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Author(s): Mwangi Chege
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The Politics of Education in Kenyan Universities: A Call for a Paradigm Shift

Mwangi Chege

Abstract: The winds of political change have been sweeping across Kenya for the last two decades. However, as many sections of society—the media, the church, civil society, and even ordinary people—take advantage of the unprecedented democratic space in which to engage the political establishment, the country's intelligentsia has remained aloof. The aim of this article is to interrogate discourse patterns in the Kenyan university system. Adopting a historical lens, it argues that the curtailment of intellectual freedom in the postcolonial Kenyan university is a reproduction of the colonial suppression of discourses whose objective was to ensure the political survival of the ruling class. It also argues for the adoption of critical pedagogies that challenge the status quo.

Introduction

In Kenya's universities, intellectual freedom has always been under siege. The relationship between the state and higher education has been characterized by suppression, arrests, detention without trial, and even the deaths of antiestablishment academics and students. Evident in the persistent suppression of dissenting voices is the legacy of colonialism, especially in the use of government resources and the police system, in league with university administrations, to smother critical dialogue. Intriguingly, the kind of critical discourse and political activism that withstood these pressures in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s seems to have faded in the last two decades. The question then is: Why has the intelligentsia abandoned critical discourse following the return of political pluralism in Kenya, particularly after the defeat of KANU in 2002?

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Mwangi Chege teaches writing at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He is the author of *"Old Wine" and "New Wineskins:" De-colonizing Kenya's University System* (VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2008). E-mail: cmwangi@bgnet.bgsu.edu

Besides theorizing why suppression of discourse has persisted in the Kenyan university system, this article seeks to explore how the university can reclaim its status as an agent of social change. I argue that all regimes, whether colonial or postcolonial, suppressed discourse to perpetuate their hegemony, and that the so-called banking education, which has been the predominant pedagogy, has facilitated this agenda by fostering a culture of silence. Thus, a pedagogical paradigm shift is imperative if higher education is to play its role as an agent of social transformation in the country; educators have to adopt critical pedagogies that allow critical discourses to thrive. The university must abandon its ivory tower attitude and work in concert with other sectors of society in offering a counterhegemonic discourse that challenges the status quo. This argument is premised on the proposition that it is impossible to divorce politics from education: that education is by all means a hegemonic enterprise.

Education as a Hegemonic Enterprise

That education is a hegemonic enterprise is a basic assumption of many scholars and social critics. According to Mouffe (1979), hegemony is "the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consensus of those over whom it rules" (10). In the pursuit of perpetuating its dominant position, the ruling class capitalizes on its position to design an educational system that advances its agenda. Thus, in reality, it is impossible to divorce education from politics. The school system represents "a major structural setting wherein those classes whose interests are already dominant have access to greater power by which to maintain their dominance at the expense of subordinate class interests" (Lankshear & Lawler 1989:25). In other words, educational systems embody the "struggle [for] the control of the whole process of social reproduction" (Mouffe 1979:5).

An understanding of the role of politics in Kenya's higher education is impossible without an investigation of the historical circumstances that have influenced and shaped the sociopolitical fabric of Kenyan society. Any history-making process cannot be divorced from one's material conditions; the present and the future are informed by what Freire calls the "concrete conditions" inherited from the past (Freire & Macedo 1987:60). Adopting this theoretical construct, one can argue that discourse patterns in the Kenyan university system can best be understood in the context of their historicity—material conditions that have their roots in the colonial system. An examination of the colonial education policy is significant, therefore, in demonstrating how and why postcolonial regimes have reproduced colonial structures.

Education and Hegemony in Colonial Kenya

Kenya was a British colony between 1895 and 1963. Historians have come up with a number of explanations to account for the European scramble and partitioning of Africa, including philanthropic ideals, strategic considerations, and/or economic motives. Of all of these, the economic factor is the most tenable; in fact, all of these theories have an underlying economic basis. For instance, the argument for the philanthropic motive—that colonization was driven by the desire to civilize the savage natives, the so-called white man's burden—masks the fact that the cross was a harbinger of the flag. The strategic factor was also economically driven. European powers scrambled for territories fearing that any monopoly in this new frontier by a rival power would lead to the imposition of high tariffs that would hinder access to raw materials and eliminate markets for the finished goods produced by the industrial revolution in Europe (Oliver & Atmore 1972:108–9). Echoing these scholars, Elkins (2005) points out that after establishing the Kenyan colony, the British colonial government launched a vigorous campaign to attract settlers with the aim of transforming Kenya into a British commercial empire. But how was the education system going to facilitate the colonial agenda?

