A Policy Analysis of Formal Education in Modern Multiethnic Kenya: A Case for Cultural Hybridization

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In January 2008, inter-ethnic clashes broke out in Kenya. Hostilities were directed at people perceived to have voted for a particular political party during the December 27, 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections in which the main opposition political party accused the government of rigging. Several people died in the skirmishes, while others were displaced from their homes and sent seeking refuge in churches and police stations. Hostility escalated prompting the international community to step in to assist with food, shelter, and other essential needs. The former United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, stepped in to broker negotiations[1] between the opposing sides. Although the disputed elections were blamed for the crisis, ethnic conflicts emanate from longstanding land disputes between various ethnic groups dating back to the colonial period.

While few accusations of wrongdoing against the British colonizers might be disputable, and many would argue that the British legacy of inequitable power relations, unequal distributions of resources and opportunities among Kenya's ethnically diversity communities, and an obsolete and inadequate educational system continue to limit Kenyan prosperity and threaten national unity, I argue here that it is time to move forward. I further argue that in post-independent Kenya, and against a backdrop of colonial domination, oppression, and marginalization, education is now one of the most important means to empower Kenyans with

the knowledge necessary to understand, acknowledge, and define their own identity as a united country of diverse ethnicity. In this chapter, I discuss historical and contemporary contexts in which educational policies, curriculum structures, and educational practices in Kenya contribute to the current state of affairs in Kenya. I engage these contexts as a basis for which contemporary education in Kenya could be restructured and formulated as a model for envisioning a means by which Kenya might reorient itself in a globalized world. I show how the arts and art education are central to this goal.

Impacts of Colonial Partitioning and Post-colonial Independence on Educational Thought in Kenya

The present social, political, and economic conditions in Kenya are a direct consequence of the General Act of the African Conference signed at the Berlin Conference of 1885, and the Brussels Declaration of 1890 in which European nations[2] allocated themselves the vast land and resources in the continent of Africa (American Journal of International Law, 1921). The people of Africa were neither invited nor represented at the Berlin Conference and the Brussels Declaration. In 1919, the United States of America and the European powers ratified the Agreements made at the two forums under Article Eleven of the Act, which paved way for partitioning the African continent. As a result of the partition of Africa and subsequent establishment of British colonial rule in Kenya, the colonial power demarcated geopolitical boundaries and introduced British formal education. These developments destabilized and changed the lifestyles of more than 40 indigenous ethnic cultures in Kenya. Blanton, Mason, and Athow (2001)[AQ: not found in Refs. Found Blanton, Mason, & Athow?] wrote, “When the European powers imposed formal territorial boundaries throughout the continent in 1885, the seeds for ethnic conflict in post-colonial Africa were sown. …boundaries were drawn with little

or no consideration to the actual distribution of indigenous ethno-cultural groups" (p. 473). In the struggle toward independence, Kenya's political landscapes were fragmented and divided along ethnic and religious affiliations foreshadowing a divide between different elements of the prospective ruling class. Blanton, Mason, and Athow noted, "With the demise of colonial rule, the former colonies, with their colonial borders essentially intact, were transformed into some of the most ethnically fragmented states in the world" (2001, p. 473).

After gaining independence from Britain in 1963, the newly independent nation of Kenya faced the enormous challenge of mapping out strategies for reconstruction, and laying a foundation for national unity from the existing cultural diversity. The limited availability or denial of formal education opportunities to Kenyan Africans during the colonial era generated a lasting demand for schooling after independence (Eshiwani, 1993; Sheffield, 1973). The new government formed the first education commission, the Ominde Commission,[3] to formulate a new education policy for Kenya. The commission established guidelines for the newly independent nation and initiated "a beginning of a continuous planning in Kenya" (Ominde Report, 1965, p. 10)[AQ: not in Refs. Is this cited as "Kenya Government, 1965"?]. A major theme that emerged from the first part of the Ominde report was that the political and social role of education in independent Kenya were made evident in the utilitarian, social, cultural, and personal goals of education. The Commission made 160 policy recommendations that stressed the role of education in nation-building and promoting national unity through emphasis on cultural and social values, and integrating education with national economic planning (Ominde Report, 1965; [AQ: not in Refs. Is this cited as "Kenya Government, 1965"?]. *see also* Eshiwani, 1993; Sheffield, 1973). The Ominde Commission was first among the many education

commissions that would later characterize the way the Kenya government would deal with education changes.

