Boarding Schools as Colonizing and Oppressive Spaces: Towards Understanding Student Protest and Violence in Kenyan Secondary Schools

Teresa A. Wasonga[*]
Northern Illinois University, USA

Tompson Makahamadze
Makelle University, ETHIOPIA

Abstract: Goffman's theory of total institutions and Fanon's theory of violence were used to explain student protests and violence in Kenyan secondary schools. Youth violence around the world is not a new phenomenon. However, the persistence, frequency, and intensity of violence, and their consequences beg for logical explanations and remedies. This study was part of a three-year project facilitated through the Networked Improvement Community partnership for self-study and intervention. Although a holistic approach to research was applied, data for this study were gathered through narrative inquiry. Participants (teachers, principals, and members of the school community) were identified purposively using the snowball process. Data were analyzed through deductive and inductive reasoning. Findings indicate a preponderance of student protest and violence among students in boarding schools. Student violence was a response to the devaluing and oppressive environment in boarding schools which resembled total institutions, and students exercising democratic rights to protest. The paper argues that school authorities could mitigate violent protests by providing formal political means of representation and democratic decision-making; creating new spaces for negotiation and peaceful protest; listening to the voices of students; and engaging in dialogue to create a common vision and mission.

Keywords: *Student protest and violence, Networked Improvement Community, secondary schools.*

Introduction

This study investigated persistent students' protests and violence (SPV) in Kenyan secondary schools. Across the world, violence in schools is a phenomena of concern (McMahon et.al, 2020; Furlong & Morrison, 2000; 1994) needing intervention, particularly its impacts. Although schools are considered safe places, they are also associated with violent acts (Furlong & Morrison, 1994; McMahon, 2020). Furlong and Morrison argue that taking into consideration "*the role that school as a physical, educational, and social environment plays in violence among its participants*" is the best way to focus attention on the worthiness of the issue of violence (2000, p. 73). The American Association of University Professors "Student protest" (1996) described student protests as rebellion against authoritarianism that pervades institutions and comes in the form of "*violence, rough and undisciplined actions, and outbreaks of protests against the rules and regulations through which faculties and administrations attempt to govern students*" ("Student protest", 1969, p. 319). School violence has also been conceptualised as "*an instrument of power that the structurally weak … can employ to serve their interests*" (Cooper 2014, p.600). In the last two decades Kenyan schools have experienced SPV persistently. And despite the persistence, frequency, and intensity of strikes, school closures, and wanton damages and losses (National Crime Research Centre [NCRC], 2017; Opere et al' 2019; Sugut & Mugasia, 2014); there are limited logical explanations and remedies.

Research focusing on student protests indicate that students dissent the failures of adults to uphold values/ideals, and their (adults) acts of authoritarianism ("Student protest", 1969; Cooper, 2014; NCRC, 2017). According to Amutabi (2002), the autocratic nature of institutions and the oppressive structures under which they operate are often ignored, specifically when it comes to their impacts on subordinates/students. Meanwhile, studies cite authoritarian leadership in Kenyan secondary schools as one of the major causes of SPV (Amutabi, 2002; Malenya, 2013; NCRC, 2017; Republic

[*] **Corresponding author:**
Teresa A. Wasonga, Northern Illinois University, Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations, DeKalb, IL 60115, USA.
✉ twasonga@niu.edu

of Kenya, 1991). Authoritarian leadership and its manifestations are features of both colonialist bureaucracy and patriarchy that are associated with power over and dehumanization (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Freire, 2003).

Background of schools and school protests and violence in Kenya

The Kenyan school system has undergone great transformation since 1963 when Kenya gained independence from the British colonial rule. However, governance and power structures have fundamentally remained the same. Deeply rooted in the system are "*continuities in political practice from the pre to post-colonial period*" (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p. 11) including racialized views of inferiority of Africans, cruelty, hostility, brutality, and control as experienced by youths in juvenile detention camps (Ojiambo, 2017). Detention camps were places where delinquent Kenyan youths were institutionalized under the control of colonial masters with the purpose of subjugation (Jones & Fowles, 2008). These camps were later transformed into boarding schools in post-colonial Kenya. As schools, these institutions have maintained the colonial legacies of control, authoritarianism, violence, alienation, bureaucracy, and strict discipline (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Boarding schools took on the image of detention camps becoming places of confinement, deprivation and oppression, instead of discovery and collective thinking. Today, the majority (90%) of Kenyan secondary schools are boarding facilities. The Kenyan government inherited the concept of boarding schools with all its flaws and has justified its continued use as a tool for unity in bringing together children from different ethnicities and regions across the country (Republic of Kenya, 2005). The Government argues that boarding schools offer opportunities for economy of scale in education (Jagero, 2012) and bureaucratic control.

Over the decades since independence, boarding schools have remained the same as changes to the Kenyan school systems have focused on structure (from 7-4-2-4 to 8-4-4), curriculum (subject content), and teacher preparation. Less consideration has been given to student needs, balance of power, technological changes, and changes in the economic structure. Meanwhile, access to information, critical consciousness, greater awareness of rights, and students' voices have emerged, at times in the form of protests and violence (SPV). Historically, the first school strike on record in Kenya was at Maseno Boys (primary) in 1908 when the boys refused to participate in manual labor and pressed for more reading and writing (Sifuna, 1990). Despite multiple layers of oppression, few incidents of school violence are documented between the 1900s and 1970s with the exception of boycotts, walkouts, or peaceful demonstrations (Republic of Kenya, 1991). However, acts of SPV would increase markedly in the period between 1980 and 2000 (NCRC, 2017). In this same period, the country was experiencing general unrest under the weight of political oppression and threats at the behest of a highly centralized and personalized executive power (Amutabi, 2002). Indicative of the general status of political unrest and ethnic clashes in the country, acts of violence in schools uniquely targeted fellow students and school facilities resulting in deaths, sexual assaults, and wanton destruction of school property (Republic of Kenya, 2001). NCRC gives examples of the worst cases of school unrest and violence. In July 1991, male students at St. Kizito Mixed Secondary School violently attacked female students and set their dormitory on fire. Over seventy girls were raped and nineteen killed. In May 1997, twenty-six female students at Bombolulu Girls Secondary School died in a dormitory fire suspected to be an act of arson by fellow students. In March 1999, students from Nyeri Boys High School locked up four prefects in their cubicle and burnt them up with petrol. In May 2001, a fire set by students at Kyanguli Secondary School in Machakos killed sixty-seven students.

