

## **Students, Violent Protests and the Process of Self-Realization in Kenyan Secondary Schools**

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### **Abstract**

Secondary schools in Kenya have occasionally exploded into orgies of violence often resulting in destruction of property and, sometimes, loss of life. But despite the much inquiry and the subsequent body of knowledge this phenomenon has inspired, such occurrences still persist thus raising some fundamental questions; for instance; what are the ultimate causes of this behaviour? is the students' destructive behaviour to be seen merely as a result of pure chance, their nature, their circumstances or all these, and whatever the case, what is their nature? While part of the discourse has tended to dismiss such behaviour by students as merely 'the way students have always behaved', this paper views it as that of 'conscious individuals continually searching for "who" they are through their actions in school life as they make choices based on their experiences, values and outlook'. The paper starts by seeking to discover the underlying causes of this phenomenon by analyzing students' 'lived' concrete experiences, in 31 schools selected from five of the eight former provinces of Kenya, within the existentialist paradigm. This analysis reveals that to them, violent protests constitute a means to their self-realization, a position which though seemingly sound, this paper finds it to be rather limited as it only serves to promote the vicious cycle of violence. Accordingly, the paper recommends recourse to approaches that necessarily entail the humanization of both the students and their perceived oppressors in their schooling process.

I object to violence because when it appears to do good,  
the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.  
(Mahatma Gandhi)

### **Background and Context**

Most reports on the phenomenon of student violence appear to point to a common fact that this occurrence is widespread to the extent that it is a global concern albeit taking different manifestations and proportions from one place to the other. In the U.S. for instance, it has been characterized by the presence of gangs in schools with corresponding incidences of non-fatal violent victimization at school among students 12 to 18 years of age; teachers reporting having been threatened or physically attacked by students

from their schools (Robers et. al, 2013); youth carrying a weapon to school, being threatened or injured with a weapon in school (CDCP Surveillance Summaries 2014; 63 No. SS-4). In the U.K, media reports have in the past reported on schools where teachers are beleaguered with devastating experiences of being abused, threatened and having knives and loaded guns pulled on them by their students who, reportedly, are out of control (MacMillan, 2002; Munn et al, 2007). In China, the media has reported on several incidences of student violence as in the reported case of students beating up a teacher in class in solidarity with their colleague whom the teacher had punished (CCTV News, 22 April, 2016). In Africa, cases of student violence in secondary schools have popularly been depicted as an escalating problem (Ngwokabuenui, 2015). What therefore emerges is that this problem is a ‘malaise of international proportions’ as described by various researchers including (Nkinyangi 1981, Smith 2002, Debarbieux 2003).

Cases of student unrest and violence in Kenya have been in existence as far back as 1908 in Maseno School (Republic of Kenya, 2001). Notably, occurrences in the 1960s and 1970s were relatively few and took the form of boycott of classes and mass walkouts (Republic of Kenya, 1991). Consequently, not much inquiry focused on this phenomenon until in the mid-1970s and early 1980s when the first studies; Kinyanjui (1976) and Nkinyangi (1981) were carried out respectively. In the 1980s, however, through the 1990s and the 2000s, school unrest took a new dimension involving wanton destruction of school property, mass rapes and worst of all, loss of human life. The frequency of occurrences has also increased through time. For instance, in the period between 1980 and 1990, the number of schools experiencing student unrest and violence increased tremendously from 22 (0.9%) to 187 (7.2%) and by 2001, this had increased to 250 (9.6%) secondary schools (Republic of Kenya 2001, p.6) while in 2008, more than 300 schools experienced violent protests in second term alone. The period 1990 and beyond saw much more research focused on this phenomenon than in the preceding period. However, despite such profound efforts and the subsequent implementation of their recommendations, albeit in part, student violence in Kenyan secondary schools still continued unabated.

At the national level, the government, through the Ministry of Education has always responded to these occurrences beginning with the characteristic condemnatory statements; ‘wanton destruction of school property will not be tolerated’ and, sometimes, enacting new regulations. For instance, following the occurrences of student unrest in the 1960s and 1970s, a presidential decree was issued in August, 1978, banning strikes by students and workers hence, reportedly, the following term appeared to be relatively calm despite two schools going on strike (Kinyanjui, 1976). At this time, matters of school indiscipline were also guided by the recommendations of the ‘Report of the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (Gachathi Report) of 1976 which had recommended that the problem of discipline must be dealt with by teachers in schools and other educational authorities and that education should “assist youth to grow into self-disciplined, self-respecting and law-abiding, mature-minded and creative people”.

