

**STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI AND
DEMOCRATIC SPACE 1970 -1992**

BY

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C50/64545/2010**

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN HISTORY, DEPARTMENT
OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

2013

DECLARATION

This research is my original work and has not been presented in any other University or College for the award of degree, diploma or certificate.

Signed.....Date.....

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SUPERVISOR

This work has been submitted with my approval as University supervisor

Signed.....Date.....

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all university student activists who fought against any injustice of any form during their years of study at the University of Nairobi.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work owes much to the scrutiny and advice of my supervisor Dr Mary Mwiandi. She was not only patient enough, but also raised concerns on my work which I amended. Her insights, suggestions and criticisms have shaped this work to its current form. She does not share responsibility for errors in this work which may still be present.

I am grateful for the British Institute for providing me with a research grant to conduct this research. Its library facilities and creative space proved to be a boon at the time I conducted this study. I am grateful for this too.

I am also grateful to former and present employees of the University of Nairobi who helped me as I carried out my research. I reserve special thanks for Grace and Stella of the University archives who painstakingly helped me in finding material for my research. I thank Professor Godfrey Muriuki and Chief Justice Willy Mutunga who gave me leads as well as historical insights on events that happened in the University during the eighties and nineties. In addition, I am grateful to all my respondents who granted me their time in spite of their busy schedules to give me personal accounts on the subject of study.

My family supported me morally and materially as I conducted this research. For this I am eternally grateful. I thank my parents, Amb. Zakayo Kamencu and Mrs Hellen Kamencu. They assisted me with ideas for my research and leads of respondents pertinent to this study. I also thank my siblings, Mr Kimathi Kamencu, Mr. Kaberia Kamencu and Miss Kingwa Kamencu who assisted me with much-needed financial and logistical support as I carried out my research.

I wish good tidings to all of you.

ABSTRACT

This project paper is an in-depth study on student activism and democratic space in the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1992. It examines the relationship of students, in their activism, to the University administration and the state. It also looks at the tactics the students used in their activism. The objectives of this study were to explain the causes of student activism in the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1992, the impact of the students' activism and the challenges that were faced by students in their activism. Generational revolt theory and Marxist theory were used in the study. These theories were useful in assessing the various dimensions that confrontations would take between students, on one hand, and the government and the University administration on the other. The study was conducted using secondary sources and primary sources which mainly involved fieldwork and library research.

The study argues that student activism in the University of Nairobi was caused and heightened by the opening and closing of democratic space within and outside the University. Different events between 1970 and 1992 which caused closures or expansions of democratic space were discussed in the study and were used to validate this argument.

The study also revealed that the students, in their activism, influenced sections of the Kenyan public to weigh in on political discourses. The church, trade unions and a number of politicians weighed in on discourses concerning issues the students had raised in their protests or issues that the student demonstrations resulted to. In doing so, the students played a conscientising role by influencing Kenya's social fabric.

Challenges that student activists faced are also examined in this study, which are argued to have influenced the tactics that the students employed in their activism. The study further argues that student activism of the 1960's was generally concerned with issues particular to the University but became increasingly involved with Kenya's national politics with the murder of J.M Kariuki in 1975. The students' relationship with President Daniel Arap Moi is also examined in the study and is explained to be an additional factor in making national politics a major concern of their activism between 1978 and 1992. The study further argues that student activism was

instrumental in expanding the national democratic space in the early 1990s by taking part in the clamour for multipartyism.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------|---|
| APP | African People's Party |
| COTU | Central Organisation of Trade Unions |
| GEMA | Gikuyu Embu Meru Association |
| GSU | General Service Unit |
| KADU | Kenya African Democratic Union |
| KANU | Kenya African National Union |
| KNUT | Kenya National union of Teachers |
| KPU | Kenya People's Union |
| KUCSA | Kenyatta University Student Association |
| NCKK | National Council of Churches of Kenya |
| NKP | New Kenya Party |
| NUKS | National Union of Kenyan Students |
| NUSO | Nairobi University Students Organisation |
| NYS | National Youth Service |
| SONU | Students Organisation of Nairobi University |
| SUNU | Student Union of Nairobi University College |
| UNISA | United Nations Student Association |
| UNO | United Nations Organisation |
| USAB | University Student Accommodation Board |
| USU | University Staff Union |
| SONU '92 | Students Organisation of the University of Nairobi 1992 |

WORKING DEFINITIONS

Activism: The use of often direct, often confrontational action, such as a demonstration or strike, in opposition to or in support of a cause.

Democratic space: The arena that exists between the state and the individual, in which people interact to hold the state accountable, shape public debate, participate in politics and express their needs and opinions.

Kamukunji: A public rally or meeting held to in response to a current affair or issue.

Madaraka day: A Kenyan national holiday held to celebrate the day Kenya got its internal self-governance. The date of the holiday is 1st June.

Kenyatta day: A Kenyan national holiday held to celebrate the efforts of Kenya's first President - Jomo Kenyatta - in fighting for independence. The national holiday has hitherto been renamed ***Mashujaa day***. It is celebrated annually on the 20th October.

Special Branch: The former intelligence branch of the Kenyan government charged with the responsibility of maintaining the country's national security. The Special Branch was notorious in the 1980s for arrests of dissenters in Kenya. These arrests were usually followed by detentions and or bouts or torture.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction:

The University of Nairobi, the oldest and largest university in Kenya, came into being in 1970. Originally the Royal Technical College of East Africa, it was established by the colonial government with financial backing from the Gandhi Memorial Academy Society as a Technical and Commercial Institute in 1951.¹ In 1961, the Royal Technical College of East Africa was transformed to the Royal College, Nairobi, a constituent college of the University of London. It was done on recommendation by a working party formed in 1958 to look into the quality of the college's education. Subsequently in 1962, governors of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda enacted the University of East Africa Act that set up the Federal University of East Africa. This move was an attempt by the East African governments to "harmonise higher learning programmes in the region by constituting a common administration for all the colleges".²

The University of East Africa, established on 28th June 1963, had three constituent colleges: The Royal College, Nairobi, Makerere University College and the University College of Dar es Salaam. This effectively brought to a close the special relationship these colleges had with the University of London.³

The University of East Africa was established at the time when each of the three East African countries had either just gained independence or was at the eve of independence. Kenya was not independent, but had just gained her internal self-government in the same month, while Uganda and Tanzania had become independent in 1962 and 1961 respectively. These countries, Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika – later Tanzania were fledgling republics trying to find their feet and as years progressed each of them pursued different economic and political ideologies. Perhaps

¹ Jacquelin M.Klopp and Janai Orina "University Crisis, Student Activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya," *The African Studies Review*, Vol 45, No1, 2002, p.72, retrieved 26th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/1515007>.

² Mary Mwiandi, "Development of University Education in Kenya Since Independence", in Kassahun Berhanu Alemu, Tor Halvorsen & Mary Mwiandi, eds, *Shaping Research Universities in the Nile Basin Countries* (Kampala: 2010), p. 107.

³ *Ibid.*, p.107.

the harmony previously envisaged for the region's higher education could not be achieved with the ideological discrepancies of the three countries coming into play.

The University of East Africa subsequently disintegrated with each of the three main constituent colleges transforming into fully fledged Universities. Makerere University in Uganda, University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and University of Nairobi in Kenya were established in 1970. Despite the disintegration, these universities "continued to work together through the guidance of the University Committee for East Africa, created under the auspices of the East African community."⁴

Traditionally, student activism in Kenyan institutions of higher learning has been a product of institutional issues, national issues and indeed international issues. Before independence, the students at the Royal College, Nairobi in May of 1961 went on strike in protest against disciplinary action taken on some students after heckling a member of the Legislative Assembly who had come to address a group of students at the college. The cause of the strike was later linked to outside political differences at the time.⁵ A sit in demonstration on Uhuru Highway took place on February 12th 1963 with the students demanding construction of a subway across the highway while another demonstration was held two years later in protest against the bombing of two villages in Uganda allegedly by United States airplanes from the Congo.⁶ One of the first cases of student activism that saw university students from the Royal College, Nairobi and the government violently collide was on January 27th 1969. This collision occurred when the government prevented Odinga Oginga, leader of the opposition party – Kenya People's Union (KPU) – from addressing students at the University College of East Africa, Nairobi.⁷ The aftermath of this confrontation was the closure of the University on the same day, an indefinite suspension of five students and the resignation of one of the College's lecturers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o. He resigned in protest, "outraged by the silence of most lecturers and professors" in light of the suspensions handed out to the students a few days after the university was closed.⁸ This confrontation between university students and the government,

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵ Report of the Senate Committee Appointed to Look into the Problem of recurrent Student Disturbances at the University of Nairobi, March 1980 p.33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.33.

⁷ Klopp and Orina, "University Crisis, Student activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya", p.49.

⁸*Ibid.*, p.49.

culminating in the closure of the university and expulsion of some students, created a precedent for further confrontations between the students and the government most of which were modelled on this pattern.

Further confrontations between students and the Kenyatta administration persisted with students engaging in activism. Key strikes during this period included: the 1972 student strike demanding an underpass on the Uhuru-highway, the strike in 1974 demonstrating the introduction of a loan system and demonstrations against the murder of Kenyan Politician, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki that took place in March of 1975, 1976, 1977 and 1978. Josiah Mwangi “J.M” Kariuki, was a former Assistant Minister who was “allegedly murdered by elements in the government” in March of 1975.⁹ Students also demonstrated against the detention of one of their lecturers – Ngugi wa Thiong’o – who was very popular amongst the students. This detention took place in the final year of the regime of Kenya’s first President – Jomo Kenyatta. Daniel Arap Moi’s succession of Kenyatta after his death in 1978 saw him engage in populism to endear himself to the public.¹⁰ He released Ngugi wa Thiong’o and other political detainees in December 1978, a move that was celebrated by students on the streets demonstrating their support for the new President.¹¹ The move, celebrated by the students as democratic, was to prove illusory as subsequent repressive tendencies by the Moi regime were to take the students back to the streets – the first one occurring barely a year after the demonstration of students support to the regime.

This study is a history of student activism in the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1992. It argues that student activism in the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1992 was heightened by opening and closing up of democratic space both within and outside the University. The study will use Lisa Horner and Andrew Pudephatt’s definition of democratic space as “the arena between the state and private sphere of the home and family in which citizens interact and engage in political processes.”¹²

⁹ Amutabi N. Maurice, “Crisis and Students in Universities in Kenya: Examining the Role of Student in National Leadership and Democratisation Process” *The African Studies Review*, Vol 45, No.2 2002, pp.169 retrieved 15th April 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1514792>.

¹⁰ Klopp and Orina “University Crisis, Student activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya”, p.50.

¹¹ Amutabi N.Maurice, “Crisis and Students in Universities in Kenya.” p.168.

¹² Lisa Horner and Andrew Pudephatt, “Democratic Space in Asia-Pacific”, Working Paper For Discussion, UNDP, October 2011, retrieved 17th August 2013, <http://www.oslogovernanceforum.org/images/stories/PDFs/democratic-space-a-background-note.pdf>.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Most of the existing studies on student activism have linked student activism in Kenya to political repression, crisis of Kenyan university systems as well as state interference on university affairs. These studies have also drawn information from the various public universities in Kenya.

The studies, however, have not interrogated the link between variations of democratic space – both within and outside the Universities – and student activism. In addition, they draw their information from a number of Kenyan public Universities but have not zeroed in on a single institution of higher learning.

This research sought to link democratic space as a cause of heightened student activism in the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1992. Hitherto, most studies on student activism in Kenya have not been particular to an individual university in their approach. Studies like Maurice Amutabi's "Crisis and Student Protest in Universities in Kenya", Jacqueline Klopp and Janai Orina's "University Crises, Student Activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya", have rather taken a broader scope by discussing student activism in the different Kenyan public Universities. Student activism in this study is, therefore, specific to the University of Nairobi. By zeroing in on the University of Nairobi and the given period – 1970 and 1992 – this research linked opening and closing of democratic spaces to student activism. Effectively, it has given a narrative of student activism in the university and linked it to events that were taking place on a national level and in some cases, a global level at the time. In doing so, the study implies that events that were going on at the university were a microcosm of the events going on at a national level.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To determine the causes of student activism in the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1992.
2. To determine the impact of the University of Nairobi students in their activism.
3. To identify the challenges faced by Students in their activism.

1.4 Justification of the Study

In the Kenyan public domain, students of the University of Nairobi have been blamed for engaging in acts of hooliganism. Generations of students of the University of Nairobi have shared this public image as a common heritage. Looting and destruction of property have been blamed on the university students whose demonstrations are commonly referred to as ‘riots’. As a result, the causes that the students champion for or against in their activism lose their legitimacy and lack public support. Student activism, from the public’s perspective, is tantamount to student hooliganism. This perception, therefore, calls for scholarly research to analyse the history of students’ activism so as to disabuse the public’s perception on the heritage of student activism in the University of Nairobi and interrogation of the causes that may have led students to engage in activism in the University of Nairobi during its early years of existence. Student activism in Kenya has attracted scant scholarly examination in the attempt to analyse its contribution to the democratic process. Where the studies have been carried out, a number of universities have been placed under study to create a monolith out of the student movement in Kenya. This study focused on the University of Nairobi.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study is mainly concerned with the history of student activism in the University of Nairobi from 1970 to 1992. The period chosen for the study, 1970 to 1992, has taken a number of considerations into account. The University of Nairobi became a fully fledged University by an act of Parliament in 1970.¹³ It would be, therefore, important to find out how student activism in the University of Nairobi evolved since the establishment of the institution. In addition, the year 1970 is of political significance in the study as it came a year after the banning of Kenya’s only oppositional party – Kenya People’s Union. This closure of a democratic space effectively made Kenya a *de facto* one party state and was bound to create an alternative bastion of opposition. The year 1992, on the other hand, saw the return of multiparty politics since 1969. The repeal of section 2 (a) of the constitution in December 1991 to allow multipartyism saw a proliferation of political parties which increased alternative political representation. This represented an opening of a

¹³ Mwiandi, “Development of University Education in Kenya since Independence”, p.109.

democratic space that had a significant effect on student activism in the University of Nairobi at the time.¹⁴

The University of Nairobi is the subject of this study on account of its history and location. Unlike all the other public universities, the University of Nairobi has been in existence as a fully fledged university through the years the research covers – most of the years of the Kenyatta regime and Moi regime. The choice of the University of Nairobi has much to do with its location. Most of the University's campuses were then situated in Kenya's capital city – Nairobi. Nairobi has been described as the “central nerve of the political system in Kenya.”¹⁵ Student activism in the University of Nairobi, situated in a political hotspot, would most likely be more pronounced and visible than in other public universities.

This study will mainly limit itself to major demonstrations students of the University of Nairobi engaged in during 1970 and 1992. Demonstrations held by the students of Kenyatta University College, a constituent college of the University of Nairobi, will also be looked at. However, the study will mainly focus on the University of Nairobi because of its location in the heart of Nairobi city and its proximity to state institutions.

1.6 Literature Review

There is scant literature on student activism in Kenya and more so literature on student activism that is University specific. This is surprising given the role students have played in the democratization process in Kenya. There is, however, a surfeit of material on student activism in other countries which may give insights for this study.

Maurice Amutabi's article “Crisis and Student Protest in universities in Kenya” generally looks at the causes and impacts of student activism in Kenya. The article analyses student activism of some of Kenya's public universities giving the causes of the activism, its impact and the role of former students in national leadership and democratization. The article argues that student activism was a product of university

¹⁴ Amutabi N.Maurice, “Crisis and Students in Universities in Kenya.” p.174.

