and armed forces, Urafick Textiles, and the Bora Shoe Company also formed popular theatre troupes. These troupes were used to entertain and praise the leader of each organization as well as to propagate the party line and government policies. Performances took place at political, social, and cultural events, and at places of work. The government-supported NAG groups were also used to campaign for the government (the only political party) during elections.

With the economic crisis of the late 1970s, precipitated by a world debt crisis, Tanzania introduced the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) mandated by the World Bank. These programs were market-oriented and incompatible with Villagization and the government’s socialism. With the implementation of the World Bank debt restructuring came the forced issue of democratization. Subsequently, international aid organizations—which funded theatre with their own social, political, health, and developmental agendas in mind—came to supplant government. With this shift, theatre went from propaganda for the government to analysis and criticism of it. What was formerly ideological became critical introspection and satire. It was at this time that the grassroots Popular Theatre movement came into maturity, sweeping through Tanzania, Zambia, and Kenya, and firmly establishing itself as a viable, community-based medium of empowerment and change. Popular Theatre was seen as a mechanism grounded in the past, yet malleable, enabling a community to address issues on its own terms.

With the advent of a multiparty system in 1992, an amendment to the Tanzanian constitution forbade politics in the workplace. Popular Theatre troupes lost support, several dissolved, and a few continued activities commercially.

### *Cultural Remix*

Tanzania’s policy shift to a market-influenced economy had a profound impact on its theatre and performance. Urban and rurally based theatre artists, no longer able to rely solely on government funding, began to form their own, independent troupes. Forced to produce paying performances outside their community, many rural performers and troupes came to Dar es Salaam to seek their fortunes. Because these rural performers were familiar with traditional forms they were able to find work with urban troupes hungry for new dances and novelties.

An example of how rural performances became urban-based and consumer-driven is found in the small village of Luwaita where the people took action when a coffee cooperative failed to pay them. In need of money, the community’s dancers and musicians contacted a group in Dar es Salaam and made joint

performances by creating new combinations of dances and songs. They were able to shape their shows to suit the taste of a wider, more multiethnic urban audience. Other rural groups likewise developed multiethnic styles and repertoires. These performance pastiches were ideally suited for ethnically mixed, urban audiences, serving up accessible entertainment with a big helping of nostalgia.

The performance vocabularies of theatre troupes expanded to include eclectic styles of music and instruments, including electric guitars and drum kits. One group, Mganda WaKinkachi, evolved by absorbing and imitating many forms of indigenous dance along with heavy doses of colonial marching bands—complete with uniforms, animal skins, and colorful feathers. The subject matter, use of language, and style of presentations also evolved to include themes from popular culture. Several groups, such as Nyati (from Nzali) and Nyota (from Nyota), developed into productive and dynamic groups, successfully transforming structure, content, and production processes from traditional into modern performance expressions. Some groups were so complete in their transformation that they achieved a level of professionalism and organization that enabled them to tour regionally and internationally (Nyoni 1999).

### *Theatre for Development*

In the early 1980s Popular Theatre in Tanzania evolved into what became known as Theatre for Development (TFD). The evolution of Theatre for Development was in part a response to the overwhelming social, economic, and environmental issues confronting the nation. Popular Theatre had proved itself effective as a communicative, educational, and propagandistic medium, however, by the early 1980s in Tanzania, times were changing.

For Tanzania and nations like Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Malawi, Ghana, and Zambia, the development into nationhood was turbulent, often filled with violence, dictators, cronyism, coups, and monumental missteps. Independence, self-rule, capitalism, and democracy were institutions Tanzania and other African nations had never known or participated in. Tanzania, along with other African nations, went from being a resource for the West—with their riches carted away, their people enslaved and exploited—to nationhood. The West, China, and the USSR responded by giving aid with many strings attached. Tanzania and the other African nations became pawns. The idealism of nationhood was shaped by either socialist ideology or capitalism. Greed and corruption became part of the system.

The Theatre for Development built on Popular Theatre but was different in two fundamental ways: (1) it was facilitated and guided by outsiders (i.e., theatre professionals) who activated community members and; (2) it was more analytical with a direct focus on problem solving. Opiyo Mumma gives a succinct description of the form:

Theatre for Development (TFD): This movement, like Popular Theatre, recognizes the characteristics of indigenous African performances. Where TFD exists, it is facilitated by a team of theatre experts who work with various types of development and extension agencies, helping them create theatre that will carry a message on such themes as nutrition, literacy, health, environment, sanitation, and agriculture around the communities. This kind of theatre varies from straight drama to song and dance. The songs are usually simple, catchy tunes with a clear message, composed and sung by the extension workers together with the audience. TFD workers fall into groups: government agents and autonomous practitioners. They are sometimes animators or facilitators. (1997:10–11)