There were numerous subsequent major reviews and official reports that came over the years, but the 1998 Commission of Inquiry chaired by Dr. Davy Koech performed the most intensive and extensive inquiry into the education system. The Commission visited all of the districts in Kenya between August 1998 and August 1999 and collected information from members of the public and specialized groups and individuals, including educationalists and representatives from the civil society, religious organizations, and politicians. Despite the intensive, extensive, and comprehensive nature of the Koech Report, the government of Kenya never implemented its recommendations. Instead, the Ministry of Education argued that the report was not implementable, citing cost, structural, and institutional limitations. The rejection of the Koech Report brought into question Kenya's respect for education planning, curriculum development, and recognition of professionalism in research (Amutabi, 2003).

Notwithstanding the rejection of the Koech Report, the Kenya government, under external pressure to implement Structural Adjustment Programs[4] (SAPs), indicated in a 2001 education report that "The development of education in general and providing quality for all in the country is difficult, if not impossible, under the implementation of the SAPs' requirements, for example, cost sharing and liberalization of the economy" (Kenya Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 10). However, the report also mentioned that inadequate policy based on the inherited education system and legal frameworks and statements have negatively affected the development of quality basic education. According to the Ministry of Education, education in Kenya "to a large extent still has a colonial orientation, promotes rote learning and is still elitist," and "the process of policy making, planning and implementation does not seem to be based on systematic

evaluation of the education sector based on available information" (Kenya Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 12). The challenges in education are impacted by the multiethnic nature of Kenya's population, and any meaningful reforms in any sector including education must address the challenges of a multiethnic society.

Ethnic Inequalities

In pre-independent Kenya, minority non-Africans[5], mostly Europeans and Asians, held key positions in government and the private sector. Political independence was an opportunity for African Kenyans not only to receive sovereignty, but also to expect higher participation in the government. However, at independence, Kenya adopted a British-styled constitution and inherited a poorly trained work force responsible for a new nation faced with meeting the needs of the diverse ethnic groups with variegated interests (Sheffield, 1973). As a result, after independence, most of the non-Africans were retained in the workforce as expatriates. Nevertheless, expectations of African Kenyans were high, and for the new government, priorities established in expenditure patterns were of direct relevance to the opportunity for members of various ethnic groups to compete in the marketplace for political and economic positions. While the allocation of resources and provision of social services to the citizens were crucial issues, one area of concern that was never addressed was the geographically defined ethnic pattern (land distributions) that would later and periodically become a major source of ethnic conflicts.

The existence of ethnic and racial imbalances during the colonial era in Kenya emanated from the British colonial policy of *indirect rule.*[6] This was a tactical policy that provided for sharing of power between the colonial government and the local leaders to provide protection for the Christian missionaries and the British settlers from any potential local hostilities (Parker, 1950). The British colonial government held the view that through the system of indirect rule, the Natives

would enjoy a significant share in their own government. At the same time, British settlers allocated themselves most of the fertile land in Kenya, while "restrictions on Native landholding, urging and even forcing the Natives to work, limitation on Native production of certain crops, and considerable racial discrimination in government services, education, and social life have had unfortunate effects, especially in Kenya" (Parker, 1950, p. 21). This manner of patronage was inherited by the African Kenyan leaders of the new government and resulted in the uneven distribution and re-distribution of national resources, especially the re-allocation of former white land[7] in the Rift Valley province, by Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya.