Despite these statistics, there were hardly explanations for the violence nor policies aimed at thwarting SPV. SPV would peak in 2016 and 2017 when 130 and 126 schools respectively went on a rampage (Opere et al, 2019). During these unrests, students beat up teachers, fought with police and parents, set their schools on fire, killed fellow students, and destroyed personal belongings (Cooper, 2016; Cooper, 2014; Malenya, 2013; NCRC, 2017). Schools were closed and students were vilified by government, parents, school administrators, and the media without investigating and addressing the core causes of protests. Criminal charges were unsuccessful because of corruption and the ages of the students while parents and guardians were forced to payed for damages (Cooper, 2014; Cooper, 2016; Opere et al, 2019).

The Government, through the National Crime Research Center (NCRC) conducted "*a rapid assessment of arson in secondary schools*", to examine issues related to the school burning crisis (NCRC, 2017). The NCRC provided a list of possible causes of SPV and strategies to help address the problems. However, the list focused primarily on factors external to students' locus of control - exams, schoolwork load, peer pressure, school leadership, and lack of guidance and counselling (Amutabi, 2002; NCRC, 2017). These explanations overlooked the deplorable conditions in public schools, students' capacities to resist oppression, violation of students' rights to humane treatment, and specifically, students' abilities to engage in purposeful political action and activism (Cooper 2014; Cooper, 2016; Opere et al, 2019). The focus on external factors also detracted attention from the psychological impacts of the perpetual state of nervousness and dissatisfaction associated with institutionalization, poor conditions of living, poor learning, and authoritarian governance (Goffman, 1958; Malenya, 2013; NCRC, 2017).

Theoretical framework

Many scholars have theorized about violence and its implications (Fanon 1963; Goffman 1958; Freire, 1990, Hooks, 1994). Goffman (1958), Fanon (1963), and Freire's works on violence and its causes largely inform this study.

Total institution, a theory proposed by Goffman (1958) seeks to explain violence in institutions. The concept of total institution is akin to oppression. It has been described as *"a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period, lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life"* (Jones & Fowles, 2008, p. 103) in contrast to "*basic social arrangement in modern society in that we tend to sleep, play and work in different places, in each case with a different set of co-participants, under a different authority, and overall without a rational plan*" (Goffman, 1958, p. 45). The barriers between spheres of life are broken; instead, subjects are organized under strict rules and singular authority with a high propensity towards authoritarianism. Daily activities are carried out collectively on a rigid schedule of explicit order. The system of authority takes away people's control of their environment causing "*chronic anxiety about breaking the rules and chronic worry about the consequences of breaking them*" (Goffman, 1958, p. 52). Punishments for breaking rules are more severe than at home. Goffman (1952, p. 59) provides four human responses to total institutionalization: 1) Situational withdrawal where the people will withdraw attention from everything except events immediately around their bodies. In other words, they will avoid involvement in interactional events. 2) Rebellion, with which they intentionally challenge the institution, including fragrant refusal to cooperate with staff through intransigency and high rebel-morale. 3) Colonization, a process whereby staff uses undesirable experiences from the outside world to demonstrate the desirability of the inside. Colonizers use the humanist effort to make life in total institutions bearable to increase its attractiveness and colonization. 4) Conversion, which is a scenario where the institutionalized takes over completely the staff or official view of himself and tries to model the expectations of the staff. They take a disciplined moralistic disposition, presenting themselves as enthusiasts of the institution. Each of these responses represents a way of managing the tension between the home environment and the institution.

Boarding schools in Kenya mirror total institutions in structure, functions, power relations, and outcomes. Cohorts of students live together under the same conditions, with rigid rules, consequences, and distinct authority (Cooper, 2016; Oduor & Kajilwa, 2016). School authorities, having "*internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom"* and thus authoritarian (Freire, 2003, p. 47). The central relationship between the staff and their subordinates is surveillance – "*seeing to it that everyone does what he has been told is required of him, and this under conditions where one person's infraction is likely to stand out in relief against the visible, constantly examined, compliance of others*" (Goffman, 1958, p. 59). The outcomes are predictable, "*If lower-power people are continually subjected to harsh treatment or lack of goal attainment, they are likely to produce some organized resistance to the higher power-people*" (Hocker & Wilmot, 2014, 128). They may resort to aggression either against other oppressed individuals or the oppressors to reduce the anxiety that emanates from oppression.

In addition to being a likely an outcome of total institution, violence has been conceptualized differently by Fanon (1963). In seeking to explain causes of violence during decolonization, Fanon described violence as a cleansing force that "*frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect*" (Fanon, 1963, p. 41). He explained that violence against the oppressor is cathartic and liberating. In relating oppression and violence, he claimed that non-gratuitous violence is necessary, not only for the oppressed to thwart the oppressor's violence, but also to restore justice, humanity, and self-actualization (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1990, Hooks, 1994).

