

LAUNCH OF *NYERERE ON EDUCATION VOLUME II*  
SALIM A. SALIM  
DAR ES SALAAM, 6 DECEMBER 2006

nduse Katesh Rejaca

It is a privilege for me to join you for the launch of the second volume of writings on education by the late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the founding President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mwalimu was a man of many dimensions - political philosopher, statesman, poet, humanist, but perhaps the role closest to his heart is that of teacher.

Mwalimu is widely known as an international statesman and an articulate spokesman of African liberation and African dignity. The source of these powerful themes – liberation and dignity – was in Nyerere the teacher.

Conversely, for Mwalimu, education was much more than classrooms and desks. Education was about liberation and dignity.

THE BRAZILIAN ACTIVIST,

His ideas on education resonate with those of Paulo Freire. By linking the principles of education for liberation to the goal of building an egalitarian, socialist society based on the philosophy of *Ujamaa*, he provided an innovative and yet 'localized' theory of social change. He provided a sustained critique of colonialism and racism, and was a committed advocate of equality, unity and economic and social justice for the postcolonial world.

You do not have to agree with everything Nyerere said or did; indeed he was human like you and me, and his life also had his fair share of failures and contradictions. The point here is not that all <sup>MWALIMU</sup> he said was magically true or

THE POINT IS

wonderful. Instead ~~it was~~ that Mwalimu articulated an analysis and a vision for education. An analysis and vision that challenged, inspired, cajoled us then, and it can challenge, cajole and inspire us today.

Reading Mwalimu's writing on education matters not only because it can teach us history, but also because we can learn from that history to critique and inspire the present. In that sense what Mwalimu has to say is profoundly relevant today.

In recent years we have made immense strides in improving education. We have seen bright new classrooms across the country. We have seen the data that show many more of our children are enrolled, who have better facilities, more teachers and more books. Mwalimu would have been proud to see this

achievement. We delight in all things not because they are an end in themselves but for a higher purpose. Schooling is not important for its own sake, but for what it enables its learners to do. For Mwalimu, and he grappled with this all his life, the key question in education <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ about the *purposes* of education.

What, indeed, is the purpose of education? Why do we strive so hard to ensure our children are educated? Why do we believe in life-long learning? Indeed, what are the hallmarks of an educated person?

I will not give you a comprehensive tour of Mwalimu's views on education – that is why the two volumes published by HakiElimu and E & D Ltd are here – read them!

Rather I want to highlight three aspects that are particularly pertinent to Tanzania, and indeed Africa, today. In each case I will juxtapose what Mwalimu emphasized with a few simple questions about the present reality, and invite you to reflect with me.

First, education is nothing if it does not help us get out of the grinding poverty that marks the lives of so many of our fellow citizens. Over and over <sup>MWALIMU</sup> he talks about education as giving us the skills "to help people transform their lives from abject poverty". This transformation is the opposite of fatalism, the opposite of dependency, and the opposite of despair. <sup>FOR EXAMPLE,</sup> In talking about adult education in 1969, Mwalimu said:

"We are poor and backward and too many of us just accept our present conditions as "the will of the Gods", and feel that we can do nothing about them. In many cases therefore the first objective of adult education must be to shake ourselves out of a resignation to the kind of life Tanzanians have lived for centuries past. We must become aware of the things that we, as members of the human race, can do for ourselves and our country.... We must learn that we, ourselves, can change these things".

This is a vision that sees education as enabling Tanzanians to take charge, to make things happen rather than just have things happen to them. This is a vision imbued with impatience with the present and the confidence to imagine and create a better ~~life.~~ FUTURE.

The question is – is our education today doing these things? Are our pupils in Std three, or our students in Form two, or our university students thinking of education in these terms? Not as a ticket to better jobs and money, but as transformation of the self and community, and as development of a fundamental sense of self agency?

Second, what kind of education do we need? What was an educated person to Mwalimu? He called for the cultivation in every student, every citizen, of three things:

“an enquiring mind; an ability to learn from what others do, and reject or adapt it to [a citizen’s] needs and a basic confidence in

his own position as a free and equal member of the society, who values others and is valued by them for what he does and not what he obtains”.

<sup>THE VITAL</sup>  
Mwalimu emphasizes a characteristic of the mind – ~~it is one that is~~ enquiring, wondering, inquisitive, asking questions, wanting to know more – a mind that is thirsty for knowledge and understanding, not smug or complacent. He ~~then~~ emphasizes here as he does so many times elsewhere, the value of experiential learning, and learning from others. Not that this is simply to be uncritically swallowed, but rather to be weighed, evaluated, contextualized, and then to <sup>ONE IS TO</sup> decide what to take, leave out or modify. This is an active mind that is nourished by the past but is not enslaved by it. And that word again –



"confidence" – the confidence of a full citizen, a "free and equal member of society".

WHICH YARD STICK?

And how is the educated person to be measured? He or she is valued by "what he does and not what he obtains". It is not the wealth and cars and titles and mansions that matter, but rather what the person does in the service of <sup>his/</sup>her community, which Mwalimu has elsewhere said is the obligation of every person educated at the public expense.

A person's worth is also not to be measured, like we all too often do, to Mwalimu's great chagrin, by examinations. Over and over again he complained about "placing too much emphasis on written examinations" and

exclaimed "we have to get rid of the ambush type {terminal] examinations".