¹⁵ Herve Maupéu, “Political Activism in Nairobi”, in Helene Charton-Bigot and Deyssi Rodriguez-Torres, eds, Nairobi Today The Paradox of a fragmented City (Dar es Salam: 2006) p.403.

crises as well as repression and this activism played a role in Kenya's democratization process. The article, however, does not adequately link the variance of democratic space – both within and outside of the university - and student activism in the University of Nairobi. In addition, the article does not adequately address the domestic issues students faced within the university that may have prompted them to engage in activism. For the most part, his article is a study of the stormy relationship between the government and students in Kenyan public universities. Universities covered by his study include the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Egerton University and Moi University from 1970 to 2000.¹⁶ Although he mainly discusses the University of Nairobi, the paper does not give a comprehensive historical narrative of student activism there. In addition, all the article's sources are secondary in nature and, therefore, unbalanced in capturing firsthand accounts of instances of student activism in the University of Nairobi.

“University Crisis, Student Activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya” is an article by Jacqueline Klopp and Janai Orina that discusses student activism within the context of a “University Crisis”. The “University Crisis” referred to here is the many cases of student protest, the declining quality of university education and the increased repression within the public universities. The article mainly attributes this university crisis to the totalitarian nature of the Moi and Kenyatta regimes which saw the university subjugated to a repressive state and economy. Although it cites Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) as a cause of the University crisis, it downplays its effect on University education giving more significance to state-university links as a bigger cause of the University crisis. It argues that state actors played an active role in causing the University crisis mainly through patronage appointees and political repression. The article also links the struggle for academic freedom and University autonomy with the broader, national struggles to democratize the state and the economy coming to the conclusion that the Kenyan University system was a microcosm of the country's repressive rule. Jacqueline Klopp and Janai Orina's article is well researched and has a balance

¹⁶ Amutabi N. Maurice, “Crisis and Students in Universities in Kenya: Examining the Role of Student in National Leadership and Democratisation Process” *The African Studies Review*, Vol 45, No.2 2002, pp.157-177, retrieved 15th April 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1514792>.

between secondary and primary sources.¹⁷ It describes activism in the University of Nairobi amongst other Kenyan Public Universities of the time – from the late 1960s to 2001. The article's focus – state-university links – strips past university administrations of agency in the repression of democratic space within the university. In addition, it reduces student activism to a reaction against external interference of university administration by the state.

“Academic Freedom in Kenya”, an article by Donald Savage and Cameron Taylor, examines the state of academic freedom in Kenya during the Moi and Kenyatta regimes. The article mentions few instances of student activism, such as student demonstrations against the government's cancellation of a lecture to be given in the University College Nairobi by Odinga Oginga, against the role of multinationals in Kenya, students' celebration of the 1982 attempted coup and students' protest against murders of J.M Kariuki and Robert Ouko suspected to be state-sanctioned assassinations. The article is more of a commentary on academic freedom in Kenyan public universities rather than one of student activism and generally examines the interactive trends between the students and the faculty, on one hand, and the state on the other.¹⁸ Interactions between faculty and the state are well discussed thereby not giving student activism much prominence on the article. Faculty and students, however, are generally portrayed in the article as agents using their academic freedom as an alternative democratic space during the Kenyatta and the Moi regimes. Student activism in the University of Nairobi is mainly discussed in the article within the context of academic freedom; the cases of student activism discussed were an expression of academic freedom or were reactions to infringed academic freedoms. The article, therefore, restricts itself to academic freedom, a subset of democratic space. It, therefore, does not provide a detailed description of how students and the state reacted to closures or openings of democratic space.

Philip Altbarch's article “Perspectives on Student Political Activism”, analyses student activism from a global outlook. The article examines trends in student

¹⁷ Jacquelin M.Klopp and Janai Orina “University Crisis, Student Activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya,” *The African Studies Review*, Vol. 45, No 1, 2002, pp.43-76, retrieved 26th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/1515007>.

¹⁸ Donald Savage and Cameron Taylor, “Academic Freedom in Kenya,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 25, No 2, pp.308 -321, retrieved 25th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/485222>.

activism and mainly juxtaposes student activism in the Third World against that of Industrialised countries. It begins by looking at student activism in its historical context highlighting its close ties to nationalism, its predisposition to support the left and instances where it supported rightist nationalist causes. Altbarch's article then delves into the life of student movements and their sporadic nature and the responses to student activism. Altbarch argues that the rhythm of academic life, undergraduate generational change and sociological factors militate against sustained student movements while the mass media, the state and the university administrators are the key agents that partake in responses toward student activism. The article further discusses the structure of student movements, the causes of activism and impact of student activism with illustrations of this impact on countries like France, Myanmar and Japan.¹⁹ Although there is a conspicuous absence of primary sources in the article, it attempts to provide a comprehensive framework with which one can understand student activism. As such, student activism in the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1992 was largely leftist in character, attracted violent responses from government and had a significant influence on democratisation.

Philip Altbarch in his article also discusses the location of major Universities of the Third World as a contributor to the possibility of activism in these Universities. He argues that many major Universities in the Third World are located in capital cities and a large proportion of the student population is within reach of the centres of power. This effectively "makes demonstrations easier to organize and gives students a sense that they are at the centre of power and have easy access to it."²⁰ University of Nairobi's geographical location, therefore, goes well with the framework Altbarch provides for student activism in the Third World and makes it a suitable subject of study.

"Student Protest in Sub-Saharan Africa" is an article by John Nkinyangi that relates educational concerns that student protest against to wider-based social and economic concerns. Poor facilities, declining standards of education and increased university fees would prompt student activism that would later be a vent for broader national

¹⁹ Philip G. Altbarch, "Perspectives on Student Political Activism" *Comparative Education*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1989, pp.97 – 110, retrieved on 15th April 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3099006>.

²⁰ Ibid.,p.107

issues – government repression and declining economic conditions, for example. He gives various illustrations of student activism from countries like Nigeria, Senegal and Kenya and tries to understand African students’ political protests.²¹ The article, devoid of primary sources, discusses the question whether educational institutions will in the future become arenas of social struggle in the African countries as other avenues of dissent become progressively closed. Nkinyangi’s hypothetical question is answered by a participant in student politics in the early 1970’s who observed that as Kenya moved closer to a repressive one party state “the opposition relocated into the universities and the University student political institutions became the structures through which these battles were fought.”²² Student activism in the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1992 largely resembles patterns in which student activism in African universities operated.

William John Hanna describes student protest in African countries within a “communications conceptual framework” in his article “Student Protest in Independent Africa”. In the framework, he identifies five basic elements: catalysts, students, messages, targets and the outcomes. These elements vary in character from one University to another and illustrations of student protest are used to put the elements in context. According to the article, a theory of student protest can be developed if variables are operationally specified and needed data is collected to establish a relationship between the variables.²³ Although a theory has not been developed in the article, the framework established has provided elements, namely, catalysts, students, messages, targets and outcomes – that provided lenses with which the research topic has been analysed with.

“Youth and Higher Education in Africa” edited by Donald P. Chimankire is a book that comprises studies on youth, student activism and higher education in the Universities of four countries in Africa. The countries under study – Cameroon, Eritrea, South Africa and Zimbabwe – have somewhat parallel cases. Four basic

²¹ John A. Nkinyangi, “Student protests in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *Higher Education*, Vol 22, No 2, 1991, pp.157– 173, retrieved 25th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3447250>.

²² Klopp and Orina “University Crisis, Student activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya”, p.49.

²³ William John Hanna, “Student Protest in Independent Black Africa”, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol 395, No. 4, 1971, pp.171-183, retrieved on March 15th 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1038585>.

issues are argued to underlie the intense confrontation between students and the state which came to dominate the four countries' university politics. Economic decline, patronage appointees by the state, impinging on Academic Freedoms and ignoring of the students' welfare issues are some of the issues that are responsible for the students' collision with the state.²⁴

In the case of Cameroon's University of Buea, Jude Fokwang's article "Student Activism, Violence and the Politics of Higher Education in Cameroon: A Case Study of Buea" provides an analysis of student activism in the University of Buea from its inception in 1993 to 2003. The article explains why students in their protests use violence and argues that student activism cannot be depoliticized because it is, by its essence, political. It also explains how the University administration at the University of Buea over the years stifled student activism and politics through intimidation of students, restructuring and reconfiguration of the mandate and mode of operation of the Student Union in the University of Buea. The article also provides an ethnic dimension to student politics in the University of Buea and places this within the broader landscape of national politics, which is also ethnicised.²⁵

Annie Chikwanha article "Higher Education and Student Politics in Zimbabwe" not only looks at student activism in relation to the Zimbabwean State, but also investigates what drives this activism by investigating the background of the students and their predispositions to activism. Factors such as religion, gender of the students and the type of school they formerly attended are used to explain their predispositions to activism. The article also gives a history of student activism in Zimbabwe which dated back to the struggle against colonialism. Armed struggle veterans, later to lead the Zimbabwean government, hailed the students contribution to the independence struggle. The attainment of independence, however, saw the government systematically deny the students political space which compelled university students in Zimbabwe to reclaim the political space they had before. Student leadership and its challenges are also discussed in the article. The study uses a plethora of interviewees,

²⁴ Donald P. Chimankire, ed, *Youth and Higher Education in Africa*. (Dakar, Codesria, 2009).

²⁵ Jude Fokwang, "Student Activism, Violence and the Politics of Higher Education in Cameroon: A Case Study of the University of Buea (1993-2003)," in Donald P.Chimankire, ed, *Youth and Higher Education in Africa* (Dakar, Codesria, 2009), pp.9-33.

who are students drawn from two universities – African University and University of Harare. This provides firsthand insights on student politics and student activism.²⁶

South Africa's case is examined by Mlungisi Cele's article "Post-apartheid Higher Education: The Role and Challenges Facing Student Activists" which argues that student's engagement with University authorities in South Africa has metamorphosed from being confrontational to being co-operational on account of the tough stances institutions assumed in the mid-1990s when student demonstrations were viewed as 'not constructive'. Organisational changes in the way student bodies operate and see their role are responsible for the focus on participation and engagement with university administrators. With the privatization and individualization of higher education services in South Africa, the article implies that student leadership has become increasingly parochial.²⁷

Student activism in Eritrea, on the other hand, covered by Barhane Berhe Araia "Post-war Politics and Higher Education in Eritrea" is put in the context of a newly formed seceded state advocating for a nationalist discourse while being increasingly repressive. The article discusses the role played by University of Asmara students in challenging hitherto unquestioned nationalist projects in post-war Eritrea. The study mainly through interviewing the students at the University of Asmara, established that student activism in Eritrea is driven by self interest and the perception they have of their obligations to society. The article likens the stage Eritrea's political culture reached in the early 2000's to where most African countries were in the early 1960s. This is because Eritrea at the time was just emerging as an independent and sovereign country as most African countries did in the early 1960s. In Kenya's case, an emphasis was put on nation-building and nationhood. The article, therefore, offers valuable insights on how student activism is reconstructed by the state in face of nationalist discourses. Although the entire book does not discuss student activism in

²⁶ Annie Chikwanha, "Higher Education and Student Politics in Zimbabwe", in Donald P.Chimankire, ed, *Youth and Higher Education in Africa* (Dakar, Codesria, 2009), pp.79-107

²⁷ Mlungisi Cele, "Post-Apartheid Higher Education: The Role and Challenges Facing Student Activists", in Donald P.Chimankire, ed, *Youth and Higher Education in Africa* (Dakar, Codesria, 2009), pp.35-78

the University of Nairobi, it offers crucial leads and valuable insights on issues of the state and student welfare that would inform their activism.²⁸

Volume one of “Shaping Research Universities in the Nile Basin Countries” looks at higher education systems in the Nile Basin while seeking to understand the roles of the higher education systems in these countries. The countries’ universities under study include Burundi, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, and Uganda.²⁹ The studies done are not studies on student activism but studies on the state of institutions of higher learning in these countries. Although student activism is only covered incidentally by the studies done, Mary Mwiandi’s article “Development of University Education in Kenya since Independence” is pertinent to the research topic. It gives a history of the establishment of the University of Nairobi – Kenya’s oldest public University - from its beginnings as a technical college to its establishment as a fully fledged University. The article briefly schemes through student activism, attributing some of it to the implementation of structural adjustment policies and implies that it is present in public universities more than it is in private universities.³⁰

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The research carried out was based on the following theories – generational revolt theory and the Marxist theory. These theories largely have been drawn from some studies on student activism that either mention them or seem to be compatible with them.

The generational revolt theory has been advanced by Lewis Feuer who has argued that a “generational revolt” drives students into activism and that “activist movements are acting out the “struggle of the children against the parents.”³¹ University students are likely to be of a different generation compared to the authorities that they confront – those in government or those in the university administration. Indeed, many of those

²⁸ Berhane Berhe Araia, “Post-war Politics and Higher Education Students in Eritrea,” in Donald P. Chimankire, ed, *Youth and Higher Education in Africa* (Dakar, Codesria, 2009), pp.109-136

²⁹ Kassahun Berhanu Alemu, Tor Halvorsen and Mary Mwiandi, eds, *Shaping Research Universities in the Nile Basin Countries*. (Kampala, Fountain Publishers, 2010)

³⁰ Mary Mwiandi, “Development of University Education in Kenya Since Independence,” in Kassahun Berhanu Alemu, Tor Halvorsen & Mary Mwiandi, eds, *Shaping Research Universities in the Nile Basin Countries* (Kampala: 2010) pp.105-143.

³¹ Philip G. Altbach “Perspectives on Student Political Activism,” *Comparative Education*, Vol 25, No. 1 (1989), p.104, retrieved 25th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3099006>.

occupying these positions have gone through the same institution. Upon graduation, for example, graduates of the University College of East Africa, Nairobi, in the 1960's stood to occupy positions in the civil service.³² With time, these former students, representing the establishment, would be confronted by students of a different generation. This generational gap may be responsible for misunderstandings between the two generations and may manifest themselves in student protest and subsequent repression by the “parents”, whose authority would have been challenged.

Donald Chimanikire in the book “Youth and Higher Education in Africa” argues that youth protest, particularly in universities, is “as a result of a process set in motion by rapid rates of social change and the discrepancy between the formative experience of parental generations and those of a given generation of youth”.³³ The discrepancy may cause the “parental” generations, arguably in government, or in the university administration to look at student activism from a different lens than that of students’. Indeed, the university students of the 1960s were generally politically inactive as they were supplied with “basic requirements and guaranteed positions in the ranks of the bourgeoisie”.³⁴ Assuming that many of these former students were in government and the university administration that students confronted between 1970 and 1992, these administrators may have looked at the student activists as hooligans bent on creating chaos in the country and within the university.

The Marxist theory uses dialectical materialism as a philosophical mode of speculation. It interprets history as a progressive change from lower to higher stages of human freedom, with greater ability to control their material environment.³⁵ The theory postulates that the history of all societies that have existed is the history of class struggles. Postulated by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, the theory posited that class struggles pitted one oppressed class against an oppressor class. Marx and Engels argued that their society was in the “epoch of the bourgeoisie” where two classes –

³² Jacquelin M. Klopp and Janai Orina “University Crisis, Student activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya,” *The Afrifan Studies Review*, Vol 45, No1, 2002, p.48, retrieved 26th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/1515007>.

³³ Donald P. Chimanikire, ed, *Youth and Higher Education in Africa*. (Dakar, CODESRIA, 2009), p.

3.

³⁴ Amutabi N. Maurice, “Crisis and Students in Universities in Kenya”, p. 161.

