

Article

Are we right to blame it all on colonialism? The subject of history and gender in schools in a Malawian context

by

Alinane Priscilla Kamlongera Katenga-Kaunda
PhD in Social Work
P.O. Box 1348, Zomba, Malawi
E-mail: nanecece@hotmail.com

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Abstract

The study on the history school subject showed that any reenactment of the history discipline should include the reinterpretation of identities from a historical perspective, and this reinterpretation should start with colonial history because this is where it all began. A different approach to history will have positive implications on society's view of gender, as it will encourage the inclusion of devalued categories such as women, black women and third-world women. But does this mean that colonialism is fully to blame for all the gender issues, as is the case within the Malawian history syllabus? This paper explores the influence of colonialism on the history/social and environmental sciences primary school subject.

Keywords: gender, history, curriculum, syllabus, colonialism

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Introduction

...what remains most in my memory is the faded but still beautiful picture of the young girl from Malawi... she was Rachel Chilembwe, a relation of John Chilembwe...I mention her not only because of the pathos of her story but primarily to indicate that women, too, have played their part in the Malawi Diaspora, to be sure, in the whole history of Malawi. One day, I have no doubt; we shall have many studies of the female element in Malawi's past (Macdonald, 1975:4)

Nearly 40 years ago, Macdonald (1975) made a note of the fact that women have played an integral part in Malawi's history, elaborating that their contribution was yet to be recognized. He noted this along with his description of Chilembwe's niece, Rachel. John Chilembwe is one of the independence martyrs and heroes of Malawi. However, after four decades in which history has been taught as a subject in Malawian schools, the question remains: How is "her story" told within Malawian primary school history textbooks? With the passing of four decades, has the Malawian history syllabus managed to document the role of women in historical events? Finding answers to these questions can help to determine how the practice of the social and environmental

sciences syllabus can be improved in Malawi. Along with documenting women's roles within history, this article seeks to identify and examine factors that might have affected the writing of Malawian history. The article puts forward the question on whether the way women are portrayed in students textbooks are highly influenced by colonial values and thoughts.

An overview of the factors shaping the current practice of social and environmental science syllabus in Malawi

The nature of history as a subject

To fully understand the importance of learning and teaching history, it is first instructive to explain how history as a subject has been presented in the curriculum over the years. This section will look at the process of how the school subject of history claims a central place within the union of subjects that has taken place in many countries, such as what is called social studies in the United States, Norway and social and environmental sciences in a Malawian context. The union has been between the school subjects of history, civic education and geography. Stanley and Nelson (1994) define this combination as one that carries all human experience over time and space. In a Malawian context, the subject was first changed by the Ministry of Education from a history subject standing on its own, to the combination of this subject of history with geography and civics education, which was then called social studies and is now called social and environmental sciences (Hau, 2006).

The central place that history has claimed within such a combination means that the topics selected for the other two subjects (geography and civic education) are based on how they relate to the topics within a historical content. Therefore, history as a subject sets the tone in terms of what message is carried within the social studies/social and environmental sciences school syllabus. Its central unifying place in social studies education is based on the fact that the existence of human beings is naturally historical. This is true even within the field of sociology, in that the large scope of content is influenced by history (Ross, 2006).

The importance awarded to the history discipline is because it covers a great breadth of topics. Indeed, no part of human existence is beyond historical investigation and analysis. Ross (2006) reiterates this by saying: *“History is uniquely predisposed, therefore, to synthesize subject matter from the full range of human knowledge. For this reason alone history is the subject best suited to serve as the curricular core of social studies education”* (p. 41).

The power and influence of colonialism - on what is considered Malawian

As pointed out earlier, this article sets out to understand how colonialism influences how history is told in the context of Malawi. Before delving into an assessment of how colonialism has impacted on history as a school subject, it is instructive to look at the power and influence of colonialism on what is considered Malawian in general.

After establishing the power that the history discipline has on human nature, we turn to look at what factors have influenced the story of how history itself is told. Frantz Fanon (1968) argues that the power of the colonizers lay in them dehumanizing the natives by defining them as inferior and sub-human. He gave the example of the ideas held by colonizers about the black people in Africa and the Caribbean who were labeled as instinctual and sexual beings without self-control and discipline. The black person's nature was thus viewed as an impediment to the social progress of Africa and the Caribbean (Fanon, 1968). According to Western colonial ideas, the general consensus is that colonialism played an integral part in the enlightenment of all colonized territories with respect to reason, democracy and social change. This line of thought disregards the colonized native's life norms, and rather frames colonized territories as the pre-colonial place of darkness characterized by impulse, superstition and despotism (Young, 1995).

