

Post-Moi era Discourse Patterns in Kenyan Universities: A Nation crying for ‘Organic’ Intellectuals

By Alex Mwangi Chege*

Abstract

The Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Moi regimes in Kenya are known for their ruthless suppression of discourse, including in higher education. Examples are galore of university lecturers and students that were harassed, arrested, detained without trial, or allegedly executed under suspicious circumstances for their political activism. But the same period, between the 1960s and mid 1990s, witnessed vibrant discourse in the country as radical scholars, politicians, and students refused to be intimidated by the state machinery. Unfortunately, serious discourse has diminished particularly in universities during the Mwai Kibaki regime, since 2003, despite the many misgivings that have characterized Kenyan politics during this period—return of mega corruption, abuse of human rights, economic inequalities, and escalating ethnic polarization. The country’s intelligentsia has retreated, leaving the task of nurturing the nascent democracy to politicians, the media, the civil society, the clergy, and ordinary citizens. Adopting an analytical approach, this article seeks to: account for the apathy that characterizes discourse among Kenyan intellectuals; demonstrate the need for the intelligentsia to reclaim the role of “organic” intellectuals; and propose means by which the intelligentsia can execute the role of re-shaping national ethos.

Key words: Organic intellectuals, Discourse, NARC, Ivory-tower, Critical Pedagogy, Ethnicity, Social change.

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Introduction

Many scholars have analyzed how postcolonial regimes in Kenya reproduced the colonial state and its apparatuses to silence opposition. Klopp and Orina,¹ and Amutabi² have adopted a historical approach to demonstrate how the Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Moi administrations resorted to repression and rhetoric of sycophancy to curtail dissent. Similarly, Chege³ has used a historical approach to demonstrate how the political class in Kenya, both colonial and postcolonial, has used education, especially higher education, to perpetuate their hegemonies. He recommends universities adopt progressive pedagogies in order to challenge the status quo and thereby reclaim their role as vanguards of change. This article builds on that work. Prompted by the 2008 violence that was experienced in many parts of the country following the disputed presidential elections of the previous year and the escalating ethnic polarization, this article seeks to account for why contemporary Kenyan scholars are not taking advantage of the current democratic space to spearhead discourse of change; how the intelligentsia can reclaim the role of “organic” intellectuals, which Gramsci defines as “the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental social class”⁴ in a muddled political environment. Amutabi⁵ has analyzed the various types of intellectuals and how they are manifested in the Kenyan body politic. But, this article focuses on organic intellectuals on the grounds that with radical intellectuals, politicians, and prominent and seasoned members of the civil society co-opted by the political class, the nation is in dire need of a new crop of intellectuals to redirect national discourse by countering the ethnic fetish that now dominates national psych, including institutions of higher education.

Background

Discourse patterns in Kenya have always been characterized by government crackdown on self expression and intellectual freedom. Although scholars have pointed out that the Kenyatta administration was relatively tolerant compared to most African leaders of his time, and Moi who succeeded him as Kenya’s second president (Munene⁶ ; Throup and Hornsby⁷), the works

¹ Jacqueline Klopp and Janai Orina, “University Crisis, Student Activism, and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya,” *African Studies Review* 45, no 1 (2002).

² Maurice Amutabi, “Crisis and Student Protest in Universities in Kenya: Examining the Role of Students in National Leadership and Democratization Process,” *African Studies Review* 45, no 2 (2002).

³ Mwangi Chege, “The Politics of Education in Kenyan Universities: A Call for a Paradigm Shift.” *African Studies Review* (forthcoming).

⁴ Gramsci Antonio, *Selections From prison Notebooks*, eds. H. Quintin and G. Nowell (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 3.

⁵ Maurice N. Amutabi, “Intellectuals and the Democratisation Process in Kenya,” *Kenya: The Struggle for Democracy*, eds. G. Murunga and S. W. Nasong’o (London: Zed Books, 2007).

⁶ Macharia Munene, “African Intellectuals in Hostile Media Environment.” Paper

of the scholars named above illustrate how the administration was out to quash any perceived political threat. Scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiongo, Maina wa Kinyatti and Abdilatif Abdalla joined political prisoners such as Oginga Odinga, Martin Shikuku, Jean Marie Seroney, and Koigi wa Mwere in detention for criticizing the administration. By the time of Kenyatta's death in 1978, there were many politicians and intellectuals languishing in detention. Suppression of discourse became even more pronounced during the Moi era. This was his strategy to consolidate power given the circumstances that surrounded his ascension to the presidency—the fact that he belonged to a little known ethnic group, his humble economic background, modest education, hostility from Kenyatta's inner circle and power brokers, and the attempted coup of 1982 (Throup and Hornsby⁸ and Widner⁹). Detention without trial and harassment by the state machinery were to become the hallmark of the administration. Scholars, such as Ngugi wa Thiongo, Alamin Mazrui, Edward Oyugi, Maina Wa Kinyatti, Mukaru Ng'ang'a, Willy Mutunga, and Katama Mkangi were detained without trial and later forced to flee into exile. Other scholars perceived as radical, such as Micere Mugo and E.S Atieno Odhiambo fled into exile as well. The same fate—expulsion and for some detention, faced student activists. The long list of victims, as documented by Klopp and Orina¹⁰ and also Sheila Wambui in a *Daily Nation* article on November 28, 1992,¹¹ includes Mwandawiro Mghanga, Tirop arap Kitur, Peter Ogego, Adungosi, and Gacheche wa Miano among others.

Thus, discourse patterns in the universities during the two regimes present an intriguing paradox—existence of vibrant discourse in the face of systemic stranglehold on intellectual freedom. Radical scholars and student activists exercised intellectual freedom fully aware of the risks such an undertaking entailed. These were scholars who assumed the role of “organic” intellectuals in the struggle against dictatorship, corruption, and mediocrity in government. The intelligentsia identified with national issues and used their position to influence policy and shape national ethos.¹² During this period, which Amutabi refers to as the “golden age” of the University of Nairobi, the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, discourse in the university was dynamic. The university was, as he puts it, “academically vibrant and tumultuous, a hub of political activism.”¹³ This view is tandem with Mazrui's; he describes post-colonial African

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⁷ David Throup and Charles Hornsby, *Multi-Party Politics in Kenya: the Kenyatta & Moi States & the Triumph of the System in the 1992 Election* (Nairobi: E.A.E.P, 1998), 15.

⁸ Throup and Hornsby, *Multi-Party Politics*.

⁹ Jennifer Widner, *The Rise of a Party-State in Kenya: From "Harambee" to "Nyayo!"* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992).