³⁵ Martin Spechler, *Perspective In Economic Thought*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), p.111.

the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – were in constant struggle against each other.³⁶ The bourgeoisie owned the means of the production while the proletariat, a deprived and oppressed class, owned their own labour which they offered to the bourgeoisie at a meagre wage. They were “slaves of the bourgeois class” and they later rose against them in a revolutionary manner to create a classless society.³⁷ When put in context, those in government as well as those in the university administration are the bourgeoisie who are out of touch with the students’ problems and by extension the problems of the ordinary citizens. Indeed, this assumption gains credence considering the “civilian population and the students have become bedfellows, civilians for their economic woes and students for their poor living conditions.”³⁸ The students, part of the civilian population on the strength of their plight, engage in a class conflict with those in government, as well as those in the university administration, in an attempt to create a classless society where all “would work according to their abilities and would consume according to their needs.”³⁹

The theoretical frameworks used in this study proved helpful in looking at student activism. Both theories – the Marxist and generational revolt theories – provide a prism which can be used to view the relationship between two entities – the government and the University administration, on one hand, and the students on the other. Generally, the study depicts an antagonistic relationship between these two entities and the theoretical frameworks present a means of interpreting the dynamics surrounding confrontations between the state and the students.

1.8 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are to be tested by the study:

1. That student activism in the University of Nairobi was caused and heightened by the opening and closing up of democratic space within and outside the University.
2. That students of the University of Nairobi, in their activism, influenced sections of the Kenyan public to weigh in on political discourses.
3. That challenges faced by student activists influenced their activism.

³⁶ Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *Selected Works in Two Volumes*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958) pp.34-39.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.41-44.

³⁸ Amutabi N. Maurice, “Crisis and Student Protest in Universities in Kenya”, p.163.

³⁹ Spechler, *Perspectives In Economic Thought*, p.112.

1.9 Methodology

This section will show the methodology used to conduct this study. Both secondary and primary sources were used. Fieldwork and Library research were mainly used in the study.

Secondary sources, such as academic articles, student magazines and books on student activism, were used in the initial stages of the project to learn more about the topic of study as well as to give leads on potential primary sources to be used for the research, such as minutes from student union and University Senate meetings, newspapers and interviewees. Academic articles were mainly sourced from online journals from the internet, while books and student magazines were sourced from the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library and the British Institute Library.

Primary sources like newspapers, oral interviews and university records such as minutes and letters were also used. Whereas Newspapers were sourced from the Nation Newspaper Library and Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library, University records were sourced from the Archive Section of the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library. Newspapers were used as they gave descriptive accounts of various student demonstrations that took place between 1970 and 2000. Minutes of meetings and letters between various university actors, such as students and university staff, were able to give details on the fate of student leaders after their involvement in demonstrations. The records also gave a chronology of student demonstrations. Oral interviews, on the other hand, were conducted to get a firsthand account of events as they were. In picking interviewees, different sampling techniques were used.

To determine general cases of activism, random sampling was used to pick any former student of the University of Nairobi who was at the university any time between 1970 and 1992. To get a deeper and intimate understanding about student activism in the university during these years, key individuals who were at the centre of student leadership and activism were sought out. It was also imperative to interview former or present lecturers in the University and government functionaries who bear insights on the period under study. The attributes possessed by these groups were used to sample respondents for the oral interviews. This kind of sampling is

known as purposive sampling. Some of the names of the interviewees, who were in the aforementioned categories, were retrieved from secondary sources.

Snowballing sampling was also used. The technique involves the use of one respondent to lead a researcher to another respondent. These recommended respondents may have an in-depth understanding of the topic under study or may offer different information and or perspectives on the topic. Respondents in the oral interviews referred to other potential respondents who would have insights on the research topic. Data collected was analysed and presented qualitatively. This is where one presents information and arguments as given by the informants and where necessary, gives it meaning. The qualitative approach enabled me to use various historical sources collaboratively so as to present a well-rounded, comprehensive history on student activism.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE ROYAL COLLEGE, NAIROBI AND THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, NAIROBI (1961 -1970)

2.1 Introduction and Background of the University Of Nairobi

The University of Nairobi came into being in July of 1970 when the University of East Africa was dissolved. Prior to this, the institution had transformed from the Royal Technical College of East Africa into the Royal College, Nairobi, a constituent college of the University of London. It later was renamed The University College Nairobi on May 20th 1964 about a year after the establishment of the University of East Africa which “brought to a close the special relationship with the University of London.”⁴⁰

Compared to the 1970s and 1980s, university student activism in Kenya was of less intensity and frequency than in the 1960s. Literature on student activism in Kenya has generally portrayed the university students of the 1960s as apolitical and focused on their studies. Maurice Amutabi in his article, “Crisis and Student Protest in Universities in Kenya” attributes the students’ passivity to the privileges they enjoyed and the promising job prospects that they were to benefit from as a result of the Africanisation programme that would see a number of them land plum government jobs upon graduation. Jacqueline Klopp and Janai Orina’s article echoes the same perspective.⁴¹

This Chapter, however, argues that the students at the University College were politically aware of their environment but only engaged in political activism against government when political incidents of national significance directly involved them. It also invalidates the argument that the students’ activism of the 1960s was kept at a bare minimum due to the privileges the students enjoyed and proves, in some cases, that the students’ activism was influenced by poor and or inadequate University catering and accommodation facilities. Besides anti-establishment activism and

⁴⁰ Mary Mwiandi, “Development of University Education in Kenya since Independence,” Kassahun Berhanu Alemu, Tor Halvorsen & Mary Mwiandi, eds, *Shaping Research Universities in the Nile Basin Countries* (Kampala: 2010) pp.107-108.

⁴¹ Jacquelin M Klopp and Janai Orina, “University Crisis, Student Activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya,” *The African Studies Review*, Vol 45, No1, 2002, p.48, retrieved 26th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/1515007>.

activism driven by University facility grievances, cases of activism driven by international concerns are also mentioned. The Chapter attributes the ‘calmness’ of the students to the grappling of leadership style by the independence government which, in turn, grappled with what policies to adopt in its early years. In addition, it also seeks to understand the origin of the student-government dynamic that persisted in the 1970’s, 1980’s and 1990’s when student activism was more pronounced.

As the Royal College, Nairobi, a constituent college of the University of London, there were incidents of activism even before Kenya gained its independence. These cases of activism, however, were largely based on domestic issues and rarely went beyond such.

2.2 Pre-Independence Student Activism In The Royal College, Nairobi:

The first documented incidence of student activism in the Royal College, Nairobi had much to do with the politics of the decolonization of Kenya. In February of 1961, Kenya held elections that pitted two main parties – Kenya African National Union (KANU) and Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) – against each other. The parties had different stands on how to govern the soon to be formed republic. While KANU favoured a strong central government, KADU advocated for a government with a weaker centre, but with strong regional powers.⁴² The standpoints advocated for by both parties were also influenced by ethnicity. KANU’s membership was mainly made up of individuals from the Luo and the Kikuyu ethnic groups which majorly had comparatively bigger populations than other Kenyan communities. KADU, on the other hand, was supported by smaller ethnic groups; its leaders feared the “dangers of a one-party state dominated by a few ethnic groups”.⁴³ KADU leaders, in an attempt to preempt domination from larger ethnic groups, formed a defensive federation in order to protect the interests of the regions they hailed from, which were inhabited by the comparatively smaller ethnic groups. The party’s position, however, implied the perpetuation of ethnic division and would defer the “golden prize of nationhood.”⁴⁴

⁴² Mugo Gatheru, *Kenya: From Colonisation To Independence, 1888-1970*. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2005) p.170.

⁴³ B.A Ogot, “The Decisive Years 1956 – 63,” in B.A Ogot and William Ochieng, eds, *Decolonisation and Independence in Kenya, 1940 - 1993*, (Nairobi, East African Education Publishers, 1995) p.65

⁴⁴ Gatheru, *From Colonisation To Independence*, p.170.

The election saw KANU win the majority of seats in the Legislative Council but refuse to form the Government until it freed Jomo Kenyatta, one of the individuals who was at the forefront of agitating for Kenya's independence. The Colonial governor, Sir Patrick Renison, refused to release Kenyatta and as a result, Kenya was ruled by a coalition of two parties – KADU and the New Kenya Party. However, the coalition did not enjoy widespread public confidence due to the few seats it won and the formation of government done in “total disregard of the desires of the majority of Kenyans.”⁴⁵ The popularity and militancy of the *de facto* opposition, KANU, soared with “intimidation and violence against political opponents becoming widespread.”⁴⁶ It was under this background that the first student “disturbance” in the Royal College, Nairobi took place.

Students of the Royal College, Nairobi on May 18th 1961 went on strike in protest against disciplinary action taken on some students, after heckling a member of the Legislative Assembly who had come to address a group of students at the college. Musa Amalemba, a legislator representing North Nyanza, was condemned by the Students as a “tribalist stooge” who “had joined the KADU government.”⁴⁷ The heckling of Musa Amalemba by the students reflected a lack of confidence that sections of the Kenyan public had in the ruling coalition that eventually bolstered KANU's influence. In a report chronicling the history of bouts of students' activism in the University of Nairobi, the students' actions were linked to the “outside political differences prevailing in the country at that time.”⁴⁸

Two years later on 12th February 1963, the students staged a sit-in demonstration on Uhuru highway demanding construction of a bridge or a safe road crossing across the Highway.⁴⁹ The demonstration took two phases. The first phase saw a large group of students protest against the Nairobi City Council's failure to provide “a safe road crossing or bridge for the use of students going to college.” The students blocked

⁴⁵ Duncan Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles*, (Nairobi: Kenya Leadership Institute, 2006), p.293.

⁴⁶ Ogot, “The Decisive Years 1956 – 63”, pp.68-69.

⁴⁷ Standard Staff Reporter, “Royal College Back to normal a day after Strike for a Day,” *East African Standard*, May 19th 1961, p.5.

⁴⁸ Report of the Senate Committee Appointed to look into the Problem of Recurrent Student Disturbances at the University of Nairobi, March 1980, p.33.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.33.

traffic and were later cleared out of Princess Elizabeth way (now Uhuru Highway) by Police and eight of them were arrested. Their colleagues later protested against these arrests, camping at the Police Station's compound and were later violently dispersed. Another wave of arrests was made.⁵⁰ In total, twenty-eight students were arrested, tried and later fined £3.⁵¹ KADU President Ronald Ngala later made a statement in support of the students' demands arguing that the cost of construction of a bridge would be "a minor factor in relation to the students' lives."⁵² The demonstration would prove to be the first among many demonstrations that would be violent; the rest of them taking place after Kenya gained her independence. It also marked the beginning of an association between the government opposition and the students which in future, predominantly saw the student activists lean towards dissenting and leftist voices within government.

2.3 Post-Independence: Student Activism in The University College Nairobi

The Royal College, Nairobi was renamed University College, Nairobi on 20th May, 1964.⁵³ The renaming of the institution came six months after Kenya had gained her independence. At independence, Kenya displayed characteristics of an underdeveloped economy at the periphery: "the preponderance of foreign capital, the dominance of agriculture, the limited development of industry and heavy reliance on export of primary products and imports of capital and manufactured consumer goods." Kenya would have to formulate policies that stemmed growing urban and rural poverty and decay, as well as support the indigenization of the economy. To realize these changes, Kenyans were to work hard to improve existing infrastructural facilities such as communications, hospitals, power supplies, financial and educational institutions.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Nation Reporter, "Riot Squad Squash Sit Down Protest," *Daily Nation*, February 12th 1963 p.16.

⁵¹ Report of the Senate Committee Appointed to look into the Problem of Recurrent Student Disturbances at the University of Nairobi, March 1980 p.33.

⁵² Nation reporter, "Students Appear in Court Today, Daily Nation," *Daily Nation*, February 13th 1963 p.16.

⁵³ Mary Mwiandi, "Development of University Education in Kenya Since Independence," in Kassahun Berhanu Alemu, Tor Halvorsen & Mary Mwiandi, eds, *Shaping Research Universities in the Nile Basin Countries* (Kampala: 2010) p.108.

⁵⁴ William Ochieng, "Structural and Political Changes" in B.A Ogot and William Ochieng, eds, *Decolonisation and Independence in Kenya, 1940 - 1993*, (Nairobi, East African Education Publishers, 1995) p.83.

To create a sense of unity and nation-building, Kenya's President Jomo Kenyatta initiated a national slogan called "Harambee" meaning "Let us pull together." The national slogan was meant to be a total commitment by the "politicians, intellectuals or elites, professors teaching at the Universities and colleges, the school teachers and church leaders and their congregations, and all those who were managing various government agencies bureaucracies."⁵⁵ The implied meaning was that voices of dissent were to be kept at a bare minimum and any challenge of the government by these groups – including the students – would have been reframed as dissidence likely to reverse the gains the new republic would make.

One of the first incidences of student activism in post-independent Kenya was on 14th August 1964 when students of the Faculty of Veterinary Science boycotted their lectures and refused to eat their meals. The students' grievances were the small quantity of food rations for their meals, the meals' poor quality and other catering issues. As a result of the students' protests, the acting principal of the College set up a committee of enquiry to look into meals and other "matters related to the students' dining halls."⁵⁶ Whereas the committee's findings may have found some of the student's grievances unfounded, some of their recommendations sought to ensure that the students' grievances were addressed. The lecture and meal boycott was a low-key incident that did not attract, nor warrant, much attention from the government.

Student activism was also a product of international concerns. Many African nations regained their independence at the height of the Cold War. The war was to play out in the continent with each of the two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – competing for influence in the continent. It was important to the United States that the newly formed independent states in Africa should not fall into the crutches of Moscow.⁵⁷ The United States' policy was, therefore, geared towards preventing the Soviet Union from dominating the continent.

⁵⁵ R. Mugo Gatheru, *Kenya: From Colonisation to Independence 1888-1970*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc, 2005) pp.207-209.

⁵⁶ University of East Africa, Report of the Committee of Enquiry Into Meals and Other Matters Related To The Students' Dining Halls, p.1.

⁵⁷ Godfrey Muriuki, "Some Reflections on Cold War Africa and After," in Macharia Munene, J.D Olewe Nyunya & Korwa Adar, eds, *The United States and Africa*, (Nairobi: 1995) p.5.

On February 15th 1965 the students staged a demonstration outside the United States Embassy in Nairobi in protest against the bombing of two villages in Uganda allegedly by United States airplanes from the Congo.⁵⁸ This demonstration took place at a time when an anti-American sentiment had taken root throughout Africa. This sentiment stemmed from the American-led UNO intervention in the Congo crisis against radical nationalists led by Congolese Premier, Patrice Lumumba. The effort culminated in the murder of Patrice Lumumba who was eventually replaced by Col. Joseph Mobutu - “one who was amenable to US imperialism.”⁵⁹ The Ugandan Prime Minister, Milton Obote, denounced the United States’ involvement arguing that the American main interest in the Congo was the exploitation of Uranium deposits and the eventual liquidation of “all blackmen in Africa.” The United States thereafter supplied Congo with planes which bombed two Ugandan villages for their alleged support of pro-Lumumbists.⁶⁰ This may have had the effect of concretising the anti-American sentiment in Africa that had then surfaced.

In the demonstration, students from the University College Nairobi condemned the bombing by chanting Anti-American slogans, while asking the East African governments to be watchful of “Yankee Manoeuvres”.⁶¹ Perhaps the students’ concerns were not only informed by the bombing of Ugandan villages, but also by a raging diplomatic stand-off between Tanzania and America at the time which saw Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere recall his envoy to America.⁶² Bearing in mind that University College, Nairobi was a constituent college of the University of East Africa, the students were bound to react to an issue that affected the region. Students from Makerere College took part in a similar demonstration a day after the students of the University College, Nairobi held one.⁶³

The students of the University College, Nairobi turned their attention to a domestic issue months later when they staged a three-day strike within the college precincts on

⁵⁸ Report of Senate Committee, p.33.