The colonial government embarked on an education program that advanced its imperialistic goals. The first step was to legitimize colonization. To achieve this goal, the colonial system employed what Althusser (2001) refers to as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). According to Althusser, ISAs—i.e., propaganda and rhetoric—are more powerful and more effective than RSAs in terms of advancing the interests of the ruling class, since they are subtle in nature. It is when ISAs fail that RSAs—i.e., force—is used. Althusser also observes that among possible ISAs, literacy is the most effective. Literacy in colonial Kenya was a vital and strategic tool for propagating colonial ideology, or what Homi Bhabha (1994) refers to as "colonial discourse": a discourse centered on the "racial fetish" whose aim was to stereotype and dehumanize Africans on the basis of their skin color and to position the colonizer as an innately superior race. The colonial discourse presented colonization as inevitable, as a noble service. In this arrangement, literacy was meant to ensure that natives did not question their subordinate position in the caste structure of the colonial system.[1]

To succeed in producing and perpetuating this social order, the colonial system made sure Africans did not receive the kind of education that would raise their consciousness and cause them to resist colonial domination or agitate for change. Africans received exclusively vocational training. According to the Beecher Report of 1949, education for Africans was supposed to lay "particular emphasis on the acquisition of practical attitudes and skills"

(Colony and Protectorate of Kenya 1949:2). The report recommended that "agriculture should play a large part in all teacher-training, and that all teachers should be in a position to teach this subject where necessary; and to encourage in their pupils the right attitude towards the soil" (13). Even the curriculum at Alliance High School, the premier native school, was predominantly vocational. According to James Sheffield, "The first two years of study at Alliance High School consisted of a 'literary' curriculum, including English, arithmetic, and general science, [but] the emphasis after the third year was distinctly vocational, in keeping with the general European belief in the African's limited intellectual capacity" (1973:24). In other words, the colonial education system consigned natives to rural areas and menial work. The net effect of this policy was the curtailment of political consciousness among the natives, while ensuring that they remained a constant supply of cheap labor on European farms. The *Phelps-Stokes Report* (see Lewis 1962) demonstrates that the colonial government also rejected the idea of higher education for Africans. According to the report, "the present need for this stage of education [higher education] is very limited.... Only two schools south of Egypt and the Sahara ... have any claim to recognition as colleges" (103). Although the colonial government justified denying Africans an intellectually rigorous curriculum and higher education on the pretext that they were by nature cognitively incapable, the policy was politically motivated. It was meant to deny Africans the means to develop critical thinking skills that would promote political consciousness. Denying natives higher education was a scheme aimed at ensuring that they remained susceptible to colonial discourse and exploitation.

Another strategy employed by the establishment to curtail dissent was the promotion of discipline and morality as the core objective of native education. According to the *Phelps-Stokes Report*, "Government, missions and settlers were ready to agree that the development of character is a vital requisite in all educational activities" (Lewis 1962: 44). The Beecher Report made similar recommendations: "To state our objectives briefly, we desire to see a morally sound education based on Christian principles" (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya 1949:92). In fact, discipline was a crucial criterion for admission to schools. For instance, the report recommended that "there be instituted a system of interview by the European school manager and the inspector of schools, which coupled with the applicant's report from his primary school as to his character, shall be decisive in selecting pupils for entry to intermediate schools from amongst that group of applicants" (15). Evidently, "character" and "discipline" meant blind obedience to an oppressive system; they were synonyms for collaboration and sycophancy. This kind of vetting was meant to deny politically conscious individuals access to education and to ensure that the system produced a class of loyal elites who would legitimize the colonial agenda by propagating the establishment's policies among their kin.

