THE EVOLUTION OF STUDENTS MILITANCY IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD: TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN KENYA

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Introduction.

Student militancy as a widespread phenomenon in Africa, mainly since the 1960's, is the subject of a much older and wider "youth phenomenon" dating as far back as the middle ages, and spread widely across Europe in countries such as France, Italy, Germany and England, where the movement initially confined itself to the university campuses and centred on disobedience to authority (for example, the king and his delegates) and on the refusal to be disciplined (Hobber in Lipest and Altbach, 1969: v, Ngesu 2013).

Since the mid-1960's and more intensively in the 1970's nearly every Africa country had in one way or another experienced a shake up by students outbreaks (Ishumi, 1976). Such countries include Egypt, Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, South Africa and Ethiopia. Again the triggering causes varied and were frequently shaped by local situations but closer examination reveals a basic struggle for "power' to influence and/or actually participate in the affairs of national politics and education ranging from formulation of national goals and policies to formulation of school/college curricula to internal and external administration of the educational and cultural institutions (Ishumi, 1976, Ngesu et al 2013). Closer home the first case of student indiscipline was reported in Maseno in1908 when students refused to participate in manual labour and pressed for more reading and writing (Anderson 1970, 135). Three years later Mumias School went on strike against colonial administration (Ngesu et al 2013).

The concept of students' militancy

Students militancy refers to acts of defiance or lawlessness by a group of people, possibly leading to a riot in an attempt to express anger, frustration or disappointment concerning real or imagined grievances (Ngesu et al, 2013). It also refers to any act that results in threats or actual harm to a person (student, staff member or community member); or other student's property, school's property or even the community's property. Some of these actions may result in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation (Kinai, 2010). The Manifestations of Student Militancy include absconding from school, boycotting classes, boycotting school meetings, riots, demonstrations, sit-in, burning school property, killing fellow students and boycotting meals. These demonstrate that the manifestation of student militancy is varied and requires closer scrutiny by the stakeholders towards policy intervention measures.

Evolution of student's militancy from a global arena

This was a common phenomenon in France and the U.S.A for a variety of reasons. In France, the conflict was against two strong pillars, the political regime and the education system, which are interrelated. Both were accused of conservative and reactionary resistance to change (Ishumi, 1976: 195). The political regime, having betrayed the national social revolution, and the education system being elitist by various means, such as the rigid and discriminatory examinations, helped to perpetuate the existing socio- political structure. The student movement in Britain must be understood in relation to the political system. The post-1960 world produced a blurring of political alignments which gave force to the negative definition of democracy (Cox and Dyson 1969).

In England it was the campaign for nuclear disarmament; in France it was the opposition to the colonial war in Algeria, and in Germany it was the rejection of militarism and laws contrary to liberal principles. A degree of optimism occurred with the rise to prominence of newer, younger figures who offered a vision of a brighter future. John F. Kennedy was the symbol of this change, and like a magnet he attracted the attention of the young all over the world. In his inaugural speech, he began "let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans" (Horbes, 1969: 2). Affluence, a new spirit of independence in the classroom, a new defiance among the oppressed and new standards of morality in the arts all played their part in increasing the level of comment, criticism and dissent, which erupted in a few places and spread with breath-taking speed in learning institutions.

In Indonesia, student power in the 1960's was principally in the form of political nationalist agitation against the ruling regime and aimed at revolutionizing that society (Ishumi, 1976:194). In collaboration with, though by no means dominated by, 'the army', student power was directed at redefining national goals. Considered "reactionary", President Surkano had to retire to give way to a more radical regime.

The student struggle in North America on the one hand was directed at the injustice and imbalance in the socio-economic structure, and sought to redress the inequalities and institute fairness in access to and distribution of the opportunities in life (Ishumi, 1976:195). On the other hand, at the micro level, it sought to influence the socialization process in educational institutions in terms of ideology, the content of curricula and research, in accordance with the desired social ends.

Students militancy as a phenomenon in Africa

As with humanity, student militancy in Africa constitutes a complex phenomenon, affirming Aristotle's contention that, in consideration of mankind, one should realize that the parts are greater than whole. There is no doubt that the current period of African history is volatile, characterized by both a sense of hope and despair, and that change will bring with it new possibilities in terms of lifestyles, moral politics and consciousness (Ishumi, 1976; Ngesu 2013).

In modern times, conflictual relations and tensions have been witnessed more intensively across campuses in Africa, especially since the mid- 1960s (Ishumi, 1990: 64, Omari and Mihyo, 1992). These conflicts have frequently been more open than latent reflecting the struggle for recognition, power and rights. In Africa, student struggles have been observed not only in universities but also in other institutions of higher education and training and even in secondary schools.

The general contention in the struggle has revolved, among other things, around the fight against a seemingly conservative and hardline adult society. Students have observed that adult society is slow or else reluctant to accept their views and even slower and more reluctant to accommodate them in critical discussions and making crucial decisions in relation to the organization and future of society. The adults have been accused of being conservative and slow to accept change.

