The State of Theatre Education in Tanzania

Paper Prepared for

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1.0 COUNTRY PROFILE

Tanzania came into existence when two independent countries, Tanganyika and the Islands of Zanzibar opted for a union in 1964. It is 940,000 Sq. km. in size, and borders Kenya and Uganda to the North, with whom they now form a rejuvenated East Africa Community. To the West is Rwanda, Burundi, with Lake Tanganyika creating a border between it and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To the South there is Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, while the East is an 800 long stretch of the Indian Ocean Coastline. (Ministry of Education and Culture: 1974).

In 1998 Tanzania’s population was estimated at 32.1 million, (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: 2000), with the population census expected late the year 2001. It is inhabited by over 120 ethnic groups, most of who are Bantu speaking. The country, however, is fortunate to have a pervasive national language, Kiswahili which is spoken by nearly everybody, and serves as a great unifying factor.

The country was formerly colonized by the Germans but when they were defeated by the axis power in the First World War, it was mandated to the British from whom it gained independence in 1961.

The economy of Tanzania is based largely on agricultural products and processing figures for 1998 ascribe agriculture to 46.3% of the Gross Domestic Product, while industry accounts for 21%. (Friedrich Ebert Foundation: 2000). The mining sector however is becoming increasingly significant. At one time, Tanzania was the World’s leading producer of sisal, and although the industry is rejuvenating, thanks to an increasing interest in natural fibres rather than synthetic, major exports include cotton, cashew nuts, coffee, spices, fish, flowers and fruits. With a population that is 85% rural most of the economic activity is carried out by smallholder farmers whose main occupation is subsistence rather than commercial farming. (Friedrich Ebert Foundation: 2000)

New areas of economic activity, such as tourism are also becoming increasingly important, as Tanzania is replete with wildlife in several parks, including the world famous Serengeti. Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa’s highest peak is also located in the country, as well as several
large African lakes, such as Lakes Victoria, Tanganyika, Malawi and of course the exotic islands of Zanzibar and Pemba.

Politically, Tanzania has been like a haven of peace in troubled Eastern and Central Africa. It has enjoyed relative stability since independence except when, in the early sixties, soldiers mutinied and British troops had to be called in. Under the widely loved and internationally respected late President, Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, Tanzania enjoyed feelings of nationhood unusual in most African states. On his retirement, he was “peacefully” succeeded by President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, who after his two five year terms, and after launching multi-party politics, was also “peacefully” succeeded by the current President, Benjamin W. Mkapa.

Lately however, there have been dark clouds on the long peaceful horizon, emanating from the Islands of Zanzibar in particular, where expressions of dissatisfaction from a main opposition party in the past two general elections precipitated some deaths early in 2001.

An overview on the profile of Tanzania would not be complete without mention of some major milestones of post independence history. In 1967, the then President Nyerere declared Tanzania a socialist state with the Arusha declaration. Major means of production were nationalized, education was revamped, and hundreds of thousands of Tanzanians were forced to move into villages. (Riccio 2001)

The rationale both for the villagisation and the Arusha declaration was that the Tanzanians should be masters of their economy, in as egalitarian a setting as possible. “Ujamaa” (family-hood) as this strategy was called sought to instill “socio-economic collectivism and national unity through non-tribal egalitarianism” (Riccio 2001:131) For Mwalimu, a country beset with so much poverty, illiteracy and disease, had to come together, start together in order to pull together. The verdict on the experiment has not been unanimous even though the experiment was abandoned in the mid 1980s. One thing is certain, though, that nearly forty years later, Tanzania is one of the most cohesive nations in Africa, and the villages have now solidified and become a reality, many having at least a school and a health centre, although their functioning may not necessarily be optimum.
1.0 THE STATE OF THEATRE IN TANZANIA

In order to appreciate the state of theatre education in Tanzania it is important to review the state of theatre itself.