In Tanzania today, Theater for Development is pervasive. In outline, the ideal TFD practice requires a catalyst group of theatre professionals to conduct a one- to three-week residency in a village. The objectives are, in the words of Mgunga Mwa Mnyenylwa, director of Parapanda Arts in Dar es Salaam and TFD practitioner:

To address in a theatrical way the issues necessary for development of community issues. These issues have included AIDS prevention, enhancement of sanitation, nutrition standards, eradication of illiteracy and poverty, corruption, leadership irresponsibility, communication, and environmental education. (1999)

In addition to theatre professionals trained in TFD, a village project might include educators, community members, schoolchildren, nurses, health officers, and development workers. The professionals see their role as helping a community deal with its own problems. They are also political activists promoting the grassroots, practical involvement of rural people. Funding for such projects comes from international NGOs, the government, universities, and development organizations. The introduction of issues from the outside is not strictly a top-down initiative. The community is empowered and activated to address very real local issues. However, the TFD does not go so far as to raise issues challenging institutionalized governmental exploitation and corruption (Kerr 1995:159–60).

Frowin Nyoni, lecturer of African Theatre at the University of Dar es Salaam, notes how in the mid-1990s a TFD project in the village Ukombozi was censored locally by village leadership. The song they developed during the project was never sung in performance. The implication of corrupt, incompetent local and national government was not what the leadership wanted the public hear:

People from all regions in Tanzania  
 Especially those belonging to parties  
 We are saying that we pay tax  
 Our children do not have desks in school  
  
 We pay tax but we do not get medicines  
 We pay tax our roads are in a dilapidated condition  
  
 Now it is a big task to the third phase government  
 To build school in villages  
 Education is essential to us Tanzanians  
  
 To build roads in villages  
 Transport is essential to us Tanzanians  
 To build dispensaries in villages  
 Health is essential to us Tanzanians (Nyoni 1998)

David Kerr says the beginnings of TFD in Tanzania were noble in intention. TFD began in Tanzania when a team from the University of Dar es Salaam—Penian Mlama, Eberhard Chambulikazi, and Amadina Lihamba—created a theatre campaign capable of sustaining community participation and critical analysis. Oxfam International funded the campaign, entitled Theatre for Social Development, and centered it at Malya, a large Ujamma village in Mwanza Region.

Malya was chosen because of its mix of peasants and workers, totaling about 5,000. Its dynamic 25-person Ujamma executive committee was lead by a village chairman and secretary. It had a vigorous performing tradition, which had already achieved local fame under the guidance of the village cultural subcommittee.



Over a period of about 18 months in 1982/83, the theatre team from the University of Dar es Salaam, known as the catalyst group, made five visits—some for two weeks, others for over a month. The advantage of the extended and frequent visits was that the university team was able to build a closer relationship with the core team in Malya, and become a part of the social life of the village.

The first play was about older men impregnating young girls. Their success allowed the catalyst group to become so well accepted that they were able to influence a Malya Christian sect, the African Inland Church, to stop its hostility to theatre performances. In general, the campaign led to a revitalization of cultural life, and paved the way for economic projects to alleviate problems such as unemployment and vagrancy. (Kerr 1995:158)

Ideally, Theatre for Development is empowering and educational. The TFD professionals impart a methodology of how to identify, investigate, ask questions, collect data, and analyze. Interviewing techniques are taught, as is an awareness of how to identify, for instance, local health hazards. Then, with the TFD professionals as teacher and moderators, a local chairperson is elected to facilitate the group's brainstorming. Democratic and participatory ideals are central to the TFD process and after the central issues are identified, analyzed, and discussed, a solution evolves. A storyline, situations, and themes develop and the group discusses how to approach and organize its work. After a strategy is mapped out, the TFD group (consisting of 1 to 6 professionals and 10 to 20 locals) tests the material through improvisation, using a mix of traditional, modern, and other styles of popular dance, as well as poetry, drumming, masking, and role-playing drama. One project led by Bakari K. Mbelemba of Mandela Theatre of Dar es Salaam combined several disparate traditional dances.

Often the group's research is presented in front of the gathered community who are then asked to lead the group in dramatizing and illustrating the issues, offering suggestions and commentary to the TFD group. Essentially, the community provides the source material and the TFD troupe leads select locals in the development of the performance. However, a TFD troupe may simply conduct the research then develop the material with community input, but evolve and present the performance themselves. In any event the entire community is invited to attend the finished performance and continue being part of the process.