In support of Fanon's theory, Freire (1990) explains that oppression leads to loss of humanity and that dehumanization breeds violence. While dehumanization is the outcome of oppression, humanization manifests as freedom and justice. Historically, humanization has been negated by "*injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors*" (Freire, 2003, p. 44). Notably, the oppressed often appropriated violent tactics from their oppressors and unleash them on their targets who include oppressors, accomplices or the powerless. Research shows that when oppressed gain freedom, they have tendency to identify with and take on the identity of the oppressor and become oppressors, a state known as coloniality (Freire 1990; Quijano & Ennis, 2000). For example, in Kenya, coloniality, the perpetuation of oppression was continued after detention camps were transformed into boarding schools in post-colonialism.

Total institutionalization (Goffman, 1958) and Gratuitous violence (Fanon, 1963) suggest psychological injury and pressure from which the most likely escape is unrest, protest and non-gratuitous violence.

Methodology

This research is part of a larger three-year project. The project facilitated the creation of school/community/university partnerships (SCUP) to study variations in academic outcomes in ten Kenyan secondary schools. The project applied a holistic approach to research including quantitative and qualitative data. However, the data used in this study were gathered through qualitative narrative inquiry approach, including focus group discussions, individual interviews, and observations. Narrative inquiry focuses on how humans experience their world (Creswell, 2012). For "*educators looking for personal experiences in actual school settings, narrative research offers practical, specific insights*" (Creswell, 2012, p. 502) that explain a phenomenon. The primary research question for this study was, "How do school stakeholders talk about their experiences with student protests and violence?"

Participants: The study focused on three boarding schools that had experienced protests and violence before and at the time of this study. One school served girls only, the other boys only and a co-ed school. Individuals were selected purposively for interviews and focus group discussions through snowball process because they were "*information-rich*" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Initial interviews with those who had experienced SPV led to others who were approached to participate in the study. Respondents were teachers, school administrators, county officials, students, and members of the community.

Data collection: Schools were visited multiple times (four times a year) over three years beginning May 2016 in the months of May to July. In each school, the researchers conducted two focus group discussions with students, interviewed prefects (3-5), teachers (5), the principal, and two members of the Board of Governors. Researchers probed participants to get to the deeper meanings of responses beyond opinions and subjective feelings. For example, researchers used the 5whys technique to get respondents to think deeper about the cause and effect relationship and the factors underlying the problems they narrated (Serrat, 2009). Three key questions guiding the focus group discussions and interviews were: 1) talk about your experience with protest and violence; 2) talk about your understanding of the causes of protest and violence in the school; 3) how can protest and violence be avoided?

There was continuous collaboration between the researchers and participants for reliability and consistency in collecting, validating, analysing, and reporting data (Creswell, 2013). The three-year period provided time to comprehend each school's context, develop relationships, trust, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and evolve ideas. Member checks and reviews were carried out.

Data analysis: Data were analyzed through deductive reasoning (based on theoretical frameworks) and inductive reasoning (allowing for new themes to emerge) (Creswell, 2012). In deductive reasoning, data was compared for fit with the framework whereas in inductive reasoning, we looked for emerging patterns.

Findings

The data indicated a preponderance of student protest and violence (SPV) in Kenyan boarding schools. Although boarding schools were not the cause of the SPV in themselves; conditions were devaluing and likely fomenting SPV. Themes based on deductive analysis of data included*:* Kenyan public boarding schools as total institutions, colonial legacies, and dehumanization. Inductive analysis produced the theme, students as activists and conscientious beings in their environment. These themes are explored below.

Kenyan public boarding schools as total institutions

Stories told in the three schools, Warembo Girls School (WGS), Vijana Boys School (VBS), and Zalendo Mixed School (ZMS), were reminiscent of observations in other boarding schools. Generally, boarding schools in Kenya are located in remote rural areas with limited access to the outside world, except for occasional visits from parents, government officials, and vendors. Students are residents in these schools for nine out of twelve months with no phones and can only leave the school compound with permission from authorities to attend to essential events such as doctor's visit, school sanctioned activities or returning home. As described by Goffman (1958), the students work, learn, sleep, play, and eat within the school under the same authority (principal and teachers). Students live by a predetermined schedule with rigid rules and dire consequences under the surveillance of teachers.

At the time of the study, WGS served 2400 girls with insufficient infrastructure (dormitories, classrooms, labs, dining). Classes were overcrowded with a minimum of 65 students per class. The dormitories, though modern with cubicles, were equally overcrowded with triple-decker beds, the top beds too close to the iron sheet roof that is cold at night and hot in the day. Rooms that were intended for four students accommodated eight with personal belongings strewn over the beds. The dining hall was converted to a dormitory to accommodate increased number of students, prompted by the Government policy of 100% transition from primary to secondary. Students picked their meals from the kitchen and ate under a tree or in the classrooms. Water scarcity and sanitation were endemic. One student explained how they woke up at 4.00 am to queue for about three litres of water to be used for "*all of my hygiene needs for the day*", and most of the time there was not enough. The ratio of toilets to students was about 1 to 100 with many students using any available space to ease themselves at night. Sanitary towels were thrown around the ablution blocks and the dormitories. The dormitories and classrooms were compromised by the relatively small size of windows, most of which were broken, allowing mosquitoes in at night. The food was poorly prepared and often too little, those with money supplementing with foodstuff from venders. Those without money expressed frustration. In contrast, researchers observed that teachers had special meals with snacks between.

Vijana Boys had a population of 600 in a one street school. The school was overcrowded and lacked essential facilities. There was one small, almost empty laboratory, a dining hall under construction, and not enough housing for teachers. A mud house in the school compound sheltered two teachers. The boys' dormitories were built out of corrugated iron sheets from bottom to top with very small windows. Students referred to them as "kaunda suits," analogous to former President Kaunda of Zambia's attire. In the day, the heat was unbearable, in the night it was freezing cold. There were no bathrooms, no running water, and the toilets were at least 500 meters from the dormitories. There were no beds,

instead, there were thin mattresses on the floor. One student said, "*I hate it when darkness comes, and I know where I am going to sleep. I pray that I do not need the toilet at night.*" Another said, "*We all do.*" Classrooms were modern, built for 40 but holding at least 60 students. Students bathed in a river nearby, where they also fetched water for cooking. Most of the students had torn school uniforms and complained of "biting hunger".