A discussion of theatre in Tanzania can be divided into four major segments: Pre-colonial, Colonial, Post Independence, and Contemporary theatre. All of the four segments have distinctive features as outlined below.

1.1 Pre-Colonial Theatre

Tanzania, as we mentioned in the country profile has over one hundred and twenty ethnic groups. Before colonial imposition of the state of Tanganyika, later to become Tanzania, these were distinctive entities with their way of life and bounded by the horizons of their own capabilities. Theatre being human, as Wole Soyinka (1976) points out, and as these 120 groups are human, it means one hundred and twenty theatres.

We are using theatre here not in the Western Classical tradition of stage, performers and an audience, but in the more general form of “symbolic performance, with symbolic images representing life though action” (Mlama 1983). Such symbolic performance could include dance, storytelling, poetic recitations, some rituals, dramatizations and so on. This paper however does not go into the merits, demerits or deficiencies of defining theatre this way, as this has been debated at length by a number of scholars (Kamlongera 1989 Kerr 1995, Lihamba 1986, Mlama 1991, Mda 1993). This is the debate generally raised in Western theatre “oriented” circles, which still doubt whether Africa indeed had a theatre.

\[1\] We use Western theatre “oriented” circles as some Africans, such as Taban Lo Liyong also were vehement that Africa had no theatre.
Pre-colonial Tanzania’s theatres therefore were part and parcel of the people’s way of life, and the performances were in direct response to the people’s interpretation and search for artistic presentation of meaningful phenomena. The theatre therefore was essentially utilitarian and sought to raise, discuss and impart societal norms, as well as be able to pass them on to successor generations. This was not “art for arts sake”, but art for specific, or as we would now say, special purposes. Among these one can include the different initiation rites for both male and females, war dances, marriage dances, including the dramatizations in the verbal exchanges, some religious rituals and so on (Mlama 1991).

While the communities knew who was good at what, most such performances were participatory, and often the audience merged with the performers, and anyone with a spark of inspiration could pick up the song wherever.

There were no specific teachers as such, but what was taught was more or less collective community wisdom, often the repositories of the aged. Thus the young got their “pieces” from the adults, and they would pass them on when their time came.

The setting described is quite idyllic, though real. It sounds like those anthropological “clean type and rustic” activity. What is described however is basic and is meant to emphasize again that while there was life, there was theatre. Now and then the groups went to war, or because of pestilence or other, people moved around and so on and as such certain identical theatre forms could be found across groups. There were also intermarriages, and then of course the emerging of “business” centres with their own cultures, especially that of Islam. In general, however ethnic arts remained relatively intact until the more aggressive colonial system landed on the scene.
1.2 Theatre During the Colonial Times

The first major impact of colonialism was to create entities where they never existed before. Thus Tanganyika, the precursor of Tanzania was a result of Colonial demarcations based on the infamous Berlin Conference of 1886. Overnight the 120 disparate groups now formed one nation. Nothing particularly unified them except the will of the colonizer.

Realities therefore began to change. While the allegiance to some customs and traditions remained, there was “a new king to worship”, who did not come with any historical trappings on how to do it. A new song had to be found, in honour of the King, and this was for all the 120 different subjects.

The new king had not come only with politics. He had also come with “new” religions. Belief in God was not new, and there were several theatrical performances to this effect. The new dispensation however must have taken the biblical expression “jealous” God too seriously, for all of a sudden all the other Gods were not important and had to be suppressed. Professor Mlama cites German Colonial policy, which for example said that:

“German Mission Evangelical and Catholic alike should be encouraged to take an active part in the realisation of the national colonial program, in other words, they should not restrict their activities to mission work, but should help to establish German Culture and German thought in the Colonies” (Mlama 1981).

Colonial Policy therefore was not particularly keen on building on what the people had, but instead wanted to impose its own. Christianity in particular frowned upon many of the traditions and customs. Marriages had to be changed to suit the culture of Europe (one-man one wife). Festivities that often involved revelry (drinking and dancing) were seen as sinful. Dances in
which people wriggled their waists were seen as pure sensualism, and many other rites and rituals were discouraged as barbaric, savage or sinful.