⁵⁹ P. Godfrey Okoth, “Uganda’s Foreign Policy Towards the United States of America,” in Machariah Munene, J.D Olewe Nyunya & Korwar Adar, eds, *The United States and Africa*, (Nairobi: 1995)p.111.

⁶⁰ Ibid.,p.111.

⁶¹ Francis Raymond, “‘Yankees go Home, ’say students,” *Daily Nation*, February 16th 1965, pp.1 & 16.

⁶² Adrian Begg, “Dar Recalls Envoy In America,” *Daily Nation*, February 15th 1965, p.1.

⁶³ Mike Barry, “Tear Gas Used In Kampala,” *Daily Nation*, February 17th 1965, p.1.

6th December 1965 in protest against sharing of rooms in their halls of residence.⁶⁴ In the aftermath of the students' strike, the college was closed down and the students were sent home with an ultimatum – every student was to either sign a form agreeing to shared accommodation or to seek admission elsewhere.⁶⁵

Members of the public, as well as two government ministers, expressed their indignation at the students' ingratitude "at the opportunities and subsidies already being given to them by the taxpayer."⁶⁶ The Acting Minister for Education, Julius Gikonyo Kiano, argued that the students' strike had raised "very serious questions for the people and the Government of Kenya." His statement was predicated on his claim that "students were already costing the taxpayers of Kenya nearly 30 times the per capita income of the citizens of Kenya."⁶⁷ His comments were later echoed by the Chairman of the College Council, B.M Gecaga, who appealed to students to "be prepared to suffer some inconvenience in the spirit of *Harambee* in order that the benefits of higher education so heavily subsidized by a generous programme of government financial assistance can be enjoyed by as many as possible."⁶⁸

The Chairman of the Council argued that the shared accommodation was a temporary measure and that could not be avoided. He further added that, while the student hostels had been built on a one-person-per-room basis, the Chief Health Inspector had examined the rooms and found that the buildings were not in any way overcrowded according to city by-laws.⁶⁹ However, an investigative column done by the *Daily Nation* newspaper revealed the state of the students' living conditions:

On average there is one toilet for every 18 students; wash basins are at about one for every six and showers are one for every 13. Because of this, a number of students find they are late for early morning lectures.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.33.

⁶⁵ Michael Parry, "Share a Room or Leave Students Told," *Daily Nation*, December 16th 1965, p.3.

⁶⁶ Editorial, "Students' Oath Price of readmission," *Reporter*, January 14th 1966, p.15.

⁶⁷ Nation Reporter, "Plea To Students, Daily Nation," *Daily Nation*, December 10th 1965, p.24.

⁶⁸ Parry, "Share a Room or Leave," *Daily Nation*, December 16th 1965, p.3.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.3.

⁷⁰ Nation Reporter, "Not Quite a College Room of one's own," *Daily Nation*, December 9th 1965, p.5.

The government's and public's reaction to the students was to insinuate that the students were not nationalistic enough to sacrifice their welfare for the progress of the young nation. The government, in particular, reframed the students' strike to the public as an unpatriotic and selfish act by which the students showed their ingratitude to the citizens' whose taxes funded their education. In an address to the annual delegates' conference of the University Students Association of East Africa at University College, Nairobi, the Minister for Economic planning and Development, Tom Mboya, reiterated the government position on the students' strike. He condemned the students' strike and argued that the public were angered because their expectations were that the students appreciated the challenges facing the new East African nations better than the rest of the citizens because of the education they had received.⁷¹

Editorials in newspapers betrayed a general feeling of displeasure at the students' demonstration. The President of the Students Union, Steven Nagenda, replied to an editorial commentary that portrayed such a view only to be suspended for six months from the University for "indiscipline and insubordination." In a letter to Nagenda, the College Principal, Arthur Porter, cited the language used by Nagenda in his letter and a provocative speech given by the same during the demonstration as reasons for his suspension.⁷² He also cited Nagenda's previous expulsion from another institution and his "marginal academic performance" as "relevant factors" he considered in making his decision.⁷³ Nagenda's suspension, given its timing - the day of the students' readmission - and the "relevant factors" cited by the suspending authority, could have been an example to the rest of his colleagues.

This first strike at the University College, Nairobi may have set the scene on the pattern of government and university administration reactions to student activism in future years at the same institution and much later at the fully fledged University of Nairobi. The argument that students were a privileged lot that drew their privileges from the sweat of taxpayers - and were abusing this privilege - was to be used later by government officials in subsequent cases of student demonstrations. Perhaps this was

⁷¹ Nation Reporter, "Students Urged to Be Constructive," *Daily Nation*, December 22nd 1965 p.17.

⁷² University of East Africa, PUEA/9/2, Letter to Steven Nagenda.

⁷³ Ibid.

a ploy to isolate the students from the larger majority of citizens by portraying them as ungrateful hooligans who, in later years, would stone the citizens' property – cars and shops, for example. Effectively, this “hooligan image” would eclipse the issues the students would demonstrate against causing the public to focus on the students' behaviour rather than sympathise with the legitimacy of their claims. The students, in effect, would be portrayed as spoilt brats. Expulsions and suspensions of student activists from the College, and later the University, were to be used by future University administrations in dealing with many of the demonstrations held in later years.

2.4 Early Student Activism takes a Political Twist

The next incidence of student activism was to take a different form and was to be based on the politics of the new republic. It was also to see the students exhibit their different political leanings.

Kenya's first two years of independence saw the opposition Members of Parliament from KADU and African People's Party (APP) parties lured to join the ruling party, KANU, in the government. Prior to this development, there existed an ideological split in KANU which saw the radical wing of the party confront the conservative wing – which President Kenyatta was a part of – of “betraying the pledges which they had made to masses before independence.”⁷⁴ Whereas KANU radicals favoured socialism as an economic policy and redistribution of land in independent Kenya, conservatives in the party as well as the newly joined members from the opposition favoured capitalism and retention of the status quo.

The migration of the Members of Parliament to KANU had the effect of strengthening the conservative wing of KANU which as a corollary upset the party's equilibrium. The Limuru conference of March 12 – 13th 1966 was the spark that precipitated in the exit of radical KANU Members of Parliament led by the Vice-president, Jaramogi Odinga Odinga, from the ruling party. The conference endorsed a new party constitution, drafted by Odinga's rival – Secretary-General of the party and Minister for Economic Planning and Development, Tom Mboya. The constitution replaced

⁷⁴ William Ochieng, “Structural and Political Changes”, p.94.

Odinga's Deputy President Party position with eight Vice-Presidential positions for each of Kenya's eight provinces.⁷⁵ Slighted at the move, Odinga together with other radicals such as Bildad Kaggia, Achieng Oneko, Joseph Nthula, Zephania Anyieni, Tom Okello Odingo and Oduya Oprong broke away from KANU to form Kenya People's Union (KPU) which was supported by urban workers, trade unions and students who advocated for socialist policies.⁷⁶ This exit from KANU was accompanied by resignations from government by the same radicals. Odinga, for instance, resigned from his position as Vice-president while Achieng Oneko on the other hand, resigned from his position as an Assistant Minister.

Against the backdrop of this confrontation between the group of 'rebel' MP's led by Jaramogi Odinga Oginga in the KPU (Kenya People's Union) and a majority led by Jomo Kenyatta in the ruling party KANU, Odinga Oginga addressed a large gathering of University students at their dining hall on the night of April 27th 1966.⁷⁷ His address which was on "Non-alignment and the new affairs in Kenya", seemed to imply that Kenya was a neo-colony and argued that old colonial masters, who after giving Kenya political freedom, came back "in the cloak of advisers to enslave Kenyans' way of thinking."⁷⁸ The reception of his address was mixed - getting cheers from some students and boos from others.⁷⁹

Odinga's address drew a reaction from the ruling party KANU – which Odinga and his followers had defected from. A statement from KANU headquarters was released which roundly criticized Odinga for his address alleging that he was "trying to involve the students in partisan politics".⁸⁰ The statement seemed to imply that there was a likelihood of the students being brainwashed by Odinga and insinuated the pliability of the students. Part of the statement read as follows:

⁷⁵ David Goldsworthy, Tom Mboya The man Kenya Wanted to Forget, (Nairobi: Heineman Educational Books Ltd, 1982) pp.242-243.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.101.

⁷⁷ Standard Staff Reporter, "Cheers and boos by students greet Mr Odinga," *East African Standard*, April 28th 1966, p.1.

⁷⁸ Peter Muruga, "University Students 'Left in Suspense' by Mr. Odinga's Speech," *East African Standard*, May 2nd 1966, p.4.

⁷⁹ Standard Staff Reporter, "Cheers and boos by students greet Mr Odinga," *East African Standard*, April 28th 1966, p.1.

⁸⁰ Standard Reporter, "Unbecoming Performance at University," *East African Standard*, May 4th 1966, p.8.

We have enough confidence in the students to know they are not willing to be misled by the political pastiche served up to them. Furthermore they are not likely to pay much attention to ideas which are put across to them in a manner which is so divorced from the intellectual level and critical standards to which they are accustomed.⁸¹

The Students Union of the Nairobi University College (SUNU) released a statement signed by their Secretary-general, A.K.D Odoch, which was a rebuttal to the statement released by the ruling party, as well as a letter to the *East African Standard* newspaper by a fellow student criticising Odinga's address. It seemed to emphasise their position as students, their right to choose guest speakers and their academic freedom. As much as the statement implied the neutrality of students in the raging confrontation between KPU and KANU, it cautioned the KANU regime on imposing ideologies of the ruling party on the University.⁸² The statement was also a response to a letter that was critical of Odinga's address and its reception written by a student to the *East African Standard* newspaper. Excerpts of the newspaper column that reported the students' response betrayed a semblance of student's solidarity with Odinga. The column, in part, stated:

"...We have as much sympathy for Mr Odinga as we may be expected to have for any nationalist in Kenya – and indeed in the world." Criticising the author of a letter writer to a newspaper who said he was a student and who expressed disappointment in Mr. Odinga's address, the statement concluded that no one had ever had such a large audience as Mr Odinga. Practically the whole student body had heard him.⁸³

Whereas the 1965 strike may have seen two government ministers weigh in on the tiff between students and the University administration, the confrontation between the students and the government was not clear cut. The incident in 1966 betrayed a semblance of latent student support for the opposition. In contrast to the student strike of 1965, this exchange set the stage for the tumultuous relationship between the students of the Nairobi University College and by extension the University of Nairobi and the government. A lecturer based in the University during this time noted:

⁸¹ Ibid., p.8.

⁸² Standard Reporter, "Students answer criticisms on Invitation to Mr Odinga," *East African Standard*, May 4th 1966, p.8.

⁸³ Ibid.,p.8

The students of the University College Nairobi in 1966, wanted to give Odinga a chance to address them in their halls of residence. The then Principal Arthur Porter sought the Government view about this and the Government said that Odinga shouldn't be given a chance to address students. The students protested against the government for infringing on their academic freedom. This was the genesis between the quarrel between the Government and Students. Once they started in 1966 there was a continuation of this relationship.⁸⁴

Perhaps the incident of 1966 did not only set the stage for the relationship between the government and students but also informed the ideological orientations of the students in their relations with government. Many of the future demonstrations to be held by the students were to betray a leftist political orientation of the students; perpetually challenging the government and rarely coming out in support of it.

The next major demonstration took place in March 13th 1968 when the students of Nairobi's University College demonstrated in the streets of Nairobi in protest against the hanging of Africans by the Smith regime in Rhodesia.⁸⁵ The students, donning their red gowns, were in particular demonstrating against the hanging of three Zimbabwean freedom fighters that had taken place during the previous week. These freedom fighters had been denied their right to appeal as well as "the protection of the reprieve granted by the Queen of England." The students marched to the British High Commission in Nairobi where they presented a memorandum that challenged the British government to intervene militarily and topple the regime of Ian Smith.⁸⁶ The students in their activism were not challenging repression on a national scale but on an international one, having asked the British government to intervene in the affairs of another country.

2.5 Academic Freedom, National Politics and Student Activism

The existence of an opposition party in Kenya – KPU - did not necessarily translate to a democratic gain in Kenya's political landscape. The ruling party, KANU, employed coercive tactics against its rival. With a lion's share of Members of Parliament (MPs), it used its numbers in parliament to pass legislation that saw sitting KANU MP's who

⁸⁴ Interview with Godfrey Muriuki, 16th October 2012, University of Nairobi.

⁸⁵ Report of the Senate Committee Appointed to look into the Problem of Recurrent Student Disturbances at the University of Nairobi, March 1980 p.33.

⁸⁶ Nation Reporter, "University Demonstration," *Daily Nation*, March 13th 1968, p.5.

had defected to KPU to stand for reelection in June of 1966. The government imposed restrictions on KPU campaigns during the election. After the election it also embarked on a campaign of harassing of KPU luminaries - arresting and detaining most of them indefinitely between August and November of 1966. Local government elections held in August of 1968 presented an opportunity for the KANU government to further restrict the KPU opposition. The opposition was prevented from holding public rallies ahead of the election and this made it resort to hold covert political meetings at “weddings and funerals.” Kenya’s political landscape was defined by acrimonious exchanges between two of its political parties.⁸⁷

Students of the University College, Nairobi were to get involved in the political showdown between the two parties. As part of the systematic repression the KANU government used to undermine the opposition, it banned a lecture to be given at the College on January 24th 1969 by Odinga Odinga the leader of the official opposition and the leader of KPU. The government through its Minister of Education, Julius Gikonyo Kiano, had cancelled the lecture to be held at the University College’s Taifa Hall. This message was conveyed in a letter by the Minister addressed to the Principal of the College and copied to the President of the Students’ Union and the leader of the opposition, Odinga Odinga.⁸⁸ A students’ delegation had requested for a meeting with Kiano to discuss the Governments’ directive but the Minister, in a subsequent letter emphasized that the subject was not up for discussion.⁸⁹ Angered by an infringement of their academic freedom and dismayed by the Minister’s high-handedness, the students boycotted their classes on the 24th and 25th of January and held demonstrations on campus as riot policemen were on standby.

The Minister of Education ordered the students to report to class on the 27th of January and called to an end of the demonstration, but the students were adamant; some of them forcibly ejecting their colleagues out of classes. The governments’ response was to close the college and send in anti-riot police and the paramilitary – the General Service Unit – to enforce the order. In the ensuing chaos, a number of

⁸⁷ Daniel Branch, *KENYA Beyond Hope and Despair*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) pp.58-64.

⁸⁸ University of East Africa, PUEA/9/3, Letter by J.G Kiano to the Principal, Nairobi University College, 23rd February 1969.

⁸⁹ University of East Africa, PUEA/9/3, Letter by J.G Kiano to the Principal, Nairobi University College, 24th February 1969.

students were injured as the police and the paramilitary personnel harassed them out of their Halls of residence. For the sake of their safety, some students opted to leave their personal property behind.⁹⁰ In view of the confrontation between the students and the government, there may have been a need for the government to justify its actions to the public. However, the government was unable to release information which its considerations for banning the public lecture was based.

The University administration suspended 5 students indefinitely for their alleged involvement in the strike, while the rest of the students, on readmission, were required to sign an apology to the President and an affirmation to the college that they “would observe its rules and regulations.”⁹¹ The incident was received differently by members of the public with contributions by members of the public to newspapers being generally critical of the students, rubbishing their demonstration and qualifying them as dissidents “behind KPU and its leader.”⁹² In a letter to the Commission of Inquiry formed to investigate the cases of the five suspended students, however, the NUKS (National Union of Kenyan Students) showed solidarity with the students and requested the commission to reinstate the students.⁹³ A lecturer from the Department of English, James Ngugi, resigned in protest against the handling of the crisis by the administration.