ZMS occupied a defunct factory. Being close to a major road, it served both boys and girls from the vast region as day scholars. Later, it was converted to a boarding school for boys and girls. Unlike single sex schools, teachers here spent a lot of time resolving issues of boy-girl relationships and girls performed very poorly academically. The school catered for about 700 students of which 240 were girls. Amenities were inadequate. Girls bathed outside exceedingly early in the morning or late at night. There were four toilets to 240 girls and about 20 minutes of a bathroom break. Girls were in constant conflict with teachers for returning late to class from break. The dining area was a makeshift shelter that could hold about 100 students. Food was served in the kitchen and eaten under trees or classrooms. Although the school had modern classrooms and one dormitory, the office building was in pathetic condition with leaking roof. School administrators had modern houses, while teachers lived in houses made of corrugated iron sheets. Due to insufficient number of classrooms, a third of the students listened from outside. There was no room for teacher to move inside the classroom. ZMS had a borehole from where they drew water, but the ablution blocks for both boys and girls are wanting.

In describing a typical day at school, Jaji narrated:

We wake up at 4.00 am for morning studies, some students continue their sleep in class. Breakfast is at 6.00 am on a first come, first served basis with no guarantee. Then we clean our dormitories, classrooms, and toilets. The teachers come around to supervise. Class starts at 8.00 am and teachers wait with a cane for those who are late. We have a 20-minute break from 10.45 am. Lunch starts at 12.30 pm and it is pandemonium, some girls who are weak miss lunch often, so they must buy food from the canteen. We have time for games and fetching water between 4.00 to 5.30 pm. We have supper between 6.00 and 6.30 pm. We must be in class for preps by 7.00 pm. Mostly, we take tests and more tests, and we bath after night prep before we go to bed around 11.00 pm. That is why we are always tired. Saturdays and Sundays are different, but we do the same things.

These schools reflect characteristics of total institution in the way they organize and the likely outcomes as stated by Goffman (1958).

Colonial legacies

The authoritarian rule in schools can be explained through the lens of colonialism and coloniality. Colonial structures of power produced discrimination and created a framework within which coloniality, a continuation of colonial forms of domination, operates (Quijano, 2007). In each of the three schools, researchers observed that principals, teachers, and prefects exercised absolute power, including corporal punishment for breaking school rules and performing poorly academically. With unrestrained authority, students experienced brutality at the hands of teachers and prefects. In Jedidia's statement below, there is evidence of coloniality and Goffman's situational withdrawal.

I am poor at math; I did not use be like that. But now I do not bother to try anymore. When I was in 2nd year of school, I performed poorly, but even before the teacher told me why I was wrong, he caned me. First, I got scared and then I just did worse. Recently, I did not even try, so the principal called me and instructed two teachers to deal with me. They said I will let the class down and both caned me as the principal and others watched. That was it, I wish I could just disappear from school.

This scenario was replicated in each of the schools, especially from girls who have learned to overdress (as padding) in preparation for beatings. At ZMS, researchers observed as girls were caned as they returned from a bathroom break. Dida, a senior student said, "*You have to prepare for it, we have four toilets for 240 girls and 20 minutes, somebody has to be late unless we all decide not to go to the toilets. The teachers have the power to do what they want and if you joke, they will send you home.*" Another said, "Our principal is like a god, even the teachers fear him, you do not ever want to be called to his office and if you are, you know you are going home. This place is like hell." In the boys' discussion group, one said, "*They (prefects) make you feel small like in the 'animal farm' where some animals are superior to others. They can beat you up if you dare talk back to them. They are like kings and we are their servants.*" In a rejoinder, another boy whispered, "*Like prison, I think prison will be nicer.*" In an interview, a principal said, "*Students must suffer, otherwise they will not be successful. Jesus suffered to save the world.*" Responding to a question on how the school can achieve success, the principal at VBS responded "*Discipline, strict discipline, we cannot spare the rod. So, we cane them, and we make sure they are disciplined.*" Like Goffmans' idea of colonization (increasing attractiveness), a member of the school board at WGS described the principal, "*She is extremely strict, these are the white people that we have today to keep our children in line. She understands discipline is needed in school.*" Researchers noted consistent use of metaphors, including biblical metaphors to explain or justify subordination of students whether it was suffering, endurance, forgiveness, or respect.

In a meeting, teachers did not only question the illegality of corporal punishment, but they were also enthusiastic about corporal punishment, a form of conversion (Goffman, 1958). In their words, "*these kids do not listen, some are as dump as pigs, and the only language they understand is the cane. Even when we call their parents, the parents tell us to beat them, they blame us if we don't.*" Another teacher added, "*The government banned caning, but let them tell us what else we can do, and until they do, we will use the cane.*" The deputy principal who is in charge of discipline asserted, "*We have to maintain order, there are over 500 boys and girls here and without strict order, we have a market not a school. Order means, they follow rules, and the teachers make it happen.*" A teacher added, "*If you are not careful, they will run you down, you instil discipline, you keep them down.*"

These schools are managed through inferiorization of students. Not once did teachers say anything positive about students. Martinot (n.d) describes the reasoning of teachers as "hegemonic mind", an inclination to disempower many and serve the interests of few. Research suggests that students subjected to this kind of treatment will eventually fight back through rebellion, protest, or violence (Cooper, 2016; Freire, 2003; Amutabi, 2002; Fannon, 1963; Goffman, 1958).