When Kenyatta, a member of the Kikuyu ethnic group, assumed office as president of Kenya, there seemed to be a notion held by the rest of Kenyans that the Kikuyu were in power, and it was apparent that the Kikuyu people exploited this notion to their political and economic benefit. During Kenyatta's rule, legislative elections enabled local and regional elites to move in and out of Parliament and power as the regime allowed competing leaders to vie openly for local supremacy under the one-party state. Orvis (2001) compared this style of administration to the late colonial period, where the central government, often using repressive tactics, largely limited politics to few selected ethnic groups, particularly in central Kenya, which included the Kikuyu, Embu, Meru, and Kamba. Similarly, President Moi,[8] who proved to be a far shrewder political operative than anyone had imagined, quickly set out to replace systematically the existing Kikuyu political elite with his followers from the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU),[9] particularly from his own Kalenjin ethnic group.

In 1992, tribal groupings emerged with demands for equity and inevitably caused political tensions in various parts of Kenya, particularly in the Rift Valley Province where most of the land

formerly belonging to British settlers had been re-allocated to the most affluent members of the Kikuyu community by the Kenyatta government (Orvis, 2001).

Although the issue of land has continued to be a sensitive issue in Kenya during the post-independence period, I view the most serious problem that has never been addressed since independence to be the boundary demarcations and political divisions between Kenya's ethnic groups. These were essentially British demarcations in their scheme of dividing and ruling Kenyans, and as subtle as this might seem, it is the crucial issue responsible for the ethnic clashes in 1992 and more recently in the 2007 post-election period. While ethnic and sub-ethnic factionalism has been the hallmark of elite politics, it is the British-orchestrated political tribalism that has taken a more grim turn on the ground (Orvis, 2001). It is no wonder that even several decades after independence, Kenya's ethnic groups continue to identify themselves by their so-called ancestral lands because political leaders, especially in the last 20 years, have maintained serious rifts by creating yet more ethnic-based administrative divisions. For instance, between 2004 and 2006, the president of Kenya, Mr. Mwai Kibaki, created new political districts for Kamba, Tugen, and Gusii communities in a move to solidify his political status. This is a practice that post-independent Kenyan leaders have often used to maintain status quo, while appearing to settle disputes among ethnic groups involved in power struggles to secure control of the nation's resources. It is evident that the ongoing struggle for resources, particularly land, among the various ethnic groups has created a destabilizing and volatile situation. Despite government efforts to unify all ethnic groups, ethnic considerations still dominate and the fight for equal access to resources results in such a precarious situation; it hampers progress and constantly creates a source of potential conflict. After the December 2007 presidential elections, the situation spilled over, degenerating into inter-ethnic violence.

An Educational Framework for the Future of Kenya: A Case for Cultural Hybridization

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Engaging the British Legacy in a Framework for the Future

As a post-colonial Kenya establishes and maintains a sense of civil cohesion and attempts to position itself for its future in an increasingly globalized world, I posit that it is crucial for Kenya to reconceptualize its educational framework to address three areas of concern:

1. Strengthening Kenya's national identity as a multicultural nation with a long, rich, and varied history, not only to be compatible with postmodern formulations of hybridity, syncretization, and pastiche, but also to consider the growing transnational movements of capital, labor, and culture as the material realities of globalization (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002).
2. Redirecting Kenyan educational policy toward construction of a critical and culturally inclusive national curriculum, which is central to Kenya's vision of itself as a nation that affirms cultural diversity from personal, social, historical, and political contexts (Nieto, 2004).
3. Engaging the study of the arts in education as a means of reaffirming both ethnic diversity and national unity.

Multicultural education has been stated as a concept that would be ideal if incorporated into education policy (Banks, 1993). Moving from but respecting multi-cultural orientation, one in which each ethnic or cultural group maintains a sense of identity, shared history, social cohesion, and opportunity, I embrace here an *intercultural orientation*, one that engages the notion of *cultural hybridity*. The notion of cultural hybridity, for Kenya, implies a fusion of legacies, ethnic practices, and aspirations amongst and across Kenya's 40 distinct ethnic groups

and with due regard to their European and British historical legacy, value systems, institutions, and structures. Intercultural education is central to such a notion.