The event in 1969, a continuation of the literary activism of 1966, was to prove to be the climax of the students’ activism of the 1960’s and set a precedent for the generally confrontational dynamic between the students and the government in future demonstrations. It also marked the beginning of a “legacy of repressing student organization and expression that worked in parallel with the suppression of dissident academic staff and wider societal opposition.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Nation Reporter, “Government Closes the College,” *Daily Nation*, January 28th 1969, p.1 &26.

⁹¹ University of East Africa, PUEA/9/3, General Purposes Committee, Report Of a Committee on Conditions for the Reopening Of the College, p.1.

⁹² “Disgusted Taxpayer”, Letters to the Editor, “Students Must Stick to their studies,” *Daily Nation*, January 30th 1969, p.6.

⁹³ University of East Africa, PUEA/9/3, Letter to the Commission of Inquiry, National Union of Kenyan Students, undated letter.

⁹⁴ Jacquelin M.Klopp and Janai Orina “University Crisis, Student Activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya,” *The African Studies Review*, Vol 45, No1, 2002, p. 49, retrieved 26th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/1515007>.

Democratic space was further curtailed by government in 1969 when it systematically decimated the KPU opposition, which drew its following mainly from the Luo community. On July 5th 1969, Tom Mboya, who had some semblance of support from the Luo community, was assassinated in broad daylight in Nairobi. Mboya's assassin, a Kikuyu, was perceived by the Luo community to be Kenyatta's agent and this made them resentful of Kenyatta and his government. Three months later Kenyatta was heckled and pelted with stones at a function in Kisumu town – whose residents were mainly Luo – where he was to officially open the Kisumu General Hospital. In the ensuing confusion, several people were shot dead by Kenyatta's bodyguards. KPU was blamed for the fracas, banned and its leaders – the most prominent being Jaramogi Oginga Odinga – were detained.⁹⁵ Kenya effectively became a defacto one party state.

2.6 Conclusion

With Kenya bereft of an opposition and its opposition leaders detained, an alternative democratic space was likely to emerge. A number of factors could explain why students would later be part of this space. The murder of Tom Mboya, may have further provoked anti-government sentiments in the students. Although not popular for his capitalist leanings, he was admired by the students for his oratory and his capacity to push academic discourses in the University whenever he was invited.⁹⁶

The banning of KPU - a party that was popular amongst the students - and the detention of its leaders may have also invoked sympathy from the students and heightened the anti-government sentiment they had which would serve as a collective memory running to the next decade. The governments' ban of Oginga Odinga's lecture, translated as an infringement of the students' academic freedom, also rankled. A memorial was held by the students every year for a number of years, on the 27th of January – one of the dates the boycott was held - to remember their fellow comrades who were brutalized by riot police and to honour the ideal of academic freedom.⁹⁷ The students in their activism for decades to come would mostly challenge the

⁹⁵ William Ochieng, "Structural and Political Changes, p.102.

⁹⁶ Amutabi N. Maurice "Crisis and Students in Universities in Kenya: Examining the Role of Student in National Leadership and Democratisation Process" *The African Studies Review*, Vol 45, No.2 2002, p.166 retrieved 15th April, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1514792>.

⁹⁷ University of Nairobi, UON/12A/1-2, Paul Kikule, Assistant Minister of Social Affairs, Students Union of Nairobi University, Letter to Students.

government and this positioned them as an alternative and oppositional political voice in Kenya.

CHAPTER THREE:

STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING THE KENYATTA ERA (1970 -1978)

3.1 Introduction

Student activism in the 1970s was more pronounced than that of the 1960s. Indeed, Maurice Amutabi's article "Crisis and Protest in Universities in Kenya" argues that student activism underwent several transformations since independence. The activism the students engaged in the early, mid and late 1970s was more intense but its roots can be traced to the activism of the 1960s. This chapter shows how student activism became increasingly politicized and attributes the increased and more politicized activism to the heightened repression that took root in the 1970s, as well as closures of democratic space within and outside the University.

3.2 Détente and A Return To Domestic Activism

A brief calm in Kenya ensued after murder of Tom Mboya and the detentions of leading KPU figures. Activism in the University College and later the University was at a bare minimum in the early seventies and cases of activism were driven by issues that affected the University directly. Trade Unions, on the other hand, were "curbed and intimidated with the boss of the government-controlled workers' federation, COTU (the Central Organisation of Trade Unions) being handpicked by the President."⁹⁸

The University College Nairobi turned into a fully fledged University in July of 1970 when the University of East Africa was dissolved. Previous colleges such as Makerere and Dar es Salaam also became fully fledged universities. The common history and bond the three universities shared was to persist even after their attaining their newfound university status.

In the early months of the University's existence, the government appeared the least interested in tolerating dissent and or alternative views on how Kenya was to be governed. During the Inauguration of the University of Nairobi on 10th December

⁹⁸ William R Ocheing, "Structural and Political Changes," in B.A Ogot and William Ochieng, eds, Decolonisation and Independence in Kenya (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), pp.102.

1970 and the installation of President Kenyatta as the Chancellor of the University, President Kenyatta in a speech downplayed the role of the University in governance arguing that governance was a reserve for the national leadership. He stated:

Some people suggest that in a rapidly developing country like Kenya, the main task of a University is to criticize whatever is observed or projected. An academic body like this is sometimes regarded as only custodian of intellect, and it is argued that a University therefore, has both the right and duty to represent opposition to any existing regime. This idea in its most extreme form can even cross the border line of arrogance. Mistakenly, it is then submitted that intelligence and wisdom which are very different things are only found within the University and that the public is supposed to pay University teachers for exposing and training of national leadership. However, within a young country, it is only national leadership which has truly sprung from and can really interpret the aspirations of our people.⁹⁹

The students were to turn their attention to a domestic matter on 18th of January 1971 when they boycotted their lectures in protest against disciplinary action taken against some women students who had an altercation with Wangari Maathai, a warden of their hall of residence. The students had confronted their warden on the 14th of November 1970 on account of her alleged discriminatory allocation of rooms that favoured students pursuing medical and veterinary courses. Wangari Maathai, in turn, called in the police who harassed some of these students. Investigations done by a sub-committee formed by the University's Disciplinary Committee revealed that the warden was on the wrong thereby acquitting the students.¹⁰⁰ Despite this, the administration suspended two students from the University, evicted four others from the students' halls of residence and threatened twenty one others with a similar punishment in the event that any of them would "participate in any further offences relating to the disturbance".¹⁰¹ The students, through their Union, protested the move asking the University administration to rescind the decisions made by the Disciplinary Committee. They later engaged in a lecture boycott and a demonstration within the University grounds after the administration upheld its decision and refused to negotiate with the students. Police clashed with the University students at the

⁹⁹Speech by President Kenyatta, Inauguration of the University of Nairobi, 10th December 1970.

¹⁰⁰ University OF Nairobi, UON/12A/1-2, Christian Oracha, Secretary-General SUNU, Open letter To The Vice-Chancellor From the Students' Union.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

University grounds but the students were unrelenting on their stands against the administration.¹⁰²

The administration was compelled by the lecture boycott to negotiate with the Students' Union and subsequently recommended to the Vice-Chancellor the review of the suspensions that had been handed out.¹⁰³ The suspensions were, however, upheld by the Vice-Chancellor.¹⁰⁴ The Vice-Chancellor's decision to disregard the recommendation of members of his administration may have been an indication of his administrative capabilities. This move did little to placate the students who were hitherto angered by the suspension.

3.3 Underpass Demonstrations: Impact and Aftermath

A demonstration was held on 21st November 1971 calling for the construction of an underpass across State House road – a road patronized mainly by students and motorists. The students were disturbed by the number of accidents that had involved their colleagues and some motorists. The students' demonstration, however, yielded no results.

The next major demonstration was in July of 1972 when the students of the University of Nairobi took part in a picket along State House Road protesting motorists' indifference to student pedestrian's crossing on the road. Several students had lost their lives while crossing in the previous years and the students, therefore, protested, asking the Nairobi City Council to build a subway for them. The students also protested against the state of the University bookshop and the services they were getting from the University Sanatorium. The demonstration turned into a confrontation between the students and the police once the police intervened.¹⁰⁵

In the aftermath of the "riot", 56 students were arrested, tried and were given an option of paying a £150 fine or serving a six-month jail term. Expelled from the University, they were also to reapply for readmission after their sentences. Vincent

¹⁰² Nation reporter, "Riot Police Move In At University," *Daily Nation*, January 29th 1971, p.1.

¹⁰³ Minutes of Meeting of Deans and Executive of The Students' Union, University of Nairobi, Held on Tuesday, 19th January, 1971, at 2:30 p.m In The Council Chamber.

¹⁰⁴ University of Nairobi, UON/12A/1-2, John Teka President of the Students Union of Nairobi University, Letter to the Vice-Chancellor, February 15th 1971.

¹⁰⁵ Wanyiri Kihoro, *Never Say Die*, (Kampala, East Africa Educational Publishers, 1998) p.46.

Mugabo, Patrobah Fungo and Andrew Oringo – SUNU’s Vice-President, Speaker and Minister for Foreign Affairs, respectively, were summarily expelled on suspicion of having instigated the demonstration. Ochieng Konyango and Chelegat Mutai, editors of the student magazine – *The University Platform* – were arbitrarily expelled for articles that appeared on the magazine related to the demonstration while a member of staff, who also happened to be one of the editors, had his contract terminated prematurely.¹⁰⁶ These articles mainly deplored the brutality of the police in handling the students’ demonstration.¹⁰⁷

The students were expelled without being given a hearing before the disciplinary committee to defend themselves.¹⁰⁸ The student magazine – *The University Platform* – was also banned, thus curtailing the students’ freedom of expression. The magazine hitherto provided a platform for the students to articulate their views not only on University issues, but also national issues. The students’ freedom of association was to be curtailed next. The Students’ Union of Nairobi University, SUNU, was subsequently banned on October 26th in an Order issued by the Attorney General, Charles Njonjo, who described the Union as a society “dangerous to the good government of Kenya.”¹⁰⁹ The students’ freedom of association had been curtailed and they now lacked a central body to articulate their grievances. Bereft of democratic spaces of expression and association, the students sought recourses that would restore their freedoms of association and expression.

Two months later, the outgoing President and Vice-President of the defunct Students’ Union in a memorandum to the Vice-chancellor notified him of a new students’ organisation. In the view of the pair, the new organisation would discourage “tribal affiliations and would promote national consciousness.” The pair – James Orenge and Harry Jembe – called the body Nairobi University Students’ Organisation – NUSO – and pledged that the Union would be non-political and would only address students’ grievances.¹¹⁰ A memorandum was also sent to the President in his capacity as the Chancellor of the University by student leaders and delegates from Universities in

¹⁰⁶ See appendices 1-3.

¹⁰⁷ The Students’ Council, The July 19th Memorandum, University Platform, July 27th, pp.3 &7.

¹⁰⁸ Nation Reporter, “Riot Students Have to Reapply,” *Daily Nation*, August 2nd 1972, p.1.

¹⁰⁹ Nation Reporter, “Student Union is Banned,” *Daily Nation*, October 27th 1972, p.1.

¹¹⁰ University of Nairobi, UON/12A/3-4, James Orenge & Harry Jembe, Memorandum: For A University In the Service of Peace and Social Progress, December 2nd 1972.

other African countries, who were attending an All African Students Conference in Dar es Salaam. The memorandum protested against the banning of SUNU and asked President to lift the ban on the students' union or to "expedite the registration of a Students Union."¹¹¹ The students' demands, however, were not adequately addressed.

An amorphous organisation was set up the following year to represent the students. Constituted from elected representatives for each of the students' halls of residence – 16 in number – the organisation was known as the Council of Hall Chairmen. The council's mandate was limited to student welfare issues and had no constitution and guidelines for its operations. A letter to the students by the Council's Chairman admitted that the banning of SUNU had adversely affected students' welfare, thus there was a need for the Council to expeditiously remedy the situation that would revive and maintain the students' morale.¹¹² The council, however, fell short as a surrogate for SUNU as it was not duly elected from the students. It, therefore, had no mandate from the students.

Perhaps previous confrontations between students, on one hand, and the state, on the other, may have caused an underlying fear of students' involvement in political activities related to the state. Correspondence between some of the student leaders and the University administration attests to this fear. A letter addressed to the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Josephat Karanja, by Kirinyaga University Students notifying him of a meeting taking place in the University between students and two government officials had to unequivocally state the purpose of the meeting and further that the nature of the meeting would be apolitical. The letter, in part, stated:

Tomorrow, Wednesday 10th, the Kirinyaga Students in the University will be holding a meeting in Hall 11 Common Room to discuss methods of raising funds for the Kirinyaga Technical Institute, and also continued participation in fund-raising activities organized by the Institute Committee, in preparation for the foundation stone laying ceremony. The meeting being non-political, we

¹¹¹J.Z.J Muggo, Coordinating secretary The Planning Committee, All African Students Conference, A Memorandum To His Excellency The Chancellor of The University of Nairobi and The President of Kenya Mzee Jomo Kenyatta.

¹¹²University of Nairobi, UON/12A/4, Magina Magina, To All Students of University of Nairobi, September 5th 1973.

hope sir that you will not have any reservations about the two gentlemen addressing us.¹¹³

In place of a central body to represent students' grievances, there was a proliferation of ethnic student organizations which were set up contrary to government policy to discourage student bodies organized on ethnic lines. A letter by the then Registrar-General, D.J Coward, to the Vice-chancellor protested the registration of such organisations. The Vice-Chancellor responded by appealing to the registrar to consider the high number of 'tribal' societies registered and that if he were to reject applications for registration, a number of students would feel discriminated against.¹¹⁴ Government officials would deal directly with students from these organizations and this would give the government an approachable face.¹¹⁵ This ultimately may have had an impact of mitigating the students' radicalism and their unity against government. 1973 was a passive year with regard to student activism but the détente between students, on one hand, and the government and the University administration on the other, would not last for long.

3.4 'Africanised' Student Activism: Anti-British Demonstrations, The Jorgensen Crisis And Their Aftermath

1974 was to prove an active year as far as the students' activism was concerned. The banning of the Students' Union two years before had created a general sense of restiveness. In addition, the students' freedom of expression was curtailed. A planned demonstration in the city on 6th February 1974 by the students against the visit of British Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, was cancelled by University authorities. The students later held a peaceful demonstration against the Secretary and by extension, the regimes of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola and South Africa, which they perceived to be racist for their white minority rule. Sir Alec Douglas-Home was profiled as a member of the British ruling class which was accused of being complicit in the racism and repression the White minority regimes of Southern Africa were party to.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ University of Nairobi, UON/12A/4, George A.K Kariithi, Letter by Kirinyaga University Students to Vice Chancellor, October 9th 1973.

¹¹⁴ University of Nairobi, UON/12A/4, J.N Karnaja, Letter to the Registrar General D.J Coward, November 5th 1973.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Kamotho Waiganjo, 5th August, 2012, Parklands, Nairobi.

¹¹⁶ Nation Reporter, "Students Blast Racist Regimes," *Daily Nation*, February 7th 1974, p.1.

The demonstration did not only stem solely from the visit of the British Foreign Secretary, however. It also provided a vent for some internal squabbles facing the Kenya Students' Union. The leadership of the Union was dethroned and a caretaker committee led by the former SUNU President James Orengo was endorsed by the students to replace the leadership. The caretaker committee led the demonstration which was denounced by the Chairman of the Kenya Students Union, Lazaro Ambissobour and the then Kenyan Minister for Education, Taita Towett. The students later demonstrated against the two and later were supported by the Central Organisation of Trade Unions (Kenya).¹¹⁷

The students later on turned their attention to a domestic issue which had a subtle relationship to the cause of their previous demonstration. The presence of European expatriates in the University was closely linked to the white minority of European ancestry that ruled over the black majority in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Angola which the students had demonstrated against.