¹⁰ Klopp and Orina, “University Crisis.”

¹¹ Sheila Wambui, “The Purge of Critical Academics Continues,” *Daily Nation*, November 28, 1992, 15.

¹² Maurice Amutabi, “Crisis and Student Protest,” 164.

¹³ Maurice Amutabi, “Crisis and Student Protest,” 165.

universities as having been at one time “the vanguard of intellectualism;” defining intellectualism as “*an engagement in the realm of ideas, rational discourse and independent inquiry.*” This was a time when, as he puts it, “campuses vibrated with debates about fundamental issues of the day—nationalism, socialism, democracy and the party system, and the role of intellectuals in what was widely designated as ‘the African revolution.’”¹⁴ Furthermore, this enthusiasm was not a preserve of Dons. Not only did students fill university halls to listen to lectures from teachers and other notable figures, they were also on their part fully engaged in public discourse. Vibrancy characterized student politics. In those days, as Amutabi observes, student politics were ideologically driven: “student action was more likely to be accompanied by demands for democratic reform.”¹⁵ Klopp and Orina provide a detailed analysis of student activism in Kenya during this period.¹⁶

Indeed, a significant number of intellectuals were at the core of the “second liberation” movement, a movement that brought together the civil society, a section of the clergy, opposition politicians, and radical scholars in the clamor for democracy. Vigorous discourse among the intelligentsia thrived pitting KANU apologists, the party’s think-tank hired to propagate KANU propaganda and legitimize the one party rule, such as Eric Masinde Aseka, William Ochieng, Henry Mwanzi, and Chris Wanjala against organic intellectuals. Etende Embeywa, then a lecturer at Kenyatta University, in a *Kenya Times* article on November 27, 1992 defends these pro-establishment scholars as “some of brilliant sons of this land...who are committed to educating Kenyans on the prospects and problems of policy alternatives in this era of multi-partyism,” referring to them as “perceptive scholars” while castigating his anti-establishment colleagues as “cogs in the wheel of imperialism and political blackmail,”¹⁷ a propagandist label meant to discredit organic intellectuals and the opposition in general.

On the other hand, progressive intellectuals countered this propaganda and exposed these scholars for who they were—scholars for hire. As Odegi-Awuondo, in a *Daily Nation* article on November 24, 1992 points out, the agenda of pro-establishment scholars was “to discredit the opposition as they glorify Kanu, a job best left to charlatans and quacks.” He accuses KANU of “hiring the ugliest calibre of academic opportunists to spread cheap propaganda to hoodwink the electorate” and concludes his argument by asserting that:

The role of scholars is not to use their pens and privileged positions to spread and instill fear and despondency in the people...Instead, the role of the intelligentsia at this particular point in Kenya’s political history is to educate the masses--the toiling peasants and workers, the teeming ‘wretched of the earth’, students, the famished and harassed underprivileged who have suffered 30 years of Kanu’s

¹⁴ Ali Mazrui , “Pan-Africanism and the Intellectuals: Rise, Decline and Revival,” 59
Amutabi, “Crisis and Student Protest in Universities in Kenya: Examining the Role of Students in National Leadership and Democratization Process,” 161.

¹⁶ Klopp and Orina, “University Crisis.”

¹⁷ Etende Embeywa, “Varsity Dons Have Done us Proud,” *Kenya Times*, November, 27 1992, 7

tyranny--on how best to exercise their democratic rights so as to get them peacefully out of the present quagmire into a better future. Prof Mwanzi and Dr. Aseka's propaganda pieces poison the mind...¹⁸

Like Odegi-Awuondo, Mwiria, in a *Daily Nation* article on September 26, 2005, castigates this KANU academic political machine and masterminds of the Youth for KANU 92, the party's most influential and well financed campaign apparatus in the 1992 first multiparty elections for "openly [defending] a system that a majority of Kenyans were uncomfortable with. Others either shut up in the face of the obvious excesses of the Moi regime, or were used to entrench dictatorship and corruption." As he puts it, "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!"¹⁹

These excerpts help illustrate the dynamic nature of discourse in the university during the Kenyatta and Moi regimes, illuminating the clash between hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses represented by "petty-bourgeois intellectuals"²⁰ or "intellectual *homeguards*"²¹ on one hand and organic intellectuals on the other. The analysis demonstrates existence of vibrant discourse despite a harsh political environment. It reveals engagement of scholars and students in public discourse. It demonstrates scholars playing the role of organic intellectuals by aligning themselves with progressive forces and ordinary citizens to challenge the status quo. It shows scholars and students subverting the ivory tower status of the university.

However, discourse patterns in the country appear to have changed significantly during the last decade, after KANU was defeated in the 2002 elections by NARC.²² The NARC victory was a culmination of decades of agitation and political action aimed at ending KANU dictatorship, especially under Moi. To majority of Kenyans, as demonstrated by election results and the euphoria that characterized the campaign period and the announcement of NARC victory, the victory was a dream come true. It was supposed to represent a watershed in the country's political landscape—the death of the old order and the birth of a new order founded on democracy, good governance, justice, and equal opportunities for all. It is, therefore, not

¹⁸ C. Odegi-Awuondo, "Varsity Dons' Critique a Sham," *Daily Nation*, November, 24 1992, 7

¹⁹ Kilemi Mwiria, "A Little Education for MPs Essential," *Daily Nation*, September, 26 2005, http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/nmgcontententry.asp?category_id=25&newsid=57960 (accessed September 26, 2005).

²⁰ Ngugi Wa Thion'go, *Detained: a writer's prison diary*, (London: Heinemann, 1981), xxi.

²¹ Daniel Moi, *Kenya African Nationalism: Nyayo Philosophy and Principles*, (Nairobi: Macmillan, 1986), 131.

²² NARC was a coalition of opposition parties formed in 2002 with the aim of defeating KANU in that year's presidential elections. The strength of a united opposition led to the first defeat of the hitherto invisible party.

surprising that a Gallup poll in early 2003 ranked Kenyans the most optimistic people on earth.²³ Unfortunately, this optimism was short-lived due to constant bickering within the government, re-invention of mega corruption, perpetuation of human rights abuse, growing social inequalities, the constitutional review stalemate,²⁴ and ethnic cronyism. The nation came to the brink of collapse after the disputed results of the 2007 presidential elections and the ensuing post-election violence in early 2008. In spite of these developments, the intelligentsia appears to have taken a back seat in public discourse. Furthermore, this silence prevails within the backdrop of unprecedented opening of democratic space credited to the Kibaki regime. This leaves one to wonder why academicians have remained aloof in the post-Moi era when the country is plagued with myriad problems, some threatening the very survival of the nation. The intelligentsia, and the university, is a crucial stakeholder in nurturing the budding democracy in the country and, therefore, should reclaim its role as catalysts of change.