Dehumanization

Freire (2003) described dehumanized not only as *"those whose humanity has been stolen but also (though differently) those who have stolen it"* (p. 44). Dehumanization is a process that distorts becoming fully human, ignoring, and neglecting the rights of others through oppression and preventing people from achieving their potential. It includes the dominant class making policies or rules and the subjects adapting to the rules. Data in this project indicated that students experienced dehumanization at the hands of teachers and fellow students. For example, Emma narrated, "*Form one was hard, I had nightmares before I came to form one because we were told about bullying, but our experiences were worse than the nightmares.*" Crying, a second-year student claimed, "*Between caning by teachers and prefects, food taken away from you and losing belongings, it was difficult to tell what hurt most.*" Others joined in agreement. "*Our teachers are there to check on how we work, but never to protect us. When you report bullying, they laugh and tell you, you will be stronger. But that is not true, some students get hurt badly, others leave school*". At ZMS, a girl narrated how she had lost everything she brought to school by the end of the term. One night her mattress was taken from under her and she woke up on the bed frame. When she reported, the senior students pounced on her, she was hurt badly and had to be hospitalized. Thieving is a cycle; those who lost their staff in one year, steal from others the following year, the victims being new students. The boys' stories were horrifying. A student narrated how younger boys were blindfolded and asked to run in the night not knowing where they were going, injuries included broken bones. A senior student and dormitory prefect at ZMS explained that things had improved since the government banned bullying and corporal punishment, but the culture was entrenched. A prefect at WGS explained how bullying was pervasive in National schools (top prestigious). She shared a newspaper cutting titled, "*Chilling details of bullying, torture at Alliance High School*" with a picture of a boy holding a bloody shirt and on crutches due to severe beating. In the article, form ones (freshmen) had reported "*being beaten up with sticks and electric cables, slapped and forced to lie on the graves of the school's founders for hours on end at night and to 'swim' on the grass.*" Her point was that if it happens at a national school with rich and well-connected parents, it is probably worse in other schools. Outside of the focus group, a girl told of sexual abuse by teachers that go unreported. When found, students are expelled while teachers get transferred to another school. This was not a rare occurrence, according to a nurse at the school.

Based on observations and discussions about teaching and learning, teachers talk and students listen. This reflects Freire's description of teacher/student relationship: "*This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)*" (Freire, 2003, p. 70). Beyond conveying content, teachers were described as "rough and tough", "mean", "abusive", "not caring", "strict", "expected just one answer", "not to be questioned" and "all-knowing". Students described themselves as "afraid", "worried", "scared", "giving up", "not sure of themselves." Smart students were favoured and treated with respect, given presents and called on all the time to respond in class, "*the teacher always smiles at her, it makes us feel bad, but it is hard to do better once you are behind and then you begin to hate school and the teachers*", one student said. Another wrote on a piece of paper, "*Sometimes I wish they (teacher) could just explain things slowly. They are always telling us they need to cover the syllabus, so we cover the syllabus and understand very little, we feel stupid, but also they tell us.*" Another student responded, "*Our teacher called me ragamuffin. I do not even know what it means.*" The other retorted, "*When I hesitated to answer a question, he said my father must have been drunk when I was conceived.*" On a light note, a senior student interjected, "*The best times in school are when they allow us to be creative like dancing, debating, recitals, singing. We competed other schools and it is nice when we win.*" Another student stood up and retorted, "*Only if they like what you are doing. Try talking about school rules and the schedule and the food, they (school administration) would not listen to us. We have no say?*" "*Sometimes, I just want to shout but I will be kicked out of school, so I just keep quiet and I think that is why I have ulcers*", a student claimed. The students laughed in unison and said, "*We all have ulcers!*" This was a symbolic phrase often used by the principal. While students had many words to describe their teachers, the most common words used by teachers to describe students were, discipline, indiscipline, and stupid.

Besides bullying, the students, specifically the Boys talked about corruption. A protest (rebellion) at Vijana Boys School (VBS) was precipitated by the feeling that the principal was spending school money on his mansion while students'

dormitory was substandard and without beds. Knowing that the principals' earnings did not match the expenditure on new car and house, the students demanded better facilities. The issue spiraled into a riot leading to the closure of the school and subsequent transfer of the principal. One parent claimed, "*The issue of principals mismanaging school funds, including theft is no secret. The problem is that nobody holds them responsible; they have mansions while students suffer. Every time a classroom or a dining or a dormitory is built, a principal builds something.*" And it does not stop there.

They (principals) make money from purchases of books, uniforms, beddings, food, name it. And that is why children cannot get enough food. We have a school bus, but you rarely see it carrying students, it is always hired out to the public for funerals, weddings at the expense of our children. If you complain, your child will be kicked out of school.

He later added, "*I am afraid, members of the Board are complacent in all this, otherwise they can stop it. It is sad, our children have no value to these people*". His child had experienced repeated bouts of pneumonia and ulcers, which he attributed to the living conditions at the school. The boy would be hospitalized, return home, and recover, but as soon as he got to school, calls would come about his sickness. Researchers observed a trend in all three schools - as the term progressed the numbers of students visiting hospitals increased exponentially. The matron at the girls' school explained that a lot of the students were stressed because of exams leading to complaints of acidity. A review of hospital cards revealed a disproportionate number of students with a diagnosis of hyperacidity and ulcers. Students took tests/exams every week, especially at ZMS. Teachers were always grading papers with many students referring to their school as a "testing centre." Often students woke up at 4.00 am to take exams. Anxiety seemed like the norm because of consequences of failing the exams. As Freire wrote, researchers observed the dehumanization of these students "*affirmed by the yearning … for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity*" (Freire, 2003, p. 44).