Students from the Faculty of Architecture on February 20th boycotted their end of year examinations and demonstrated against alleged mass failures in the department and the predetermination of their results which would make their efforts to pass their examination redundant. The students claimed that this was a ploy to frustrate Africanisation of the architectural field to the benefit of expatriates who had dominated the profession not only in the University, but also outside it.¹¹⁸ In the ensuing boycott, the students gave a condition for sitting the examination – that the head of Department Professor Jorgenson be removed.¹¹⁹ The University administration tried to coerce a number of architecture students from participating in the boycott with the threat of expulsion. These students had returned their examination cards in the boycott.¹²⁰ This action inevitably worsened the situation.

¹¹⁷ Nation Reporter, "Struggle Over Leadership Dominates Campus," *Daily Nation*, February 12th 1974, p.4.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Godfrey Muriuki, 16th October 2012, University of Nairobi.

¹¹⁹ Nation Reporter, "Varsity Students Threaten To Boycott Examination," *Daily Nation*, February 23rd 1974, p.3.

¹²⁰ Standard Staff Reporter, "Students' Action removes them From University – Registrar," *East African Standard*, February 25th 1974, p.5.

Students from Kenya Polytechnic, Kabete Campus and Kenyatta University College, a constituent college of the University of Nairobi, then joined the demonstrations held in support of the architectural students. The examination boycott spread to Kenyatta University College where the students refused to take their examinations.¹²¹ After demonstrating for days and engaging in running battles with the police, the University of Nairobi and its constituent college were closed indefinitely. A number of students were assaulted by police with a number of female students being raped in the demonstrations, while others were arrested. Consequently, the standoff between the University students, on one hand, and the University administration and the Police, on the other, provoked a number of responses from various entities.

COTU through its Secretary-General, Dennis Akumu, condemned the police brutality as well as the University's administration move to close the University without looking into the students' grievances. Groups such as the University Staff Union (USU), the National Union of Kenya Students (NUKS) and the National Christian Council of Kenya's Committee on Church and Society condemned the police brutality and called for a body to be constituted to inquire into the demonstration. The NCKK committee, in a statement, in part, stated:

We feel the police should not be used to cover the inefficiency of the University administration to settle their problems. We therefore call upon the University administration not to victimize the students and further that an independent inquiry be instituted to look into the whole matter.¹²²

KNUT (Kenya National Union of Teachers) through its Secretary, Ambrose Adongo, also condemned the police brutality as well as the administration's move to close the University. It called on the government to reinstate the Student Union it had banned in 1972. The impasse between the students and the University administration, later to be dubbed the "Jorgensen" Crisis, was attributed to the lack of a registered Students Union which may have been used by the administration and the students' to mitigate the crisis.¹²³ In later days, the Nairobi branch of the ruling party, the Railway African

¹²¹ Nation Education Correspondent, "Tear-gas and batons on the Campus," *Daily Nation*, February 26th 1974, pp. 1 & 17.

¹²² Standard Staff Reporter, "University Staff Call for a Public Inquiry," *East African Standard*, February 28th 1974, p.1.

¹²³ Standard Staff Reporter, "'Reopen University and set up student Council' – K.N.U.T.," *East African Standard*, February 28th 1974, p.5.

Union, the Architectural Students Association, the Kenya Makerere University students Union and Students of Dar es Salaam University denounced the University administrations' handling of the crisis.

Politicians, the most prominent of them being the Member of Parliament for Nyandarua North, J.M Kariuki, also weighed in on the public debate on the University crisis. He condemned the brutality of the police in handling the demonstration and argued that the demonstrations were a domestic affair for the University and should have been handled at that level.¹²⁴ The lack of a Students Union did not make things for the government and the University administration any easier; the authorities lacked a centrally elected student body from the student population to engage with. The student protests were now not under any Students Union, yet they were the most potent in that they confronted the University administration and the government with a problem in a "country without any political opposition."¹²⁵

The Students of the University of Nairobi put the administration in an awkward position as they – particularly the finishing students - had not taken their examinations and this meant there would be no intake of the freshmen who were waiting. This effectively held the authorities to ransom and they were recalled five weeks later without either of them being victimized. Charges against five arrested students were dropped while the head of the Department of Architecture, Professor Jorgensen, resigned. The students did their examinations and soon after closed for the long vacation. The University began its new academic year in August of 1974.¹²⁶

3.5 Loan Scheme and an Economic Angle to Student Activism

At the national level a high cost of living and inflation loomed. As a result of the first oil crisis of 1973-1974, prices for crude oil trebled internationally. Kenya's then Minister for Finance and Economic Planning – Mwai Kibaki – announced in February of 1974 that hard days lay ahead.¹²⁷ True to his prediction, the Central Organisation of Trade Unions, COTU, in March threatened to go on strike if their wages and salaries

¹²⁴ Nation Education Correspondent, "University Shut Indefinitely," *Daily Nation*, February 27th 1974, p.1&24.

¹²⁵ Wanyiri Kihoro, *The Price of Freedom: The Story of Political Resistance in Kenya*, (Nairobi, MvuleAfrica Publishers, 2005) p.163.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.163.

¹²⁷ Nation reporter, "Hard Days Ahead," *Daily Nation*, February 6th 1974, p.1.

were not reviewed in light of the rising cost of living.¹²⁸ With the threat of an examination boycott still existing, there existed a fear of the students' and the Trade Unions working in concert. A letter by the University registrar to the Vice-Chancellor was a testament to this. In part, the letter stated:

Excuses are being manufactured to cause a further delay for the examinations to coincide with the general strike called by COTU. I have no evidence but influence from that end cannot be ruled out.¹²⁹

Kenyatta University College was reopened on March 16th 1974, three weeks after being closed down. However, a minor standoff between the students and the Administration ensued as the college reopened. The college main gates were closed as the students streamed in. In addition, they had been asked for their identification cards as they entered the college. The students also had other grievances, such as the establishment of a bookshop at the campus, increase of teaching allowances in view of the prevailing inflation, improved medical facilities, postponement of exams for diploma students and students' representation in the college's departments. The College principal, however, held an outdoor meeting with students where they were able to reach a compromise on some of their demands.¹³⁰

The Kenyatta University College students boycotted their lectures and held a peaceful demonstration within the College's precincts on the 5th of August 1974, protesting against a shortage of lecturers. A committee was constituted to investigate the causes of the students' grievances and to recommend some solutions that would remedy the standoff between the students and the administration. The committee comprised a few members of the college staff and a few members from the student body. The mandate was given to the committee as the student body felt that there existed no fair and just means by which the students could forward their views through the existing channel. An existing student Union – the Student Affairs Committee – had been previously

¹²⁸ Nation Reporter, "General Strike Threat By COTU," *Daily Nation*, March 12th 1974, p.20.

¹²⁹ University of Nairobi, UON/12A/4J, J.K Koinange, Internal Memo to the Vice Chancellor, 20th March 1974.

¹³⁰ Nation reporter, "Kenyatta College Principal and Students hold Frank talks," *Daily Nation*, March 18th 1974, p.3.

dissolved by the College's principal and was described by the Staff-Student Committee report as a "unilateral move that precipitated a crisis of leadership".¹³¹

The activism of the students of Kenyatta University College later spread to the University of Nairobi main campus, where students went on a sympathy strike in solidarity with Kenyatta University College students. The students argued that, since the Kenyatta College was a constituent College of the University of Nairobi, the two were one institution. The students' grievances included operation of a loan scheme introduced by the government that would see student pay for the hitherto free education, congestion in the students' halls of residence and dining facilities and a shortage of staff.¹³²

The main reason for the students' boycott, however, was the loan scheme which according to the students was an imposition. No dialogue between the students and the Ministry of Education had been initiated. The students protested against its dictated terms of payment and its "unilaterally determined system of operation." The student decried the unfairness of having to take the loans, while their forerunners working at the Ministry of Education had not. The students also opposed the loan on the strength of its incompatibility with the objective of development; it would dissuade potential manpower from taking up University training on account of being in debt after the completion of one's course. They also opposed the loan on account of its likelihood to encourage the notion of education as a privilege rather than that of a social right that the government was obligated to provide. This complaint was also tied to the likelihood of the loan scheme benefiting children of the petty-bourgeoisie who would not have to take the loan owing to their advantaged economic status.¹³³

The students ignored a government directive to resume their lectures immediately and compared the government directive to the government's move to declare a strike by Railway workers illegal yet "they had worked for a full month without pay." In the absence of a student Union – a democratic space closed in October 1972 - the students were unable to negotiate the loan scheme with the Ministry of Education and this

¹³¹ University of Nairobi, UON/12A/4J, Report Of The Student/Staff Committee To look Into The University Crisis, 11th August 1974, pp.1-6.

¹³² Nation Reporter, "Students Threaten to go On Strike," *Daily Nation*, August 8th 1974, p.1.

¹³³ University of Nairobi, UON/12A/4J, Present University Crisis in Perspective, The Coordinating Committee-In-Exile Kenyatta University College/University Of Nairobi, August 20th 1974.

caused the students to go on strike.¹³⁴ The University of Nairobi and its constituent college, Kenyatta University College, were closed on August 14th 1974 after ten-day and seven-day boycotts, respectively. The students' were unable to reach a compromise with the University administration mainly because of a lack of a Students Union that may have mitigated the crisis. While the University Council had asked the students to utilise "available machinery" to channel their grievances to the administration, the students argued that they could not use the Council of the Halls of Chairmen as a surrogate for a Students Union as the Council had no mandate from the students; it had not been duly elected.¹³⁵ The crisis was, therefore, a product of the banning of the Students Union in October of 1972. In the absence of a centrally elected student leader, however, the students' rights were championed by the chairman of United Nations Student Association (UNISA), Ben Ooko Ombaka.

A barrage of strikes in other institutions, as well as trade unions, accompanied the students' boycotts. Students in one of the colleges in Nairobi, Railway Training School, boycotted their lectures. Trade unions, such as the Kenya Union of Commercial, Food and Allied Workers, Kenya National Union of Teachers went on strike or issued strike notices. Employees of institutions, like the East African Railways Corporation and East African Airways also went on strike. With mounting industrial action facing his regime, President Kenyatta through a Presidential Decree banned all strikes and threatened violators of the directive with severe action. A democratic space on a national level was effectively curtailed. His decree was ironically supported by the COTU.¹³⁶ Kenyatta's decisive action may have been driven by the need to sanitise his government's image in view of mounting opposition to his regime and an impending election that was to take place two months later. His governments' leadership may have been called to question, if the litany of trade unions went on strike as they had planned.

The Presidential Decree came in the heels of the University's closure which may have been driven by the same motive. A popular rumour that existed at the time claimed that Kenyatta had closed the University indefinitely – scattering the students

¹³⁴ Nation Reporter, "Student Agree To 'Peace' meeting," *Daily Nation*, August 12th 1974, pp.1 & 16.

¹³⁵ Nation Reporter, "University is Closed," *Daily Nation*, August 15th 1974, p.1.

¹³⁶ Nation reporter, "Mzee bans All Strikes," *Daily Nation*, August 17th 1974, p.1.

countrywide - to excise the oppositional threat the students may have posed during the general election to be held in October of that year.¹³⁷ In the run up to the General Election, the Kenyatta regime became increasingly repressive. In addition to the strike ban imposed, applications by former KPU luminaries to contest the 1974 General Elections were rejected by the ruling party KANU, despite their release from prison and admittance into the same party. Dissident politicians, such as J.M Kariuki, were barred by government from campaigning for reelection.¹³⁸ The Kenyatta government was under threat and all steps had to be taken to neutralize threats to its legitimacy.

The University was reopened 5 months later on the second week of January 1975. The students were made to apply for readmission with a number of student leaders denied readmission. On account of the virtual expulsion of the student leaders, a “Coordinating Committee” of students of the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University College was at the forefront of calling for a continuation of the lecture boycott that had taken place 5 months earlier. The Committee accused the Vice Chancellor of dividing the students on ethnic grounds. It was also claimed by the students that high ranking lecturers and head of departments were demoted for airing views considered pro-students. The government moved swiftly, however, and in keeping with the Presidential Decree issued in the previous year that banned boycotts and sit-ins, it banned all unlicensed meetings in the University.¹³⁹ Student leaders of the University of Nairobi were victimized, but those of Kenyatta University College were left out, a move which provoked condemnations from Kitutu East Member of Parliament, George Anyona, and the Secretary General of KNUT, Ambrose Adongo. Faced with the threat of expulsion if they continued the boycott, students of the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University College finally resumed their lectures. Arrests of student leaders, including the leader of the Coordinating Committee, Kenneth Kariuki, further intimidated the students.¹⁴⁰

In light of the coercive tactics that the University administration and the Government had used, the students were compelled to accept the terms of their readmission

¹³⁷ Kihoro, *The Price of Freedom*, p.164.

¹³⁸ Daniel Branch, *KENYA Beyond Hope and Despair*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) pp.107-109.

¹³⁹ Standard Reporter, “Most Students Registered,” *The Standard*, January 8th 1975, p.1.

¹⁴⁰ Standard reporter, “Students Resume Classes At Both Universities,” *The Standard*, January 9th 1975, p.1.

unreservedly. The loan scheme would be implemented without any adjustments or compromises, expulsions of their colleagues were upheld and their freedoms of assembly and association curtailed. In addition, the students had to contend with the absence of a duly elected students' union that would have represented them. Against this backdrop of diminishing democratic space, a bout of student unrest was a trigger away.

3.6 “J.M Day”, Increasing Dissent and Repression

According to Daniel Branch, the 1974 Kenyan elections signalled Kenyan intolerance of the hypocrisy and excesses of the ruling elite. Over fifty percent of sitting Members of Parliament were voted out. Prominent among those who remained, were three government critics, J.M Kariuki, Jean Marie Seroney and Martin Shikuku. Among the three and indeed compared to any politician in Kenya then, J.M Kariuki, popularly known as J.M, was the most popular. He criticized the governments' land policy and coming from the same ethnic group as Kenyatta – Kikuyu – he had greater credibility among the landless and former Mau Mau veterans.¹⁴¹

Perhaps he drew this credibility from his history as a former Mau Mau detainee and the fact that while other members of the ruling elite, including Kenyatta, accumulated property and wealth rapidly, he positioned himself as a castigator of corruption in government and its land policy. As a corollary, his supporters were mainly the indebted and the poor, the landless and the land-hungry who were “dismayed at the rapid accumulation of poverty and wealth by the ruling elite.” Kariuki had not only built his support amongst his ethnic group, but had also built himself a nationwide profile by attending public fundraising events, opening schools and other public institutions in every conceivable setting.¹⁴² He had, in addition, cultivated support within the University of Nairobi through using on-campus speaking engagements and on occasion speaking in favour of the students when they were involved in confrontations with the state in the early 1970s.

Viewed as a threat, the government declined to grant him a licence to hold campaign meetings in his constituency before the 1974 elections. He, however, managed to

¹⁴¹ Branch, *Between Hope and Despair*, pp.105-108.

¹⁴² Ibid., p.105-106.

return to parliament on a landslide victory. His resilient political career and his stance on political issues positioned him as a symbol of resistance to Kenyatta's government not only nationally, but within his Kikuyu ethnic group. The government in early 1975 pressurised media houses not to report his movements and political activities. It also denied him licenses to hold public meetings.¹⁴³

On March 1st 1975 a bomb exploded in a Mombasa town bound bus in Nairobi, killing 27 people and injuring another 80. The following day, J.M was reported to have been escorted by non-uniformed policemen for questioning. The policemen were accompanied by the then commandant of the paramilitary wing, GSU, Ben Gethi. J.M Kariuki was never to be seen alive again. He was murdered and his body was left for animals to dispose of in a remote spot in Ngong Hills, an area located in the outskirts of Nairobi city. His body was discovered the following morning, recovered by local police men who in turn took it to the Nairobi mortuary. The corpse, however, was unidentified and the mortuary only made an announcement of its possession on the morning of the 11th. The announcement was made "shortly before the time limit for claiming the body was due to expire."¹⁴⁴ Kariuki's family identified the body as Kariuki's in the evening of the same, days after announcing his disappearance.