Various notions of *cultural hybridity* depend on their context of description. From a Media Studies perspective, Kraidy (2005) describes "hybridity" as a contemporary emblematic notion that "captures the spirit of the times with its obligatory celebration of cultural difference and fusion, and it resonates with the globalization mantra of unfettered economic exchanges and the supposedly inevitable transformation of all cultures" (p. 1). In the context of colonization and in the post-independent nations, Lunga (2004) describes hybridity as a survival strategy for cultures "caught between the languages of their colonization and their indigenous languages" and that hybridization is a process though which post-independence cultures "use colonial languages without privileging colonial languages" (p. 291).

From these perspectives, cultural hybridity is represented as the result of contact between and integration of cultures, but within the context of multiethnic post-independent nations, what would the notion of cultural hybridity really entail? I consider as a case in point the problem of language. During the colonial period, the establishment of the British colonial empire, demarcation of geopolitical boundaries, and introduction of British formal education undermined the indigenous cultural values and practices in Kenya. British influence was manifested in the notion that it was synonymous with modernity and civilization for a person in the colony both to receive British formal education and speak the English language. In this regard, the use of English language played a powerful role in subjugating the cultures of colonized countries. Some critics argue that the continued use of the colonial language in Kenya is a sign of continued colonization of the mind (Ngugi, 1986), while others contend that the colonial language, in this case English, could be used without privileging or creating hierarchies across specific indigenous

cultural identities (Lunga, 2004). Although some might consider it colonization of the mind, I find the English language to be an essential tool for weaving strands of cultural and ethnic diversity into the fabric of Kenyan national consciousness in a globalized world. Paradoxically, I therefore argue for the maintenance of the use of the English language as a means of furthering social cohesion amongst Kenya's diverse ethnic groups. Kenya, after all, is now a country of both blended and distinct cultures, situated within an increasingly globalized economy, and greatly impacted by political, environmental, religious, and ethnic issues, events, and aspirations throughout the world. A unified identity relies on, at the very least, a common language.

Other than the use of English and existence of geopolitical boundaries separating Kenya from other African nations as defined by the British, there exist internal geographical and cultural divisions demarcated largely on the basis of ethnicity. If the notion that "hybridity involves the fusion of two hitherto relatively distinct forms, styles, or identities, cross-cultural contact, which often occurs across national borders as well as across cultural boundaries, is a requisite for hybridity" (Kraidy, 2005, p. 5) is correct, then there is need to initiate and expand meaningful conversations across cultures. One of the most effective ways to cultivate meaningful interaction and understanding across cultures is through educating Kenyan people to understand and respect not only their own cultural heritage, but also to embrace their obligations to maintenance of a peaceful, prosperous, and unified multicultural nation.

Educational Policy Recommendations

As mentioned earlier, the education system inherited from the British was not adequate to make significant contributions to intercultural harmony in independent Kenya. Ntarangwi (2003) writes, "Many [Kenyans] receive an education devoid of the central ingredients that are crucial in making them active participants in their own socio-cultural existence" (p. 213). Furthermore,

the government of Kenya acknowledges that “the education sector faces management problems which are occasioned by centralized bureaucratic structures and politicization of education at national, provincial and school levels” (Kenya Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 13). The obvious problems of centralization of management are administrative rigidity and lack of responsiveness, which normally result in delays in decision making and/or ineffectiveness in implementing recommendations made by various stakeholders in the education sector. In a politicized education system, other impediments would include lack of adequate resources, inefficiencies in policy execution, and lack of accountability, especially among the low-rank workforce. I recommend the following reforms in response to these conditions.

First, the government must restructure its system of the education management, initiate curriculum reform, and improve teacher education. This conclusion is already well understood amongst Kenyan policy makers. The Kenyan Ministry of Education acknowledges that while there should be no excuse for inefficiency, “Inadequate policy and legal frameworks and statements have negatively affected the development of quality basic education” (Kenya Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 12). The Ministry further acknowledges that Kenya’s education system, to a large extent, has a colonial orientation, promotes rote learning, and is still elitist. According to the Ministry, “the process of policy making, planning and implementation does not seem to be based on systematic evaluation of the education sector based on available information” (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 12), and the policies relating to education have in most instances been inadequate. There is urgent need for the government of Kenya to improve the management style of education by systematic research and evaluation of the sector by education and research experts. Subsequently, policy recommendations should be implemented by competent education officials and qualified teachers in the schools.