The Ivory Tower Mentality

As noted earlier, the irony of the last decade is that although the Kibaki administration has been perpetuating the old order (bad governance that has produced endemic corruption, abuse of human rights, and heightened ethnic polarization), the intelligentsia has adopted an indifferent attitude. This is happening despite the unprecedented opening up of democratic space not just in the wider society, but also in the university. As a matter of fact, the Kenyan university has undergone several reforms such as the President relinquishing the role of Chancellor, a position his predecessors held. Furthermore, university councils and administrations now have relative autonomy in the management of these institutions, including hiring Vice-Chancellors and other high level administrative staff. It would appear that prevailing conditions are conducive for intellectual freedom to flourish than ever before. What is clear though is that these reforms have not produced concomitant dynamic discourses among the intelligentsia. Of course the university community is not and has never been a monolithic group. Not all scholars and students during the Kenyatta and Moi regimes were activists, neither are all scholars and students in Kenya today cocooned in the culture of silence. It is true there are academicians who continue to contribute to public debate, especially through publication of politically probing articles in local dailies, such as Emanuel Kisiangani of Kenyatta University. Students have also come out to protest unpopular government policies such as demonstrations following the assassination of Oscar Kingara and John Paul Oulu, two officials of Oscar Foundation. The assassinations were interpreted as a case

²³ Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman, "Briefing: Using Opinion Polls to Evaluate Kenyan Politics, March 2004-January 2005," *African Affairs*, 104, no 415 (2005), 325.

²⁴ Kenyans have been clamoring for a new constitutional order for a long time. The current Constitution was adapted during the transition period from colonial state to independence, in 1963, and was actually written by the British Government, the departing colonial power. The Kenyatta and Moi governments amended this constitution at will to suit their interests. Toward the end of his era, Moi succumbed to both internal and external pressure and started the process of re-writing a new constitution. NARC promised a new constitution within its first 100 days in power, but the internal squabbles within the party derailed the process. The pursuit of a new constitution remains a mirage, about a decade after KANU was voted out.

of extrajudicial killings that the Kenyan government has been accused of perpetrating²⁵ especially because shortly before both were assassinated, the government had claimed the foundation had links with the *Mungiki*, a militia group based mainly in Nairobi and the Central Province. But, certainly, the level and quality of discourse in higher education today pales in comparison with what was witnessed between the 1960s and early 1990s. In fact, latest student protests have become orgies of violence attracting outrage even from progressive forces, such as the Mars Group.²⁶ The following section examines the causes of this ivory tower syndrome.

The NARC Illusion

The NARC “revolution” may have been the worst phenomenon in the liberation movement in Kenyan history. Liberation movements in the country, starting with the struggle for independence and later struggle against Kenyatta and Moi dictatorships, usually assumed a nationalistic outlook. Reformists whether politicians, civil society, or intellectuals, coalesced around the agenda of change in a spirit that appear to have transcended ethnic chauvinism. However, that kind of nationalism appears to have died with NARC.

Soon after NARC assumed power, cracks between the two main coalition partners, the National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK) of Mwai Kibaki, now president, and LDP of Raila Odinga, became imminent following claims by LDP that NAK had reneged on a pre-election memorandum of understanding (MOU) guaranteeing equal sharing of power. Perpetual bickering and squabbling characterized the NARC government leading to the ultimate fallout in 2005 between Raila Odinga and his lieutenants on one side and Kibaki and his supporters on the other. The disintegration of NARC had far-reaching ramifications in the country’s political landscape.

First, hitherto reformers, the most prominent opposition politicians and members of the civil society who had come together to form the NARC party, abandoned the platform of change and became heavily involved in political turf wars that epitomize post-Moi politics in the country. Those who remained in NARC (and later the Party of National Unity (PNU) that propelled Kibaki to his second term in power after the controversial 2007 elections) became preoccupied with consolidating power. This category includes Kiraitu Muriungi, Paul Muite (before falling out with Kibaki), Martha Karua, and Kivutha Kibwana. Gibson Kamau Kuria, a renowned human rights lawyer and ardent critic of the Moi administration, though not in government, became an ardent apologist of the regime. Some of these politicians have even been linked to multiple corrupt deals such as the Anglo Leasing scandal.²⁷ On the other side of the political divide, in LDP, which evolved into the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) in the

²⁵ In his report, Professor Paul Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary or Summary Executions Mission to Kenya concludes the Kenyan government has been involved in systemic extrajudicial killings. *The Standard*, April, 28 2009 http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/downloads/alston_pressfinal.doc (accessed April, 28 2009).

²⁶ Led by Mwalimu Mati, Mars Group is one of the most politically active and dynamic non-profit organization in Kenya today when it comes to checking on the political class.

²⁷ Shadrack Wanjala Nasong’o and Godwin R. Murunga, “Prospects for Democracy in Kenya,” in *Kenya: The Struggle for Democracy*, eds. Godwin R. Murunga and Shadrack W. Nasong’o (London: Zed Books, 2007), 10.

build up to the 2007 elections, yesteryear reformists such as Raila Odinga, James Orengo, and Anyang' Nyong'o have been consumed by how to wrestle power from their now political nemeses—initially in the NARC government and now in the coalition government.²⁸ They are equally consumed in partisan politics just like their coalition counterparts in government. With perennial reform advocates sucked in these turf wars, the agenda of change in the country appears rudderless and this development has impacted discourse patterns in the university as well since intellectuals have also taken sides in this political duel.

The death of NARC also exacerbated ethnic tensions and polarization in the country. It is worth noting that tribalism has always been a significant factor in the Kenyan socio-political fabric. The colonizers planted the seed of tribal suspicion through the policy of divide-and-rule and postcolonial regimes perfected the strategy for the same reason—perpetuation of their hegemonies. Like his predecessors, the Kibaki administration has been heavily accused of perpetuating tribalism by appointing people to strategic positions in government from his Kikuyu ethnic group and their cousins from the Mount Kenya region (the Meru and the Embu), and surrounding himself with ministers and a cabal of business people from the region—an exclusive club dubbed the “Mount Kenya Mafia.” His appointment of Nick Wanjohi as Vice-Chancellor of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, a political scientist to head an exclusively science-oriented institution, was widely viewed in this light. No wonder his appointment triggered opposition and disquiet in the university. Reverting to the old order of governing, through ethnic henchmen was utter betrayal of the spirit of NARC, which was a multi-ethnic coalition. This development and Kibaki's decision to renege the MOU with LDP gave credence to the belief by other communities that the Kikuyu, the most populous, widely spread, most educated, and economically endowed ethnic community are determined to entrench themselves in power at the expense of other ethnic groups.²⁹ Politicians exploited this tribal fetish during the constitutional referendum of 2005 and the elections of 2007 resulting in the 2008 postelection violence.