In 1966, University College of Dar-es-Salaam students went on strike due to Nyerere's insistence that they be involved in nation building by serving in the National Youth Service for six months. Following the strike, the then President sent all the students away and made National Youth Service compulsory for all Tanzanians with Form Four level of education and above, including those who had college education at certificate or diploma levels. For other cadres, national service was voluntary. Nyerere's philosophy was known as "Ujamaa" meaning "familyhood"

and it was to guide Tanzanians on a path of peace and stability and it provided a social infrastructure for stable and economic development (Nyerere, 1968). His goal was to integrate rural villages into a modern state to ensure citizens had an institutional structure to allow them to participate in their government. Though the idea was noble, from a realistic perspective it did not find ready acceptance in a post-colonial state that had cherished privileges for a few. The problem alluded to in this case was the belief that University students were entitled to an elite status, which was not consonant with the political philosophy that Nyerere was articulating.

A radical evolution of students militancy in Kenya

Student upheavals and activism is not a recent phenomenon in Kenya but an over- year's problem. Indeed upheavals can be closely linked to adolescence. They exhibit problems that can be simply identified as indiscipline problems (Makinde 1987:17).

The nature of student upheavals in secondary schools is multi-faceted as it involves indiscipline that is self destructive to the individual student, school property and the school community in which it is located. The problem with the current nature of secondary school indiscipline is that it has become very violent and ghastly if we take the Kyanguli secondary school fire tragedy of 2001 in which 67 boys were burnt to death, 58 of which were burnt beyond recognition (Ndetei 2002: 4).

The nature of upheavals exhibited in schools is a form of maladjustment (Griffin 1994:12). According to Griffin, heads of schools should embrace constructive punishment which will aim at instilling values and change of behaviour rather than fear achieved through corporal punishment.

In his research, "Secondary School Strikes: The Art of Blaming the Victim," Kinyanjui (1975) sought to investigate the cause of school unrest in Kenya. In all the four schools sampled, it emerged that the management of resources in schools was the critical issue leading to school unrest. In one of the schools sampled, it was reported that the school financial problems had become worse in 1974 when the school bursar had stolen the money.

The other cause of student upheavals was lack of facilities, insufficiency of that available and poor maintenance of the available ones. The facilities pointed out in the Kinyanjui research as lacking included books and library services, laboratories and equipment. Experts in education say that liberal parents, the ban on caning, some provision in the Children Act and lack of role models of high moral integrity are some of the factors that have robbed teachers of the power to correct-way-ward students. Teachers dare not punish a student lest they be dragged to court. They neither cane nor use other forms of punishment as this amount to abuse according to the law.

The society on other hand is seen as the key towards explaining student upheavals in secondary school. Conditions in the home and community may be related to the behaviour problems. The problems, which exist in the society, are easily reflected in schools. Ndakwa (2005: 15) supported these views when he observed that incitement from the society is one of the causes of militancy when students are asked to act on their behalf. Research findings by (NCCK: 1992 & Ngesu 2013) on student militancy in schools and colleges revealed that the youth suffer from a condition commonly referred to as identity crisis.

Being at adolescent stage of human growth and development, most of them turn to rebellious actions such as smoking and drug abuse due to peer influence. They lose their self image and respect thus engaging in inappropriate behaviour which includes strikes homosexuality and student militancy.

Student upheaval has profound effect on curriculum and in Kenya, scholars have held on the view that the school curriculum may be a cause of militancy in Kenyan schools. The Report on Student in-discipline and Unrests in Secondary Schools (Wangai, 2001: 15-16) observes that:

- o The current curriculum did not wholly address the policy, objectives and philosophy of education; and
- o The curriculum did not cater for the holistic development of the child.

Head teachers have raised the red flag over a wave of violent strikes that threatens to paralyze learning institution in most secondary school country wide. The trend is worrying as incident of burning down school property are now the preferred choice of many students in expressing grievances (*Daily Nation,* July 14, 2008).

Students' militancy has resulted in injuries and even death of the victims. In Kenya, the St. Kizito tragedy shocked the world. In 1991 the boys of the school invaded girls as they slept in their dormitories. In consequence of the attack, nineteen girls died. A study be Ngesu (2011) established that much of the student militancy, and even open violence, is perceived to be related to incidences of an adverse, insensitive and unfriendly school climate, often connected with a school management and administrative style under younger, less experienced and less

professionally qualified head teachers. The situation, according to the research findings, seems to be accentuated by

- A seemingly less than adequate level of cooperation and intervention accorded by parents in the home environment (that could otherwise have an important reinforcing effect on the disciplining of children); and, on the other hand,

- The perception of youths that the adult society is repressive and does not accommodate their views and values, and is thus reluctant to accord them the place and status they deserve.

Conclusion

Although the causes of student militancy are firmly rooted in the socio-historical experiences of growing up (child-rearing practices, parenting styles and responses, and the youths' personality traits), school governance, among intra-school factors, seems to have had a precipitating influence on student revolts and riots. This is a causal factor linked to a stern, hyper-critical and otherwise punitive approach by school managements. A significant proportion of newly appointed heads of secondary schools in the study sample lacked prior management experience, which had a negative impact on school discipline and the general performance of their school. Therefore the government should aim at building the capacity of the leadership, comprising having a vision, setting directions, developing people and managing the teaching and learning programmes, leading to a reduction in malpractices that have a negative impact on school discipline and academic performance.

Most students—male or female—resort to violence in order to achieve their goal and get what they want. This is typical of students who are exposed to aggressive media, an aggressive environment and more often to a violent or a lax family setup. Such students disrupt class processes and undermine the quality of the classroom learning environment. A situation such as this thus seems to require a deliberate policy move to equip schools with professional services for the counseling, guidance and rehabilitation of students in their school years.

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