Second, the government should reform the national curriculum to serve effectively both the interests of diverse communities and those of a nation. While a reformed curriculum would provide all round education in the sciences in the humanities, I have emphasized the value of teaching the English language in Kenya. Driven by the need to respond to the challenge of engaging with one's language of colonization, several critics have discussed and explored the tenability and feasibility of using the language of colonization to express cultural identities (Lunga, 2004). While some may argue that as a language of imperialism, English remains potentially a hindrance for its African users because it alienates Africans from their own culture and languages, the use of English can also be liberating for diverse ethnic groups by providing a unified voice in which different cultures identify themselves as one nation (Lunga, 2004). Furthermore, in the globalized world, English language unites the ethnically diverse nation of Kenya while connecting the country to the rest of the world.

Third, for curriculum changes to be meaningful, effective, and successful in achieving intended goals, the country needs to improve teacher training programs, especially at the primary level. The Ministry of Education acknowledges, "Teachers are an important resource in the teaching/learning process and their training and utilization therefore requires critical consideration" (Kenya Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 18). The government should provide training for teachers and education department officials to ensure that both groups understand policy requirements. Training provided by the government should promote cooperation between curriculum development, teacher training, and the development of curriculum support materials.

Fourth, rather than including it as part of extracurricular activities, **the government of Kenya should incorporate arts education as a central and an integral part of the school curriculum.**[AQ: is added emphasis here okay?] This move would benefit a wide cross-section

of students who would gain knowledge and understanding of local and global trends in politics, culture and education. To promote intercultural unity and understanding, an arts education curriculum would incorporate visual arts from various ethnic groups in Kenya. The arts education curriculum should also incorporate the performing arts including oral tradition, music, drama, and dance. Through the oral tradition, which includes storytelling and poetry, children will be become aware of their cultural and material heritage that they will be required to safeguard and share with others. An arts education program will combine the listening to, making, and sharing of music from various ethnic groups in Kenya. These activities would provide a social-cultural context for promoting interethnic appreciation of music and the creative potential, which is an essential component the school curriculum. In addition to music, various communities have unique dance styles that could be shared by all cultures. It would be important to both students and teachers to understand the meaning of dance styles and formations of the various ethnic groups. For example, the Gusii and the Maasai—by tradition—each have dance performances for various occasions. However, each of occasions might have different meanings and interpretations for each ethnic group. For example, among the Gusii, initiation of boys into adulthood is through circumcision, but among the Maasai, it is the killing of a fierce wild animal, say, a lion; each of these initiation rites has a dance that accompanies a successful completion of the process, but differ in the meanings and interpretations attributed to each process. An essential aspect of learning about dances from these two ethnic groups would be to assist students to understand the meanings and interpretations of those dances from the perspectives of the respective cultural groups. The inclusion of music, dance and poetry would be vital in transmitting to children their oral tradition through stories, songs, simple poems, riddles, nursery rhymes and games. In addition to learning about the visual and performing arts, students need to

understand how their artistic heritage is changing with trends of globalization. A major reason for students to learn to appreciate their own cultural diversity is that there is to counter the enormous external influences through popular culture that somehow overshadow the traditional arts of the various ethnic groups in Kenya. Rather than embrace popular culture especially from the West, students should learn to filter out only the relevant aspects for the good of their interethnic coexistence.