The tension that characterized the NARC administration leading to the fallout between Kibaki and Odinga is being replayed in the coalition government to the extent that political action to mitigate the myriad socio-political and economic challenges facing the country such as food insecurity, unemployment, the *Mungiki* menace, environmental crisis caused by wanton destruction of forests, resettling of people displaced during the post-election violence, how to deal with perpetrators of that violence, and the constitution review process, is being obscured and impeded by tribal suspicion, acrimony, and vendetta. The “nationalist” spirit that united political activists during the Kenyatta and Moi regimes has given way to apathy, disillusionment, and tribal-based political shenanigans. This reality gives credence to Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman's argument that what may appear to have been ideological alliances against repressive regimes were in fact alliances of the elite, alliances driven by political expediency.³⁰

²⁸ To end the post-election violence of early 2008, Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General, negotiated an arrangement whereby both parties (Kibaki and Odinga) agreed to share power in a coalition government.

²⁹ Joel Barkan, “Will the Kenyan Settlement Hold?” *Current History* 107, no 708 (2008), 150.

³⁰ Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman, “Democratization, Sequencing, and State Failure in Africa: Lessons from Kenya,” *African Affairs* 108 no. 430 (2008): 1-26.

One only needs to look at how the NARC coalition was crafted to see this reality. It is undeniable that there are those who joined the coalition out of genuine need to dislodge KANU and usher in a reform-oriented government. However, most of the leaders of the party, including the top decision making organ, the Summit, constituted former KANU loyalists who left the disintegrating party because Moi had sidestepped them by anointing Uhuru Kenyatta, a son of his predecessor, his successor. Others abandoned the party because it had become an unpopular brand. Thus, joining NARC for them was simply a bandwagon effect, rather than ideological persuasion. In other words, although NARC took the shape of a mass movement, at the core it was an elite alliance driven by politics of “exclusion” and opportunism. The “fragmentation” of these elites due to mistrust and suspicion exposes the nature of these politicians and the misgivings of the reform agenda in the country. Furthermore, this was not the first case of elite fragmentation. FORD (Forum for the Restoration of Democracy), the party formed by leading opposition politicians during the clamor for restoration of multiparty politics in 1991 disintegrated in the same way, out of power struggle and conflicting egos of Kenneth Matiba and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga.³¹ The most unfortunate consequence of this latest “elite fragmentation” is that it has produced unparalleled ethnic acrimony in the country as party leaders (who behave like ethnic chieftains) incite their ethnic groups against others and use them as bargaining chips for power.

The university has also become a victim of this re-invented tribal animosity. As noted earlier, tribalism is not a new phenomenon in Kenyan universities. It is true Kenyatta and Moi appointed senior administrators in the university from their ethnic groups to ensure loyalty that was crucial in curtailing radicalism among lecturers and students. For instance, the appointment of Josephat Karanja, a career diplomat with limited teaching experience as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nairobi by Kenyatta in 1971 bypassing many experienced and seasoned scholars drew resistance from faculty and students who attributed his appointment to his ethnic background rather than qualification.³² The Moi administration perfected the art of hiring his tribesmen to head universities and even where Vice-Chancellors were from different ethnic groups, he appointed people from his community or loyalists in strategic positions to ensure the government had a firm control on what was going on in these institutions. But even with this political interference, activism in these institutions apparently remained less tribalized.

The same cannot be said about discourse patterns in Kenyan universities today. The level of political activism seems to have degenerated, reproducing the political and ethnically charged tensions evident in the wider society. According to Ali Mazrui, in a *Daily Nation* article on February, 28 2008, while ethnicity has always been a factor in the Kenyan university system, “What we now fear on our campus is greater ethnic consciousness of each other rather than greater sensitivity to intellectual nuances;” that “The post-election violence has begun to trigger academic ethnic cleansing” resulting in members of the university community desiring to transfer to ethnically friendly campuses—usually areas inhabited by their ethnic group. As he puts it, instead of universities being “arenas of universal values and intellectual fraternity, they seem

³¹ Matiba’s faction of the FORD party acquired the name Ford-Asili while Odinga’s became Ford-Kenya.

³² Amutabi, “Crisis and Student Protest in Universities in Kenya: Examining the Role of Students in National Leadership and Democratization Process,” 163.

to be “deteriora[ting] into beehives of [ethnicity].”³³ Mwiria, the Assistant Minister for Higher Education and one of the few individuals whose reform credentials appear uncompromised by the trappings of power, echoes the same sentiments. He abhors ethnicity in public universities, manifested through “staff recruitment and promotions, procurement contracts and student politics.” He argues that practicing the vice affects the quality of education, undermines the role of education in national development, and negates the universities’ moral authority to challenge the political establishment.³⁴ Subjecting these institutions to local politics promotes pettiness and parochialism at a time when they should be embracing globalization and celebrating diversity; a time when the university should be at the forefront in finding solutions to the daunting challenges facing the nation, including how to bring about national cohesion, how to restore good governance, and how to realize Vision 2030.³⁵

Student politics have not been spared this ethnic mischief. As Benjamin Muindi reports in a *Daily Nation* article on May 22, 2009, student government elections held earlier this year in the University of Nairobi mirrored ethnic tensions and partisan politics that undercut ODM and PNU power struggles, alleging that the two parties were even backing their preferred candidates.³⁶ That university politics would stoop this low led the Editorial of the *Daily Nation* on May 22, 2009 to express doubts whether current student leadership in universities could match the credentials of previous leaders, such as James Orendo, Richard Onyonka, P. L. O. Lumumba, and David Murathe. As the Editorial points out, “The then student leaders were known for highlighting the ills affecting the country and championing the rights of their colleagues.” It laments this development by claiming that:

Ethnic rivalry, money and propaganda dominated the campaigns, instead of issues, which have traditionally defined university politics. Clearly, this was the lowest point in university politics and a damning indictment of the calibre of youths and professionals coming out of our learning institutions. Obviously, the student elections were a perfect mirror of what assails the national body politics,

³³ Ali Mazrui, “Are the Universities Being Tribalised?” *Daily Nation*, February, 28 2008, http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/nmgcontententry.asp?category_id=25&newsid=57960 (accessed July 23, 2009).