As seen in Annie Coombe's remark within the analysis of Benin bronzes in Chrisman (2003:2):

...immediately after Benin forces ambushed and killed the acting Consul-General Phillips and some of his entourage, the Illustrated London News...published an article

denouncing Benin society as having 'A native chief and his followers' (Benin bronzes in Chrisman (p. 2).

Such connotations impacted negatively on the majority of the colonized territories in that it encouraged an inferior attitude towards most things considered African. In the post-colonial period, contemporary African societies strive to emulate or embrace Western culture because it is deemed as superior to African cultural traditions. A good example is that of Malawi, where English, and not the national language "Chichewa", is considered the language of instruction in many of the schools (Kayambazinthu, 1998). English is a main subject for students in Malawi and is the prerequisite for passing the O- Level examinations, which ultimately decides entry into tertiary education in the private and public education institutions (Williams, 2002). The education policy states that learners are to be taught in their mother tongue of Chichewa in the first four classes, and then from that point on, the instruction is conducted in English (Carrasquillo & Hedley, 1993; Krashen, 2003, Sharra, 2014).

Other examples can also be seen within the Malawian society's definition of what is considered civilized and what is not. Everything that is considered "*Zachizungu*" meaning "*European*" and "*White*" is considered to be upper class and of a status that most people strive to attain in Malawian society. For example, some Malawians have emulated the mannerisms and fashion of the European "gentleman", which is equated with success and exclusiveness in society. In a Malawian sense this would mean a man who is highly educated, dresses in expensive formal attire, who has table etiquette and many more mannerisms that portray the epitome of a gentleman in Europe. There is evidence that the Malawian gentleman has been influenced by the effects of colonialists, who left their ideas of the gentleman as an upstanding citizen for the natives in various colonies (Dolph, 2007). Such ideas have influenced post-independent Africa to retain Western ideals over their traditional cultural way of life.

The colonial government instilled these ideas in the natives inhabiting the colonial territories, which then led them to erase their ways of living (Said, 1978). In Malawi, it is a tradition to use one's hands when eating, whereas in the Western world it is a custom

to use cutlery. In Malawi, some sections of society frown upon the idea of eating with their hands, even when it is a long-standing tradition to eat without cutlery. The expectation is that one has to use a fork and knife when eating rice, potatoes and nsima (which is the staple dish) or any other non-traditional dish. This is partly the same with women's attire and fashion sense in Malawi, as the majority of women have been harassed for wearing mini-skirts ever since the introduction of in 1994 of the freedom to dress as they like (Banda, 2003). Yet, before colonialism, Africans wore traditional attire that barely covered their bodies (Vansina, 1966). This transformation of society then shows how colonialism has influenced the indigenous way of life by adopting Western cultural traditions as the norm of life that has been fused into African societies. The process has resulted into the West having unmarked identities and Africans having marked identities, in which Western identities are accepted without scrutiny, while African identities are scrutinized, erased and replaced for being savage (Taylor, Hinchlisse, Clark, & Bromley, 2009).

Colonialism has also affected how people within the colonized territories are perceived. Within discussions on women's situations in these colonized territories/third-world contexts, women are presented as a homogenous group. For example, Hosken (1981:11) writes:

"Male sexual politics" in Africa and around the world share the same political goal: to assure female dependence and subservience by any and all means. Physical violence against women is thus carried out with astonishing consensus among men in the world.

Hosken (1981) defines all women as victims of male sexual oppression, giving the impression that the position of women is always that of a victim, which freezes women into "objects-who-defend-themselves", men into "subjects-who-perpetuate violence" and every society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people (Mohanty, 1991:58).