This approach started sowing seeds of discord in the theatrical practices. The colonialists virtually tried to annex the totality of the life-styles. They had introduced schools, cash crops, and of course taxes. If you couldn’t beat them, then you had to join them. This of course divided the populace, which did not have much else to bring them together except hatred of the Whiteman. But as Obierika says, in Achebe’s *Things Fall a Part*, there was little one could do, as some of the close relatives had already joined the Whiteman.

The other deathblow to traditional theatre came from the schools. Previously, nearly all learning had been informal and had been designed to equip the young to carry on the mantle of the community. Thus the teaching and learning context was based on the community aspirations. With the coming of colonialism, however, learning took a new form, and was geared towards creating “subjects” that could fit in the new dispensation. Colonialism needed clerks on the plantations, domestic staff, and teachers. As the colonialists had virtually ignored the traditional systems, the only other system they knew and could propose was their own. Thus the schools were replicas of German, later British Schools, and the subject areas akin to those “back home”. This hangover persists even today, where some Africans still believe that the West is the best safeguard for educational excellence.

Theatre suffered another blow when reading materials, the stories, the skits, the choruses, the songs, and even other books to read were from the “homeland” of the colonial powers. The traditional songs and skits disappeared from the children in the school compounds. Instead the young struggled to excel in the foreign theatres. For plays, for example, European classics were selected. Shakespeare, Moliere, Chekov and so on became virtually synonymous with culture. It did not occur to the colonial powers that such plays were out of context, and
efforts were made to “look” for Universal themes in the plays selected.

From a theatre that was context specific and relevant, there now began a culture of the surface, rather than the heart. Maybe we could feel with Romeo as he looked at Juliet on the balcony, but we had no balconies and so it required extra effort to really get into it. Theatre therefore began to be the domain of a few and artistic spontaneity began to do dwindle. Artistic production diminished for artistic repercussion, and we also began to build separate audiences. Those that would enjoy Shakespeare and those that would not.

The fact that most of the traditional artistic reproductions were not written and so were unavailable for comparative purposes did not help either. These were powerful people with their texts, their schools, their churches, their guns, their colour and so on, with a people who talked only of having these things in their heads. Naturally the bigger force would carry the day.

Not quite so however. Again as Achebe comments in No Longer at Ease that “educated Africans had resorted to eating “gari” (Yam paste) and soup with hands, rather than knives and forks”, the Tanzanians also began to resort back to their traditional modes of cultural exuberance. The strange drum that the colonialists had beaten did not have many dancers. Besides with the Churchill “wind of change” many of the colonized people began to protest the foreign domination by other human beings, who, the two world wars had shown, were also human, despite all the trappings of power and pretence. And what better way to protest than sing in a language and style, or using symbols which the colonisers would not understand?

Two other things deserve special mention. One was the realisation in the late forties and onwards that traditional theatre could work, and the colonial powers started using traditional theatre to sell their wares, such as planting cash crops, health education, improved agricultural practices and the love of empire of course. This mode of using theatre developed even further in the fifties for a version of comedy, (vichekesho)
closely aligned to slapstick or *comedia del arte* as a form of creating entertainment for the colonised people in whom they had began to sense a restlessness (Mlama 1991).

The other element was the growth of Kiswahili, which had virtually become a *lingua franca* for all the urban centres of Tanzania. The colonialists, both German and the British had invested in it, and communication in Tanzania, eased up considerably because of this *lingua franca*.

1.3 *Theatre in Post Independence Tanzania*

This had two trends. The first was a reaction more or less to the colonial theatre, where the then President equated a nation without a culture as equivalent to a people without a soul, and the other form was that imposed on a rejuvenated theatre by the Arusha Declaration.

