INTRODUCTION

For a long time now there have been concerns about the status of History as a school or college subject in Tanzania. As is well known, the subject was abolished in Zanzibar immediately after the 1964 revolution, only to be officially reinstated in 1987. In Mainland Tanzania studies done in 1977 and 1987 concluded that History had been existing as a third rate subject compared to the rest of the subjects on the school and college curricular. Similarly, there has been a drastic decline in the number of students opting to study History at the University of Dar es Salaam. These hints tell something about the status and place of history in Tanzania.

It is important for us as teachers and students of History to reflect on this question. This paper attempts an update of the conditions under which History teaching has been taking place in the country and tries to identify the basic problems facing the teaching and learning of the subject. It concludes with a few reflections on the possibility of a brighter future. The teaching of History at the University of Dar es Salaam has received considerable attention in a recent article. This paper concentrates on the scenarios in schools and teachers' colleges.

1. CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE STATUS OF HISTORY

Considering the history of History teaching in post-colonial Tanzania the late 1960s and early 1970s are remembered as the period in which the subject enjoyed considerable popularity at all levels of education. This picture is derived from the study done in 1987, and can be gathered even today from accounts of people who were actively involved in the teaching or learning of the subject during the period.

This considerable popularity can be attributed to political and ideological dynamics in Tanzania during the period. The 1970s was the period when the post colonial state and its organic intellectuals were in the process of legitimising its existence and mission in the midst of continuing economic backwardness and increasing miseries in the society. The nationalistic approach that dominated history elaboration during the period put the post-colonial state in the context of a universalist evolutionary historical development of societies. On the other hand, the centre-periphery paradigm in historical discourse explained the continued economic backwardness of the continent in terms of pre-colonial, and colonial legacies and the continuing structural imbalances in the global capitalist order. It avoided bringing into light problems arising from the deeds of the post-colonial ruling groups.
History as taught during this period was in line with the ideology of the ruling groups and their political agenda. It thus appealed to the state bureaucracy as well as to a considerable proportion of the educated elites. Given that nationalist politics and ideology were still popular among the masses of the people, a nationalist perspective was also exciting and appealing to large sections of the general population. However, a series of indications show that since the late 1960s the status of history, both as a school/college subject and as knowledge, has been continuously declining. These are either implicit or explicit in the attitudes of various groups of people towards the subject.

Starting with peoples' attitudes towards the subject, studies done on this subject provide us with useful clues. In a study done in 1976, 49.3 percent of a sample population of secondary school students (450) refrained from affirming that the subject should remain on the school curriculum. Some 19.7 percent actually wished that it be scrapped off. On the other hand, 50.6 percent said that it could remain. A similar picture obtains from the results of a similar study done in 1986.

A more extensive study done in 1987 showed that among 1,222 sample students of History (past and present) the percentages of those who thought the subject was the most popular were 35.0 for those who studied in the 1960s; 18.3 for those who did it in the 1970s; and 20.6 for those who studied it in the 1980s. On the other hand, the percentages for those who recalled that History was the most hated subject in their school days were 16.6 for those who were in school in the 1960s, 29.4 for those who did History in the 1970s and 10.4 for the ones who studied it in the 1980s. From these hints it can be seen that throughout the post-colonial period there always existed a certain significant proportion of students who considered History as either uninteresting or useless. This attitude is all the more important when we consider the fact that it is expressed by students of History, some of whom had pursued it to advanced levels.

Coupled with this image are other impressions obtaining in school and college education. First, History teachers have often complained about their being disregarded and relegated to the lowest rank among other teachers by students, colleagues, school or college administration and, quite often, by parents and the public at large. One illustration of this attitude on the part of the school administration is to consider looking for a History teacher only when teachers for the rest of the subjects have been recruited. The assumption has been that History can be taught by any literate person.

Secondly, there have been occasions when Heads of schools have discouraged activities directed towards the development of interest in History among students. In others, heads of schools have been reported to have barred the formation of History clubs in their schools. Still at other schools, heads have discouraged history-related study tours in favour of those, organised by other departments. There have also been cases where school administrators obstructed the teaching of History in their respective schools. In regard to issues related to public education policy and political interventions, it is important to note that, throughout the period, formal education has been suffering a rather arbitrary separation of the so-called 'Arts' subjects from the 'Science' subjects. Both in theory and in practice the school and college curricular are such that there exists a water-tight wall separating the 'Arts' and the 'Sciences'. Those who go through the education system identify with either of these categories as early as the third year of
secondary education. This separation goes hand in hand with a ranking of the various subjects in the curricular, which places 'Science' subjects over the 'Arts' subjects. The ranking is based on the assumption that the science subjects are more difficult and more relevant to the achievement of individual and national goals than 'Arts' subjects.