Where ISAs failed, the colonial system, especially the public administration and the police force, employed RSAs to suppress any agitation or political organizing by Africans. For instance, Mugo Gatheru (2005) narrates how the colonial government brutally crushed agitation led by Harry Thuku, a pioneer of the political movement in Kenya who mobilized natives to oppose forced labor, racial segregation, land alienation, and the *kipande* system.[2] On March 15, 1922, Thuku and his colleagues were arrested during the night. The following day a large crowd that had gathered at the police station to demand their release was fired on by the police. By the end of the scuffle two hundred Africans were dead and Thuku was deported to Kismayu, a remote area in the colony. Elkins (2005) portrays an even grimmer picture in her account of the colonial government's response to the Mau Mau movement: how it detained "nearly the entire Kikuyu population of 1.5 million people[,]... physically and psychologically atomizing its men, women, and children" (5).

Education and Hegemony in Postcolonial Kenya

The Kenyatta Regime

In *Facing Mount Kenya,* a book written during the struggle for independence, Jomo Kenyatta (1982) decried the fact that the colonial education was nowhere near achieving what the Kenya White Paper of July 1923 had advocated—"training [and educating] Africans towards a higher intellectual, moral, and economic level...." He argued that expecting Africans to achieve this "higher level" while "they are denied the most elementary human rights of self-expression, freedom of speech, the right to form social organisations to improve their condition, and above all, the right to move freely in their country" was unfathomable; indeed, "whenever someone dares to express his opinions on any point, other than what is dictated to him, he is shouted down at and blacklisted as an 'agitator'" (197). Kenyatta claimed that the African could attain the "higher level" only with the freedom "to express himself, to organise, economically, politically, and socially, and to take part in the government of his own country" (198).

These passages from Kenyatta's book suggest the contradictions inherent in his legacy. On the one hand, Kenyatta portrayed himself as the liberator, the champion of freedom and liberty. On the other hand, when he assumed the reins of power as Kenya's first president, he would present another face—that of a dictator who curtailed and suppressed the same freedoms he had agitated for. Elkins (2005) narrates a story that helps illuminate this irony. In 1965 Sir Evelyn Baring, the former colonial governor who had detained Kenyatta, paid him a visit. "Baring was uncharacteristically nervous as he visited his old office, especially because Kenyatta was standing just opposite him [,]... the man whose trial [he] had rigged and who,

because of [his] signature, [had] spent years of his life banished to a desert Wasteland." In that tense atmosphere, Baring said to Kenyatta, " 'By the way, I was sitting at that desk when I signed your detention order twenty years ago,' and Kenyatta replied: 'I know. . . . If I had been in your shoes at the time I would have done exactly the same.' " Kenyatta even admitted to having "signed a number of detention orders sitting right there too" (2005: 354–55).

In the area of higher education, Kenyatta did exercise a level of relative tolerance (see Throup & Hornsby 1998:26; Munene 2004). But the administration was also keen on eliminating opposition, a strategy that led to the forced dissolution of KADU, the official opposition party at the time of independence; the proscription of Oginga Odinga's KPU; and the detention or alienation of perceived procommunist leaders such as Odinga, Pio Gama, and Bildad Kaggia. Furthermore, when the administration came under intense pressure following the assassination in 1969 of Tom Mboya, a flamboyant politician and nemesis of Kenya's politics at the time, and the assassination of Josiah Mwangi Kariuki (JM), the popular anti-establishment politician known for his castigation of the Kenyatta regime for creating a nation of "ten millionaires and ten million beggars" (Githinji & Cullenberg 2003:8), the government responded by deploying the police to arrest protestors and critics of the system (Amutabi 2003:129).

It is against this backdrop—the suppression of discourse in the wider society—that the University of Nairobi, the only university in the country at the time, became the epicenter of political activity. The university came to be known for vibrant intellectual dialogue and political activism, and radical scholars from its faculty, in concert with radical politicians, challenged the establishment's maneuvers to convert the country into a one-party state by assassinating political "enemies" (see Klopp & Orina 2002; Amutabi 2002). Radical and Marxist-leaning lecturers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o exposed the corruption of the ruling elite and challenged their neocolonial tendencies, especially their land grabbing, exploitation of workers, and exaltation of foreign cultures at the expense of the native cultural heritage.