Mwa Mnyenylwa told of a TFD project he worked with in 1998 that took him to villages to address serious health hazards involving sanitation and drinking water. Part of the community performance included a skit about how people get sick when they do not wash their hands before eating. For that and other TFD projects, Mwa Mnyenylwa assigns each community issue a different art form—drama, poetry, chorus, heroic singing, and dancing. After the performance comes an often heated community discussion with a Joker character as facilitator.<sup>6</sup>

Kerr sees a problem in TFD being generally supported by NGOs and development agencies from the developed, and predominantly the Western, world. Kerr regards TFD as an insidiously sophisticated form of propaganda.

The jargon used by popular theatre workers to describe Theatre for Development ("participatory," "bottom-up," "concretization," "liberation," and so on) derived from the combative Freirian language of popular resistance. But the actual practice had to conform to the paternalistic (or, in some cases, regressive) realities of government hegemony.

Most of the nations in which the workshops took place had a history of collaboration between political and economic elites. As long as the government was closely monitoring these theater experiments there was no likelihood of drama being used for creating genuine solidarity of peasants and workers against oppression. Instead, theatre was used to legitimate existing power structures by providing a semblance of government participation in grass-roots cultural movement. (1995:159–60)

Theatre for Development remains the most widely used performance form throughout Tanzania. The three groups noted below, The Bagamoyo College of Arts, Parapanda Arts Company, and the Mandela Theatre Group, all use TFD in their work. Kerr's critique aside, it is a form that reflects the needs and ambitions of Tanzania.

### *The Bagamoyo College of Arts*

The government-sponsored national companies of dance, acrobatics, drama, and music were also victims of Tanzania's 1979 economic crisis and programs mandated by the World Bank and IMF. The Tanzanian government, strapped by austerity programs, severely curtailed their arts support, asking the nation's leading artists to develop alternatives in response to the dissolution of the national companies. Their answer was to create a centralized school to train cultural workers.

The town of Bagamoyo was chosen in 1981 for The Bagamoyo College of Arts. The former colonial capital of German East Africa was chosen for its historical significance and its 70-mile proximity to Dar es Salaam. For hundreds of years Bagamoyo was also the termination of several slave and trade routes that ran deep into the interior of East and Central Africa. Bagamoyo—which means “lay down my weeping heart”—is where countless enslaved East Africans said goodbye to Africa (Ng'Hangasamala 1999).

The beautiful campus of the College of Arts is located on the white sandy beaches of the Indian Ocean, providing an ideal relaxed working atmosphere. At first there were two dance and one drama groups in residence providing instruction. Classes took place under two very large, old mango trees, in keeping with many Tanzanian teaching traditions. Classrooms, dormitories, offices, and a large thatched-roof building that houses an indoor and outdoor stage were built over a period of several years. Initially, the college was fully subsidized by the government with students receiving a full tuition waiver and a living stipend. Today, students must pay full tuition (TSh 85,000 per year; about U.S.\$110) (Malda 1999). As government funding dwindled, the mission of training cultural workers for the preservation and propagation of local traditions fell to the wayside. Today many students aspire to form groups and become independent artists rather than return to their regions as cultural workers. According to performer Haji Ahmad Malda, “Many go to Dar es Salaam to make money” (1999).

Competition for entrance to Bagamoyo is intense. Each year college instructors go into the countryside to audition hundreds of applicants (in 1999 there were over 500 applications) from which 50 or more are asked to Bagamoyo for a weeklong audition. Fifteen students are admitted for study in the areas of drama, fine arts, music, dance, stage technology, and acrobatics (Malda 1999).

The audition requires excellent written and oral English and Kiswahili, and a high school diploma. Although English was de-emphasized during Ujamaa in favor of Kiswahili, it is widely spoken among the educated. Bagamoyo's inclusion of English reflects how the language has grown into the lingua franca of commerce, communications, education, and tourism.

A rigorous practical audition requires each applicant to audition in each area. The popularity of acrobatics at Bagamoyo, and throughout Tanzania and Kenya, dates back to 1964 through 1968 when many Tanzanians trained in China. Acrobatic groups composed of Africans subsequently formed and became crowd pleasers evolving their own unique style by incorporating traditional and modern song and dance, including hip-hop and break dancing. Many Tanzanian acrobats can be found in Kenya where the tourist trade is more lucrative.

Gender is taken into account in the school's final selection process because so few women audition due to the limits imposed by traditional cultures and women's resultant inhibitions. The selection process also considers tribal and geographic distribution. Applicants are not required to identify their tribal or ethnic affiliation, but traditional knowledge is a plus.