Later in the 1990s and beyond, task forces have been appointed to investigate and

make recommendations on the situation of student unrest in Kenyan secondary schools including; the 1991 task force chaired by Dr. Lawrence Sagini, the 1995 taskforce chaired by Archbishop Nicodemus Kirima, the 2000 task force for schools in the then Central province chaired by Mr. P. M. Macharia, the 2001 taskforce chaired by Naomy Wangai and the 2008 taskforce by the Parliamentary Committee on Education. Similar efforts can be seen at the international level considering that by 2006, at least three international conferences had been held in the U.K. with a resolution of creating an international observatory on violence in schools (Munn et al, 2007), all which serve to testify for the increasing concern about this phenomenon.

While it is not the primary purpose of this paper to review all these taskforce reports, a quick, albeit critical, review reveals three main features that are relevant to the aim of this paper. First, the taskforces have always been appointed at a time when the incidences are at the peak, a moment of desperate need for a quick solution. Such efforts therefore essentially constitute a hasty response to this problem rather than one that primarily springs from a deep and careful analysis of the crisis. Second, the taskforces work within such a short period of time, often spanning a maximum of three weeks to carry out their investigations nationally and compile a full report with 'viable' recommendations. It is therefore argued in this paper that such investigations have not been exhaustive of the core issues related to the problem of student violence. Third, the methodology often adopted by these taskforces in their investigations is typically empirical in nature, often involving visits to the affected schools gathering information from oral interviews and presentations from the identified stakeholders including some students as well as reviewing media reports and written memoranda from consultative committees and even from members of the public. However, this happens without concerted efforts to triangulate and critically reflect on the sources of this information, particularly their respective points of view or intentions within a carefully selected theoretical paradigm. Consequently, the antecedent efforts have exhibited some inadequacy with regard to methodological rigour and theoretical suitability. This is further compounded by the lack of genuine commitment to the full implementation of the recommendations of these reports hence occurrences of student violence still persist.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Discourse in research commonly holds that the pre-conceptions held by a researcher greatly determine the kind of theoretical orientation they adopt in the subsequent task of data analysis. Notably, most of the antecedent inquiry into this problem in Kenya has tended to focus on the negative consequences of student strikes, thereby shifting the focus from a consideration of the causes or students' grievances to the negative social character of student violence thereby obscuring a meaningful engagement with the students' real experiences associated with the protests.

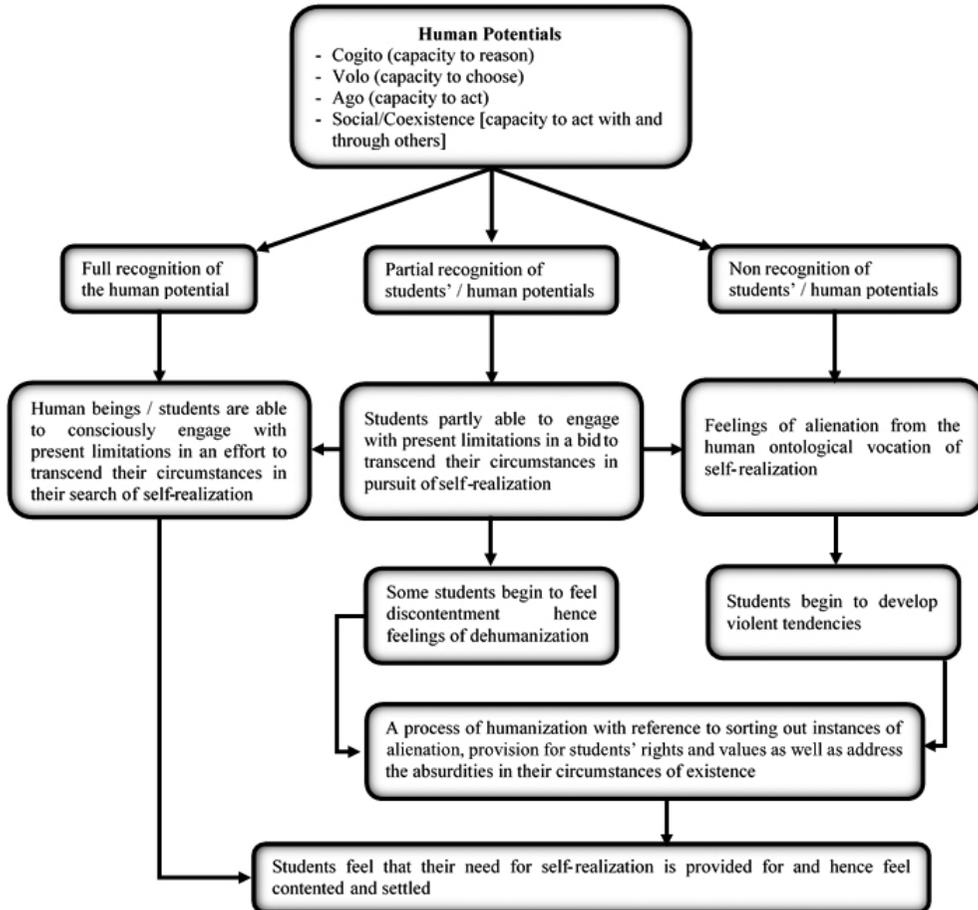
In view of these considerations, analytic reflections carried out in this paper are