In the same way that the administration countered opposition politics with force, the establishment was determined to censor political activism in higher education, a policy aimed at producing what Thiong'o (1981) refers to as "petty-bourgeois intellectuals" (xxi). Many anti-establishment scholars (such as Thiong'o, Willy Mutunga, Micere Mugo, Edward Oyugi, and Ali Amin Mazrui) were detained without trial. Student movements and protests were crushed and their leaders (such as Chelagat Mutai and Ochieng K'Onyango) expelled or detained. Reflecting on his detention without trial, Thiong'o explains:

> The real reason for my political imprisonment was, of course, my having been involved with ordinary working people in a community theatre that reflected their history of anti-colonial struggles and those against contemporary social conditions in the post-colonial era. The real crime was not

> simply the fact that our village theatre raised issues, but more importantly, in a language the people could understand. (1997: 80)

Thiong'o's project was conspicuous and politically vulnerable in many ways. First, the cast comprised mainly peasants (Thiong'o 1981). Second, the play was in vernacular (Kikuyu), giving it the potential of becoming a mass movement of the poor. Third, the play addressed injustices facing the poor—mainly land grabbing, meager wages, and poor working conditions. Indeed, Thiong'o was assuming the role of what Gramsci (1971) refers to as an "organic" intellectual of the oppressed, "the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental social class" (3). Furthermore, in a Foucaultian sense, Thiong'o was breaking a cardinal rule of established discourse insofar as "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers" (Foucault 1972:216). The project sought to give peasants a voice, to raise their political consciousness, and thereby to empower them to resist oppression and injustice.

Another illustration of how Kenyatta's administration silenced discourse in higher education is the way it handled the Student Union of Nairobi University (SUNU). According to a 1972 article in *The Kenya Teacher*, the government, exhorting students to "grow up," had banned the organization on the grounds that it "represented a danger to the government." The so-called threat was a campuswide demonstration organized by the Union to demand "curriculum and examination reforms, participation in all decisions affecting student welfare, and improved living conditions on campus." The government mobilized the police to "restore order," and following the incident the editors of the *University Platform*, the student publication, were expelled on the grounds that the articles they had published were "highly critical of both the Government and university administration" (12).

These machinations on the part of the Kenyatta administration, however, did not deter intellectuals and students from expressing their views. Lecturers, particularly literary scholars such as Thiong'o, Mugo, Okot P'Bitek, and Taban Liyong, used their teaching, their publications, and their connections within the political world and civil society to challenge the ruling elite, and their willingness to risk their lives in pursuit of a more just and equitable society won them admiration and adoration from their students. The same can be said of student leaders who articulated their grievances and demands for inclusion in the decision-making process through the *University Platform* and at student meetings.

The Moi Regime

The Moi administration was characterized by "detentions and political trials, torture, arbitrary arrests and police brutality reminiscent of the colonial era"

(Adar & Munyae 2001) and became even more notorious at cracking down on dissidents than the Kenyatta administration had been. During the Moi regime loud expressions of patriotism became indistinguishable from sycophancy and were virtually a requirement for political, professional, and even personal survival. People from all walks of life—politicians, academicians, civil servants, the clergy, and ordinary people—competed in singing the praises of and pledging loyalty to the president.

The net effect of the Big Brother syndrome in academia was threefold. Those academics who were not ready to compromise their intellectual freedom fled the country, while others languished in detention without trial on trumped up charges of sedition, possessing and/or teaching subversive material, being a threat to national peace and stability, or creating disturbance and disorder in the country. This cadre included scholars and writers such as Thiong'o, Mutunga, Katama Mkangi, Edward Oyugi, Mukaru Nganga, and Maina wa Kinyatti. Likewise, student leaders such as Tito Adungosi, Mwandawiro Mghanga, Philip Tirop arap Kitur, and Gacheche Wa Miano were detained for their presumed participation in the clandestine Mwakenya movement (Wambui 1982). Another category of intellectuals comprised those who opted to remain safe by refraining from any engagement with political activism. A third category consisted of those who became the mouthpiece of the administration—lecturers who offered themselves for hire to propagate the ideology of the establishment. This category included Henry Mwanzi, Aseka, William Ochieng, and George Eshiwani. Many of these people worked in concert with the Youth for Kanu organization (YK), a group of youthful party diehards charged with ensuring KANU's reelection in the 1992 presidential election (the first multiparty election), thus proving, as Mwiria (2005) expresses it, that "sycophants do not age!" He adds: "These academics openly defended a system that a majority of Kenyans were uncomfortable with.... In the Kanu days, it was difficult to differentiate between the highly-educated and their semi-literate counterparts; all plundered the economy and sang songs of praise very shamelessly and determinedly!"