Nkwabi Ng'Hangasamala, dancer, performing artist, and instructor at Bagamoyo studied mime in Sweden. Other exchanges have involved Chinese performing artists, American choreographers, Japanese drummers, and Soviet musicians. During the fall of 1999 Bagamoyo was engaged in a collaborative project with the U.K.'s Welfare State Theatre. In January 2000, SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) sponsored a performance exchange with a Swedish theatre group. Since 1985 Bagamoyo has participated in a number of exchanges and tours, primarily to Europe.

Despite being underfunded, Bagamoyo has become an important center for the exchange of traditional knowledge in Tanzania and the region, hosting artists from other East and Central African countries. The college is one of the few arts training institutions in Africa devoted to exploring and propagating an African aesthetic. Students from other African nations and the occasional student from developed nations, come for "short courses" and individual study. One- and two-month courses in music, drumming, dance, and mime are offered to non-Africans at a rate of U.S.\$5 per hour. Hard currency from private lessons is an important source of revenue for the college. Instructors at the college are provided with housing and paid about TSh 90,000 per month (about U.S.\$120). The government also provides support for productions. Operating and maintenance expenses must be borne by the college (Ng'Hangasamala 1999).

Graduates from the college have employment opportunities. Tanzania has no national theatre so many graduates either join existing dance groups or are employed by national or international NGOs as cultural workers. Some grads form their own groups and a small number go into television, which is still in its infancy and pays poorly. Many graduates work in radio drama, which is more highly developed and widespread, and relatively lucrative.

In 1987, the college established the Bagamoyo Players, composed of faculty and staff with the objective of keeping themselves artistically alive, challenged, and experimental. Nkwabi Ng'Hangasamala comments on the function and process of the Bagamoyo Players:

We don't want to lose our practical abilities and we need a laboratory for an alternative view so students can learn by example. Often we include students in the work. Each year we create a performance. We come together and pick a theme to explore in our performance. Last year [September 1999] the theme was "AIDS: Art and Health." In 2000 the theme will be corruption. We consider our work original.



6. A scene from *Kifo Cha Mnazi (Death of a Coconut Tree)*, by Rashid Masimbi, presented by the Bagamoyo Players in August 1999. Haji Ahmad Malda, as an ancestor, imparts advice to Kise Bernard, who plays the wife of a modern Tanzanian businessman who has "lost" his tradition. (Photo by Abraham Bafadhili; courtesy of Thomas Riccio)





7. A scene from *Kifo Cha Mnazi* (*Death of a Coconut Tree*), by Rashid Masimbi, presented by the Bagamoyo Players in August 1999. The Bagamoyo Players ensemble performs a dance for “planting a new tradition.” (Photo by Abraham Bafadhili; courtesy of Thomas Riccio)

We usually start with a dance tradition and dramatize the dance according to the tradition. We do research and do much discussing to “open it up” and find a narrative connection by working with the dances from different traditions. We put them together to explain a narrative story line. We program the dances following a human story line. We illuminate the dance so each traditional dance tells another part of the narrative. It’s important to illustrate the story clearly because the performance must tour and have broad audience appeal for all the people in Tanzania and even foreigners when we tour to Europe. That’s why we include pantomime and teach it here. (1999)

The Bagamoyo Players’ 1999 production of *Kifo Cha Mnazi* (*Death of a Coconut Tree*) by Bagamoyo

instructor Rashid Masimbi included dances drawn and reworked from several traditions. The production included dances of initiation, hunting, finding a fiancée, and “warriorship.” In Western terms the production was a narrative-based collage that included dance theatre, realistic dialogue interludes, occasional songs, and instrumental accompaniment. In the fall of 1999 the production toured to Jordan and was enthusiastically received even though it was performed in Swahili.

When I asked about reactions to the reworking of traditional dances, Ng’Hangasamala responded:

We enlarge traditional dance, we don’t take it. In Tanzania traditional dance is considered the property of all. The people who originated the dances are happy to see them performed by others. What is important is the feeling of the dancers and not the exact dance. Our performances always provoke audience participation when we perform in the regions. (1999)

The Bagamoyo Players will also take commissions from NGOs. Recent commissions included a performance on family planning funded by Oxfam. Most independent groups (comprised of Bagamoyo graduates) work solely from commissions, developing plays or dance-music performances addressing a specific issue or event. Once a commission payment is received, a budget is developed, which determines how much time will be spent developing the performance. Often performances pull from a group’s known materials, which are reworked to suit the commission. Between commissions, in order to make ends meet, groups often perform in bars, presenting a wild mix of traditional and popular songs and dance. Ng’Hangasamala remarks, “There are many talented people performing in bars. But when they are playing to drunks they are not developing our Tanzanian theatre style. They are a step removed from go-go girls” (1999). But such is the state of Tanzanian performance. The dilemma was debated by every theatre and performance person I spoke to. In Tanzania, “It is a time of tough choices” (1999).