This ranking has been explicit in the manner in which students used to be divided into the respective categories. The practice has been to place the best students into the "Science" category and to put everybody else into the 'Arts' category. This is also clear in certain policy pronouncements made during the period. In 1967, for example, Solomon Bilufo, then Minister for Education, announced that expansion of 'Science' streams was to be favoured against that of 'Arts' streams at the national level. He further emphasized that the number of 'Arts' students entering the University of Dar es Salaam would be determined "not by their qualifications, but by the number of bursaries left after the Science bursaries had been awarded". The Minister justified this by saying:

Whatever may be said of the importance of cultural and social aspects of education, it would hardly perform its function if it didn't serve economic development efforts to the fullest possible extent.

It is noteworthy that this official view is as true today as it was in 1967. Part of the evidence comes from the current government position on education and employment, whereby young people are advised to pursue disciplines that prepare them to compete for jobs in the 'free' market system. The 'free' market has no jobs requiring formal studies in History as an entry qualification. Why this is the case is a subject to be discussed at some further point in this paper. We should however recall that in 1984 a Cabinet Minister publicly said that History was a "useless subject".

The split of formal education into two supposedly unrelated categories and the low ranking of the 'Arts' subjects have adversely affected the status of History. This follows from the fact that while Geography claims some degree of scientificity because of the nature of its subject matter, and while the languages (Kiswahili, English, French) claim relevance because of their role in communication, History is most-difficult to defend within the logic of the dominant thinking regarding the nature and function of formal education. It can not claim to be most suitable for the ideological reproduction of the ruling bureaucracy either, because that role has long been taken up by Political Education.

When a suggestion was made in 1980 to merge History with Political Education (Siasa), the aim was certainly not to make Political education take a more historical approach. The authorities could only have thought of strengthening the legitimising function of formal education. Rumours had it that the plan was later abandoned because of Julius Nyerere's intervention in his capacity as the President of the United Republic. It is however certain that apart from this possible split of the government bureaucracy over the issue, the abandonment of the plan followed the resistance and protest by History teachers.

Reference can also be made to the 1976 vocationalization and diversification of secondary education policy, whose implementation categorised secondary schools in Mainland Tanzania into four biases,
namely, Agricultural, Technical, Commercial and Home Economics. In practice, the policy, which began to be effected in 1979, meant devotion of more time to the key subjects in each of the biases and the relegation of the rest of the subjects to the status of "options", particularly in forms III and IV.

The impact of this policy on History teaching can be estimated from the given list of compulsory and optional subjects from each bias. It is noteworthy that while Siasa, Religious Studies and the Languages appear as requirements in all the four biases, History does not appear as a required subject in any of them. Similarly, Music and Sports appear as options in all the biases. History is completely excluded from the Home Economics and Technical biases. Given these circumstances it is no wonder that the proportion of students doing History in Form III rapidly declined from 85.4 percent in 1980 to 48.2 in 1981, and further down to 43.6 percent in 1982.

The most recent innovation undertaken by the Ministry of Education has been the introduction of a subject called Social Studies for forms I to IV. The subject combines the former syllabus of Geography and History for the O-Level, and adds aspects of Sociology and Political Science. It is meant for all students who opt not to pursue the separate syllabi of Geography and History.

The authors of the syllabus claim that the themes, topics and subtopics are so organised that they "systematically stimulate and promote mental, manipulative and attitudinal development." However, a quick look at it will reveal that the syllabus lacks any internal unity. What has been done is to arbitrarily chop off some aspects of the former Geography and History syllabi and simply lump together the remaining parts in an unpatterned mix with aspects of Sociology and Political Science.

While this development is generally unfortunate to the country's education system it has devastating consequences on the status of History. In the first place the aspects of African history covered in the syllabus are so scanty and superficial that at the end of their studies the students will not have gotten even the minimum understanding of the subject; Secondly, the implementation of this syllabus will most likely lead to total elimination of History as a subject in the school programme. This is because there is talk about students' freedom to opt either for the two separate subjects or for Social Studies. Sooner or later students will find themselves doing the new subject.

This pessimism is partly based on personal imaginations. It is known that History students at the O-Level have often complained about the length of the current syllabus, saying it is too long to cover within the given time. By the logic of this complaint one would not be surprised to see all students going for the condensed and shorter syllabus. They will of course consider other factors such as relevance to the A-Level programme. But given that a subject called General Studies has also been introduced at the A-Level, it is hard to imagine many students still wanting to pursue History as a separate subject. Furthermore, given the trends in education policy in this country one would not be surprised if the government actually made the new subject compulsory to all secondary school students. If this happens, it would be difficult for students to still want to do History.
The picture emerging from the above discussion is that the status of history is declining. Several attempts have been made to explain this situation. In 1977, for example, Prescilla E. Ole Kambaine gave a long list of situations leading to negative attitudes towards History among students. Among other things her list included poor teaching methods, poor provisions (books, teaching aids, quality, teachers etc), language difficulties, vastness of the syllabus contents and poor occurrence of the subject as a job requirement.