Chakrabarty (2007) cautions that it is important not to be uncritical in accepting the "global relevance of European thought" (p.v238). The author argues that no one remembered the fact that, as much as the "universal thought' was transferable ... and was transferred, the thought was also open to different interpretations from one place to

another, therefore at times it contained elements that defied translation". Chakrabarty (2007) questions the legitimacy of the conclusion that European thought is universally valid, and is responsible for all social and political achievements, as well as the aspirations of the whole of humankind. Chakrabarty does not refute that some ideas in the colonies were influenced by Europe; however, he recognizes that some ideas more than once have proven to be incompatible, unfit, unsuitable for "translation" and transplantation. Hence, the Europeans cannot be uncritically or paradigmatically commended or blamed for having been the sole instrument in shaping the future of non-Europeans. Spivak (1999) questions the notion of the third world as being a pure victim of colonialist oppression. Instead, she advocates that a post-colonial critic should adopt a more responsible role - that of highlighting the limitations and openings of a discourse on colonialism. As a result, her work demystifies certain facts that are crucial to later discussions on whether the West is wholly responsible for what the Malawian curriculum is as of today.

Understanding that there are different facets to the arguments makes one realize that alongside asking the question of how her story is told by history, it is equally important to identify and examine other factors that have influenced the telling of this story in history. Having identified colonialism as one of the influences, are we then correct in only pointing towards colonialism for an engendered curriculum? What follows is the methodology that was used to answer this question.

Methods

The study adopted a mixed method approach, primarily utilizing qualitative methods with a quantitative component (Creswell, 2005). Consequently, the study largely utilized a text analysis of the selected books for the study, combined with a count of the number of women compared to men, as well as a count of the feminine pronouns versus masculine pronouns.

Eight books from the Malawian primary school classes from standards 5 to 8 were selected for review. The textbooks, which are said to be the major force in standardizing

curricula (Mc Cutcheon, 1995; Kihlstrom, 2013), were selected using judgemental and quota sampling.

Data selection and sampling criteria: History textbooks

In this section, I describe how I selected the textbooks that were analysed in the research study. In the first instance, it was intended that I review eight of the history textbooks that are- and were subscribed to each of the primary school classes from standards 5 to 8. Four of the textbooks were to be the ones used in the old school syllabus, whereas the other four are the newly published books for the current syllabus. In past years, the curriculum did not have student books for the different classes, so I chose to analyse the books that were the Teachers Guides for the four different classes. Unfortunately, as I was gathering the old textbooks, I was only able to find two of the textbooks from the four I had intended to analyse, and these two were those of the history teachers' guide textbook for standards 5 and 6. Moreover, this was despite my efforts to visit the Malawi Institute of Education (the people who had published the other two books) and also appealing to history teachers in different primary schools to look through their old history books. A lot of the teachers I approached did not recall having seen history teachers' guide textbooks for standards 7 and 8; therefore, I had to find an alternative. I then decided that an analysis of the referenced book in the syllabus would be a very good addition to the study. The use of specific books in writing the syllabus would come a long way in interpreting the efforts made to improving the history syllabus' gender content. I thought this to be difficult, as this process of picking the referenced books in the old syllabus might also mean my picking two more books that had been referred to in the new curriculum so as to help balance the analysis. I then took time to look through the references of both the old and new syllabi. I noticed that the old syllabus had a variety of books it used to refer to in the writing of the curriculum, but the new syllabus had the old syllabus as one of its referral books in the reference section. The other new books that were referred to were books which dealt with the methodology of teaching social sciences at the primary school level. This process is what was referred to as Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform (PCAR), in which Malawi changed to an outcome-based methodology of teaching. In finding out that the

new curriculum had used the old syllabus as a reference book, it made my job easier in that then I only had to choose two books referenced in the old syllabus, as the content would then be the same with both the old and new syllabus. I then decided on one of the referenced history books among eight that I remembered to have been popular during the time that I had been a student: *From Iron Age to Independence: A History of Central Africa* by D.E. Needman, E.K. Mashingaidze and N. Bhebe.

I chose *The African Heritage* by M. Sibanda, H. Moyana and S. Gumbo as the other book from the recommendation made by two teachers I had met in my quest to find the teachers' guidebook 7 and 8. They had recommended the books, stating that the book contained most of the historical stories of standard 7, and it was the book that both of them used as a teachers' guide. Looking through the book, I saw that it indeed contained stories for standard 7 as cited in the syllabus document. In her own research on policy discourse analysis Allan (2010:57) recommends that a researcher be immersed in both the data of the textbooks and data about the textbooks as I did referring to the syllabus document, so in this way the researcher provides a contextualized analysis.