### *Parapanda Arts Company*

“Parapanda will not perform in bars!” declared Mgunga Mwa Mnyenylwa, the troupe’s director. He is part of a new breed of young Tanzanian theatre artists, savvy to the new market economy yet cognizant of their role and responsibility in shaping the nation’s future. Mwa Mnyenylwa is a man on a mission, constantly in motion. He is a director, performer, administrator, poet,

teacher, and an advocate of Kiswahili. I spent some time with him in *dalla-dallas* (crowded public passenger vans) shuttling between rehearsals and to and from his offices. Parapanda's small office is on the grounds of a large secondary school near Dar es Salaam's bustling Buguruni market. Mwa Mnyenylwa's office at the Tanzania Theatre Center, where he serves as program director, is near the infamous Kariakoo Market in central Dar es Salaam. Both market areas are microcosms of Tanzania, crowded with people, cars, and pollution, bustling with market activities. The five-story poured-concrete building that houses the Tanzania Theatre Center is only half-completed but is inhabited nonetheless. On the same floor is the East African Theatre Institute, which works regionally. Both recently formed organizations are dedicated to communication, advocacy, and the development of theatre arts and artists.

Mwa Mnyenylwa explained how Tanzanian theatre is in the throes of evolution:

The theatre industry is young in Tanzania. Before, Tanzania theatre was protected, but also a political tool. Now with the market economy it will have to find its way. This is a time of great opportunity and importance. For me, the way for theatre is not through performing in bars. Parapanda will never perform in bars. (1999)

"Parapanda" is a Kiswahili word for the horn trumpet used to call people in Mwa Mnyenylwa's home region of Langa, a mountainous area in south central Tanzania. The company was started in 1993 by Mwa Mnyenylwa and other students at the University of Dar es Salaam:

I dreamed of being a theatre artist ever since I was very young. I was an education student but I wanted to do theatre too; it is a strong tool for education in Tanzania. The theatre department at the university was dull, with nothing going on. There were no performances, no acting, and just the studying of theatre with little practical experience. My friends would say, "So you are studying Ngoma? What are you doing, studying something you can get in your home village?" I got tired of trying to explain what theatre can do and what I study. This inspired me to start a group. I needed to start a theatre company because the department was dead. Only a few had any theatre training. Most of us, including myself, had no practical training, but the ones with no training were more aggressive. We came to it without preconceived notions of what theatre should do and how it should do it.

At first many people supported the idea, but when the commitment increased many made excuses. It was very frustrating. It is very difficult to start and maintain a theatre company. The National Arts Council has several theatre groups on the official register, but where are they? Many are dead before they are born. I made up my mind. Theatre can be done even with one person. I figured I had to start a theatre and that others would follow. (1999)

Parapanda's first production was *The Witch* (1994), an original, company-developed script concerning



8. Mgunga Mwa Mnyenylwa, Director of Parapanda Arts Company, in rehearsal. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, April 1999. (Photo by Richard Mziray; courtesy of Thomas Riccio)

9. A public presentation of a Parapanda Arts Company workshop on health and hygiene at Buguruni Grammar School, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, spring 1999. In this photo a Parapanda Arts Company member assists workshop performers to explain the necessity of boiling drinking water. (Photo by Mgunga Mwa Mnyenylwa; courtesy of Thomas Riccio)



rent and land problems from the perspective of traditional spiritual beliefs. They began with an ensemble of eight, but the student actors could not commit to a rehearsal schedule. Mwa Mnyenylwa and another actor played all eight characters themselves to much praise.

Parapanda's next production was a youth theatre piece, *Our Cry* (1995). For this production Mwa Mnyenylwa went around collecting children not attending school—those working as vendors in nearby markets, dropouts, and university staff children (staff and faculty housing is located on campus). Using school facilities, he hired a drummer and dancers to teach and train the 20 children. He bought Cokes, milk, and oranges to keep the children coming. The challenge and excitement of theatre drew more children and momentum. *Our Cry* was primarily a dance performance developed from stories about children and AIDS. The production's success prodded the university into becoming Parapanda's official sponsor. Other sponsors included international foundations and medical NGOs. Over the years, Parapanda has received sponsorship or direct commissions from several European embassies and the European Economic Community, the Tanzanian National AIDS Control Program, the Roman Catholic Church, the World Health Organization, and Oxfam. Funding has gone to support street and market performances, workshops, and seminars. In addition to HIV/AIDS, performances have dealt with family planning, reproductive health, prenatal care, and trachoma.<sup>7</sup>