A number of politicians known to be close to the J.M Kariuki foresaw the possibility of a cover up of J.M's murder, given the history of cover ups after the murders of Tom Mboya and Pio Gama Pinto in 1969 and 1965, respectively. Members of parliament soon after the announcement of J.M's death set up a Select Committee to investigate the murder. The committee comprised MP's who were sympathetic to J.M Kariuki and long-standing critics of government, such as Jean Marie Seroney, Martin Shikuku, Charles Rubia, Grace Onyango and its head, Elijah Mwangale.¹⁴⁵ The committee later presented its report to President Kenyatta on 3rd June 1975 who ordered them to expunge the name of one of his close associates – the Minister of Internal Security, Mbiyu Koinange.

¹⁴³ Kihoro, *The Price of Freedom*, p.165.

¹⁴⁴ Branch, *Between Hope and Despair*, pp.113-114.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.115.

While it was later suspected that the bomb attack may have been an attempt by Kariuki's rivals to implicate him and thereby get rid of him politically, students from the University of Nairobi saw things differently. To the students, Kenyatta and his associates were behind the bomb attempt which was designed to create a "lethal distraction to facilitate the abduction and elimination of J.M. Kariuki."¹⁴⁶ The students' suspicion of the governments' involvement in Kariuki's murder might have stemmed from the J.M Kariuki's criticisms of government and the government's known attempt to sabotage his political career.

The discovery that J.M Kariuki had been brutally murdered drove students into the streets again on March 12th 1975.¹⁴⁷ The students boycotted their lectures and held demonstrations for five days inside and outside the University, confronting the police while doing so. Members of the public joined the students in the early days of the demonstrations, prompting the police to try and contain some of the demonstrations within the University; they were apprehensive at the prospect of a protracted joint demonstration of the students and members of the public. An anti-government sentiment was manifest in the students' demonstrations where they denounced Kenyatta and his close body of associates with some suggesting that some statements Kenyatta had made alluded to J.M Kariuki's murder. J.M Kariuki, once Kenyatta's Private Secretary had become Kenyatta's adversary before his death. In this light, the students, therefore, analysed one of the statements, Kenyatta was reported to have said that: "Even satan was once God's angel but when he offended God, he was expelled into hell!"¹⁴⁸ At Kenyatta University College, students in a demonstration attempted to deface the University's signboard so as to remove President Kenyatta's name from it.¹⁴⁹

J.M Kariuki's funeral became the climax of the students' five day demonstration. The students in their red gowns – worn as a symbol of mourning – heckled the then Provincial Commissioner for Central province, Simeon Nyachae who had come to read President Kenyatta's message of condolences.¹⁵⁰ Several leading politicians

¹⁴⁶ Kihoro, *The Price of Freedom*, p.165.

¹⁴⁷ Nation Reporter, "University Students Dispersed," *Daily Nation*, March 13th 1975, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Kihoro, *The Price of Freedom*, p.167.

¹⁴⁹ Branch, *Between Hope and Despair*, pp.113-114.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Godfrey Muriuki, 16th October 2012, University of Nairobi.

spoke at the burial of J.M. Kariuki with some student leaders, like Wanyiri Kihoro, calling on the government of the day to resign.

As resentment over the murder brewed, a military display was staged by President Kenyatta with military aircraft making low swoops in the city while troops from the army marching on the streets of Nairobi. The underlying message Kenyatta sent through this was that he would “no longer tolerate any more public protests over the J.M affair.”¹⁵¹

The students were not sated by the 5-day spate of demonstrations in response to J.M Kariuki’s murder. Subsequent attempts by students of the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University College in late March and April to hold other demonstrations related to the J.M affair were thwarted by the police who banned these demonstrations and on occasion sent their riot unit to stop the students. The police cited security reasons as their rationale for cancelling the students’ demonstrations. Students’ attempts to hold demonstrations coincided with attempts by COTU to hold demonstrations which were ultimately called off by the Police. Subsequent student demonstrations that were held did not only protest against the murder of J.M Kariuki, but also against other previous and emerging student grievances. The students wanted their expelled colleagues readmitted, as well as a withdrawal from the loan scheme. They also protested against a proposed introduction of a National Youth Service Scheme that would see them engage in nation building projects and get partially militarized.¹⁵² The scheme was presented to parliament and was perceived to be a punishment intended to cow J.M Kariuki’s supporters in the University.¹⁵³ In the aftermath of J.M’s murder and subsequent demonstrations, democratic space shrunk not only in the University, but also nationally.

The students held another demonstration on May 26th demonstrating against the attempts by politicians to introduce a GEMA (Gikuyu, Embu and Meru) branch at the University.¹⁵⁴ Other grievances included: the proscribing of the students union, the loan scheme attempts and congestion in their hostels. The attempted establishment of

¹⁵¹ Wanyiri Kihoro, *The Price of Freedom*, p.168.

¹⁵² Nation reporter, “Student Demo Stopped as ‘Security Risk’,” *Daily Nation*, March 24th 1975, p.3.

¹⁵³ Branch, *Between Hope and Despair*, p.119.

¹⁵⁴ Weekly Review, Chronology of Clashes, February 15th 1985, p.12.

a GEMA University Students' Association was, however, their main bone of contention. This was closely tied to the manhandling of two police officers two days earlier who were detected at a student meeting meant to establish the association. In light of the historically stormy relationship between students and police, students were aggressive against police officers.

Three students were arrested in connection with the manhandling of the police officers and the students held a meeting within the University precincts to discuss the incident.¹⁵⁵ The meeting, unlicensed, was violently dispersed by police who engaged the students in running battles. In the ensuing chaos, a number of students and police officers were injured while a number of female students were raped including Lucy Mahihu, a niece of the Provincial Commissioner of Coast Province, Eliud Mahihu known to be a close associate of President Kenyatta. Ninety four students were arrested in the fracas and charged with rioting after proclamation, a crime whose maximum penalty was then life imprisonment.¹⁵⁶ The President subsequently exercised his powers of clemency by pardoning the students and ordering for their release from custody.

The President's pardon was later on used by Kenyatta University College students to ask for permission from the College's administration to hold a peaceful demonstration. Once permission was granted, the students' changed the motive of the demonstration. The students demanded immediate action against those accused of complicity in the murder of J.M Kariuki. The names of the accused featured prominently in a report released by the Parliamentary Select Committee, chaired by Elijah Mwangale, which investigated the murder of J.M Kariuki. Amongst those mentioned by the report included the commander of the General Service Unit (GSU) Ben Gethi, Pius Kibathi Thuo, a police officer, the Minister for Internal Security, Mbiyu Koinange and the head of the presidential bodyguard, Arthur Wanyoike Thungu. The students alluded to some of these individuals in their demonstration

¹⁵⁵ Nation Reporter, "University closed," *Daily Nation*, May 28th 1975, p.1.

¹⁵⁶ James Kimondo and Andrew Kuria, "Students Face Life Sentences," *Daily Nation*, May 28th 1975, pp.1 & 32.

demanding that it was imperative for Kenyans to know under whose auspices the accused were acting.¹⁵⁷

Sustained activism by the students later bore them dividends as by September 1975 a new students union was registered with the registrar of societies. The students' Union was named NUSO (Nairobi University Students Organisation). Elections for the first NUSO officials were held in November of 1975. The students earmarked March 2nd – the supposed date of J.M.'s murder – as an anniversary date on which they would boycott their lectures and demonstrate against his slaying. This took place in 1976, 1977 and 1978 and in student lingo the anniversary was called "J.M day".¹⁵⁸ The anniversaries were mainly characterised by running battles between students and the Police. Of the three J.M days during Jomo Kenyatta's regime, the J.M day of 1977 was the most intense and was followed shortly by another demonstration which concerned second year Commerce students, who were protesting one of their colleagues resumption of the following year of study despite "having failed in the 1st year examinations". University property was destroyed and other students and members of staff were assaulted.¹⁵⁹

The aftermath of J.M Kariuki's murder and its investigation was not only felt in the University of Nairobi, but also among Kenya's political elite. Members of the Cabinet who voted in favour of the adoption of the report of the Parliamentary Select Committee investigating the murder of J.M Kariuki were dismissed. Critics of the KANU regime, such as Jean Marie Seroney and Martin Shikuku – who were part of the Parliamentary Select Committee – were detained months after the release of the report. Other government critics suffered the same fate, with Kitutu Masaba Member of Parliament George Anyona, being detained in 1977.

The arrest of Ngugi wa Thiongo – a writer and lecturer in the University of Nairobi - in December of 1977 and his subsequent detention in January of 1978 effectively brought the face of government repression to the University's threshold. Ngugi had been arrested after months of staging a play he had written called *I will Marry When I*

¹⁵⁷ Nation Reporter, "'Act Now on J.M Report' Say Angry Students," *Daily Nation*, June 6th 1975, p.32.

¹⁵⁸ See appendix 4.

¹⁵⁹ Report of Student Disturbances in the University of Nairobi 1961-1980, p.3.

Want. The play was staged in a village theatre at Kamirithu, near Limuru. The play's cast comprised villagers who in the play engaged in political satire and caricaturing political leaders. The play engaged the Kenya government as it considered the peasants its preserve. Ngugi was, therefore, arrested and detained for "his onslaught against what the government considered its terrain, an act meant to stop the production and publication of the play."¹⁶⁰ The detention of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, one of the most famous University lecturers, elicited intermittent student demonstrations in 1978 that demanded for his release.¹⁶¹ His plight was to feature as a recurring theme in student demonstrations for years to come. The repression was palpable; observable nationally and now felt by the student community at the Campus grounds. The University students now thirsted for a new democratic order. Perhaps their hopes for such a regime were heightened with the death of Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, on August 21st 1978.

3.7 Conclusion

Student activism in the University of Nairobi in the early seventies was mainly about domestic issues that were particular to the University students. This pattern of activism was generally similar to the student activism of the 1960s. There were, however, occasional instances where students of both decades demonstrated against international issues. There was a general fear of student involvement in national politics at this time.

Student activism in the University of Nairobi in the years covered in this chapter, however, took a different dimension after the murder of J.M Kariuki. The murder saw the students jettison whatever fears they had in engaging in national politics and weigh into national politics by continually demonstrating against his murder and demanding the prosecution of senior government officials implicated by the findings of the report prepared by the Parliamentary Select Committee investigating J.M Kariuki's assassination

¹⁶⁰ Maurice Amutabi, "Intellectuals and the Democratisation Process in Kenya," in Godwin R Murunga & Shadrack W Nasong'o, eds, *Kenya The Struggle for Democracy* p.215

¹⁶¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writers Prison Diary*, (Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers limited, 1981) p.219

CHAPTER FOUR

ILLUSORY DEMOCRACY (1978-1982)

4.1 Introduction

The swearing in of Daniel Moi as President of the Republic of Kenya on 22nd August 1978 at about 3p.m by Chief Justice Wicks marked the beginning of a new era in Kenya's history.¹⁶² According to Rumba Kinuthia, the then Chairman of the Students' Union, NUSO, the general mood of the country was characterised by apprehension and uncertainty of what lay ahead.

“People were so used to Kenyatta at the helm; his death came as a natural shock. He was not thought as the dying type; he was seen as almost immortal.”¹⁶³

Perhaps it was this mood that informed Moi's approach in discharging his mandate as the new President of Kenya. To assuage the country's anxiety, he declared that his mould of leadership would not be a radical departure of from his predecessor's. He intimated that he would follow Kenyatta's footsteps – *Nyayo* in Kiswahili - as the new President. Addressing a delegation from Central Bank in September of 1978, he assured the members of the delegation that he would continue with Kenyatta's policies as it was through this that, “Kenya would be able to maintain and advance its unity and prosperity”.¹⁶⁴

Some of Moi's proclamations during the first few months after taking office had some democratic undertones in them. On September 7th of 1978 at State House he assured a delegation from the COTU that the right of workers' collective bargaining would be guaranteed by government.¹⁶⁵ On the 12th of September, while hitting out at middlemen for exploiting *Wananchi*, citizens, he argued that the role played by middle men ought to have been reviewed.¹⁶⁶ While issuing a directive that in effect suspended land deals completely, he pledged to uphold the freedom of the press.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Joseph Karimi and Philip Ochieng, **The Kenyatta Succession**, (Nairobi, Transafrica book Distributors, 1980) p.171.

¹⁶³ Oral interview with Rumba Kinuthia, 17th August 2012, City Hall Annex, Nairobi.

¹⁶⁴ Daniel Branch, **KENYA BETWEEN HOPE AND DESPAIR 1963 – 2011**. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) p.136.

¹⁶⁵ Nation Reporter, “Moi Pledges to Workers,” *Daily Nation*, September 8th 1978, p.1.

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Karimi, “Keeping Prices down,” *Daily Nation*, September 13th 1978, p.1.

¹⁶⁷ Nation Reporter, “Moi Suspends Land Deals,” *Daily Nation*, September 17th, 1978, p.1.

Such proclamations were essentially democratic as they implied a protection of rights and freedoms. Daniel Moi went beyond making these proclamations while following a democratic direction.

In his *Jamhuri* (Independence Day) address to Kenyans on December 12th 1978, Moi announced the release of all Kenya's detainees – 26 in number.¹⁶⁸ These detainees had been left behind bars by Kenyatta when he died. The group comprised “11 political prisoners, a group associated with a subversive publication and shifta bandits from Somali.”¹⁶⁹ The move, an opening of a democratic space, was welcomed by sections of the Kenyan public. Students led by their Union's Chairman, Rumba Kinuthia, in a demonstration, showed their support for the President's clemency. They celebrated the President's move, and were “especially happy” as they celebrated the release of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, a former Chairman of the Literature Department of the University of Nairobi.¹⁷⁰ They later gave their former lecturer a wild reception two days after his release during an address at one of the University Lecture Halls - Taifa Hall. It is important to note that the demonstrations the students engaged in were not only a show of support for the release of the detainees but also an endorsement of the new President's leadership. This was evidenced by the portraits of President Moi which they held up after the *Jamhuri* day announcements that were made as well as the chants of *Moi Juu! Moi Juu!* (Hail Moi, Hail Moi) that they also made during the wild reception they gave to their freed lecturer two days later.¹⁷¹

It may have not been known to the students that President's democratic move of freeing the detainees came almost in the heel of other moves that may not have been as democratic. President Daniel Moi on 17th of October 1978, published a Special Issue of the Kenya Gazette, the Legislative Supplement No.43 which had several legal notices “intended to legalise his rule.”¹⁷² He also issued other notices in November – Notice 234 and 235. Essentially, these notices – particularly Notices 222, 234 & 235 – gave the President and the Minister for Home Affairs power to detain any person without trial. It also gave the officer in charge of a place of detention the power to

¹⁶⁸ Wanyiri Kihoro, **The Price of Freedom**. (Nairobi: MvuleAfrica Publishers, 2005) p.175.

¹⁶⁹ Nation Reporter, “Moi Frees Detainees,” *Daily Nation*, December 13th 1978, p1.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁷¹ Nation Reporter, “Students Give Freed Ngugi Wild Reception,” *Daily Nation*, December 14th, 1978, p.28.