Students as activists and conscientious beings in their environment

Looking at the data repeatedly and reflecting on every word, researchers asked questions about students' motivations. They asked what students wanted, what they were missing, and what they were not saying, or saying in code words and other expressions. Students liked their schools and wanted to succeed seeing education as gateway to brighter future careers. However, they dreaded the hardships of being in boarding schools. A student at WGS told passionately how she and her friends believed they were creative, bright, ambitious girls; but "our teachers say we have no value, we have no experience in life, but that is why we are in school. We want to be challenged; we want to create things not just sit there like empty 'debes' (tins) to be filled." At ZMS, the girls recited a poem written by one of them on "the girl child." The poem focused on the plight of girls in the country highlighting how they were mistreated by the boys and teachers. Gestures in the audience indicated empathy.

Students were aware of their environment; they were conscious of the politics of the country and their schools. They understood their place in society and loathed how they were devalued and dehumanized by the conditions in which they lived. This consciousness was manifested in different ways. At VBS, they protested the opulent life of the principal in their collective action. They burnt their dormitories and classrooms to protest inhumane conditions, authoritarian rules, testing without teaching, and poor meals. At WGS, they successfully demanded the transfer of a principal because she had been accused of embezzling school funds. A teacher was chased and beaten by students for molesting children with impunity. At VMS, students once boycotted classes to demand more toilets if they were to get to class on time from bathroom breaks. Generally, students agreed that protests in schools was expression of rights and agitation for change similar to political unrest. Similarly, they associated corruption in schools to general corruption and impunity in government. Students were critical of politicians who paid lip service to rid the country of corruption and associated the pathetic state of schools to the pathetic situation of the country due to looting by politicians.

According to Amutabi (2002), students' actions, tacit or explicit indicate their alertness and responsiveness to local and national issues affecting them, and their democratic right to protest. These were captured in the following statements - "*We learn history and civics. They teach us about the constitution, and it is always surprising that teachers and others think we do not know our rights.*" "*I did very well in History and Civics, so I know what democracy is and I know when my rights are trampled.*" "*The adults do not even believe in what they teach, if they did, they would treat us better.*" It is evident that students are activists in their own right and their activism is often in response to situations in which their opinions and influence are ignored and they lack political mechanisms for communication within the school system ("Student protest", 1969). Students' protests are rarely interpreted as "*responding to authoritarian leadership, institutional decay, and management of crises*" (Amutabi, 2002, p. 159); instead, students are blamed and vilified.

Discussion

The purpose of this article was to explain, not just the likely causes of protests and violence in Kenyan secondary schools, but the intensity. This paper has argued that boarding schools are forms total institutions, where students live under similar authority and conditions for work and social life with outcomes that include violent reactions and actions. Some scholars also liken boarding schools to a syndrome. According to Guadalupe & Edling (2017), a boarding school syndrome refers "*to the phenomenon of young children being separated from their parents and placed in an*

environment characterized by violence and insecurity which can create long-term trauma" (Guadalupe & Edling, 2017, p. 52). The study observed that theoretical underpinnings of authoritarianism, dehumanization, and total institutions predict protest and violence, specifically when we consider that students are political actors and conscientious beings with expectations and capacities to act. When dehumanized, students will act, react, or engage, sometimes with protest and intense violence. According to Furlong and Morrison (2000), "*students may react in a violent or aggressive manner in response to bullying, social rejection, public humiliation, perceived lack of fairness in disciplinary action, and stress*" (p. 75). This is a phenomenon that is not limited to students, it is about humanity (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 2003). Cooper (2014) in her investigative research on student protests in Kenya, found that students have learned that arson is effective as a tactic in protest politics, and that "*citizens' initiatives tend to be neglected until they pause direct threats to public peace and financing*" (Cooper, 2014, p. 538). Politically, students view schools as oppressive spaces and consider protests and violence as instruments of power to negotiate for their survival needs. While the aspect of violence is always the focus of authorities, Amutabi (2002) argues that the focus should be students' "*democratic rights to fight oppression*" (Amutabi, 2002, p.159) and demand for dignity (Freire, 2003). Although plausible, the political angle does not explain the intensity of students' violence in Kenyan boarding schools.

This research revealed the pain and despair among students in boarding schools because of "*a culture of violence that is embedded in the school as an institution and is expressed by people's (teachers', leaders', administrators', pupils', and students') ways of acting: endorsed ideals, talking, gestures, choice of subject content, rule-making, and so forth*" (Guadalupe and Edling, 2017, p. 52). Concurrently, the research revealed students' passion for their ideologies and identities, expectations and aspirations, and intellectual engagement that seem to be disappearing gradually because of distractions in school. The data, collectively, revealed a relationship in which teachers, as Martinot (n.d) explained, practiced "*self-superiorization through inferiorization*" of students that inevitably lead to anger, violence, and dehumanization on the part of students. Several scholars argued that oppression in any form is violence on both the oppressed and oppressor with dire consequences ("Student protest", 1969; Fanon, 1963; Martinot, n.d; Freire, 2003; Opere et al, 2019). The experiences of students in Kenyan boarding schools ranging from bullying, hunger, verbal or sexual abuse, corporal punishment, poor learning and teaching, and poor living conditions are all forms of systemic violence on students. Furlong and Morrison (2000) describe systemic violence in schools as practices and procedures that prevent students from engaging in learning, the core business of schools. Such practices include, "*exclusionary practices, overly competitive learning environment, toleration of abuse, school disciplinary policies rooted in exclusion and punishment, discriminatory guidance policies*" (p. 75). "STUDENT PROTEST" (1969) described dormitory life as "*marked by violence, rough and undisciplined actions*" (p.312). These descriptions echo the activities in a report by Kenya Teachers Service Commission and the Ministry of Education on bullying in Kenya's premier schools (Wanzala, 2017). According to the report, bullying that was masterminded by hand-picked prefects and sanctioned by the administration included: students being pulled out of a dormitory at night and frog matched while being beaten, students forced to wake up at night to clean toilets and classrooms while being whipped with belts and hockey sticks, and younger boys missing meals due to inadequate cutlery and short mealtimes. These actions culminated in physical wounds like broken hands, broken legs, and many other injuries. Physical injuries soon disappear, but the emotional scars last for a while. Boarding school authorities rarely interfere with acts of aggression that go on in dormitories considering it a normal initiation process, especially when it is targeted at newcomers. They tend to regard the harmful rituals and traditions inflicted in dormitories as private affairs that do not concern them. The normalization of these violent initiations contributes to the generation of implicit socialization norms and norm deviations (Guadalupe, & Edling, 2017) that soon result in protest and violence. For this reason, Furlong and Morrison (2000) suggested that educators should take responsibility for their part in normalizing, and in abating school violence. The authors argue that teacher responsibility can only be emphasized when it is clear to them how schools as institutions foment violence. They find the school as a system "*causes and exacerbates problems the individuals within it experience*" (Furlong & Morrison, 2000, p. 73).