In 1998 the Institute of Resource Assessment commissioned Parapanda to develop a Popular Theatre performance dealing with the conflicts between Western and Tanzanian environmentalists and people living off the land. For the project Parapanda worked in four regions, dealing with issues such as soil erosion, the use of chemical fertilizers, sewage treatment, and deforestation. Parapanda developed performances rooted in local traditions and used stories to educate locals about long-term implications of environmental degradation and its health and farming consequences. The environmentalists' concerns were articulated and recontextualized from a local point of view. In this way, those characterized as "outsiders" became familiar, their issues understood. Often, these performances incorporated practical advice about hygiene and disease prevention, linking the personal with larger environmental issues. All of the performances used animal characters representing the concerned, yet unbiased wisdom of nature.

Parapanda's performances evolve improvisationally from scenarios, dancing, movement, and musical drama. A mix of recitation and singing is characteristic. All of the performers have musical and dance abilities in traditional and/or popular forms. Performance prologues are tribal dance presentations choreographed by Mwa Mnyenylwa. Parapanda rehearses five hours a day, six days a week. A month is the normal period to develop a major performance; two weeks for a small performance such as the *Kalevala* commissioned by the Finnish embassy. A small project, such as the *Kalevala* celebration, pays about TSh 150,000 (U.S.\$190).

A large part of Parapanda's work concerns training. The World Health Organization sponsored a health project to focus on disadvantaged urban areas. Parapanda trained health drama groups in organization and management skills, theatrical techniques, heroic recitation, dancing, and instrumental music in traditional styles. These training programs must fill in the blanks left by poor education, urbanization, and the break with traditional village knowledge formerly passed down by village elders.

Mwa Mnyenylwa is trained not only in the theatre but also as a counselor. He often conducts workshops using Theatre for Development practices to deal with health issues, sexual molestation, death, and grieving. He is a sought-after teacher and trainer in his own right. Through 2000, he trained



children and orphans in refugee camps or former war areas for Plan International, a Danish educational NGO. In December 1999, Mwa Mnyenyelwa was in Rwanda conducting a theatre workshop with girls orphaned and traumatized by the Hutu-Tutsi war.

Besides Mwa Mnyenyelwa, the Parapanda Company includes 10 adult performers who are paid 30,000 Tanzanian shillings per month (less than U.S.\$40). Like Mwa Mnyenyelwa, many of the company members have other jobs. The company, though successful in Tanzanian terms, still lacks management continuity and stability. They may lose their small, shack-like office on the grounds of the sprawling Buguruni School (a primary school with an enrollment of nearly 1,200). Parapanda often does children's theatre projects with the school, but their office and storage sites will be threatened if the new headmaster does not want to continue with a drama program.

During the late 1990s Parapanda experimented with several poetic works based on praise singing. Mwa Mnyenyelwa hopes to popularize Kiswahili poetry. In October 1999 when President "Teacher" Nyerere died, Mwa Mnyenyelwa wrote a poem in memoriam, which he performed at the burial and subsequently recorded with Parapanda. The poem became a hit, receiving constant radio play throughout the monthlong mourning period. This made Mwa Mnyenyelwa a national celebrity and raised the profile of Parapanda. Parapanda has also experimented with and adapted tarabu, an (originally Arabic) Afro-Muslim recited poetry tradition popularized on Zanzibar.

Mwa Mnyenyelwa places Parapanda's ambition and predicament in the context of an emerging market-driven Tanzania:

Now we want to experiment and develop a Tanzanian style. But there is no government support and we cannot afford what we really want artistically because we must serve the commissions. The only government support is for the police and army theatre groups who used to be for propaganda and educational purposes. Today they are more for entertainment, dance, and drumming. Tanzanian One Theatre is well funded by the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi [CCM] party, but all they do is chorus and party politics drama.

The times in Tanzania are difficult and people need to laugh. Besides there is no such thing as a theatre tradition in Tanzania; we are starting from zero. There is no tradition of people going to the theatre. There are no theatre buildings; there is no tradition of people paying for theatre. So we look now for short-term solutions and projects for survival. That is why we are looking more at radio, poetry, and heroic recitation. (1999)

Mwa Mnyenyelwa's charismatic and motivated leadership holds Parapanda together. His energy, vision, and sense of mission bespeak the transformation of a Tanzanian theatre and performance. His near-heroic ambition is to create performance that speaks from and for the people. This is no simple task in multiracial, postcolonial, post-monoparty, and now market-driven Tanzania. Compounding the difficulty is the lack of financial support from a country burdened by its own foreign debt, poverty, corruption, and an HIV/AIDS time bomb already imploding. Despite the odds Mwa Mnyenyelwa believes performance to be central to Tanzania's rehabilitation and survival.