guided by the existentialist paradigm according to which; ‘existence precedes essence’, meaning, humans exist first and then begin constructing, defining and/or changing their nature and/or identity (Sartre, 1947) hence human nature is that of ‘becoming’. Accordingly, Existentialists hold that human beings are always continually searching to find out ‘who’ and ‘what’ they are throughout life as they make choices based on their experiences, beliefs and outlook. This therefore implies that human beings are ‘not yet’ or ‘never really complete’ hence are in a process of flux as they transform themselves to become more and more human (Chege, Sifuna and Oanda, 2006 vide Sartre 1947). Existentialists also view human life as absurd or unfair hence human beings always seek to transform it, and in which process, they construct their identities and find meaning in life. Finally, Existentialists view human beings as having values which direct their actions and are free to choose these values which entail what to be or do yet this freedom entails some responsibility which they have to take.

Within the existentialist mode of thought, two thinkers whose theories on violence appear relevant to the purpose of this paper are; Frantz Fanon with his theory of ‘violence as therapy’ and Paulo Freire with his theory of ‘violence as dehumanization’. Fanon sees violence as that which is initiated by an oppressive regime and which must be overcome by violence hence violence as a necessary tool for freeing and cleansing the victim’s consciousness [violence as therapy] (Fanon, 1964). On his part, however, Freire sees violence as a process that necessarily entails erecting barriers and obstacles in people’s path through which they pursue self-affirmation thereby interfering with their process of becoming fully human. It is therefore a process of dehumanization. To him therefore violence has never been initiated by the oppressed given that they are just but products of oppression trying to restore their humanity lost in the process of oppression (Freire, 1972).

Accordingly, the two theories have been adopted in this paper to constitute a framework within which students are viewed as active individuals always negotiating, developing and producing their identities according to their different encounters in school life, processes and practices (conditions of existence) thus humans whose actions are not pre-determined as in Plato’s view of ‘essence precedes existence’ but are a means through which students are always proactively seeking to develop their identities (essences) within their conditions of existence.

**Conceptual Framework**



**Fig: A schematic representation of the formation of tendencies of violence within the persons of students.**

From the illustration above, human beings are presented as having the potentials to reason, decide and act responsibly and these potentials must be fully realized. Accordingly, human beings are always in a continuous process of humanization (or personization) and this forms their ultimate ontological vocation in this world. It is this human ontological vocation that makes human beings move from initial experience, through understanding and judgment, to responsible action in search of their fulfilment (full humanity) within a human society. However, sometimes human beings may fail to realize these potentials and this interferes with their process of becoming fully human.