For the new curriculum, I have chosen to use the student textbooks: *The Social and Environmental* textbook despite having the Teachers Guides alongside the student texts. This is solely for the reason that the students' books have a greater influence on students, as these are the books that the students read and are in direct contact with. Consequently, the textbooks were selected using judgemental and quota sampling. Textbooks are said to be the major force in standardizing curricula, with an under-carried study proving that American students spent a significant amount of their time learning and mastering formal textbook material (Mc Cutcheon, 1995). Table 1 below showcases the textbooks that were analysed:

Table 1: Textbooks chosen for the study

From the old curriculum	From the new curriculum
Primary History Teachers' Guidebook 5 written by D.P. Chipeta and published in 1986 by The Malawi Institute of Education	Social and Environmental Sciences Learners' book for Standard 5 written and published in 2008 by Malawi Institute of Education
Primary History Teachers' Guidebook 6 by D. Lamba in 1987 by The Malawi Institute of Education	Social and Environmental Sciences Learners' Book for Standard 6 written and published in 2008 by Malawi Institute of Education
From Iron Age to Independence: A History of Central Africa by D.E. Needham, E.K. Mashingaidze and N. Bhebe published in 1984 by Longman	Social and Environmental Sciences Learners' Book for Standard 7 written and published in 2009 by Malawi Institute of Education
The African Heritage by M. Sibanda, H. Moyana and S. Gumbo published in 1982 and revised again in 1994	Social and Environmental Sciences, Learners' Book for Standard 8 written and published in 2009 by Malawi Institute of Education, not in references

The units of analysis in these books were primarily identifying phenomena, among which the patterns of relationships were established: a) A comparison of the portrayal of female roles in relation to the males' characters portrayed in the same texts; b) The gender of authors and individuals on the editorial teams for the studied texts; c) The number of women's stories compared to men's; and d) The number of female pronouns compared to male pronouns.

Presentation of findings

The findings are presented around different themes that emerged during an analysis of the data. What follows is the presentation of the findings along with the identified themes.

Dominance of usage of male pronouns

If one is to follow up on the reference to men and women from OBk 5 to NBk 8, we can see the place we are starting from and where we are in the process in terms of engendering the social science curriculum. To begin with, in OBk 5 all reference to the teacher and the learner bears the male pronoun of he, his or himself, thereby assuming that it is only men and boys that are expected to use this book. The general assumption to be made from this is that boys and men are the primary receivers of an education and teaching jobs, respectively. A year after in 1987 there seems to be an improvement in OBk 6, where it is a little different in that it acknowledges the fact that the teacher or student could be of either gender, male or female. In OBk 6, the teacher is referred to as "himself/herself". It is only once on *page 59* that the teacher is referred to as a "he". From here onward, the books appear to be well aware of using neutral language in reference to all gendered aspects, e.g. head teacher, village head, Mr. Speaker/ Madam Speaker and many more. Of course, there is one part on *page 73* of book 8 where the reference does not give a clear picture of whether the reference is gender biased or just a general indication of a human being. In referring to paying taxes, the sentence reads: *Tax to be paid by every man was introduced*. This is comparable to the sentence on *page 77*, which reads: *Nyasaland, therefore, fought for Independence to free herself from British rule*. As with many countries, the country of Nyasaland is referred to using a female gender. I chose to analyse this occasion, referring to a *man* to represent a generalization of a human being, while according the female reference to a country to the grammatical rules of the English language.

The findings from both syllabi also showed that compared to men, women have been portrayed as a group of people who did not have an integral part in the formulation of history. In comparison to men's stories, which had records of detailed events, female

stories were kept brief with less information than the latter. In the majority of places that women were referred to, they were referred to mostly as nurturers, helpless, unable to achieve and always subservient to men.

On the other hand, most of the chapters and paragraphs that contain men's stories are on their leadership skills and heroic escapades, be it as missionaries, the colonizer or the colonized.

Western influence on the curriculum

The suppression within colonialism involved the capturing and domination of the souls of the colonized, which led to a mimicking of Western ways and a definition of what knowledge was inclusive of what now consisted to be known as historiography. The history discipline in general and African history in particular was drawn from a European perspective that predominantly covered a constellation of kings, nobles, church and merchants (Feierman, 1994).