A follow up study by this author ten years later confirmed the continuity of all these problems and further documented some of them. Similarly more recent interactions with the University of Dar es Salaam students doing their Teaching Practice have further revealed the severity of poor teaching methods and approaches as problems facing History teaching.

However, for the sake of proper understanding, the problems mentioned above need to be categorised and contextualised. The starting point is the recognition of the fact that in all occasions history elaboration involves telling a story, and that there are differences between a good story and a poor one. In short a good story is an interesting story told in an interesting way, thus the logic behind the need for content, relevance and method appropriateness in pedagogy.

Regarding content, relevance and appropriateness in the teaching of history in Tanzania problems exist at two levels. At one level, since independence the history taught has been predominantly conservative and far removed from the concrete experiences of the bulk of the people. It is a universalist and developmentalist history, characterised by emphasis on supposed universalist historical developments, determined by technological changes. Such history is abstract, dull, and therefore uninteresting.

Even when History teaching covers anti-colonial struggles and mass resistances to certain colonial policies it avoids the concrete experiences of the masses of the people, only presenting clusters of events arranged and elaborated in accordance with the legitimating ideology of the post-colonial state. Being so silent about the deeds, thoughts and experiences of African slaves taken across the Atlantic, of the men and women who protested against colonial occupation and subsequent domination, and of the oppressed peasants and workers under the colonial and post-colonial governments, the current history is thus unable to enhance development of critical consciousness among the people, and therefore uninteresting to them.

At another level the current history, as presented both in textbooks and classroom expositions, lacks sense of historicity and meaning. Consider for example the fact that in standard V. where History teaching begins, the first topic is 'Systems of production in pre-colonial Tanzania'. The relevant text distinguishes several such systems, including hunting and gathering, fishing, pastoralism, weaving and farming. One wonders whether this constitutes history at all. If this hollow and dead framework is what is presented to young people who are just beginning to know something about history we should not be surprised to learn such misconceptions and false assumptions about the nature of the subject.
Similarly, textbooks, and especially classroom expositions, often talk of 'factors for the collapse of the East African Community' 'reason for the colonization of Africa', 'effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade', and so on.' The actual stories about these phenomena are seldom told. This tendency developed as an antithesis, or critique of the narrative/descriptive approach so commonly used during the colonial days. Its advocates favoured synthesis and analysis. What has happened in effect is a movement from one extreme end to another, which is equally disadvantageous and devastatingly harmful. If historical narratives without contextualization, synthesis and analysis are meaningless and repelling, a mere listing of 'factors', 'reasons' and 'effects' render History hollow, hence equally unexciting and meaningless. In short, the negative attitudes towards History so clearly manifest in schools, colleges and the society at large, have a lot to do with the dominant approaches to the teaching of the subject matter.

Regarding teaching methods, several studies and casual observations done affirm that throughout the period under consideration the dominant method at all levels of education has been lecturing, occasionally followed by short, supply-type evaluative questions. Limiting learners activity mostly to listening and copying of notes this method makes the classroom encounter dull, idle and boring on the part of the students.

It should however be noted that the predominance of dull expository methods in History teaching is itself an indication of the fact that the teaching of this subject has been suffering from lack of provisions in terms of teaching aids, reading materials and qualified teachers. It certainly requires a well-motivated and qualified teacher, and a fairly well provisioned History department, to consistently teach the subject using the exciting and pedagogically advantageous methods.

These are some of the notable problems at the level of pedagogy. But one needs to look beyond these immediate concerns in order to begin capturing the deeper issues involved. Here one needs to contrast the currently obtaining image concerning the status of History to what prevailed before the coming of the modern era. It can be generalised that in all pre-capitalist societies knowledge about the past was associated with wisdom, social integrity and even the capability to lead. These were moments in the histories of various societies when people largely believed that the past has a bearing on the present in important ways.