The Moi administration sought to extend its grip to every aspect of the university. Klopp and Orina (2002) provide a detailed analysis of how the administration worked in concert with university administrations to frustrate intellectuals and student leaders critical of the regime. Student expulsions based on flimsy suspicions became the order of the day. The same fear crept into classrooms, since it was widely known that the government deployed undercover Special Branch agents and informers to monitor what lecturers said and taught (Amutabi 2003). Most lecturers, aware that they were being watched, refrained from criticizing an administration plagued by systemic inefficiency and mediocrity emanating from endemic tribalism, nepotism, and corruption. Political correctness became imperative for survival. Teachers relied exclusively on the lecture method, since promoting critical thinking skills and political consciousness was inconceivable. Con-

sequently, the suppression of discourse, the same strategy that the Kenyatta administration and the colonial system had institutionalized, helped perpetuate the Moi dictatorship for twenty-four years.

Thus far, it is evident that discourse patterns in Kenyan universities reproduced those of the wider society and that in higher education they remained unchanged in the transition from the colonial and postcolonial eras. But the question remains: Why did Kenyatta renege on the ideals he had championed during the struggle for independence? Why did he curtail freedom of expression, which he had earlier argued is a crucial ingredient in the intellectual development of an individual? And why did Moi perpetuate suppression of discourse decades after independence? The answer is that postcolonial regimes reproduced the colonial state for political survival; after all, they had a common agenda—economic exploitation. Under the Kenyatta and Moi administrations, democratizing the state would have impeded the plunder of public resources. Exploitation of state power, by means of both its ideological and repressive apparatuses, was a necessary path to amassing wealth. Thus the postcolonial regimes reproduced the hegemonies of the colonial state (see Mutua 2006; Ajulu 2000). Moi (1986) admits that university education was meant to be an apparatus for producing what he calls "intellectual home-guards" (131) or custodians of the status quo.

The Kibaki Regime

There is no doubt that the Kibaki regime in Kenya has brought about an opening of democratic space. Freedom of expression is unprecedented. However, the greatest challenge to the administration came after the falling out between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga, his coalition partner. Their two parties, Kibaki's National Alliance of Kenya, a conglomerate of other small parties, and Odinga's LDP had come together to form NARC, which propelled Kibaki to the presidency. After more than two years of squabbling, LDP quit the government over what the party claimed was failure by Kibaki to follow through on the memorandum of understanding that required equal sharing of power. Many wondered what would happen to the LDP luminaries, given the history of political detentions and assassinations in the country. But none of them, including Odinga, has been arrested or harassed by the state machinery. The university system has also experienced relative reform. The president relinquished the position of chancellor of public universities and instead appointed an individual chancellor for each one. Also, university councils now have the autonomy to hire vice-chancellors and other top administrative officials through a competitive process. As a result of these changes, it is safe to say that higher education is experiencing a level of autonomy that did not exist before.

Despite the laudable reforms, the Kibaki administration has evinced its own share of shortcomings, including the corruption epitomized by the

Anglo-leasing scandal, in which cabinet ministers close to Kibaki allegedly committed the country to dubious contracts worth billions of shillings meant to siphon public coffers. The police storming of *The Standard* media house and confiscation of its equipment under the guise of protecting national peace and security is another demonstration that the colonial legacy lingers on. The move caused a national and international uproar, since it was seen as an outright government attack on freedom of expression, sparking spontaneous demonstrations in major cities across the country. Even more revealing were the developments following the disputed results of the 2007 elections. After Kibaki and his new coalition party, the Party of National Unity (PNU), was declared the winner in the closely contested presidential election, Odinga and his new party, the Orange Democratic Party (ODM), refused to accept the results, claiming that the state had colluded with the Electoral Commission to manipulate the tallying of votes. During the next two months members of the Kikuyu, Kibaki's tribe, were the targets of ethnic cleansing, and other communities supporting the PNU exploded in many parts of the country, especially the Rift Valley and Nyanza provinces. Perhaps the only edifying event was the publication of the "Waki Report" (Republic of Kenya 2008), which detailed the excessive force meted out by the police against those who took to the streets to protest the officially announced election results. By the time calm was restored, more than thirteen hundred people had died through ethnic cleansing measures or police shootings. The situation was so dire that Kofi Annan was dispatched by the United Nations to mediate between the two principals, and although they agreed on a peace accord that called for an equal sharing of power, the unending wrangling between the two sides has left many wondering whether the coalition will survive.