Looking back to the analyses of the two sets of textbooks, there is a resemblance to the trait explained above as most of the topics are on kings, namely Shaka Zulu, King Khufu, the church, Dr. David Livingstone, nobles, Queen Elizabeth and the merchants mentioned within the topics of the Portuguese and Arab traders in Malawi. All textbooks (both old and new) carried stories within these realms, with the exception of some parts within the (new) social and environmental sciences books, which is equally due to the fact that the history school subject had been combined with geography and civic education.

The analyses also confirmed what Prakash (1994) calls "after colonialism", in which the written colonial history in a sense perpetuates notions of colonialism. The realignment of events during colonialism appears to carry the voice of the colonizer rather than the colonized. As far as colonialism is concerned, what we predominantly read throughout the books is the recollection of the point when the Westerner met the African, and where the Western perspective is used to describe historical events. Instead, the

narration carries a voice that depicts the Westerners' experience of Africa by leaving out the voice of the indigenous inhabitants of Africa. Reading through the topics concerning colonialism, it is almost impossible to make a judgement on whether colonialism was advantageous to the natives or not. However, it was interesting to note that despite the different changes made to the two syllabi, there has been no attempt to change the content of these stories in regard to how the story on colonialism was told.

Granted that there were other parts in the books used within the new syllabus that other political activists had added that were not there before; still, no attempt had been made to add the natives' voice within the topics. None of the topics have any remembrance of what life was like in Malawi or other countries (of course with the exception of any general recollection of early civilization) before colonialism, which gives the impression that the history before colonialism is indeed primitive and insignificant (Seidman, 2008). It is obvious that the stories told were entirely to serve the sole purpose of Westerners' remembrance of their collective experience in Africa.

A majority of the documented stories within the history topics have predominantly covered stories on Western travellers to Africa rather than Africans themselves. There is more written on the explorers and pioneers than what has actually been written on Africans, which again confirms the notion that all that is native is backward and deserves to be ridiculed and demeaned. The story of David Livingstone, Sir Harry Johnstone and Sir Alfred Sharpe are too repetitive within both sets of the syllabi for one to forget. This gives the impression that there was nothing worth documenting before the West's influence as Afigbo (1981) mockingly puts it, and that the central element of being civilized then was the existence of writing, which at the time natives did not possess, so therefore he had no history prior to being taught by the Europeans. This indicated the need for the history syllabus to source out more historical sources covering indigenous stories unrelated to the European influence in Africa.

The masculine memorial culture

The analysis also proved that the existing constellation of history has a masculine memorial culture (Feierman, 1994), which has been proven by the fact that there has been written on females and history. Moreover, the majority of the topics have fallen within the part of history that predominantly carries men's activities over females'. Many of the topics covered accounts relating to fought battles, politics and military accounts, and these categories only covered a few stories women. One of the critiques to the literature on colonialism as applied to the curriculum is with how Feierman (1994) pointed out that African structures inclusive of the discipline of history have adopted a blueprint from the colonialist view of how things ought to be. The discipline carried and mimicked the colonial values and traditions within its historical knowledge. The categories of historical analysis are drawn from Europe, and therefore the historian looks in Africa for a familiar history with recorded events of kings, the nobility and the church.

Within the analysis of the old and new textbooks, it has been proven that stories on leadership and battles take precedence over stories about ordinary citizens and ordinary events. What this says is that for one to be phenomenal and to yield some importance, one needs to have been part of these categories, while at the same time the impression given is that ordinary people have not been instrumental in contributing to a country's history and culture. In that, as a society we belittle others' contributions such as that of ordinary labourers, unknown civil rights activists, as well as the role of mothers and women in taking care of children and their families, which more often than not stands unappreciated, to imagine then the number of unsung heroes around the world (Ginsberg, Shapiro, & Brown, 2004). The process of engendering needs to go beyond that which classifies famous leaders and politicians as history or social studies, to that which prioritizes and is inclusive of "ordinary roles", such as that of naming great mothers, so that we are unable to ignore key actors/actresses within these roles since they are the majority of roles that depict women. In this way, we are not only guaranteed to have the presence of both men and women, but we also affect society as a whole in that the message is now that motherhood is as important as politics.

By only stressing the roles played by famous leaders, investors, politicians, movie stars and soldiers, we fail to provide individuals within society with a true reflection of their role in society, and thus also fail to provide role models for girls, as only a few women are found within these categories. Indeed, there are some women who hold and have held leadership positions, though unfortunately it is not a majority of them. It also has been proven by comparing the old textbooks to the new textbooks that the problem is not necessarily the availability of female leaders (who were in some of the old textbooks), but rather that the new textbooks for social and environmental sciences chooses to ignore them. All the activities that women feature in the new textbooks are limited to making up stories, and none of them are biographical.