According to Martinot (n.d), students live in multiplicity of colonialities and are subjugated in both body and mind. The power of coloniality can be so strong that the oppressed suffer constant anxiety, nervousness, despair, and when they see no other recourse or peaceful path to change, they resort to violence to suppress oppression. Fanon (1963) explained such violence as a "*cleansing force*" (Fanon, 1993, p. 41) that frees one from inferiority complex and despair. The intensity of violence seen in Kenyan schools may be proportional to the severity of the suffering they experience and the anticipated outcomes of the violence including catharsis, liberation, and action from authorities. The intensity of dehumanization is likely commensurate with the intensity of violence and the expected sense of relief, more like Newton's third law of motion - For every action or force in nature, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Unlike day schools, boarding schools are places where students experience greater levels of violence, and therefore likely to engage in intense violence themselves, including arson, murder, burning, and destruction of property (Opere et al, 2019).

Implications

As some studies, including ours indicate, school-based violence does not only affect students but also teachers and school administrators (McMahon et al., 2020). Therefore, it is the duty of all stakeholders to participate in creating a

safe atmosphere for learning. Many researchers propose the use of conflict management training to equip stakeholders with skills for resolving school-based violence (Kibui, Kibera & Bradshaw, 2014; Wamocha, Nasongo & Injendi, 2012). A study conducted among students in schools located in four administrative regions namely, Central, Eastern, Nairobi, and Rift Valley reveal that school leaders had no training in conflict management. These regions are among those that have multiple incidents of violence (Kibui, Kibera & Bradshaw, 2014). Another study conducted among students in boarding schools in Western Kenya attribute student violent activities to the absence of conflict management training (Wamocha, Nasongo & Injendi, 2012). As the findings of this study reveal, students resort to violent tactics as a way of registering their problems. Conflict management training would likely empower them to use less aggressive approaches when dealing with issues affecting them. On the other hand, it would provide teachers with alternative approaches to resolving school problems peacefully.

Some scholars suggest the use of moral education and guidance and counseling to address 'structural reasons for violence' (Krek, 2020). The concept of structural reasons for violence suggests that students have prior exposure to bullying, hostility, violence and destructive behavior outside of schools (Krek, 2020). The prison-like conditions in boarding schools tend to exacerbate these experiences and fuel violent behavior during protests. Moral education and guidance and counseling are important conflict resolution mechanisms, but teachers may not be willing to provide these services. A study at a Slovakian boarding school indicates that teachers are not eager to participate in moral education to eradicate the structural reasons for violence citing issues like overcrowded classrooms and the need for the teacher to dedicate time to teaching instead of focusing on moral education issues. As this study has shown, teachers in boarding schools manipulate conditions in the boarding schools to control and exercise power over students. It is unlikely they would be interested in issues of moral education. However, guidance and counseling, and moral education can help students realize their mistakes and initiate behavior change, but it is important to effectively address the issues of school leadership and structures that trigger violent protests in schools.

Several scholars recommend revisions of school policies that are strict, exclusive, and utilize punitive measures to deal with student problems (Krek, 2020; McMahon et.al, 2020; Wamocha, Nasongo & Injendi, 2012). Repressive policies and actions that school leaders often employ, alienate those very students that are most at risk of getting involved in acts of violence. Students view such repressive policies and actions as attempts by the school management to marginalize them and violate their rights. Policies that include students' input are important for enhancing a peaceful and safe environment for learning. Eliciting students' input is critical for identifying key factors and conditions that likely contribute to student violent protests and generating effective, context-specific solutions for prevention and intervention. Furlong and Morrison (2002) indicate that SPVs are all tied to contexts, actions, and policies that schools as organizations can influence.

Conclusion

This study qualitatively examined students' protests in Kenyan boarding schools. The article focussed on three boarding schools that had experienced a wave of violent student protests namely, Warembo Girls School (WGS), Vijana Boys School (VBS), and Zalendo Mixed School (ZMS). The study analyzed the findings under the following themes, Kenyan public boarding schools as total institutions, the influence of colonial legacies, and dehumanization (deductive themes), as well as students as activists and conscientious beings in their environment (Inductive theme). The research revealed that students experience prison-like conditions in boarding schools. As a result of the dehumanizing experiences at the hands of the school authorities, students vented out their frustration through destructive behavior, including violent protests.

Recommendations

1. Boarding schools should be created and managed with policies that enable children to thrive socially, academically, physically, politically, and emotionally. Students' rights should be upheld, living conditions should be humane, and there should be mutual respect between educators and learners.

2. School leaders, teachers and students should be trained not only in conflict management skills that can help students and members of staff who may have social and emotional challenges, but also to recognize situations that cause distress.

3. More research is suggested on students' participation in decisions that concern them including how holding regular forums where school leaders, teachers and students can share ideas on the welfare of students.

4. Research is also suggested to find out how parents should be involved in matters affecting learning in boarding schools because they are important stakeholders in the school community. Studies indicate that "parental school involvement is associated with student success, higher attendance, and lower suspension rates, which may prevent school violence." McMahon, et al., 2020, 3). Parental involvement in Kenya would probably look very different.