### *Mandela Theatre Company*

The best-known company in Tanzania is the audience-pleasing Mandela Theatre. Founded in 1989 by Bakari K. Mbelemba and named in honor of

Nelson Mandela, the Mandela Theatre is less burdened with philosophical aspirations than Parapanda and is essentially commercially driven. Mbelemba is an affectionate, gregarious man who has done theatre since 1972 when he was an actor in the National Theatre Troupe. In 1980 he was among the founding faculty of The Bagamoyo College of Arts. Forty-nine years old in 1999, a fit and energetic ex-boxer, Mbelemba identified himself as “a dramaturg, director, actor, author, and well-known radio actor. The people all over Tanzania and many parts of East Africa know me as ‘Mzee Jangala,’ my radio name” (1999).

From its very start Mandela has offered well-known ngoma (traditional dance), which remains its bread and butter. The troupe includes 31 members (19 men, 12 women) from many different tribes. Mbelemba describes their work:

They teach dances to one another from their tribes or from dances that they know but not particularly from their tribe. Many go home to their village to learn or invite dancers from villages to town to teach us. We perform only those dances that are high in entertainment value and attractive. The famous ones. The ones people want to see. Each full member of the group can act in plays, play music, and dance. It is the requirement. Everybody knows 50 dances from about 20 tribes. (1999)

I interviewed Mbelemba at his rehearsal space, which is located a kilometer from Parapanda's offices. The rehearsal space is a large, open-air, walled compound, a “social club” (i.e., beer garden) owned by Mbelemba's brother who lets the group rehearse for free. I was there on a late December afternoon. The troupe's band practiced Afro-pop songs. In another area performers taught and worked on a traditional dance. At a table nearby two performers worked on a skit for an upcoming commission. The troupe rehearses five days a week, 8:00 to 5:00 Monday through Friday, but during Ramadan they do not perform because Mbelemba and many members of the troupe are Muslim. True to Mandela's socialist origins, each company member must, to a greater or lesser degree, do everything: drum, play a musical instrument, sing, act, recite poetry, and participate in management and publicity. Performers are paid TSh 30,000 to TSh 38,000 per month (approximately U.S.\$38 to U.S.\$47) ac-

10. A 1996 Mandela Theatre Company workshop for school children sponsored by an international NGO. The children are participating in a theatre game. (Photo courtesy of the Mandela Theatre)



cording to experience and time with company. They are paid every month, however if they are not paid, "They will understand that it will come" (Mbelemba 1999).

Performers often come from all over Tanzania to work with Mandela. Some are trained and some are not, but if the group deems they have talent, they are brought into the company. Experienced performers are integrated into the company, while novices apprentice: "Some performers come to learn and are willing to undergo theatrical and practical training and are not paid until they are ready. Then they become a member of the company, like Shakespeare" (1999). The Mandela group, like Parapanda, also conducts Popular Theatre training workshops in the regions.

The company supports itself primarily by performing dance, music, acrobatics, and farcical sketches in social clubs. They have a regular schedule of social club appearances, with Mbelemba's brother's club being their Thursday and Saturday venue. When I asked how he reconciled being Muslim (which forbids drinking) with performing in social clubs, Mbelemba remarked, "Because it is work, not pleasure. Allah will not keep a man from making his living. Work is not a sin" (1999).

Like Parapanda and Bagamoyo, the Mandela Theatre also works on commissions from local and international NGOs. They often travel to the regions with a group of 15 to 20 performers. However, because commissions are drying up, Mbelemba was struggling with how to sustain his company. One plan was to reduce the company to 15.

The major problem is musical instruments. Electric instruments are costly. We need money for videocassettes because people need to see our work on television, because the business of theatre has become important. But the biggest problem is transport. We have no bus to travel and have to hire a bus or truck for tours, which cuts into our earnings. We will fail to reach our goals because of lack of transport. If we cannot do our work, we will itch with pain. (1999)

Plays are usually company-developed, addressing various problems in Tanzanian society, such as AIDS and education: "Our plays come from a social consciousness, not from politics or religion" (1999). Mbelemba writes for the company. His play about the Tanzanian-Ugandan war was controversial, but well-received. A recent Mandela production dealt with forgiving children for bad behavior and was a metaphor for Tanzanian society. Other Mandela plays include *Mafuriko* (1994), a play about AIDS; *Kichuguu Cha Moto* (Fire Hill, 1996), about corruption; *Niachieni Mwenyewe* (Leave Me Alone, 1997), about social consciousness and responsibility; and *Nani Mwamba?* (Who Is Stronger?, 1990, '91, '95, '98), their best-known and most often performed production. The play portrays a young Witch Doctor coming into his own with spiritual powers. With his new powers he gives people what they want—power, wealth, sex, and immortality. This makes the people insane and the society goes crazy. The young Witch Doctor sets out to heal them, but the wishes of the people are too strong. The situation worsens until everyone is mad. When the young Witch Doctor enlists the old Witch Doctor to assist in the



