

## **Tamasha ya Sanaa na Utamaduni: Spectacle of Culture, Gift Exchange and Power**

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The theatre is packed with people, visiting artists in traditional costumes interspersed with Bagamoyo residents, tourists, and the TaSUBa community. In the middle of the auditorium, some tables covered with bright cloth and a few rows of upholstered chairs, reserved for top management and high level guests. It is 13 October 2008 and the audience has gathered for the opening of the 27<sup>th</sup> *Tamasha ya Sanaa na Utamaduni* (Festival of Arts and Culture), and the inauguration of the new TaSUBa theatre. A torch is lit on stage, the flame flicking as artists and audiences pass it on to the VIP section, where it is triumphantly raised by representatives from the Swedish Embassy, the Ministry of Information, Culture and Sports, and the Chief Executive of TaSUBa. The festival reveals itself as a dramatization of status, performed by local and international social actors, in celebration of modernity, development and progress. It also reveals itself as a commodification and touristification of culture, a spectacular performance of traditional culture for the local and foreign tourist gaze.

This paper investigates the social and political dimensions of the annual Festival of Arts and Culture, organized by *Taasisi ya Sanaa na Utamaduni Bagamoyo* (TaSUBa), a national institute for arts and culture in Tanzania. Using the 27<sup>th</sup> festival in 2008 as a point of departure, the paper discusses the staged enactment of cultural performances through anthropological performance theory, focusing on social drama (Turner) and interactivity (Schieffelin). The social context of the festival is analyzed in terms of transcultural gift exchange and asymmetrical relations between artists, organizers, and national and global political actors. The paper builds on ethnographic engagements at TaSUBa from 2002 to 2009, combining digital, visual and sensory research methods.