More recently, the government has come under heavy criticism from local human rights advocates and the international community on the issue of extrajudicial killings of militants. Philip Alston (2009), the U.N. special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, has reported receiving "overwhelming testimony of the existence of systematic, widespread, and carefully planned extrajudicial executions undertaken on a regular basis by the Kenyan police." These killings target local militia groups that operate like gangs—especially the Mungiki in Nairobi and the Central Province and the Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF) in the Mount Elgon region in western Kenya. Although it can be argued that these extrajudicial killings do not constitute political assassinations per se—that they are rather a desperate attempt by an inefficient, ill-trained, and underequipped police force, in concert with an undermanned judicial system, to root out militia groups that truly are a threat to national security—the fact remains that the police and the judiciary are both notoriously corrupt, and the regime falls short of the democratic ideals expected of a modern state.

This is a time in the history of Kenya when one would expect vigorous debate and political activism geared toward preserving the democratic gains

the country has achieved so far. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The civil society and the church, two institutions that were instrumental in challenging the Moi dictatorship, became pro-establishment when Kibaki became president. In fact, Kivutha Kibwana, Kiraitu Muriungi, and Martha Karua, hitherto civil society champions of democracy, have become members of the Kibaki cabinet, and Gibson Kamau Kuria, the prominent constitutional lawyer and perennial opponent of the Moi dictatorship, has become an apologist for the regime. On the other side of the political divide, Raila Odinga, James Orengo, and Anyang Nyong'o are preoccupied with grumbling and scheming about how to wrestle power from the PNU wing of the coalition. Surprisingly, these are all the same people who had spearheaded what is often referred to as the Second Liberation—the fight for democracy under Moi's tyranny. The coordinated and ideologically driven discourse that characterized their political activism has been reduced to turf warfare that has more to do with struggling for raw power than with the creation of a democratic and equitable society in which justice and human rights are guaranteed.

The situation in universities is even more problematic. Since the disputed presidential elections of 2008, the media, religious organizations, civil society groups, and ordinary Kenyans have begun to challenge the excesses of politicians, but the intelligentsia is conspicuously silent. Unlike the period of the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, when radical academicians played the role of Gramsci's "organic" intellectuals for the oppressed, the intelligentsia today is usually mentioned in news headlines only when its representatives are demanding better pay or threatening industrial action. University students have been involved in protests, but most of these have turned into ugly incidents that undermined the principles of civil disobedience. For instance, following the assassination of Oscar Kingara and John Paul Oulu, the chief executive and advocacy director, respectively, of the Oscar Foundation, a nonprofit organization that the government claimed had links with the Mungiki, there were demonstrations in the streets by University of Nairobi students who were convinced that the police played a role in the assassinations. Prime Minister Odinga ordered the police commissioner not to interfere with the demonstrations, but to the dismay of many, including progressive forces, the protests were accompanied by looting, destruction of property, and the stoning and harassing of motorists. And in March 2009 a student protest in Kenyatta University was in the headlines not because of the issues students were articulating, but for what the *Daily Nation* termed the "orgy of violence" that took place: indiscriminate destruction of property (such as the burning of buildings and computers) worth hundreds of millions in shillings. Justifying the riots, the students blamed the university administration for its highhanded decision not to extend the deadline for registering for examinations and for meddling in the student government by replacing elected officials with those preferred by the administration.