## **Research Methodology**

In view of the concerns over the lack of methodological rigour in antecedent inquiry efforts leading to investigations that are merely descriptive rather than analytical, this paper employs a phenomenological investigation of students' experiences in relation to incidences of unrest and violent protests. The sources of data include Reports from the Ministry of Education on student Unrest (between 1999 and 2005), Newspaper Reports as well as stakeholders' especially students' 'lived' experiences from their live narratives in relation to occurrences of student unrest and violence gathered from field using dialogue schedules, after all, critical reflections do not occur in a vacuum. Field data was collected from a purposive sample of 31 schools from 5 out of the former 8 provinces of Kenya that had experienced student unrest and violence within a period of at least 2 years preceding the study. Experiential analysis as the main mode of data analysis was necessitated by the position that the methodologies adopted by antecedent efforts have not delved deep enough into the experiences of students to discover the underlying causes. Accordingly, the researcher began by identifying recurrent themes often given as 'causes' of student violence from MoE data and then subjected them to further analysis of the way these themes have been experienced and interpreted by students by focusing on their 'inner personal experiences' gathered from their 'live' narratives or testimonies by voice-recording, then they were transcribed, edited and presented with pseudonyms for purposes of confidentiality.

## **General Causes of Student Violence in Secondary Schools in Kenya**

Antecedent efforts have commonly identified 'causes of student violence' to include; exercise of power and authority; communication breakdown; the prefect system; school rules and regulations; punishment; students' rights and freedoms; and KCSE examinations. This paper, however, considers these as mere thematic areas of conflict or triggers thus uses them as starting points in analysing students' related experiences in seeking to reveal the underlying causes.

### ***Exercise of Power and Authority***

While the exercise of power and authority in schools has been identified as a cause of student unrest and violence, this paper is more concerned with how this power and authority is exercised and most importantly, how students experience the manner in which it is exercised. Analysis of MoEST reports indicated that students' grievances in relation to this aspect include complaints about 'harsh', 'high-handed' and 'too strict' school Principals and sometimes, the boarding teacher. Similarly, in their submissions, the Macharia Report of 2000 and Wangai Report of 2001 have linked students' open protests and destruction of school property to the exercise of power by school administrators. Cases in point include, Kangundo High School where students stormed the principal's

house, burnt the deputy principal's car and destroyed classes all because of alleged 'high-handedness' of the Principal and the Boarding Master (*EA Standard*, 16 July 2004-pp.2-3). Similarly, Thika Girls School reportedly went on rampage accusing the Deputy Principal of dictatorship, engineering arbitrary suspensions and meting out 'harsh punishment' on them as well as being denied access to the school bus whenever they sought to go on trips (*Kenya Times* 23 May 2008 p.4 col.4).

Data from the field also established similar occurrences in some of the sampled schools, for instance, Kobe Girls secondary where the girls violently protested against the Principal's newly enacted rule that the girls do away with all beauty products as well as juice and other junk foods, giving a one-day ultimatum for compliance. In the dialogues with students, one girl explained their frustration thus:

We felt so bad. Why would she not want us to be like our colleagues in other schools? I mean, how will our fellow high school girls from other schools look at us when we meet them in symposiums and discussions. Surely, a high school girl cannot do without applying those things on her face. By the way, it was very unfair... (Form 3 student, Kobe Secondary).

Similar experiences were reported at Mbuni Secondary where students protested the administrators' tendency to frustrate their efforts to consult over the cancellation of holiday tuition despite having paid for it and at Korongo Secondary where students protested against the decision to keep them in school longer than had been stated in the Minister's circular.

It appears that the ways in which power and authority is exercised by school administrators promotes painful experiences of devaluation on the part of the students where they feel that their subjectivity and existence in the school has been rendered meaningless given the inconsiderate attitude of the school administrators to the students' efforts to seek consultation. Power and authority is thus exercised in ways that not only fail to take care of their interests, but also those that tend to suppress their subjectivity. Similarly, Kobe secondary incidence presents girls experiencing the declaration of non-use of beauty products as a negation of their preferred outlook. Apparently, the girls felt frustrated, humiliated and their worth compromised by the Principal thereby developing in them the need to initiate actions aimed at restoring their lost humanity and self-worth, a process of self-realization, which, to them, necessarily involves violence.