³⁴ Kilemi Mwiria, “We Must Stem the Slide of our Universities into Tribal Enclaves,” *The Standard*, March, 20 2009 <http://www.eastandard.net/print.php?id=1144010007&cid=490> (accessed March, 20 2009).

³⁵ Vision 2030 is the Kenyan Government’s development blueprint which aims to “transform Kenya into a newly industrialising, ‘middle-income country providing a high quality life to all its citizens by the year 2030.’” “Kenya Vision 2030: The Popular Version,” www.planning.go.ke (accessed July, 20 2009).

³⁶ Benjamin Muindi, “Ethnic Political Bug Hits Varsity Polls,” *Daily Nation*, May 22, 2009 http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/nmgcontententry.asp?category_id=25&newsid=57960, (accessed June 16, 2009).

where the country has been torn apart by primitive ethnic chauvinism, corrupted electoral process and outright thievery. In the past, student politics provided a platform for ideological contest. Student leaders propagated high-brow socio-economic and political theories aimed at creating an egalitarian society... So when university politics degenerate to ethnic hatred, vote-buying and violence, then the ear of ideology and political thinking has gone to the winds. As we vilify the students for resorting to the jungle law, we must not forget that they are a creation of a perverted political system and a faulty education system.³⁷

As the discussion reveals, the abortion of the NARC dream has had a significant impact on discourse patterns in the wider Kenyan society and the university. In particular, the co-option of reformers into the mainstream of politics as usual has robbed the reform agenda a crucial stakeholder. Furthermore, ethnicization of discourse as a result of “elite fragmentation” has crept into the university hindering meaningful intellectual dialog and interrogation of issues of national importance.

Lack of Motivation

Another major factor that has affected discourse patterns in Kenyan universities is lack of motivation among lecturers, with poor remuneration being the most significant contributing factor. Lecturers are among the most poorly paid professionals in the country. It is, therefore, not a coincidence that in earlier decades, when universities were vibrant, lecturers earned decent salaries. Soon after independence the salary of a university professor was higher than that of a judge, Member of Parliament, or even a Permanent Secretary,³⁸ but now a Member of Parliament earns more than ten times what a professor earns. This harsh economic reality has forced educators to “moonlight” to supplement their meager incomes, a development that has impacted negatively the quality of education and scholarship in these institutions.³⁹ It is sad that intellectuals are forced to concentrate on bread and butter issues rather than pursuit of knowledge and teaching.

Lack of facilities is another demoralizing factor lecturers have to contend with. As scholars such as Amutabi⁴⁰ and Sifuna⁴¹ have pointed out, the rapid expansion of university

³⁷ “Varsity Ideology Sinking,” *Daily Nation*, May, 22 2009, Editorial section. http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/nmgcontententry.asp?category_id=25&newsid=57960, (accessed June 16, 2009).

³⁸ “Kenyan University Lecturers strike for improved working conditions,” *Voice of America News*, June 18, 2007, <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/.../2007-06-18-voa36.cfm> (accessed August 20, 2009).

³⁹ Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha, “Reforming Higher Education in Kenya: Challenges, Lessons and Opportunities” (Paper Presented at the State University of New York Workshop with the Parliamentary Committee on Education, Science and Technology, Naivasha, Kenya, August 2004), 6.

⁴⁰ Maurice Amutabi, “Political Interference in the Running of Education in Post Independent Kenya: A Critical Retrospection,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 23 (2003): 127-144.

education in Kenya has been motivated by political considerations rather than sound planning. Forcing universities to admit large numbers of students without corresponding expansion of facilities has resulted in a logistical conundrum whereas the unrealistic teacher-student ratio continues to pose a teaching and assessment nightmare to teachers. Most importantly, teaching large classes has taken away meaningful interaction between teachers and students that is necessary for *dialogic education* to take place. According to Freire, *dialogic education* thrives in a democratic classroom environment where students are empowered to participate in the teaching and learning process. This kind of education is the antithesis of *banking education* where the teacher exercises authoritarian power and the student is reduced to an object.⁴² Unlike in earlier decades when smaller classes allowed for tutorial sessions where issues raised in regular lectures were revisited and discussed in a more interactive environment, interactivity in the current classroom set-up is impossible. Teachers have to rely on lectures to cope with the large class sizes and pressure to moonlight.

Another factor that appears to have affected teacher-student interaction is the adoption of the 8-4-4 system of education to replace the 7-4-2-3 system in 1985. To this day, most Kenyans resent the new system. Adopted during the height of Moi dictatorship, no national debate was entertained on its merits and demerits. More than a decade later, and after collating views from the public, The Koech Commission of 1999 took a bold move and recommend the country revert to the old system. As was characteristic of the administration (basing decisions on politics rather than professional advice or the will of the people), the president went around the country trashing the Commission's recommendations. Backing these recommendations, Okwach Abagi and others, in a paper published by the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research, a renowned non-profit research and policy analysis organization, hail the report for coming up with "558 recommendations to salvage education from its present worrying state." In their view, those recommendations were both "pertinent" and "timely" since they had the potential of "resuscitating the education sector by making it more focused, manageable, relevant and cost-effective considering the critical challenges facing the education system."⁴³ Public opinion on the system has mostly been negative, including many university lecturers who still consider high school students joining the university academically unprepared and immature, and therefore, incapable of engaging in meaningful academic discourse.⁴⁴ Even when the students graduate,

⁴¹ Daniel N. Sifuna, "Crisis in the Public Universities in Kenya," in *Educational Dilemmas: Debate and Diversity*, eds. Keith Watson, Celia Modgil, and Sohan Modgil (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1997).

⁴² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New Revised 20th Anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993), 53.

⁴³ Okwach Abagi and others, "Implementing the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya (The Koech Report): Realities, Challenges and Prospects. Practical Strategies for Transforming the Report Recommendations into Reality," Institute of Policy Analysis and Research, Kenya, 2000. http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/resource_guides/education&id=28638&type=document (accessed July 29, 2009).

⁴⁴ Mwangi Chege, "Old Wine" and "New Wineskins:" De-colonizing Kenya's University System, (La Vergne, TN: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2008), 69.

many Kenyans are skeptical about their preparedness and qualification to handle professions they are trained for. That educators would lack faith in their students, compounded with the sheer numbers in their classes, is an impediment to dialog in the learning process that is requisite for critical discourses to thrive.