Although student activists claim that the undemocratic nature of the Kenyan university system and the suppression of discourse over the years

have left them with no other option but public demonstrations, the trend of current protests is troubling. Civil disobedience is a universally accepted medium of expression, but indiscriminate destruction of property and harassment of innocent motorists are inexcusable. It is high time that members of the Kenyan intelligentsia, including students, engage in discourse that interrogates the direction the country is taking. It is time for educators to reexamine their role and that of the university, which is not just the production of manpower, but also the empowerment of students to be critical thinkers. It is time for the university to reclaim its position as an agent of social change, which can happen only through what Freire (1993) calls "dialogic education" as opposed to "banking pedagogy"—the kind of teaching that views students primarily as "containers" or "receptacles" to be "filled" by the all-knowing teacher (1993:53). Indeed, a pedagogical paradigm shift is imperative if Kenya'a higher education is to play the role of empowering students as agents of social transformation.

Decolonizing Education in Kenya's University System

What Friere calls "banking" education is the predominant mode of Kenyan institutions, and this is a pedagogy incapable of producing social change. In fact, it contributes to the perpetuation of injustice, since it fails to produce citizens who are equipped intellectually to challenge the status quo. Given that many educators are themselves captives of the status quo, the transformation has to begin with the teachers, who must understand the hegemonic potential of education and the fact that traditionally it has been a tool for the ruling class to entrench its interests. Lecturers must appreciate the critical role they need to play—that of molding students into active citizens equipped to challenge the opportunism of politicians, the active polarizing of the country along tribal lines, chronic corruption, nepotism, the abuse of human rights, and poverty, all of which are aggravated by inequalities in access to quality education. Educators must understand the folly of divorcing education from lived experience: a flawed notion that education can be neutral. Fear of political retribution and the demoralization of many lecturers because of their poor remuneration and working conditions should not be an excuse for indifference to the cause of shaping the country's destiny.

Definitely, the pedagogies that Kenyan educators have employed over the years are incapable of producing this transformation. To date, the culture of silence remains deeply entrenched in higher education and "banking" education remains the predominant pedagogy. That is why empowering students with critical thinking skills must begin with pedagogical innovation—pedagogies that would allow vibrant and critical discourse to thrive in universities, including classrooms; that would allow educators and students to engage knowledge, not in the abstract, but in the context of the current sociopolitical milieu; that would empower students to engage

in counterhegemonic discourse; and that would end once and for all the abuses of the colonial state as they were reproduced in the Kenyatta and Moi dictatorships. Any university worth its name should strive to equip students not just with functional skills, but also with the conceptual tools necessary for challenging inequality and injustice. It must be the kind of education centered on what Freire refers to as *conscientizacao*, the capacity to "perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of society" (1993:17). It must be the kind of pedagogy grounded in the pursuit of democratic ideals and committed to empowering students to question the rhetoric of the ruling class and educational policies that have always served to mask those interests. Educators have to realize and embrace the double-edged nature of education: that even though it can be the single most important "ideological state apparatus," it is equally the most powerful agent of social change. As Spring (2005) puts it, "In one dimension, the distribution of knowledge (or schooling) is used to control others. In the second dimension, knowledge gives the individual the ability to gain freedom from the control of others" (56).

An empowering education, furthermore, must be historically situated. It must be premised on the understanding that suppression of discourse, whether in the wider society or the university, has been a scheme invented by the ruling class to perpetuate its hegemony, and that "'knowledge' is socially constructed, meaning that it is a creation of particular dominant groups in a particular society at a particular time and serves to help maintain those groups in power" (Porter 1991: 9). Teachers must create a democratic classroom atmosphere that allows educators and students to participate in critical discourse. Educators must realize that intellectual freedom is not the preserve of lecturers, and that a pedagogy that undermines students' voices is as problematic as government-instigated suppression of discourse. Educators must also be wary of the notion that educational institutions should be neutral; that the university should focus only on "pure" academics and leave political activism to politicians. Intellectuals must not abdicate their roles as citizens with the moral responsibility for acting as midwives to social change; they must embrace the role of organic intellectuals in the democratization process of the country. Any attempt to "depoliticize" education is in fact a ploy to diminish its counterhegemonic potential. Knowledge is always ideologically situated. As Giroux says, when "school knowledge" is not open to critical examination, it is merely "a particular representation of dominant culture, a privileged discourse that is constructed through a selective process of emphases and exclusions" (1988: xxx).