### ***Communication Breakdown***

The manifestations of this breakdown include; constrained channels of communication between students' body and their prefects and the administration in general; non-involvement of students in making decisions which directly affect their own welfare and failure to address or simply trivializing students' grievances. Examples of reported cases include a school in Mombasa where students protested against the evasive behaviour of their principal thus not addressing the students' complaints (*Daily Nation* 14

July 2000 p.5 col. 1-2); a boys' secondary school in West Pokot that protested against the alleged refusal of the principal to listen to students' grievances (East African Standard 14 November 2004 – Online Edition) and a school in Kilifi where students went on rampage demanding the transfer of their principal for always dismissing their grievances as trivial (*The Star Newspaper* 7 June 2012). Data from the field too was rife with incidences where schools had experienced unrest and violence due to communication breakdown as summarized in the table below:

**Table1: Summary of Incidences of Student Unrest Related to Communication Breakdown**

Name of school ( <i>pseudonym</i> )	County	Type of School	Nature of Disturbance	Grievances
Kasuku	Meru	Girls Boarding	General unrest	- Inconsistency in communication by the principal and deputy principal with Principal insulting deputy principal - Postponement of issues rather than solving them when they occur
Mbuni	Meru	Boys Boarding	Burnt cow-shed	- Unfulfilled promise of buying school bus. - Burnt cowshed as a way of communicating their displeasure because if they openly told the principal, he would suspend them.
			Walked out of school before closing	- Failure to refund tuition money following banning of holiday tuition by the Minister of Education. - Overstaying in school despite circular from minister that schools should close earlier. - General poor communication between principal and deputy principal
Korongo	Kirinyaga	Boys Boarding	Open protest	- Change in school entertainment programme without involving students - Wanted to close as early as the Minister's circular had directed
Kifaru	Kirinyaga	Mixed Boarding	General unrest	- Misunderstanding amongst Form 1 and Forms 2-4 parents - Poor communication between parents and teachers
Kobe	Kisumu	Girls Boarding	- Violent protest, braking of window panes and utensils in the dining hall.	- Poor communication between the principal (administration) and students. - Poor communication between the principal and teachers. - Principal never listens to students grievances unless they are reporting a teacher.

Ndovu	Kakamega	Mixed boarding	- Violent protest	- Poor communication amongst administrators i.e. Senior teacher sides with deputy principal against the principal.
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(Source: Author's Field data)

An experiential analysis of data on this aspect reveals inner feelings of frustration, alienation, humiliation and intimidation on the part of the students as a result of the way school administrators, teachers and prefects exercise their power and a general situation of poor communication channels. Students suffer alienation when they feel that their existence in the school is taken for granted while they suffer frustration on occasions of the school administration curtailing their efforts to present their grievances to be addressed. But as human beings, students are conscious of themselves as beings-in-the-world within which they must strive to transform any such limitations in their pursuit of self-realization. Accordingly, such circumstances where the conditions of existence seem unbearable, coupled with the administrators' unwillingness to listen to them, provide students with a justification to take the initiative to not only seek to transform such conditions, but also express their experiences of frustration and alienation in their pursuit of self-realization.

### ***The Prefect System***

Past MoE, Taskforce and media reports constantly pointed out the prefect system as a cause of unrest in some schools with the most memorable incidence being Nyeri High School where some students locked up four school prefects in their cubicles while they were asleep and burnt them using petrol due to some differences (*Daily Nation* 25 May 1999 p.5 col.2-5). Data from the field too revealed instances where prefects were still being appointed instead of students electing them as was the case in Mbuni Secondary and instances of alleged rigging of some students into certain positions such as the head boy and deputy head girl as reported at Ndovu Secondary and the head girl, sanitary and dining hall prefects at Kobe Secondary - positions that are considered 'strategic' by the school administration. Other practices often associated with unrest in schools include the preferential treatment of prefects by the school administration which takes various manifestations including being given offices and special rooms in the dormitories (cubicles) and a special diet different from that of the other students. In Kasuku Secondary for instance, dialogues with the students revealed that the prefects are always served with some soda (soft drinks) whenever they hold a meeting. Accordingly, when the prefect system lasted, the prefects perceived themselves to be a 'different' and 'privileged' lot from the rest of the students.

In a prefect system, prefects are meant to enhance effective communication between the students and the school administration. However, this function has been partly misinterpreted both by the prefects themselves and by some school administrators. In cases

where prefects have been appointed or even manoeuvred by the administration to occupy certain strategic positions, such prefects tend to be loyal to the school administration at the expense of championing the welfare of the students thereby suffering mistrust from the rest of the students who perceive them as ‘spies’ of the school administration. This attitude breeds disquiet and hostility towards such prefects. On their part, the prefects, consciously or unconsciously, further entrench this perception into the students’ consciousness by depicting their role as that of ‘reporting on other students’ whenever they break rules, as revealed by student respondents at Kobe and Mbuni Secondary schools in Kisumu and Meru Counties respectively.