The question therefore is why such knowledge should now be seen to be inferior to other forms of knowledge. In short the answer has to do with the nature and dynamics of the contemporary society. It is noteworthy that since the mid 17th century in the context of European history, and since the end of the second World War in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, the dominant organising principle in the society has increasingly been the capitalist value process. Being pervaded by the ever increasing elitist urge for surplus production and appropriation the contemporary society is overwhelmed by what has been named developmentalism. Developmentalism, as politics and ideology, has for a long time dominated scholarship as well as ordinary thinking. Referring to post-independence Africa, a Law Professor had this to say in connection with developmentalism:

The central element in the dominant ideological formation in post-independence Africa is, what we call, the ideology of developmentalism. The argument of this ideology is very
simple. We are economically backward and we need to develop and develop very fast. In this task of development we cannot afford the luxury of politics: Therefore politics are relegated to the background while economics come to occupy the central place in the ideological terrain. The whole ideological discourse among the factions of the ruling class and between the ruling class and the masses is conducted within the framework of developmentalism.

Needless to say in the particular context of post colonial Tanzania the politics and ideology of developmentalism found their expression in the pragmatic policy on formal education adopted in 1967 and in specific policy decisions taken thereafter, such as the 1976 diversification and vocationalization policy. But developmentalism has also continuously been informing priorities in resource allocation, including the distribution of physical resources, time and human power in the whole process of formal education, research and writing. We can therefore understand why disciplines such as History are discriminated against in this respect.

Moreover, as part of the dominant ideology developmentalism affects peoples' thinking and attitudes. Although there have been occasions of effective struggles against its transcendence, the general tendency has been for the masses of people to succumb to its power. This, then explains why people now generally tend to see knowledge of the past as unimportant and irrelevant to their own needs and the needs of their children.

3. POSSIBILITIES FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

It has recently been proposed that to alter the above situation an anti-developmentalist people's movement for History may be necessary not only in Tanzania but at the continental level. It has to be added here that although difficult, such a movement is indeed possible to initiate and carry forward.

Those who teach the subject have an obligation to use all their imaginative power to make History learning an exciting and meaningful experience on the part of the learners. Apart from the improvement of teaching methods, the challenge here is to seek and successfully render politically correct elaborating of History. Those who face temptation to oppose this suggestion in the name of impartiality and scientificity may do well to reckon that history elaboration has, and will always be partisan. The question is therefore which side to take in the struggle between the elitist developmentalist ideology on the one hand and the needs of the toiling masses of the people on the other.

Similarly, those who are so placed as to be able to write history or shape the curricula contents have to seriously consider possibilities of producing histories that are politically correct and ideologically sound to the larger masses of people. If the histories we research on and write are to be appealing and popular among the people they have to link the current experiences of the people with the past. This can be done by focusing on those aspects of the past which have a vivid bearing on the problems and crises of the current society, and by elaborating them correctly from the point of view of the politics of the toiling masses. It will, for example, make more sense to detail the successes and failures of the masses of people in Africa in their attempts to control or squeeze...
the post colonial state into a more acceptable posture in terms of its behaviour than portraying the state merely as a tool for universalist development.

Admittedly, both in the classroom encounter and in research and writing, the desire to re-orient history elaboration faces the critical problem of lack of source materials. However, with imagination, creativity and commitment the problem can be reduced significantly.

In the classroom encounter, for example, efforts can be made to put together the bits and pieces of relevant historical information already existing, to present a more exciting and meaningful history. The emerging gaps could be identified and slowly filled in using materials accruing from new researches and publications. In the fields of research and writing critical appraisals of the existing sources, coupled with further efforts to collect relevant information, should seriously begin. The syllabi designers should use their avenue to provide a framework for historical studies which challenge all the concerned parties to produce and disseminate historical knowledge that is relevant to the needs of the larger masses of the people. In sum, the task is enormous and difficult, but something must be done.

NOTES


3. The number declined from about 40 in the late 1980s to 3 in 1991/92. The number of students currently majoring in History in the second year is 6.


7. Lawi, op.cit. p. 75.

8. Ibid, pp. 79-90.


10. Lawi, op. cit. p. 83


14. Ibid.

15. This has come quit explicitly in many official statements made since the government adoption of 'free market' economic policy.

16. Sago, op.cit. minute 7.2.4

17. Undated internal memorandum by the Head of History Department, University of Dar es Salaam, circulated to the members of staff.

18. According to rumors, which are often reliable in Dar es Salaam, the plan to merge History and Siasa was forged by Mr. M.S. Muze, then Commission for Education, and Mathematician by training.


20. Education circular letter no. 4 of 1979, pp.3-4.

21. Lawi, op.cit. p. 94 (see the table).


23. Ibid., p.iii


25. Lawi, op. cit. 50-92.

26. Reference is here made to the experience of the author during the last three years while involving himself with the evaluation of History teaching done by student teachers studying at the University of Dar es Salaam.

27. This point is elaborated by Professor E. Wamba-dia-Wamba in his recent article "African History and Teaching of History in Dar es Salaam" in Tanzania Zamani, vol.l, no.3, 1993.