In his seminal paper on *Education for Self Reliance*, Mwalimu says:

"...our primary and secondary schools must prepare young people for the realities and needs of Tanzania; to do it requires a radical change, not only in the education system but also in many existing community attitudes. In particular, it requires that examinations should be down-graded in Government and public esteem... As a general rule they assess a person's ability to learn facts and present them on demand within a time period. They do not always succeed in assessing a person's power to reason, and they certainly do not assess character or willingness to serve.

... What we need to do now is think first about the education we want to provide, and when that thinking is completed think about whether some form of examination is an appropriate way of closing an education phase”.

This was said in 1967, yet how true it <sup>RINGS</sup> ~~is for~~ today – almost forty years later! Have we learnt from Mwalimu, from history? Do we inculcate in our students the three <sup>CAP</sup> abilities Mwalimu notes? Do our graduates today have the ability to think deeply and creatively? To have aspirations, and the confidence to realize them? Or are we simply teaching to the test, characterized by memorization of facts that will not help the student deal with the real world and its vast challenges, let alone transform it.

This challenge goes to all of us, but perhaps most of all to teachers. Mwalimu spoke of the power of teachers, he even said that they are more powerful than politicians because of the power they had in shaping minds. He said that the teacher who simply does the traditional rote teaching day in day out was only perpetuating the colonial legacy, and instead the "job of the teacher was revolution". READ HIS ESSAY, 'THE POWER OF TEACHERS, IN VOLUME AND YOU WILL SEE WHAT I MEAN.

Do we think of teachers in this way? Is teacher training <sup>TODAY</sup> – its philosophy, pedagogy, methods – revolutionary or conservative? And do we in the community – parents, leaders, politicians – accord teachers the status they deserve? ARE THEY PAID ON TIME, DO WE GIVE THEM DECENT HOUSES?

Third, for Mwalimu, education did not end with schooling, even <sup>THE</sup> university.

Learning was life long. <sup>FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN</sup> ~~In~~ celebrating ten years of independence, Nyerere exhorted us, "whatever level of education we have reached, we can go on:

there is always something new to learn". <sup>HE DEBUNKS THE PROFESSIONAL  
ETHOS THAT SAYS A DEGREE OR A CERTIFICATE IS ALL  
YOU NEED.</sup>

"... there is much more that everyone can learn about our work and about areas of knowledge that they were not taught when they were at school . I know that there are some of my literate fellow citizens who never read at all. Their purpose in going to school was to get a certificate, which they could use to get work. After getting the certificate and using it to obtain employment, they just put the certificate on the wall so that everyone could see it. But they never

use the knowledge of reading and writing; they never read at all.

This is a big mistake, arising from colonial attitudes of the mind”.

Like Ngugi wa Thiongo, for Mwalimu there was also a colonialism of the mind. And it had to do, among other aspects, with an intellectual laziness of not reading, of not stretching frontiers of the mind, and of not using one's skills to engage with the life of the mind. Education was turned into a trophy to be framed and pinned on the wall for others to admire, while the country remained ~~standstill~~ <sup>IN DOLDRUMS.</sup>

I wonder, do we stand guilty <sup>AS</sup> ~~of what we~~ are accused? How many of us read ~~books~~ <sup>books</sup> real books <sup>?</sup> more than newspapers? Do our children at home see us reading? Do we read to and with them? Do the young people of our country see their

leaders grappling with the thirst for knowledge? Do our workplaces encourage continual inquiry and learning, for renewing the life of the mind also renews the life of the community and ultimately the nation?

I have selected only a few of the passages from the two volumes published by HakiElimu, and yet we see how abundant they are with inspiration and challenge. And how fresh the words are – perhaps even more pertinent in 2006 than they were in 1976. I find myself wanting to put time aside to read more and more, to reflect and challenge my own thinking, and use the material to develop a focus and perspective of not only education but a life's <sup>BASIC</sup> <sup>VALUES AND A LIFE</sup> well lived.

These two books – the one we will launch today and its earlier volume – need to be in every school and every library in our country. I am glad to learn that HakiElimu has printed 20,000 copies and that these will be distributed free <sup>OF CHARGE</sup> across the country. I commend this work—its is exactly the kind of thing we need in Tanzania. I challenge <sup>THE PEOPLE WHO COMPILED IT—</sup> HakiElimu, E & D Ltd, and the Foundation that bears Mwalimu's name to work together to ~~indeed~~ ensure as many people in Tanzania have access to these books as possible.

Finally, allow me to close with a little known excerpt of Mwalimu's, from 1965, that appears in Volume II – on "The Importance and Pleasure of Reading". Now isn't it remarkable that a president of a country would speak about the pleasure of reading?! If you read the remarks you will see Mwalimu several times expressing pleasure at the thought of a bookstore, or printing



books, or reading them. And right at the end of his remarks he paints a vision that I want to repeat here, because it is a vision well worth aspiring for today:

“When we get to the position where a man and a wife can sit together in the evening each reading or reading to each other, and when their children are encouraged to read out of school by reading books which are easily available, then we shall have made a big break-through in our development...”

Well, friends, this may just well be one of the ~~missing~~ secrets to liberating us from poverty and achieving development. I hope we will start by reading this

book, and that we will take time to read with our children and grand children,  
our brothers and sisters, and with our friends.

Thank you for listening.