Western viewpoint vs. African viewpoint and its implications on gendered content

The findings also showed that the social studies school curriculum not only underestimates women's roles in society when compared to men's, it also prioritizes as said earlier a Western viewpoint compared to the African viewpoint, so the story told inadvertently takes a white supremacist viewpoint (Loewen, 1995: 151). Therefore, as suggested by Homi Bhabha (1994), Africa unknowingly still mimics a Western tune in that our priorities are set by Western standards, and the choice of which stories are important is set by them. This also implicates our understanding of a lot of things inclusive of gender in society, in that now the stage is set on which problems we choose as a society to tackle. Even with the origins of problematizing the topic of gender equality itself, Ntata and Biruk (2009:3) in their article describe some Malawians attitudes toward gender, describing it as "an import from the West". A majority of Malawians' understanding of the concept of gender and the work of gender equality is that gender is a Western phenomenon that encourages women in society to be rebellious towards their husbands and men in general. One example can be seen with the ongoing debates on whether human trafficking exists in Malawi; some people have argued that trafficking in Malawi does not exist and was often mistaken for the child labour taking place within tea and tobacco plantations. People have also argued that Malawi has fallen victim to international priorities that have eradicated human trafficking

on its agenda, in addition to Malawi acquiring funding; thus it has resorted to creating projects in line with what the West identifies as problem areas (Migration News, 2006). The point here is not to pass judgment on whether the trafficking of children exists in Malawi, but rather to showcase how there is a constant need for Malawians to emulate the Western standpoint or viewpoint. The school curriculum is affected by this same process as seen with the contents within the book; the topics within gender and human rights are set in the books without any relation to a Malawian setting.

These topics carried within the Malawi school curriculum showed that the curriculum is also affected by various donors (international organizations, mostly from the West) that pledge funds to help improve the school curricula. The implications to the donor pledges is that Malawi as a country is forced to follow donor recommendations to the curriculum in spite of them being good or bad. The process of writing curriculum projects is bound to carry influences from the donors in that the Ministry of Education is forced to prioritize what the donors deem important so as to get funding. Hence, within these priorities and the politics within education projects, it is not surprising how society's interpretation of the concept of gender carries the same influences.

It is therefore of importance to stress here that the findings within this study are in a sense specific to a Malawian context, in that the engendering process first and foremost requires the contextualization of a case so as to identify what the process of engendering means to any syllabus.

Situations of how the process of engendering has been misunderstood can be seen in certain parts of the new books, in which issues of gender were indexed as shown with the topic on gender. None of the topics that would assumably be connected to issues of gender were connected to it in anyway, e.g. with topics such as Culture, HIV and AIDs, which gave the impression that gender takes place in a vacuum.

Women have also been shown to be a homogenous group in relation to topics such as gender and human rights. In these topics it is clear that women have been given special

attention, compared to men as seen on the topic of human rights, which specifically discusses women's and girls' rights. The impression given is that women are branded the victims while men are seen as the perpetrators, which results in demonstrating that women or girls are weaker than men. The topics are also written in a non-interactive manner, in which no real examples are given, and which leads to a misjudgement of human rights issues as a whole. This stands as an example of what Spivak touches on regarding words that claim to represent all women, all workers and all of the proletariat, when "there are no 'true' examples of the 'true worker', the 'true woman', the 'true proletarian'" (Spivak, 1990: 104). The books fall short of representing the human rights issues that face Malawi, and assume that the needs for every human as far as their rights are concerned are all the same. With a lack of female living examples in the many historical stories, we learn that the problem with the biased gender content is perhaps due to the unavailability of resources. This highlighted the need for profiling different women in the different sectors of life. The versatility shown here in the profiled women would also help in showcasing the different options available to what the history discipline is.

Other notable influences on the school curriculum

The curriculum showed that there were different power plays that helped make both sets of the curriculum to be what they were. The contents of the books bore a resemblance to what Foucault (2001) spoke of regarding knowledge: that the production of knowledge was controlled by capillary modes of power (Seidman, 2008). The analysis of the two sets of textbooks proved that there was some sort of influence on what was contained in these books. One way of proving this was with the way both sets of books had similar trends regarding the stories contained in each of the topics. The main identifiable modes of power and influence on the curricula were: colonialism, gender and Kamuzu Banda.