The motivation issue not only affects teachers, but students too. The unplanned university expansion has meant students have to endure deplorable conditions in classes and dormitories. Their living conditions are dire following the government's decision to withdraw financial support for their upkeep. Consequently, most students are more concerned with how to survive as opposed to their studies, a reality aggravated by the ever growing economic disparities in the country. For these students, as the Editorial of the *Daily Nation* on February 11, 2008 put it, juggling academic pursuit and basic survival is a murky endeavor that leaves them with little or no desire to engage in activism.⁴⁵

Thus, lack of incentives, either from the university system (where meritocracy in promotions and other avenues of professional development is nonexistent) or the government, has pushed the university community away from "finding solutions to problems facing society," which according to Nafukho ought to be the focus of higher education,⁴⁶ to matters of basic survival. Unfortunately, this is happening at a time when the country is in dire need of scientific and technological innovators to meet the economic challenges of the 21st Century and organic intellectuals to guide the country out of the socio-political quagmire it is in currently.

Brain Drain

Kenya is one of the many Third World countries faced with the acute problem of brain drain. According to the Kenyan government, there are about 1.8 million Kenyans living and working abroad.⁴⁷ A significant number in this group includes the most talented, skilled, and learned individuals. Lamenting this reality, Raila Odinga, the country's Prime Minister, is quoted in a *Daily Nation* article on July 27, 2009 calling upon Kenyan trained professionals to serve in the country before relocating abroad to avert manpower crisis.⁴⁸ There are several categories of the Diaspora scholars, such as those who decide to work abroad in search of greener pastures and the older scholars who were forced into exile by the Kenyatta and Moi regimes, for example, Ali

⁴⁵ "Public Universities' Crisis could Get Worse," *Daily Nation* February 11, 2008, Editorial section, http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/nmgcontententry.asp?category_id=25&newsid=57960 (accessed June 16, 2009).

⁴⁶ Nafukho, Fredrick M, "The Role of Universities in Promoting Cooperation Between Social and Pure Scientists for Human Development in Kenya," *Journal of Third World Studies* xvi, no. 1 (1999), 87.

⁴⁷ Government of Kenya, "The Kenyan Diaspora," *Brand Kenya*, http://www.brandkenya.go.ke/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53:the-kenyan-diaspora&catid=54:visiting-kenya&Itemid=85 (accessed July 26, 2009).

⁴⁸ "Brain Drain Hurting Kenya," *Daily Nation*, July 27, 2009, <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/-/1056/630706/-/view/printversion/-/13cc57g/-/index.html> (accessed July 27, 2009).

Mazrui, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Micere Mugo, Maina wa Kinyatti, and Rok Ajulu. The absence of the latter is crucial since the void they left has apparently never been filled. Furthermore, most of these scholars seem to have abandoned their political activism after settling abroad.

Lingering Big Brother Syndrome

Although the country has witnessed an unprecedented opening of democratic space, the same cannot be said about university administrations. In spite the relative level of autonomy universities currently enjoy, administrations in these institutions have demonstrated that old habits die hard; the Big Brother legacy of the Kenyatta and particularly Moi eras continues to haunt them. As a result, lecturers still find it hard to criticize the political class and university administrations out of fear of retribution.⁴⁹ What makes political correctness even worse in the recent past is the fact that most of the intimidation comes from within the university. Unlike in earlier days when the political establishment orchestrated suppression of discourse in higher education to curtail political dissent, current infringement on intellectual freedom and witch-hunting is mostly engineered by university administrations to ensure ethnic cronyism, corruption, and manipulation of governance organs goes on unabated.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, as Otieno points out, this has led to gagging of university teachers on what they can teach (by rewarding cronies with promotions and frustrating independent-minded academicians) and interference in student politics to ensure pro-administration or ethically correct students assume leadership positions in the student government. Thus, the culture of “playing it safe” and authoritarianism still remains an impediment to vibrant discourse and political activism in Kenyan universities.

The Way forward: From Ivory Tower to Organic Intellectuals

That higher education plays a crucial role in the socio-political and economic development of any nation is a truism most people would accent to. As this discussion has revealed, there was a time the Kenyan university played a significant role not only in producing skilled manpower, but also in shaping national ethos. Radical scholars and students became catalysts of change by collaborating with like-minded reformists in the struggle against totalitarian and corrupt regimes. This is a role current academicians must reclaim if the university is to regain its relevance. The myriad socio-political problems plaguing Kenya today—return of mega corruption, abuse of human rights, escalated ethnic polarization, economic inequalities, and a dysfunctional political system warrants a rejuvenation of the reform agenda. The civil society appear to be regrouping, although it is reeling from a credibility crisis since most of those stepping in the shoes of those who decamped to join the political class are lightweights yet to establish their ethos. The media is also picking up momentum and the masses generally remain enthusiastic about change. This is where intellectuals need to step in—as organic intellectuals to sustain the reform agenda. They should abandon the ivory tower attitude, the aloofness they have demonstrated, and spearhead discourse of change. It is high time the university reclaimed the sphere of influence it once

⁴⁹ Mwangi Chege, “*Old Wine*,” 55-57.

⁵⁰ Wycliffe Otieno, “Politics, Ethnicity, and the Mission of the University: The Kenyan Example,” *International Higher Education*4 (2008), http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/Number52/p24_Otieno.htm (accessed July 29, 2009).

enjoyed in order to re-direct national discourse from tribal acrimony and vendetta to a unified call in the pursuit of what is good for the country.

The call for universities to take a leading role in the reform agenda is not without precedent. Universities universally have had the history of catalyzing social movements. Through their sheer numbers, ability to mobilize, intelligence, creativity, inquisitiveness, social standing, social skills, energy, boldness, and progressive world view, there is something about the university community that makes it a force to reckon with when it comes to social movements. Recent democratic protests in Iran after the alleged manipulation of the 2009 presidential vote by the ruling clergy in favor of the hardliner candidate and the Tiananmen Square student protests in China pushing for democracy two decades ago attest to the enormous potential universities have to influence political action in a country. University students in USA are also credited in creating an enabling environment for the election of Barack Obama, the first African-American president of the United States. Furthermore, there was a time Kenyan intellectuals were influential on the national stage. It is a question of reclaiming this role. In heeding this call, a reconfiguration of the role of the university, a pedagogical paradigm shift, and intellectuals in Kenya networking with Kenyan Diaspora scholars is imperative.