5. Boarding schools should revise and consistently enforce school policies that are in line with new innovations like technology, freedom of speech, and activism.

Limitations

Considering that this was a qualitative study, the outcomes are not generalizable beyond boarding schools. The researchers were not able to interview principals that were in office during the SPV and students considered ring leaders.

References

Amutabi, M. N. (2002). Crisis and student protest in universities in Kenya: Examining the role of student in national leadership and the democratization process. *African Studies Review, 45*(20), 157-178.

Chabal, P., & Daloz, J. (1999*). Africa works: Disorder as political instrument.* University Press.

Cooper, E. (2014). Students, arson, and protest politics in Kenya: School fires as political action. *African Affairs, 113*(453), 586-600.

Cooper, E. (2016, November 24). A burning question: Why are Kenyan students setting fire to their schools? The conversation*.* https://theconversation.com/a-burning-question-why-are-kenyan-students-setting-fire-to-their-schools-69153

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Weidenfeld.

Freire, P. (2003). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.

Furlong, M., & Morrison, G. (2000). The school in school violence: Definitions and facts. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 82*(2), 71-82.

Furlong, M. J., & Morrison, G. M. (1994). Introduction to miniseries: School violence and safety in perspective. *School Psychology Review*, *23*(2), 139-150.

Furman, G. S., & Shields, C. M. (2005). How can educational leaders promote and support social justice and democratic communities in schools? (pp. 119-137). In W. A. Firestone & C. Reihl (Eds.). *A new agenda for research in educational leadership*. Teachers College Press.

Guadalupe, F., & Edling S. (2017), Children's Rights and Violence: A Case analysis at a Swedish boarding school. *Childhood*, *24*(1), 51-67.

Goffman, E. (1958). Characteristics of total institutions. In R. T. Cannan, J. O. Cole & L. C. Kolb (Eds.), *Symposium on preventive and social psychiatry* (pp. 43-93). Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.

Herber, C., & Trafford, B. (1999). Democratic management and school effectiveness in two countries: A case of pupil participation. *Educational Management Administration Leadership, 27*, 45-54.

Hocker, J. L., & Wilmot, W. W. (2014). *Interpersonal conflict* (9th.ed.). McGraw Hill.

Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress. Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

Jagero, N. (2012). A comparative evaluation of direct private cost in day and boarding schools after the introduction of free secondary education in the Kenyan schools. *Review of Arts and Humanities, 1*(5), 31-41.

Jones, K., & Fowles, A. J. (2008). Total institutions. In J. Johnson & J. Desouza (Eds.), *Understanding health and social care: An introductory reader* (pp. 103-106). Sage Publications.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Kibui, A., Kibera, L., & Bradshaw, G. 2014. Conflict Management as a tool for restoring discipline in Kenyan Public Secondary Schools. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Innovative Technology, 1*(3), 1-10.

Krek, J. (2020). Structural reasons for school violence and education strategies. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal, 10*(2), 145-173.

Malenya, F. L. (2013). Rebel with cause: Trivial but potent students' grievances in Kenyan Secondary schools. In S. Oni (Ed.), *Challenges and prospects in African education systems* (pp. 619- 627). Trafford Publishing.

Martinot, S. (n.d). *The coloniality of power: Notes toward de-colonization.* Open Computing Facility. https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~marto/coloniality.htm

McMahon, S. D., Peist, E., Davis, J. O., McConnell. E., Reaves, S., Reddy, L. A., Anderman, E. M., & Espelage, D.L. (2020). Addressing violence against teachers: A social-ecological analysis of teachers' perspectives. *Psychology in Schools*, *57*(7), 1040-1056.

National Crime Research Centre. (2017). Rapid assessment of arson in secondary schools in Kenya – July – August 2016. http://crimeresearch.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Rapid-Assessment-of-Arsons-in-Secondary-Schools-in-Kenya-2016.pdf

Oduor, A., & Kajilwa, G. (2016, July 28). Six reasons believed to be fueling the school fires. https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000210022/six-reasons-believed-to-be-fuelling-the-school-fires

Ojiambo, P. O. (2017). *Kenyan youth education in colonial and post-colonial times: Joseph Kamiru Gikubu's impact*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Opere, O. A., Kamere, I., & Wawire, V. (2019) School violence as a cause of non-peaceful coexistence in public secondary schools in Nairobi, Kenya. *Open Journal of Social Sciences, 7*, 130-145. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2019.79010

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.) Sage Publications.

Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from the South, 1*(3), 533-580.

Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies, 21*(2), 168-178.

Republic of Kenya (2005). *Sessional paper No. 1 of 2005: A policy framework for educational training and research*. Government Printers.

Republic of Kenya. (1991). *Report of the presidential committee on students' unrest and indiscipline in Kenya secondary schools*. Nairobi.

Republic of Kenya, (2001). *Report of the task force on students discipline and unrest in secondary schools.* Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.

Serrat, O. (2009). *The five Whys technique*. Cornell University. https://shorturl.at/yzEW3

Sifuna, D. N. (1990). *Development of education in Africa: The Kenya experience*. Initiative Publishers.

Student protest. (1969). *AAUP Bulletin, 55*(3), 309-326. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40223829

Sugut, W. K., & Mugasia, F. A. (2014). School factors associated with student violence in secondary schools in Nandi South District, Kenya. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 4*(1), 123-132.

Wamocha, L.M., Nasongo J., W., & Injendi J. (2012). Intervention measures in conflict management in boarding secondary schools in western province, Kenya. *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences, 4*(2), 103-108.

Wanzala, O. (2017, March 2). *Chilling details of bullying, torture at Alliance High School*. Nairobi News. https://nairobinews.nation.co.ke/life/chilling-details-bullying-torture-alliance-high-school-photos.