Some Final Considerations

Technology, commerce, and travel have turned the world into a global network of scientific, economic, political, and cultural exchanges, and what happened in Kenya now impacts other parts of the world. Despite its recent ethnic violence, Kenya has long been considered a model for post-colonial African nationhood. I have considered problems of Kenyan political and educational practices inherited from the British at independence in 1963 and have considered how multiculturalism, cultural hybridity, use of the English language, and arts education contribute to Kenya's potential as a unified and prosperous nation. I have argued that an education policy in Kenya should accentuate the interrelationships and diversity of cultural heritage in a globalized world. I also argue here, as have many others, that the education sector (governmental officials, policy makers, and educators) in Kenya needs to directly address the issues, however difficult, and formulate *and implement* a critical and culturally inclusive national curriculum that would strengthen Kenya’s national identity as a multicultural nation. This includes discussions of remnants of colonial administration policies and reviews of forms of discrimination in local policies. Such discussions are fundamental to an understanding of policies and practices that have failed to redress racial injustice by maintaining existing inequalities and neglecting the cultural heritage of Kenyans. Colonial education created an effect that has made it

difficult to differentiate between the new imposed ideas of the colonizers and the accepted former practices of the indigenous people. As a result, “postcolonial education has the enviable task of finding a way to speak to a community and a nation that is at one level marked by sameness and at another by difference” (Dei, 2000, p. 228). Dei argues, “If some forms of ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender, and class identities attain dominance, there is need to understand how it occurs, how students, educators, and communities interpret this occurrence and how individual subjects define their relations to the dominant identity (p. 228).

The task of establishing a successful post-colonial Kenyan national identity will not be easy, and even after 40 some years of independence the task is still incomplete and riddled with complex problems. In his critique of postcolonialism in relation to education and development, Ntarangwi (2003) finds that as a former British colony, Kenya continues to show strands of economic and cultural dependency to the extent that most of Kenya’s political and economic policies are oriented toward European and American contexts. Kenyans view development as “a process of self-denial that constructs an imagined self devoid of the assumed cultural baggage of its own traditional social and cultural practices” (Ntarangwi, 2003, p. 213). Faced with this situation, Ntarangwi argues that many Kenyans have difficulty in deciding between assuming a British/Western and a Kenyan identity, invariably results in bearing the burdens of both. With this in mind, a reconstructed education system for Kenya should aim at boosting the identities of the people and uniting previously isolated individuals and cultural groups. I believe that the arts have an important role to play in this due to both their centrality to individual cultural identity and their power to communicate across cultural distinctions those most important common human aspirations.

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Endnotes

[1] Kofi Annan, the former United Secretary-General, brought the government and opposition parties together to resolve the disputed elections. Both parties agreed to form a government of national unity, which created a post of Prime Minister that was filled by the opposition leader.

[2] The Berlin Conference was held under the German Chancellor Bismarck. European countries at the forefront of partitioning Africa were France, Germany, Great Britain, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Belgium, and Netherlands.

[3]The Education Minister appointed a commission in 1964 headed by Dr. Simeon Ominde to review all aspects of education in Kenya. The Ominde Report was published in two parts; first at the end of 1964 to deal with policy, and the second in 1965 to provide quantitative recommendations and a plan of priorities (Sheffield, 1973).

[4] During the 1990s, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) mandated the Kenya government to make certain policy changes for Kenya to receive new loans from those institutions.

[5] As a British colony, the majority of Europeans were British nationals, but because of the Berlin Conference of 1885 and 1890 Declaration of Brussels declared Africa a free trade area for European nations; there were nationals of other European nations living in pre-independent Kenya. The Asian population was made up mainly of Indian nationals who moved to Kenya during the building of the Kenya-Uganda Railway.

[6] *Direct* rule was an ideology by Sir Frederick Lugard, a famous British colonial administrator, who pioneered the idea into practical use in Nyasaland, Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria.

[7] This term refers to land that was previously occupied by the British settlers in the fertile Rift Valley province of Kenya.

[8] Daniel Moi took over as Kenya's second president in 1978 after Kenyatta's death. Moi ruled for 24 years, leaving office after the second multi-party elections in Kenya in 2002.

[9] KADU emerged as a coalition of smaller ethnic groups that feared Kikuyu and Luo domination of the newly independent country and fought for *majimbo* [federalism] for protection against central (Kikuyu and Luo) domination (Orvis, 2001).