Practices where some schools appoint rather than letting the students elect their leaders is certainly inconsistent with the students’ awareness of their right to choose their leaders as well as genuine commitment to sensitivity to their interests, fears and aspirations from these leaders. In instances such as those revealed in this analysis, the students certainly experience this denial of opportunity to choose their leaders as an infringement on their rights and freedom of choice leading to experiences of fear and anxiety for being led by leaders imposed upon them, hence not genuinely sensitive to their welfare. This, in their experience, is a barrier which has to be transformed to enhance their continued pursuit of self-realization.

### **School Rules and Regulations**

One of the ways in which schools work towards achieving moral and social development of their students is by enacting rules and regulations. However, data accessed from the MoE and that solicited through field dialogues revealed incidences of students protesting against these same rules describing them as ‘oppressive’, ‘strict’ and ‘tough’ rules and regulations’. Such instances include Chinga Girls’ Secondary in Nyeri District which protested against ‘strict rules’ and Kibage Secondary in Maragua District where students protested against the new Principal’s ‘many rules’. Equally, data from the field recorded such instances of protests against school rules, including Korongo secondary which protested changes in the regulations for entertainment without informing them; and Kobe Secondary following the Principal’s sudden introduction of ‘tough rules’ which, according to a Form 3 student respondent, ‘do not even make sense’.

Evidently, other than students experiencing these rules as ‘oppressive, strict, bad and tough’, there is also an apparent lack of understanding of these rules by the students. However, to follow these rules in a meaningful way, students must understand them not only in terms of what the rules require of them but also, how they stand to benefit from the implementation of these rules. But contrary to this, data from the field revealed that students find some of the rules as those that do not make sense and that prefects are supposed to get students to ‘follow school rules to the letter’ as revealed by a prefect at Mbuni secondary, thus;

... we just behave like friends or brothers but when it comes to matters of following rules and regulations, it becomes the opposite. We the

prefects make them follow the school rules and regulations to the letter (Prefect, Mbuni Secondary).

While rules have been used as a means of fostering discipline in schools, philosophers such as R.S Peters (1981) have tended to foreground the concept of self-discipline which promotes the kind of submission to rules that springs from the individual's own decision in which some kind of autonomy is displayed. This autonomy necessarily presupposes some knowledge and understanding on the part of the students, which apparently, is lacking in the analyzed incidences. Yet despite the apparent lack of a clear understanding of these rules, there are prizes for those who submit to them as well as the infliction of unpleasantness for those who fail to submit as evidenced at Kobe secondary where the 'defiant' students had their junk food and lotions poured. Nonetheless, the few students who followed this rule did so not because of their genuine personal commitment but possibly due to the fear of the consequences.

It is however argued in this paper that this coerced submission to rules without a clear understanding only promotes the kind of conformity that lacks conviction hence temporary compliance due to the fear for dire consequences like stiff penalties. But most importantly, other than risking to make students some form of automatons (hence dehumanization), coerced submission is intimidatory and oppressive in character hence students, as conscious beings, are likely to respond to it in ways that seek to transform it, as it is inconsistent with their ontological vocation of self-realization.

### ***Punishment***

Punishment as a cause for student unrest and violence has been commonly presented using adjectives such as 'harsh', 'unjustified', or 'too much' in both data from MoE and taskforce reports. The forms of punishment that students have protested against include corporal punishment (caning), suspension and even open questioning in the staffroom. Media reports have also presented accounts where students protested against corporal punishment as witnessed at a boys' school in Vihiga County; a school in Homa Bay where students protested the decision of the school's management board to reintroduce caning despite its ban by government (*East African Standard* 25 July 2002 p.5 col.1-2) and another school in Kiambu County where students protested the caning of seven of their colleagues alleging that teachers 'whipped' them 'mercilessly' (*East African Standard* 14 November 2004 p.4 col.3). Other reported forms of punishment through the dialogues include teachers insulting the students at Mbuni and Kasuku secondary schools.