Reconfiguring the Role of the University

As Makau Mutua⁵¹ and Shadrack Nasong'o⁵² point out, there is a general consensus on the indispensable role the civil society plays in the democratization process and socio-political movements in any given society. Elucidating this role, Nasong'o describes the three-stage evolution of social movements as follows: It begins with what he refers to as "the incubation period" which, as he points out, "is usually led by 'men and women of words.'" The role of this class, made up of "the intelligentsia and the ideologues" is to "utilize their gift of the gab and the power of the written word to publicise existing social dysfunctions and to philosophise how the dysfunctions can be fixed." In other words, the function of this class is to create consciousness among the citizens on the evils facing society; to sensitize the masses on the problems facing them and to "inspire" them into action. The second stage is the "action phase," which as he puts it, is led by "fanatics" whose function is to "Take the ideology and words of the ideologues and translate them into comprehensible terms for the masses under stress." The third stage, the "institutionalisation phase" is when the "social movement becomes bureaucratized on account of its growth in age and size, as it attracts different elements in society" (or the social movement has attracted mass following that calls for structured leadership to steer the movement).⁵³

The above analysis of social movements underscores the need and urgency for the Kenyan intelligentsia to reclaim its influence on the socio-political scene, the role of exposing the many problems facing the country today and to offer a modus operandi for tackling them; a

⁵¹ Makau Mutua, "Lessons from Kenya," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54, no. 36 (2008), <http://0-search.ebscohost.com> (accessed July 15, 2009).

⁵² Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o, "Negotiating New Rules of the Game: Social Movements, Civil Society and the Kenyan Transition," in *Kenya: The Struggle for Democracy*, eds. Godwin R. Murunga and Shadrack W. Nasong'o (London: Zed Books, 2007).

⁵³ Nasong'o, "Negotiating New Rules," 21.

framework rooted in reality and nationalism rather than myopic ethnic-based approaches. The intellectuals must realize the role of a university transcends producing skilled manpower or disseminating knowledge for the sake of it. Universities have a duty to produce responsible citizens, conscious individuals empowered to discern social contradictions and motivated to desire to create a better society. A university education should strive to create an informed citizenry by inculcating critical thinking skills among students. The concept of *critical thinking* has become common place in the academe, but often limited to academic abstraction. Schafersman defines critical thinking as “*thinking correctly for oneself that successfully leads to the most reliable answers to questions and solutions to problems,*” a process he argues involves applying “principles of scientific thinking.”⁵⁴ To the contrary, an education process premised on critical thinking should challenge students to connect educational content with the broader social context in which the learning process is situated. Freire expounds on this view of critical thinking through what he terms *conscientizacao*, the capacity to “perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of society.”⁵⁵ In other words, there is need to situate the education process in the larger socio-political context.

That the nation is at crossroads warrants all responsible citizens to engage in seeking solutions on how to heal the country and move the democratization agenda forward. As the post-election violence of 2008 revealed, entrusting politicians with the destiny of the nation is catastrophic. That is why it is important the intelligentsia reclaim the role of organic intellectuals and together with like-minded members in the civil society and other stakeholders spearhead the discourse of change informed by the reality that socio-political change in modern times will not be achieved through the barrel of the gun, arrows, or machetes, but through discourse.

There is nothing wrong with scholars fighting for decent salaries. In fact UASU, the University Academic Staff Union, should continue the fight for just salaries and reasonable working conditions. There is no justification for academicians to continue living in poverty whereas politicians and higher echelons in the civil service and government corporations continue to allocate themselves huge salaries. Ironically, the government’s rationale for paying the political class and topnotch civil servants exorbitant salaries is to promote efficiency and professionalism, to deter them from corruption. Why can’t the same principle be applied when it comes to academicians? Don’t scholars deserve decent remuneration to allow them concentrate on their core calling—teaching and research? However, it is also important for the intelligentsia to not lose sight of the big picture—their role in the creation of a democratic and stable society. They must be engaged in public discourse to demand good governance and accountability from the political class; they must join other stakeholders and responsible citizens in questioning the culture of corruption, disregard of the rule of law, abuse of human rights, and politically motivated but unsound educational policies. If they have no faith in the education system, they should be in the forefront demanding and outlining necessary reform. After all they are the experts and critical stakeholders on educational matters. This change in approach must be informed by the acknowledgement that the ivory tower attitude they appear to have adopted is elitist and serves neither them nor the society. After all, their own fate is tied to the fate of the

⁵⁴ Steven Schafersman, “An Introduction to Science: Scientific Thinking and the Scientific Method,” 1994, www.freeinquiry.com/intro-to-sci.html (accessed June 28, 2008).

⁵⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 17.

wider society, which means realization of a prosperous democratic and just society would translate into reform in the education sector, equitable remuneration, and better working conditions for them. In other words, they should take the lead in championing systemic change rather than the narrow-minded fixation on regime change that continues to fuel ethnic based politics and discourse in the country.

Adopting Progressive Pedagogies

As this author has argued elsewhere, Kenyan educators must re-examine their pedagogies as a prerequisite for empowering students to be critical and reflective thinkers.⁵⁶ Banking education, which is the predominant pedagogy in the country, is incapable of equipping students to discern social contradictions and to challenge the status quo. According to Freire, “The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed.”⁵⁷ Granted, it is high time educators adopted pedagogies that empower them (educators) and students to envision and pursue the agenda of social transformation. Instead of the system that mainly promotes regurgitation of ideas, educators must adopt “problem-posing” education grounded on “*emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality*” as opposed to “*submersion of consciousness*” that underpins banking education.⁵⁸ In other words, lecturers must adopt pedagogies that restore vibrant discourse in the university, pedagogies that allow them to exercise intellectual freedom on matters that not only pertain to their institutions and education in general, but also national issues. After all, according to Giroux, the exercise of intellectual freedom by teachers and students to challenge social injustices is a major goal of university education.⁵⁹ Thus, lecturers must embrace the role of organic intellectuals at a time when progressive forces are shrinking.

However, adopting progressive or critical pedagogies demands educators confront what Bourdieu and Passeron refer to as habitus; “The product of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after PA [Pedagogic Action, or literacy] has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices the principles of the internalized arbitrary.”⁶⁰ As this discussion has revealed, both educators and students are engrossed in a culture of political intimidation and tribal fetish. Educators must come to terms with the reality that maintaining the culture of silence perpetuates the status quo and, therefore, serves the interests of the political class. Hence, the call for educators to adopt critical pedagogies stems from the need for

⁵⁶ Chege, “The Politics.”

⁵⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 54.

⁵⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 62.

⁵⁹ Henry Giroux, “Academic Freedom Under Fire: The Case for Critical Pedagogy,” *College Literature* 33 no. 4 (2006), 2.