Kamuzu Banda, the first post-colonial president of Malawi, provides an example of what Foucault speaks of regarding knowledge within the realms of power and how that knowledge can be legitimated or subjugated (Foucault, 1977). In analysing the history of

Malawi's liberation struggle, Kamuzu Banda influenced the old syllabus and only legitimized some events and names involved in the struggle. He ordered the names of those who he called rebels to be kept out of the syllabus, e.g. Rose Chibambo and Kanyama Chiume, due to the fallout he had had with them at the time (Kalinga, 1998). The aforementioned names were only added to the new syllabus after the fall of Kamuzu Banda in 1994. This is an example of how one man was able to control the content of history by leaving out notable events which otherwise are currently embraced as part of Malawian history.

Within the traceable influences from the different power capillaries, the two sets of curricula were also able to showcase the power invested within the history/social science curriculum in creating a good citizen. The curricula showed how the discipline of history/social science was among the discourses of knowledge with the power to influence and correct power systems (Gerring, 1999). These were shown in both sets of textbooks that carried stories of John Chilembwe the Malawian martyr, stories of bravery/courage, and even stories that warned us against polluting the universe. The stories bore a message that set to influence and encourage the students' good attitudes, the capability of being tolerant and following ways that led to their being politically correct. This situation relates to how Foucault saw power as circulated between micro practices, rather than being located in the state or in macro situations, and by the fact that a simple topic within a school syllabus had such power, and therefore was expected to have so much influence on the learners (Moje, 2000).

Such examples relating to the contents of the books or curricula also confirm the fact that schools are local centres of power and knowledge that are crucial for the development of children's identities. The children can relate to the stories on courage and bravery, and by relating to them they are able to make sense of their own experiences (Perry, 2002). The sets of books, particularly the new set, bore various illustrations to allow learners to fully comprehend what a certain topic was relating.

Another observable trend concerning the power plays within the curriculum is with how the findings indicated how patriarchal discourse was privileged, and was a common trend throughout the history/social and environmental sciences subjects (Banks & Banks, 2010). In both circumstances, where the curriculum was influenced by either colonialism or gender, the esteemed, legitimate and reliable knowledge within these realms carried some sense of a chauvinistic aura that depicted men as being superior to women. As Siddiqui (2006) suggests, the knowledge almost unknowingly disciplined and self-policed the learners into believing that men deserved all that was good and were meant to be at the top, whereas women were to always be subservient. Examples relating to the influence of gender can be seen from both sets of textbooks, in which men are the only ones who are always shown sitting on stools, while the women and children sit on the floor. Even with the new set of books where a clear effort was made to engender them, we have two instances where men are depicted as sitting down, while the women stand up or sit down alongside their children.

Discussion

Indeed, the majority of the topics signified particular influences from colonialism in terms of what was deemed important. The narration consists of fact-based yearlong chronological events, a style that Evans (2004) has referred to as more than 100 years old. A different approach to writing history might have improved the inclusion of women, e.g. stories on past wedding ceremonies, child naming customs or religious traditions, activities that the people of the ancient times took part in.

Within discussing colonialism and imperialism, both sets of textbooks depicted “standards that did not address the notion that there were some that benefited more than others from colonialism or imperialism” (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991:1). Findings from both textbooks were detached from the real issues, they strayed from the fundamental issues that post-colonial theories attempted to grasp (Giroux, 1994; Hall, 1996; McCarthy, 1998; McLaren, 1997; Bhabha, 1994).

The West still has influence on Africa's depiction of events to a point that has translated to the way that the Malawian curriculum tells its account of historical events. The two sets of books lack the explanation of how colonialism created inequalities for others, whereas there were others who prospered from it. According to Apple and Christian-Smith (1991:3-4), "textbooks signify through their content and from particular constructions of reality, particularly ways of selecting and organizing that vast universe of possible knowledge. They embody what Raymond Williams (1977) called the selective tradition of someone's selection, someone's vision of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the process of enfranchising one group's cultural capital disenfranchises another's". Therefore, the findings from both the new and the old textbook indicate that the Malawian history/social and environmental studies syllabus is heavily influenced by a Western viewpoint, to an extent that it legitimizes more Western culture than its own indigenous culture.