1.3.1 *Theatre Before the Arusha Declaration*

The role that songs, stories, dances and so on, had played during the struggle had not been lost on the political elite that emerged after independence. Song stars had accompanied the major campaign rallies, and soon after independence, there was concerted effort to spearhead the cultural sector. By 1962, only a year after independence, a Ministry of National Culture and Youth was established as part of expressing the indignation that colonialism had imposed on the nation. Addressing Parliament on December 10, 1962 President Nyerere said:

> “Of the crimes of Colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe we had no indigenous culture of our own; or that what we did was worthless – something of which we should be ashamed, instead of a source of pride ..... when we were at school we were taught to sing the
songs of the European ... Many of us have learnt to dance the “rumba” or the “chachacha” to rock-en-roll and to twist and even to dance the “waltz” and the “foxtrot”. But how many of us can dance, and have even heard of the Gombe Sugu, the Mangala, and the Konge ...... So I have set up this New Ministry to help us regain our pride in our CULTURE” (Ministry of National Youth and Culture, 1974:2)

The Ministry did indeed gear up for its work, setting up the National Dance Troupe in 1965 whose mandate was to put together a National Performance that would be as representative as possible for the whole nation. Other artists went to train in acrobatics in China, and on their return also created their own music to go with their work rather than with Chinese recordings.

While the National Dance Troupe did indeed create a basket of major Tanzanian Songs and Dances, it did so by transplanting them from their cultural contexts, to make them only show cases. The dances were good and people enjoyed them, particularly the national nature of the performances, but they were devoid of the same cultural emotions that had been their origin. The dances therefore began to take a new shape, that of being spectator dances, rather than real cultural immersions.

The revival of the dances, however became like a great catalyst in various communities, especially in schools, where youths had been suppressed in performing their traditional dances. Dance groups spouted everywhere, but again as both Mlama (1991) and Lihamba (1986) point out, these were experiments devoid of deep background. They were surface manifestations, rather than fundamental changes in that the context with which
most such dances had been performed was no longer the same.

1.3.2 Theatre after the Arusha Declaration.

The Arusha Declaration was an attempt to give direction to the development of Tanzania, from an unchartered strategy to a guided one with special goals in mind. It was like the Biblical Struggle, between good and bad, and of course *good* had to win.

If post independence theatre was performance exuberance, then post – Arusha Declaration theatre was commitment. Overnight, plays appeared about what a good socialist should be. Songs, dances, recitations, about the wisdom of the leaders and the importance of socialism became the order of the day. Schools, organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, formed groups, and competition sprouted among cultural groups, both formal and informal. A new genre developed, “*Ngonjera*,” which was a poetic debate between good and evil where good was, of course, socialism or the government. Even leading theatre intellectuals joined the fray to create works that extolled the values of socialism. The President himself exhorted the artists to go and preach the good news of socialism, and they responded. It was a fantastic lease of life for the theatre, although it was unidirectional. (Mlama 1991, Lihamba 1985).

Shortly after, disillusionment began to set in as the shores of the promised land receded more and more. The war against Iddi Amin had seriously disturbed Tanzania’s allocation of resources, to such an extent that there was great hardship within the country, with shortages of consumer goods ranging from beer to sugar, to cooking oil, to soap. Despite the shortages in the public stores, the elite close to the government were not as severely affected. Besides, such shortages often are great
seedbeds of corruption, and it was apparent that some of the leadership was indeed corrupt.

The theatre artists took up their pens again, beginning in the mid-70s to complain about the “badness of fit” between the proposed and the actual. Fortunately, due to the well-developed culture of tolerance, the authors and leading artists were spared the embarrassment of jail terms, although for certain performances some queries were raised in authoritative circles.

1.4 Contemporary Trends

After the euphoria and disillusionment for theatre practitioners of the late 60s on to the 80s, Tanzanian theatre began to revert to the serious subjects that have been its recourse from time immemorial. Writer such as Kezilahabi, Hussein, Lihamba and others came up with plays that were more analytically realistic, rather than playing up to the Chief, The senior artists realised they had been taken for a ride, where they had touted for a cause which, though they strongly believed in it, they had found its execution subjected too much to human weakness and folly. And those plays began to break through, especially in the late 70s and early 80s.