The fact that these instances of punishment resulted in such unintended consequences is not only a pointer to the ineffectiveness of corporal punishment and suspension as ways of reinforcing discipline but also to the fact that beyond their ineffectiveness, they breed experiences of bitterness, intimidation and humiliation which the students experience as a painful as well as unbearable violation of their dignity. Their associated violent counter-attacks can therefore be understood either as a way of purging their bitterness, according to Fanon, or restoration of their lost dignity, according to Freire,

hence actions that are aimed both at their self-affirmation and self-realization.

### ***Rights and Freedom of Students***

Data from the MoE indicates that students have in the past held protests to claim their rights and freedom including the right to go for educational trips, having weekends that are free from academic work and a right to be taught well (quality education). At the same time, field data indicated that teachers tended to associate the apparent heightened awareness of students' rights and freedoms with the rapid social and political changes characterized by democratization as well the new Kenyan Constitution which emphasizes the idea of human rights, the effect of all which they felt was translating into intimidation of school administrators thus;

The students have a lot of powers. There is a tendency of parents teaming with their children whenever there is an indiscipline case; they know they can go to the educational offices. For instance, six students were expelled from our neighboring boys' school and one of the parents went to the court and the students were given an injunction and the principal had to reinstate them. How do you work in such a situation? (Teacher, Kifaru secondary).

According to a teacher respondent, students always feel justified to go on rampage whenever they feel they are being denied what they consider to be 'their right' since in such instances, they fondly invoke the popular expression '*haki yetu*' [our right], possibly, to embolden the idea that what they are asking for is something they are fundamentally entitled to. Apparently, and in the opinion of the teacher, students think that having rights means 'doing the things they want the way they want'. Teacher respondents therefore raised a general concern over the delicate balance between the state of discipline in those schools and the issue of children/human rights citing an incidence where students at Korongo secondary protested against the intention of the school administration to keep them in school longer than the newly issued circular stated and went to present their grievances to the District Commissioner (DC), who told them: "Whatever it is that you want, you will be given, it is your right". And so, to these teachers, it is because of this situation that their students will always want to 'have their way'. Apparently, this, coupled with the ban on corporal punishment, made the teachers feel rather emasculated.

Denial of what the students are fundamentally entitled to, for instance; going for educational trips, having weekends free from classes to develop other non-academic potentials, and being taught effectively, is to them, essentially oppressive. Accordingly, it can be rightly argued that as human beings, students have a right to free themselves from the humiliating and oppressive conditions associated with certain school routine practices. And they may choose to do so by violent means which, according to Fanon, also cleanses and frees their oppressed consciousness or enhances their self-affirmation according to Freire. Yet despite this apparent justification of violence, one would ask; if the students have a right to determine themselves, does this right entail the freedom to do so even in

ways that infringe upon other people's freedom to determine themselves too?

### ***KCSE Examinations***

Both MoE and Media reports have often attributed many of the incidents of student unrest and protests to the fear of examinations and poor performance in KCSE examinations. In this regard, there has been an emerging trend where students protest sitting for mock examinations as well as protesting against cancellation of KCSE results due to exam irregularities (Daily Nation, 18 August, 2015, Online Edition). For instance, in 2007, there was the 'computer error' incident that affected results for 40,000 candidates while in 2008, there were nationwide violent protests in secondary schools against sitting for mock examinations because of the fear that in case KCSE results were to be cancelled due to irregularities, and which to them was very likely, then mock results would be used instead, yet they were not adequately prepared for it (Daily Nation, 18 August, 2015, Online Edition).

Dialogues with students and teachers revealed interesting insights, for instance, the Principal of Kobe secondary, aware of the anxiety caused by examinations to students, wanted to exploit it for her personal interests after being interdicted, when she tried to incite Form 4 students to protest the posting of a new Principal promising that she will in return, 'help' them (pass their final exam). This is reminiscent of the case of Kasuku secondary where students protested against a Principal whom they accused of not 'helping' them (pass exams, of course through unscrupulous means) like the former one. But in all these, the fundamental question would be; why would students resist sitting for examinations or protest against poor performance?