⁶⁰ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*. (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 31.

educators to embrace their civic duty just like any other responsible citizen, which is to be vigilant and concerned about the welfare of the nation. Most importantly, it should be a shift guided by the realization of the need for them to reclaim the role of organic intellectuals that is critical in spearheading the much needed leadership in the pursuit of changing the course the country is taking. This conceptual transformation should compel teachers to strive to challenge students to also be agents of change by nudging them to come out of their comfort zones to interrogate how their lived experiences can be transformed;⁶¹ it is a call to critical thinking designed to raise consciousness among students to ensure they are cognizant of the world they live in, how the learning process reinforces their experiences, and how they could apply the knowledge they have acquired to transform their world. It is a process driven by acknowledging the double-edge nature of literacy—its hegemonic and counter-hegemonic potential. As Spring succinctly 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*.”⁶² Thus, educators and students must come to terms with the fact that there is no way an empowering education can be divorced from real issues that affect society. Any attempt to divorce literacy from lived experiences serves the interests of the political class since it produces politically unconscious individuals. This realization must motivate educators to create classroom dynamics that allow vibrant discourse to thrive; the kind of discourse that is capable of challenging the ethnically poisoned rhetoric of the ruling elite that has come to define national body politic.

A common critique of critical pedagogies is that they are populist.⁶³ However, this position overlooks the reality that the pedagogy combines a sound educational theory and praxis. The pedagogy not only exposes the hegemonic nature of literacy, it offers tools of empowerment by advocating critical discourse built on dialog. It is substantive since it calls for students (and educators) to “act as self-reflective subjects with an ability to think critically.”⁶⁴ This is not an impossible goal or mere solipsism considering the near universal consensus that a major goal of education is to inculcate critical thinking among students. The emphasis on empowerment of learners to challenge the status quo that underpins critical pedagogies makes these pedagogies handy in the Kenyan situation today.

⁶¹ Min Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner, “The Problematic of Experience: Redefining Critical Work in Ethnography and Pedagogy,” *College English* 60 no. 3 (1998): 257-77.

⁶² Joel Spring, *Conflict of Interests: the Politics of American Education*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005), 56.

⁶³ Thomas Popkewitz, *A political Sociology of Educational Reform: Power/Knowledge in Teaching, Teacher Education, and Research*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 230.

⁶⁴ Michelle Inderbitzin and Debbie Storrs, “Mediating the Conflict Between Transformative Pedagogy and Bureaucratic Practice,” *College Teaching* 56 no. 1 (2008), 48.

Networking with Kenyan Diaspora

For Kenyan academicians to play the role of organic intellectuals, it is also important they network with their counterparts in the Diaspora. First, as noted earlier, a good number of Kenyan intellectuals in Diaspora were forced to flee the country as their political activism made them enemies of the establishment. Granted, these are scholars whose credibility in the discourse of change is unquestionable and at a time when the nation is engulfed in a heavy cloud of ethnic suspicion and mistrust, they have the potential of bridging the ethnic divide. Secondly, as stated earlier, many of the Diaspora scholars are extremely talented; why can't the nation (and Kenyan educators) tap from their expertise? It is unfortunate many Kenyans see Diaspora contribution only in terms of remittances and not their intellectual and professional potential. On the other hand, some scholars have argued the term brain drain fails to take into account the Diaspora are actually developing themselves professionally since their host countries provide advanced facilities and incentives for research. They argue brain gain best captures this reality. This argument is valid, but it is one sided. Of course to the Diaspora it is brain gain since they are undoubtedly developing professionally and scholarly. However, if their expertise is not utilized by the motherland, then it remains brain drain. It would, therefore, be more accurate to describe this scenario as brain drain, but economic gain (to the mother country). However, there has been a glimmer of hope when it comes to Diaspora involvement in national affairs as the following examples illustrate:

- Some scholars in Diaspora have remained engaged in Kenyan public discourse by publishing well thought out, well analyzed, and poignant articles in Kenyan newspapers. Contributions by Professor Makau Mutua and Professor Ali Mazrui come to mind. There is also extensive scholarship on the socio-political situation in Kenya by scholars in Diaspora.
- The Kenya Scholars and Studies Association's annual conferences provide a forum where scholars can flesh out ideas germane to the nation. The decision to publish presentations made in these conferences in anthologies and journals allows for dissemination and sharing of these ideas to a broader Kenyan audience making the forum not just another elitist platform, but one with the potential of offering constructive and transformative ideas. That scholars from Kenyan universities and non-Kenyans interested in studying Kenya participate in this forum helps enrich the discussions. Hopefully, current initiatives in Kenya to make the Internet more accessible and faster will allow for more collaboration between Diaspora scholars and their counterparts in the country in a way that will transcend academic pursuits, to include socio-political activism.
- That the government would invite Professor Calestous Juma of Harvard University's School of Government and Professor Sam Makinda from Murdoch University, Australia, to make presentations in a conference of the country's ambassadors meant to strategize on how to use the diplomatic missions to advance the country's competitiveness, as reported in a *Daily Nation* article on July 27, 2009,⁶⁵ marks a break from the past where expatriates were often preferred at the expense of Kenyan professionals. Tapping from the expansive expertise from Diaspora scholars opens doors for scholars to contribute to

⁶⁵ "Don: Africa's Envoys Can Help Countries Grow Faster," *Daily Nation*, July 27, 2009, <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/-/1056/630984/-/view/printversion/-/ckvrws/-/index.html> (accessed July 28, 2009).

national development (not just economic, but also socio-political development) to the benefit of the country and fulfillment of these scholars.

- Appointment of Ali Mazrui, a patriarch scholar in Diaspora as Chancellor of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology for eight years, is another encouraging gesture. However, it would have helped if the government would cast its net wide and also develop a systemic policy of utilizing local talent. But for this to happen, the onus is on Kenyans at home and abroad to put pressure on the political class to end the culture of tribalism, cronyism, nepotism, bribery, and all other manifestations of corruption that obstruct meritocracy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident the current situation in Kenya's socio-political structure is unique. During the KANU days, there existed a clear distinction between apologists of the oppressive status quo and reform advocates. But, when previous champions of reform become the perpetrators of the same old order they risked their life fighting, then the reform agenda is in a crisis. That the public has generally remained politically charged provides opportunity for sustaining the momentum in the reform agenda, but it also opens a window of vulnerability with politicians misdirecting that energy for selfish gain as was witnessed in the post-election violence of 2008 when gullible youth and peasants were manipulated to perpetrate ethnic cleansing at the behest of the political class. This is where organic intellectuals come in—to partner with like-minded stakeholders to direct this energy into insistence on institutional reforms and accountability from the political class that will guarantee democratic gains made so far are sustained; to galvanize the country in demanding nothing less than a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The function of this class, the organic intellectuals, would be to inspire citizens to once again coalesce around issues of national interest rather than succumbing to the ethnic fetish that has been a tool of choice by both colonial and postcolonial establishments to advance their self-enriching interests grounded on corruption, oppression, and exploitation of the masses.

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