A new movement however was in a way beginning to break through. The popularisation of the arts had implied working in the arts at the level of the people. The level of the people implied their using forms that the people were comfortable with. This implied their songs and dances; their story telling devices, and of course their languages. The new plays coming out in the late 70s and 80s embodied a multiplicity of forms. A play could have within it songs, dances, recitations, mime, and formal dramatizations. The plays could be performed anywhere, and participants need not be professional artists. (Mlama, 1991).

These forms, though re-worked for Tanzania, were not really new in African theatre. They had come about as a continent wide experimentation in African forms for African
“theatising”. Shortly after independence and with the emergence of the new emphasis in African dramatics, University level departments took well-acted African plays supposedly with universal themes to villages in a movement referred to as the Travelling Theatre. While the people in rural areas enjoyed such performances, and could identify with some of the ideas and themes expressed, these were foreign manufactured goods, which left little impact on the communities (Mda 1993, Kerr 1995, Kamlongera 1989).

The second wave implied going to the communities, researching their problems, and going back to create plays which would then be taken back to the communities. While this was an improvement on the traveling theatres, the product was still manufactured outside of the community and could not be seen wholly as their own. This was later abandoned for a system where the actors stayed in the community and created with the community, so that the product in a way belonged to the communities (Mda 1993).

The Tanzania version adopted in the 80s was an improvement on this method, in that the theatre professionals from outside the community went as facilitators, to assist essentially on the form, and analysis, but the research and the acting was done by the people themselves. Mlama (1991) devotes half her book to the process.

Another trend worth mentioning is the commercialisation of the theatre, especially the dances. The rise of interest in the performing arts after independence, and its exploitation in the post Arusha Declaration period meant that many people began to see the arts as a potential for earning one’s living. Many groups sprouted in schools, in work places and in the villages. Outstanding artists were given jobs in companies so that they could bring artistic honour to their employing organisations. (reminds me of basketball in American Universities). Funds were set aside, with the government supporting its own national dance troupe.
Theatre therefore, and especially the dances, began to be seen in a competitive sense, based on who would provoke more laughter, create greater public viewership and titillation, and of course attract government interest. Meaning and relevance became stock, and equally, appreciation became stock. Dances that formerly were graceful, for example were substituted for those that were more vigorous and/or involved a lot of hip gyration.

With the coming of the financial hardship of the late 70s and 80s many of the artists were dropped from job rosters, and so a number of them got together to form groups, so that they could mutually exploit their skills for gain. The theatre which had historically been message laden, even during the socialist era, now began to be commercially laden. What played was what could sell, rather than what could teach.

2.0 THEATRE EDUCATION IN TANZANIA

An examination of the state of theatre education follows parallel lines to that of the state of theatre, but rather than follow the trends used in the previous subsection, we shall look at theatre education in three broad categories: An historical perspective, Present day trends and Problem Areas.

2.1 Theatre Education in Tanzania: A Historical Perspective

We have already discussed that education in the pre-colonial days was conducted informally in the main. There were some areas, which required specific instructions, but even these had no specific schools. Most of such teaching and learning was essentially by apprenticeship. Theatre, as we mentioned earlier was a community affair in which all were expected to participate, depending on the occasion, so each one was expected to be “performant” with regard to the roles expected of each. A man could not say he didn’t know how to give his daughter in marriage, or if he had to dance a war song for the King, apologise for not knowing how. Everyone therefore had to know what was expected of them and when, and they took the trouble to learn them.
With the coming of the colonial system, what was expected of people changed. An ambivalence arose about where to deliver, and what. The traditional system eroded quickly but without any corresponding replacement by the other system. With the imposition of religion, and the economic superstructures the demise of traditional learning started to cascade into oblivion. This got even worse with the opening of formal schools. Although these generally catered for the young, their influence went beyond the schools.