Several components are necessary for the realization of a democratic and interactive classroom atmosphere in which critical discourse thrives. "Banking" education and teacher authoritarianism are informed by a flawed epistemology that conceptualizes the teacher as the sole custodian of knowledge. What is needed is a "pedagogical paradigm shift" that

will replace "one conceptual model [with] another one" (Hairston 1982). Rather than adhering to a pedagogy that has the effect of perpetuating the status quo, educators should focus on empowering students to "work out consciously and critically [their] own conception of the world" (Gramsci 1971:323). They must strive to empower students to "read" and "name their world" (Freire 1993); to be reflective and active participants in the dialogue on how to create a just society. The paradigm shift advocated here will not be realized easily. Breaking the culture of silence calls for a deliberate and resolute effort toward "desocialization," or "questioning the social behaviors and experiences in school and daily life that makes us into the people we are" (Shor 1992:114). It is an ontological and epistemological shift that calls above all for a reexamination of teacher authority. Teacher authoritarianism has its roots in the view that teachers have all the knowledge and that students are tabula rasa. Educators and students need to realize that such classroom dynamics only perpetuate the culture of silence that serves to preserve the status quo. Contrary to the claims put forth by opponents of critical or dialogic pedagogy (e.g., Schugurensky 1998), democratizing classroom dynamics is not synonymous with creating a laissez-faire classroom atmosphere. There is a difference, as Freire suggests, between teacher authority and teacher authoritarianism:

> The teacher has to teach, to experience, to *demonstrate* authority and the student has to experience freedom in relation to the teacher's authority. If the authority of the teacher goes beyond the limits authority has to have in relation to the students' freedom, then we no longer have authority. We no longer have freedom. We have authoritarianism. (Freire & Horton 1990:61–62)

In other words, the problem is not with the teacher's assuming authority, it is the way in which that authority is exercised. Critical pedagogy does not advocate for teachers' abdicating their role; rather, it cautions against educators' using their power to silence students. It requires that educators engage students as active participants in the learning process and encourage them to express themselves as full participants in the struggle for a just and equitable society.

In addition to embracing a new pedagogical paradigm, educators must be wary of those who view critical pedagogy as a threat to their own well-being and position within the status quo. Educators must also brace themselves to handle resistance from students, who have been known to resist dialogic pedagogies because they require much more work and participation than more passive learning environments do (see Inderbitzin & Storrs 2008; Thelin 2005). They must also be wary of pessimists and skeptics who insist on waiting for an opportune time for change to take place, as if social change were a natural process (Thiong'o 1981). Bourdieu (1991) epitomizes this school of thought in his claim that "dominated individuals are less

likely to bring about symbolic revolution" because they are "dispossessed of the economic and cultural conditions necessary for their awareness of the fact that they are disposed" (131). Popkewitz (1991) similarly dismisses liberatory pedagogies as mere populism. Such positions are problematic and disturbing since they focus on the frequently hegemonic nature of education without recognizing its counterhegemonic power and liberating potential.

Conclusion

Censorship of discourse in Kenya's higher education has been a survival mechanism employed by both colonial and postcolonial regimes. It is time for the universities to reclaim their role as oases of intellectual growth and empowerment. Educators and students must resist the conservative view of the university as merely a place where manpower to move the economy forward is produced. They must also repudiate the image of the university as an ivory tower—a view propagated by the ruling elite to portray education as an apolitical enterprise, thereby masking its role as an "ideological state apparatus." It is time for educators and students to embrace a new paradigm that will encourage democratic classroom dynamics, and for teachers to adopt pedagogies that interrogate the connection between academics and lived experiences. Only in this way will universities in Kenya join other sectors of society in nurturing the democracy taking root in the country and reclaim their role as training grounds for informed citizens and agents of social change.

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Notes

1. The colonial government brought Indians from India, which was also a British colony, to work on the Kenya-Uganda railway. Most of them remained in the colony even after the completion of the project in 1901.
2. The *kipande* was an identification document every male African above the age of sixteen years had to carry. The policy was meant to curtail African movement and therefore insure a regular supply of African labor for Europeans (see Gatheru 2005).