The Kenyan system of education has often been accused of being examination-oriented given the deterministic role these examinations play. Essentially, while the main purpose(s) of evaluation consist in classifying, promoting/placing for admission and predicting future success of students in different endeavours, and while each of these functions ought to be served by a specific type of evaluation, the 844 system uses KCSE for all these purposes. Accordingly, KCSE is the one and only examination that determines the rest of the candidates' lives. Students therefore perceive it as an unfair sorting mechanism that condemns some of them to disillusionment while giving undue advantage to others considering the inherent disparities in terms of the differential levels of equipping of the schools and syllabus coverage. As a result, failure in these examinations, or even the mere possibility of it, leads to painful experiences of despair and hopelessness among the candidates, and which they must strive to transform in pursuit of self-realization.

### **Ultimate Causes of Student Violence in Secondary Schools in Kenya**

From the foregoing analyses and reflections, it can be argued that the antecedent efforts have not permeated to the underlying layers of the conceptual structure of violence

with close reference to human nature in pursuit of its fundamental causes. This may partly explain why their recommendations have fallen short of fully addressing this problem. Accordingly, this paper has tried to trace and locate origin of this violence in the students' 'lived' experiences in their respective schools within the existentialist paradigm in which humanity consists in four main aspects, namely: human rationality (rational being); human consciousness (seeking) self-destiny/determination; human dignity (beings with values and entitlements whose denial alienates them) and finally, human will (beings in a continuous state of seeking self-transcendence to become more complete beings). In this regard, the underlying causes of student violence would be seen to be; the alienation of the students from their process of self-determination; the absurdity of the students' existential conditions in their schooling experience and the affront to students' chosen values, their rights and freedom, all which are experienced by students as constituting their dehumanization. Accordingly, the protests by students, be they violent or otherwise, constitute a process by which they try to reconstruct themselves as individuals conscious of their destiny hence seeking to transform any situation that appears to alienate them from their ontological vocation of pursuing full humanity. It is a process by which, as human beings, they seek their self-affirmation. It is a process of self-realization.

### **Student Violence as a Process of Self-Realization**

It has been argued that the ultimate cause of student unrest and violence in secondary schools in Kenya is the experience of dehumanization, the distortion of the students' ontological vocation of becoming fully human (humanization). The foregoing sections have illustrated the ways in which students' pursuit of full humanity is occasionally intercepted by experiences of alienation, the absurdity (unfairness) of their conditions of existence in their respective schools and an affront to their values and freedom in their school life. Accordingly, the struggle for humanization, is possible only because dehumanization, although a common practice in schools, is not a given destiny but an obstacle brought about by some insensitive and inconsiderate school administrators and school routine practices. However, since, according to Freire, dehumanization afflicts both the oppressor and the oppressed, an authentic struggle for humanization must seek not only to liberate the oppressed but the oppressor too. It must not lead to further dehumanization.

From the incidences of student violence examined in this paper, it is apparent that in their strive for liberation, students end up becoming oppressors considering their retributive actions against their school administrators, teachers and prefects, thereby equally dehumanizing both themselves and these stakeholders. According to Freire's notion of dehumanization, such students are only at the initial stage of the struggle towards humanization and which they must seek to transcend. This is so because while the students would be understood to be pursuing the fullness of their humanity, it would appear that for them, humanity consists in oppressing an oppressor.

Apparently, the students pursue their own empowerment so that they can use the power to humble the authorities. At this level, their perception of themselves as opposites of the oppressors, though seemingly right, does not yet signify readiness for engagement in an authentic struggle to overcome the dialectical conflict between them and their school authorities. This is because the use of violence as a tool to fight against their oppression is equally intimidating and oppressive to those it is supposed to elicit a positive reaction from. And while this use of violence may appear satisfying while it lasts, it may only result in the use of more coercive ways by those in authority as a response to the violence by the students. The students are thus trapped in a kind of oppressor-oppressed duality, a contradiction which they must be ready to be helped to resolve. Their equally destructive and oppressive acts of violent protests illustrate how more oppressive than their perceived oppressors they can be when they get this power and freedom that they have, allegedly, been denied. In this way, they are bound to actualize themselves (self-realization) into human beings with tendencies that run counter to the fundamental tendencies as outlined in the existentialist treatise.

It would thus be recommendable for the students to seek to liberate themselves, and their perceived oppressors as well, rather than turning out to be oppressors in their struggle for liberation and humanization. This can be achieved by empowering the students through the process of conscientization, aiming at getting them to see their actions as equally oppressive hence worthy of avoiding if they truly stand in pursuit of an authentic process of liberation and self-realization.

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