First of all the religion required that adherents abandon what they called sinful ways, including their dances and many other rituals. Secondly, they imposed their own stories from their own backgrounds, as these were the ones they themselves understood. The traditions of story telling, of innovative and creative dances that had been with the people for ages began to be looked at with suspicion, in favour of the new ways. Pupils won gifts for such thing is reciting the *lord’s prayer*, or singing choruses in English. As these young people became adults, the gap of moving from their own tradition widened even further.

As the products of these schools eventually became the junior officials who executed colonial policy, some of them became, as Achebe’s saying goes, “those who cry louder than the bereaved”. Of course there were attractions to try to belong, and belong properly. One got a job, power and even admiration from the same people that he was party to exploiting. Being close to a whiteman meant being the whiteman yourself when the whiteman was not there. This of course was tremendously catastrophic to the traditional theatre. (Lihamba 1986, Mlama, 1983).

The death of the traditional theatre in schools was replaced by the introduction of European classics, especially by the British. Shakespearean plays and appreciation became the mark of “civilisation” and so, respectability. These plays often became performed unabridged, and often to audiences who could not understand a word of the archaic Shakespearean language. Argument was of course that there were no African plays that
could be used in schools, implying of course that all the generations of traditions of African theatre meant nothing completely to the colonisers (Mlama 1991).

With the coming of independence, things changed somewhat. African states, Tanzania included, realised that the education system had to be revamped in order to create a better sense of identity for the new independent nations. Tanzania, as stated previously, a year after independence, saw the inauguration of a Ministry of Culture and Youth with the mandate “to seek out the best of the traditions and customs of all the tribes and make them a part of (the) national culture” (Ministry of National Culture and Youth, 1974:4), for according to Nyerere, “it is hard for any man to get much real excitement from dances and music which are not in his own blood”: (Ibid.: 4).

The message got out and went to the schools and there was renewed effort to rejuvenate dances in schools and other institutions. Schools continued the choral dance and drama competitions introduced by the British and which had concentrated largely on European songs and plays, but now African elements were added – songs, dances and an African play where one could be got.

The creation and promotion of the National Dance Troupe in 1965 and the emphasis with which it was promoted, as well as the exuberance with which it performed, sent multiplier effects country wide, and young school kids began to see themselves at centre stage, near and performing for the President. Great dancers came to be seen as heroes and this wave continued on through the sixties.

The University also took up this charge, forming the Department of Theatre in 1965, adding art in 1970 and Music in 1985, as it was recognised that given the artistic exuberance someone had to be trained to manage it. Performances for the University shifted from European plays to the products of such African dramatic legends as Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo, Okot p’Bitek, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and so on. For the
Secondary Schools, while theatre was not taught as a course, African plays became part of the literature syllabus. By the late 1960’s, Tanzania could no longer afford to keep a standing army of performers, and moreover, the enthusiasm for the use of performances to foster national unity and/or culture had won off on the ages. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the way the Ministry of Culture kept being moved within government.

*Changes of “Home” for the Ministry of Culture*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Ministry of National Culture and Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>President’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Ministry of Regional Administration and Rural Development</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>Ministry of National Education</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>Ministry of National Culture and Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Prime Minister’s Office</td>
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<td>1988</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Culture</td>
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(Source: *Ministry of Education and Culture 1997: Sera ya Taifa ya Utamaduni (National Cultural Policy)*)

The breakup of the National Dance Troupe in 1967 was, however, a boon for theatre education, for the Ministry got some of the very good artists to start the Bagamoyo College of Arts in 1968. This is the only College of its kind that trains theatre artists in Tanzania though its intake of 15 students per year is too low, compared to an average of 500 applicants each year.