Are we then right in blaming it all on colonialism?

The findings showcased that different agents have influenced how the curriculum has been written, more so in regard to content on gender equality. This has alerted us to the fact that the struggle of achieving gender equity, and writing women into history, goes beyond the blame game and the uncertainty of who brought what, as this on its own does not yield any solutions. The process needs African women's willingness and strength to contribute to works that indeed talk to the difference and necessity of comparing gender along the lines of race, age, sex, location and many more social structures, their willingness to embrace these projects and use them for the betterment of their lives, the women's ability to take up multiple situations and their public discussions (Mikell, 1997).

Works on colonialism provide the basis, highlighting examples of how women have been differentially positioned in historical texts, and how they have fought injustices, as the process also illuminates stories on a gendered memory so as to encourage those who at some point wish to write them into history. In any case, as Mbilinyi (1992) puts it, the contributions of African feminism are only possible because the writers have taken

part in intellectual debates in neo-colonized locations. It is a bit problematic for any argument that alludes to gender inequality primarily being the result of colonialism, when years long after the colonialist have left we still have not been able to achieve gender parity. It rather is the Western world, the so-called colonialist at this moment, that funds and stands both behind and at the forefront of the different funded projects on empowering third-world women.

Additionally, the assertion of some post-colonialist theorists is one that takes for granted the influence that a writer's ideology has on the curriculum that he writes. The Malawian historian/writer is one who is born and raised within a Malawian society, a society which is a product of colonialism, a society that inhibits stereotypes of the colonialist being better and civilized compared to the colonized. It is therefore not surprising to see how the Malawian curriculum is influenced by external systems and beliefs that the Malawian historian/writer carries from being a product of this society. This derives from "understanding the relationship between one's understanding of the world and one's structural location in it" (Sewpaul, 2013:122). There is need for the Malawian historian writer to first acknowledge the "inscriptions built into us" (p. 123), and how this has led to the reproduction of a curriculum that still inadvertently takes a white supremacist viewpoint (Loewen, 1995: 151). Consequently, it is no longer the West that perpetuates what is defined as a Western African history

Nonetheless, even though colonialism might not be fully to blame for the existence of gender bias within the curriculum, the success of engendering the curriculum still needs to include a re-categorization of what is newsworthy, and a categorisation that does not merely represent men and women in cultural and traditional binaries. There should be a reenactment of the discipline and reinterpretation of identities within history, and this reinterpretation should still start with colonial history because this is where it all began, "*it was there that the disciplines both reached for mastery and were undone*" (Prakash, 1994:11-14). Especially now when we consider that there has been another way of depicting African history, there exists an alternative to colonial history (Mokhtar, 1980; Falola, 2001). It needs to consider why women have been excluded to begin with. The

process also needs to consider the complex relationships among women and men, as well as their historical, social and cultural experiences.

Conclusion

All in all, the findings pointed to the fact that contemporary dominant discourses, colonialism and contemporary socio-political and cultural factors all influence history and the constructions and practices of gender in a Malawian context. The process of engendering history then stands to benefit the discipline of history as a whole, in that an engendering of the school subject will first have to start with defining what history is and what stories are history, a process which will then encourage the inclusion of devalued categories such as women, black women and third-world women. This would lead to a more enlarged view of history, and because the roles divided between men and women will complement each other, as none of the roles will be considered more important than the other. Despite the syllabus having been influenced by a number of different agents such as good citizenry, norms, Kamuzu Banda and colonialism, colonialism stood out as the major influence on the syllabus. The topics signified a particular influence from colonialism in terms of what stories were deemed important to tell. Hence, despite colonialism not being wholly to blame for what lacks in the Malawian primary school social and environmental sciences syllabus, the engendering process will benefit from a different approach than that which has been forwarded by colonialism. It will benefit from an approach that includes a different kind of telling history that includes stories on past wedding ceremonies, child naming customs or religious traditions, which are all activities that the people of the ancient times took part in.

In addition to this, the study put forward the necessity of collecting new gendered historical material that displays women's roles as much as men's within history, which was non-existent in both the old and the new syllabus. What this material will provide is a different history that might give a chance to women's stories and showcase a different way of telling history: a history that tells of colonialism, a history that captures how the Malawian woman experienced it, and a history that forwards the idea that both

Malawian men and women were active and present in experiencing colonialism and history itself.

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