11. The Mandela Theatre Company ensemble performing *Niachieni Mwenyewe* (*Leave Me Alone*) on tour in 1997 in rural Tanzania. The performance dealt with social responsibility. (Photo courtesy of the Mandela Theatre)

cure, he too becomes insane. Finally the young Witch Doctor cures everyone. The question he asks is, "Then who is to blame?" The play ends with the moral, "It is the community that brings problems onto themselves" (Mbelemba 1999).

Mbelemba is one of the stalwarts of Tanzanian theatre. When I asked him about the prospects of Tanzanian theatre, this normally ebullient man was pessimistic:

I am very much afraid about it. Before there was a direction, under socialism. Now everyone is in danger—danger of each having his or her own direction. One cannot say where we are aiming. They are not sure, it is all new. We don't know what to expect. I smell a danger somewhere as a society.

Many troupes are dependent on performance for money. Now we do things not of our customs. And that is a danger, too. If we are only going to look after money and not for the good of the customs and the nation, we do nothing for the development of the nation and society.

In Tanzania theatre can be important. In this poor country theatre can make a difference and have an influence. Theatre has a good chance to educate the people to be more self-reliant and educate them about important issues. Education is the most important thing now because we are faced with three major enemies in Tanzania: lack of education, disease, and poverty.

Theatre in Tanzania must help to solve these problems. It can be the spark. We can lead. We are saying we need not be political, but to educate on various problems. This is not ideological. Just basic sense. (1999)

When I last saw Mbelemba we stood waiting for transport at Buguruni Market. I was the only white man in a sea of black faces. Streams of traffic jockeyed frantically as the surrounding mosques sang out in celebration, marking the end of the day's fast. The humidity was stifling, faces sweating and fatigued as the diesel exhaust tinted the sunset. Mbelemba was going home to his wife and two children for his fast-breaking Ramadan meal. We shook hands and in parting he said, "You should worry for Tanzanian theatre and you should worry for all theatre, too. But somehow we will all survive" (1999).

### Notes

1. The tradition of heroic recitation, or praise singing, can be found, in various forms, throughout southern Africa. It is a poetic style of talk-singing with origins in the oral tradition. Those performing heroic recitation were poets and historians, often trained from childhood. The content of the praise singing often included a tribe's history and triumphs, or the lineage of a chief or king and their heroic deeds. Heroic recitation is performed during official gatherings and ceremonies. I interviewed a traditional N'goni praise singer in Zambia in 1994. He was illiterate yet could praise sing the entire history and lineage of the N'goni people, something that would take three days to complete.
2. During my three-month trip to Tanzania during the fall of 1999, I witnessed very little bribery or corruption. This is in contrast to my 1994 trip, which was marked with numerous, almost routine, bribes made to customs officers, policemen, and other governmental officials.
3. Television was introduced in 1994 and, except for the satellite dishes of the wealthy minority, its programming remains limited to one government-controlled channel broadcasting primarily to urban areas. Production values are primitive. In contrast, radio is widespread, with several privately run stations flourishing.
4. The strong tradition of didactic entertainment in Tanzania led to the development of another form of politicized syncretic popular theatre, the *ngonjera*. Although the form is normally said to have been invented by Matthias Mnyampala, who popularized *ngonjera* during the 1960s, it is almost certainly associated with a much older tradition of Swahili poetry.



5. After mainland Tanganyika unified with Zanzibar and became Tanzania, a new ruling party, the Chama Cha Mapinduzi or CCM was formed. CCM (also known as the Revolutionary Party) remains the ruling party of President Mkapa's government.
6. The Joker character has a long history in traditional African performance. It is a tradition that pre-dates Boal's use of the Joker character, and may indeed be the source of Boal's application.
7. Commonly called "river blindness," trachoma in Africa is caused by parasitic microbes found in many African rivers.

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12. The Mandela Theatre Company ensemble in 1995 performs *Nani Mwamba? (Who Is Stronger?)* in Dar es Salaam. In this scene the performers carry the casket of an infant that died because of their irresponsibility. Bakari K. Mbelemba, director of Mandela Theatre, is at the far right. (Photo courtesy of the Mandela Theatre)