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1 In 2000 while the parent Ministry remained the same, departments that had traditionally been part of the Ministry such as National Archives, Museums were moved to other Ministries.
Bagamoyo College of Arts, from its inception, and perhaps because of its humble beginnings, still approaches artistic training in a unique way, in that its teaching staff is a mixture of academically qualified personnel with academic degrees in the Arts as well as Master Artists, some of whom have never been to school. These however are recruited because of their special skills in playing Tanzanian instruments or because of other outstanding artistic achievement and, as such, they are retained to train the young who otherwise would not have any other access to such maestros.

The University Department of Fine and Performing Arts recently adopted the same method for recruiting Master Artists, as a way of popularising and making available Master Artists, but it has yet to fully exploit this opportunity. This is in part because of the nature of universities that still rigidly approach education in the classical tradition.

Another noteworthy development in the education of the Arts came about in 1974, when Butimba Teachers College, started teaching theatre artists. Butimba Teachers College was started in 1953 as a college for producing teachers, but while new emphasis was being put on rejuvenating the arts in primary and secondary schools, no college was offering specialised training in the Arts. The College boasts of having sent 769 teachers into the world since 1991, although these also include sports teachers and those for fine art.

2.2 Present Trends in Theatre Education

The greatest development in theatre education was the enactment of a National Cultural Policy by Parliament in 1997.

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1 Figures offered by the Principal of the College when author visited the College late 2000.
The policy, among other things, recognised that the arts are so vital in the development of the nation that they deserve to be taught as “Independent Lessons” in the classroom.

Pre-primary, primary, secondary education and teacher’s college curricula shall include art subjects, e.g. music, fine art, handicrafts and theater arts. Furthermore these subjects shall be examinable in continuous assessment and final examinations of these levels of education (Ministry of Education and Culture 1997:4).

The irony of the policy statement above, however, is that the Education and Training Policy” of the parent Ministry enacted in 1995 only refers to the arts more or less in passing. Their policy statement is as follows:-

“The teaching of humanities shall be promoted in the whole education and training system.

The teaching of civics and social studies shall be compulsory from pre-primary school to Ordinary Level Secondary Education and their components shall permeate the whole education and training system”. (Source: Ministry of Education and Culture or 1995 Education and Training Policy).

While science and technology receives direct mention in the introduction of the Education and Training Policy by the Minister concerned, the arts do not, probably underscoring the fact that the arts are very likely still seen as subjects that are not so vital for the development of the nation. (Ministry of Education Culture: 1995).

Despite such ambivalence, however, the Tanzania Institute of Education went ahead and developed a theatre syllabus to be followed in Secondary Schools in 1996, and the first
examinations at Secondary School Level are expected to be held in the year 2001. Likewise, for the primary schools, the theatre studies are included in “stadi za Kazi” (Vocational Skills) and they are currently supposed to be taught from primary I-VII.

The truth on the ground, however is not so. When we did a quick survey of primary schools in and around Dar es Salaam, and the Secondary Schools, there were only two Secondary Schools out of the seven we visited which taught theatre as a subject, and the teachers in the six primary schools were still struggling to interpret the syllabus for teaching theatre.

One thing was clear though. The fact that at primary school it was not an “examinable” subject, and at Secondary School it was not compulsory, no one felt any particular pressure about teaching it. With regard to the methodology at primary school, it is essentially composed of singing songs and some minor improvisations, and in the secondary schools there was emphasis on play production and traditional dances. Needless to say, Tanzania is still at a relative comparative advantage, in that the instruments are in place for grappling with the pleasure devil.

Two other issues deserve special mention. One is the work that has been going on in primary schools around Dar es Salaam, carried on by the University of Dar es Salaam Department of Fine and Performing Arts for the last 10 years. This has essentially revolved around strengthening the theater options in these schools, including training the teachers in theater methodology. The pupils participate in an annual theatre festival with productions of their choice. They, too hold an annual festival to show case their productions.

Otherwise, the only constant sources of trained “theatricians” remain the University of Dar es Salaam which offers a training programme up to Ph.D. level in theatre, Bagamoyo College of Arts, which offers a two year post-secondary school diploma and Butimba Teachers’ College which trains teachers in the theatre methods. Recently, the Open University of Tanzania
introduced an undergraduate degree in the Arts, and my understanding is that it is even soliciting applicants for the MA programme.

Meanwhile, there are other institutions that offer sporadic training programmes in theatre, the most notable being the Tanzania Theatre Centre, which offers weeklong seminars on such issues as writing for theatre, directing and so on. Some of the more experienced groups also hold training sessions for their recruits, and with the popularity of local television drama, some private institutions are now advertising to train people in television acting.

2.3 Problem Areas in Theatre Education

In my view the single most problematic area in theatre education stems from the fact that the policy makers still cannot see the importance of theatre in the affairs of the nation. They see theater in terms of “Ngoma” (*dances*) performed by half clad people sweating away in a dance at the airport, welcoming state guests. Most of the policy makers have grown up in an education system that has alienated them from traditional theatre and as such, many of them cannot see any real term value in investing in the arts.

A corollary to this is that most of our planning has been hijacked by economists and engineers, who look at the solution of a nation’s problems on the fronts of economic development or technological breakthrough. An example is given where, in a certain region of Tanzania, some benefactor sympathised with women, who were fetching water from a well that was far from their village. The benefactor offered and provided wells in their village but the villagers rejected them and continued going to the old water well which was far. Reason? It was the only chance they got to take a walk in the evening and exchange views amongst themselves. Despite such information in development that keeps seeping through, theatre training which does not seem to have direct and measurable benefits keeps getting relegated to the backstage.
Tanzania did try in the 60s and 70s to rejuvenate the theatre. The problem, however, was that even when these efforts were being made, there was no real discussion or debate on what theatre was or how it was to be rejuvenated. Ultimately, what emerged was superficial, and essentially a consumer theatre. The dances were good, the performers were good, but there was no guiding philosophy behind it and those who were trained were only trained for a mechanical production of the Arts.

Professor Mlama mentions another dilemma in theatre development, not only in Tanzania but also in Africa in general. This refers to the main “teachers” of theatre, most of whom were expatriates with “ways of seeing” theatre in the terms of their home images. True, a number of them were dedicated to the cause of African theatre, but this was a physical dedication, and not, as Mwalimu Nyerere remarked, a “blood one”. The programmes they designed therefore inevitably had colours from their origins.

Then are the modern day problems where we have the theatre courses on the syllabus both in primary and secondary school, and there are no teachers, and those asked to teach see it as a punishment and disrespect to be selected to be in charge of the “singing and dancing” programme. The government itself does not put enough resources into the training, by providing money for such things as costumes or the equipment necessary for performances nor does it sponsor any refresher training. Many of the teachers are expected to rely on their natural skills. The three colleges that teach theatre at post secondary school level are all underfunded and cannot put up effective theatre programmes, to cater for the expanded need.

Finally on this issue, support is now beginning to come in slowly on such things as copyright laws, and pressure on local television stations to broadcast more local programmes. Then there are many more job openings in the business with more and more media channels needing artists’ products. These are things that were not there before and as such they augur well, and could have a multiplier effect backwards to push up training. Already at the University of Dar es Salaam there are
positive signs such as an increase in students from 25 in 1994 to 110 in 2001.

3.0 CONCLUSION

We have tried to look at theatre education in Tanzania backgrounded on the state of theatre practice. This is an area that requires elaborate research, and the offerings in this paper are essentially a resume of the highlights. Tanzania is at a good stage in the sense that it has already enacted an education policy and a cultural policy, both of which are supportive of theatre training. The Tanzania Institute of Education already has a syllabus for primary and secondary schools. One can hope that they will design one for form five and six of secondary school. The central dilemma of the development of theatre education in Tanzania, and probably in many other developing countries, is the lack of respect that continues to side step theatre so that the policy makers have yet to put in resources commensurate with its importance.
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