¹⁷² Kihoro, **Price of Freedom**, p.175.

punish a detainee found guilty after “due inquiry.”¹⁷³ If the detainee was punished and committed another offence, he or she was to be “liable on conviction by a court to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.”¹⁷⁴

In view of the above changes in law initiated by President Moi, juxtaposed against his ‘democratic’ proclamations and the amnesties he gave to detainees, one may deductively establish that the Moi regime in its early months was a democratic facade. As argued by Wanyiri Kihoro in his book *The Price of Freedom*, Moi set out to rule Kenya with the “least inclination to tolerate democratic dissent.”¹⁷⁵ In later months, people were to start seeing through “the Moi style of politics, which was largely based on making populist pronouncements while doing the opposite.”¹⁷⁶ In effect, therefore, Moi’s democratic gestures juxtaposed against behind-the-scene-dictatorial moves did not render Kenya a democratic state. It only meant that Kenyans were living under an ‘illusory democracy’ and a few were later to come to terms with this reality.

University students were given free rein to demonstrate on the fourth anniversary of the death of J.M Kariuki, a prominent politician who had been murdered. This anniversary which took place on 2nd March 1979, differed from previous anniversaries or “J.M days” which were characterised by running battles between students and the police. Besides an incident that took place between students from Kenyatta College and members of General Service Unit along Thika road, the demonstrations held on this day were generally peaceful. According to Rumba Kinuthia, precaution was taken to ensure that the demonstration was not infiltrated by *agent provocateurs* the state used to use to cause violence so as to portray the students in a negative light as hooligans rather than participants in a peaceful demonstration. He noted:

We bought black armbands as a symbol of mourning. These armbands, worn by the students, were to distinguish the students from other members of the public. The state would usually infiltrate the students with ‘thugs’ that would go on a looting spree so that the demonstration could be seen as violent. We were able to isolate them because of the armbands.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.176.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.176.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.176.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.177.

¹⁷⁷ Oral interview with Rumba Kinuthia at City Hall Annex, Nairobi, 17th August 2012.

In the demonstration the students condemned J.M Kariuki's assassination, asked for the implementation of the Parliamentary Select Committee report on the murder of J.M Kariuki, the resignation of any government official connected with the murder and the reinstatement of Ngugi wa Thiongo as a Lecturer in the University. The plight of squatters in the Rift Valley province and the land inequalities therein also came up in the addresses given by the student leaders during the demonstration.¹⁷⁸ These issues were formerly championed by J.M when he was alive and were now being championed by the students in their activism.

Anniversaries of Josiah Mwangi Kariuki's death were hitherto violent demonstrations with Students clashing with police. The J.M day of 1979 was different however, perhaps because it was a different regime; one that had gained some semblance of support from the student community and had even allowed the demonstration to take place. The students, who had hitherto been largely anti-establishment, were now pro-establishment.

4.2 Honeymoon is Over

The "honeymoon" between the students and the Moi-regime which largely began with the release of the detainees in December 12th of 1978 was short-lived however, as the relationship began getting tense in April of 1979. Rumba Kinuthia explains the genesis of this tension as follows:

Students were supportive of Moi soon after the release of the detainees. Moi was so buoyed by the support of the students who hitherto had been a thorn in Kenyatta's side. He actually tried to start a KANU branch in the University – University of Nairobi KANU branch. I was invited to state house and given a receipt book and a register for purposes of registering the students in the ruling party. We held a *Kamukunji* meeting at Campus with other students to discuss the move...The students rejected the idea on the strength of Kenya being a one-party dictatorship and not a multi-party democracy. As the Chairman of NUSO, I sent the receipt books and the register back to Robert Matano of KANU. The honeymoon was so short, it lasted for about 4 -5 months from the time Moi had released the detainees in December to April when the register and receipt books were returned.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Nation Reporter, "Students in JM Report Plea," *Daily Nation*, March 3rd 1979, p.24.

¹⁷⁹ Oral interview with Rumba Kinuthia, 17th August 2012, City Hall Annex, Nairobi.

Looking at these incidences, the students as intellectuals in Kenya had read between the lines to understand the sort of regime they were living under. With the existing one-party system, there was a danger of the students being co-opted into the KANU regime which had an undemocratic underbelly. Their appeal for the reinstatement of one of their lecturers, Ngugi wa Thiongo, had been done in earnest since the time of his release in December 12th of 1978. The students had in addition, sent a petition of 20,000 signatures to Robert Matano the KANU Secretary General calling for the same.¹⁸⁰ They kept on reminding the establishment of this demand but their reminders were treated offhandedly. Rumba Kinuthia recounted:

We kept on sending reminders until the whole thing played down. They did not want him back in the University. He left the country later on.¹⁸¹

This may have caused some further disillusionment with the Moi regime by the students. However, the battle lines between the student community and the Moi regime were officially drawn on October of 1979 when the students in a demonstration on October 7th, protested against a decision barring George Anyona, Jaramogi Odinga and Achieng Onoko from contesting seats in the General Elections.¹⁸² The demonstration also featured a recurrent demand from the students – the reinstatement of Ngugi wa Thiongo as a lecturer in the University.¹⁸³ The demonstration began at the university about two days after it was announced that these candidates would not be allowed to participate in the November elections of that year. The students gathered for a meeting at “Biko” square – named in memory of Black consciousness leader Steve Biko – which was situated at “Box” – one of the student hostels for the ladies in Campus.¹⁸⁴ Initially, the meeting was meant to adopt a new constitution for NUSO and dissolve the NUSO administration.¹⁸⁵ However, it was during the meeting that a decision was made to hold a demonstration immediately. The spontaneity of this decision, which may have caused the students not to seek permission from the authorities for the demonstration, was later to cause them trouble. It is important, however, to note that the decision to have the demonstration was just

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Nation reporter, “Students Protest Election Barring,” *Daily Nation*, October 8th 1979, p.1.

¹⁸³ Ibid.,p.1.

¹⁸⁴ Oral interview with Rumba Kinuthia, 17th August 2012, City Hall Annex, Nairobi.

¹⁸⁵ University of Nairobi Council Agenda for Special meeting to be held on 13th March 1980 at 9:30 a.m in the Council Chamber.

about as spontaneous as the demonstration which was held in support of the released detainees after which no student was victimised.

The students in their demonstration caused traffic jams in Nairobi where they later on stopped outside Nation House offices – a strategic location as it housed a media house responsible for the Daily Nation publication – and held a rally.¹⁸⁶ The proximity of the students rally to the Nation offices may have been the reason for the “good coverage of the demonstration given by the Press”¹⁸⁷. The Chairman of NUSO, Rhumba Kinuthia, then addressed the students on top of a makeshift platform – a Kenya Charity Sweepstake Kiosk - and addressed them; demanding an explanation from government for the barring of the aforementioned individuals from vying, the reinstatement of Ngugi wa Thiong’o and a solution to students’ accommodation problems.¹⁸⁸ The rally later morphed into a procession that marched along major streets and avenues in the city that denounced certain individuals in KANU’s leadership and hailed George Anyona and Jaramogi Odinga who “had been barred from running in the elections under a KANU ticket.” The demonstration went on with no major exchanges between the students and the police who “maintained close supervision throughout the demonstration.”¹⁸⁹

President Moi, in his capacity as Chancellor of the University, closed the University which had been open for two weeks, “to enable the students and staff to return to their respective constituencies and participate in the forthcoming national elections”.¹⁹⁰ This may have been an ostensible reason as the national elections were to be held almost a month after the closure of the University. In addition, the minutes of the 25th meeting of the University of Nairobi Council, suggest that the “seriousness” of the illegal demonstration held on the 7th of October by the University students prompted the Chancellor to announce that the “University would go on its Christmas Vacation on 13th October 1979.”¹⁹¹ The minutes also mention that the students’ demonstration

¹⁸⁶ Nation Reporter, “Students protest election barring,” *Daily Nation*, October 8th 1979, p.1.

¹⁸⁷ Oral interview with Rhumba Kinuthia, 17th August 2012. City Hall Annex, Nairobi.

¹⁸⁸ Nation Reporter, “Students protest election barring,” *Daily Nation*, October 8th 1979, p.16.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p.16.

¹⁹⁰ Standard Reporter and K.N.A, “Election Holiday for Students,” *The Standard*, October 12th 1979, p.1.

¹⁹¹ Minutes of the 29th Meeting of the University Council Held on 25th October, 1979 at 9:30 a.m in the Council chamber. P.11.

was joined by other city dwellers and this may have caused considerable anxiety of those in Government for what may have happened in the run-up to the election.

In the aftermath of the demonstration, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor J.M Mungai in consultation with the Chairman of the University council, expelled six student “ring-leaders of the demonstrators” from the University, an action that was later endorsed by the University of Nairobi Council at a Council meeting.¹⁹² The Vice-Chancellor and the Chairman may have acted *ultra-vires* as these two offices only have the power to suspend a student in consultation with the University Senate.¹⁹³ The leaders expelled were Rhumba Kinuthia (Chairman), Mukhisa Kutiya (Secretary for Foreign Affairs), Otieno Kajwang (Secretary-general), Gilbert Okungu (Secretary for Entertainment and Catering), Josiah Omuoto (Secretary for Sports) and Karanja Njoroge.¹⁹⁴ Karanja Njoroge was not a student leader - activism was not limited to student leaders; besides the leaders there existed a “corpus of radical students”¹⁹⁵ who took part in the activism. With the student leaders expelled, NUSO was virtually dead. The expelled students now had a problem in pursuing a University education. For Rhumba Kinuthia, he got more than just an expulsion:

The state monitored my activities after my expulsion. After 5 days, I was arrested along Koinange Street at around 11 a.m. where I was walking along. I was put in a land rover and it raced off to Nairobi Area Traffic Headquarters. I was held here for 26 days where I was tortured and denied food. I must have been amongst the first victims of torture in the Moi regime. My torturers would ask me “*Unataka kuharibia Mzee Bahati yake*” (do you want to spoil the Boss’s luck?) They would make it very clear to me that they were not in a hurry and they were free to kill me.”¹⁹⁶

He was released thereafter, stayed at home for a year and later on sought the assistance of United Nations High Commission for Refugees which facilitated his study at Makerere University in Uganda. He lost some years in the process as when he was admitted he had to begin from second year as per Makerere University’s requirements, yet he had already completed his second year at the University of

¹⁹² Ibid.,p.11.

¹⁹³ Oral Interview with Godfrey Muriuki, 16th October 2012, University of Nairobi.

¹⁹⁴ Oral interview with Rhumba Kinuthia, 17th August 2012, City Hall Annex, Nairobi.

¹⁹⁵ Oral interview with Walter Odame, 27th July 2012, University of Nairobi.

¹⁹⁶ Oral interview with Rhumba Kinuthia, 17th August 2012. City Hall Annex, Nairobi

Nairobi. He managed to complete his degree and was fortunately allowed to enrol at Kenya School of law when he came back to Nairobi.¹⁹⁷

President Moi castigated the students for their demonstrations in his Kenyatta Day address on 20th of October 1979 saying that, “their irresponsible behaviour and flagrant disregard of the law wouldn’t be tolerated.”¹⁹⁸ He announced the withdrawal of a KANU party branch that he had allowed students to form at the University because they did not “utilise the opportunity”. In response to the students chants of justice! justice! during their demonstration, he suggested that their demands were invalid on the strength of Kenya having no political prisoners at the time.¹⁹⁹ Perhaps he was alluding to his democratic gesture – his release of political prisoners in the previous year – which may have given Kenya a democratic image abroad as well as within. It may not have been known to many, however, that the Chairman of NUSO, Rumba Kinuthia, was in police custody – virtually a political prisoner - at the time of Moi’s address.

4.3 “No Representation, More Activism”

The University was opened on November 12th 1979 and studies went on without any major incidences between the students and the police until the following year. After a series of seemingly unaddressed grievances and bereft of a students’ union, the University students rioted in their dining halls on the 26th of February 1980 and later on moved to the streets of Nairobi. The riots were a culmination of almost a week of tension between the students and the administration in which the former felt neglected by the latter.²⁰⁰ Power failures, water shortages, poor quality of food as well as an improper food regimen seemed to be the reason for the discontent vented by the students during the riots. A former student, Walter Odame described the food regimen as well as their cause for going on strike as follows:

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Cornelius Nyamboki, “Moi blasts Students who staged demo,” *Sunday Nation*, October 21st 1979, p.1.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.,p.1.

²⁰⁰ University of Nairobi Council Agenda for the Special meeting of Council to be held on Thursday 13th March, 1980 in the Council Chamber at 9:30 a.m. Events leading to the closure of the University on 27th February, 1980 pp.1-5.

They were feeding us on Chicken every day. We called it flamingos... they were cooking flamingos for us. We rioted at the Dining halls as a result. It seems the students read between the lines and argued that there was an illegal tender... someone was eating.²⁰¹

These riots were not confined to the university grounds, but also spread outside the University. Some of the students began stoning motorists along State House Road, next to their hostels, but the police later on arrived and sealed off the road to protect the motorists. The students took to the streets the following day and went on what the *Daily Nation* called “an orgy of violence” as “rampaging students stoned cars and hurled bricks through car showrooms and store windows.”²⁰²

An underlying reason for the two-day riots also came forth during the demonstrations as the students addressed pressmen of their complaints. The students argued that since NUSO was not functioning, the administration had willfully neglected the students’ welfare because they had no one to represent them. With the expulsion of the NUSO leaders in the previous year, a democratic space had been closed up. In a column, the *Daily Nation* newspaper captured the sentiments of some of the students on their strike:

According to reliable sources, the question of NUSO was also not resolved. Elections for the union were due in the previous year but they were not held. The students complained that they “have been blackmailed by the administration as far as NUSO leadership was concerned.” They claimed that after some officials were suspended from the union the previous year, the administration called them without the knowledge of other students and amended the constitution.²⁰³

According to the above, the students were protesting exclusion from the amending of the NUSO constitution and this was a closure of a democratic space that they were protesting against. They also were protesting against their lack of political representation in the administration which had prompted the administration to treat their welfare in an offhanded manner. Ironically, the registration of their students union was cancelled with effect from 27th February 1980 - the last day of their

²⁰¹ Interview with Walter Odame, 27th July 2012.

²⁰² Cornelius Nyamboki and James Kuria, “Riots Close Varsity,” *Daily Nation*, February 28th 1980, p.1.

²⁰³ Nation Reporter, “University students riot over ‘poor food’,” *Daily Nation*, February 27th 1980, p.32.

demonstration.²⁰⁴ The Government closed the University and a meeting of the University Senate was held in which a sub-committee was set up to “review student problems and recommend solutions to these problems.”²⁰⁵

Within this atmosphere of protest, the University Staff Union issued a statement that suggested solidarity with the students. Part of the statement stated that the “persistent complaints about the University’s administration were not a figment of a few students’ imagination” and that the “sight of the riot squad seemed to spark off hysterical behaviour among students and staff because of the history of police-student confrontations in the past.”²⁰⁶ The statement was signed by the Union’s secretary-general, Willy Mutunga.²⁰⁷ This statement may have been a rebuttal to a statement made by the then University Vice-Chancellor, Professor Joseph Mungai, on 28th of February 1980 that seemed to lay the blame on the students for “breaking a dialogue between them and the administration.”²⁰⁸ It is important to point out the solidarity shown by some of the members of the faculty with the students; there existed camaraderie between some lecturers and students with the former supporting the latter in their activism. This corpus of lecturers was referred to by journalist Hillary Ng’weno as the “faculty left” whose political ideals were congenial to some of the student activists. This congeniality forged a political alliance of sorts between the student activists and the “faculty left”. Shadrack Gutto, Willy Mutunga, Anyang’ Nyong’o and Mukaru Ng’ang’a are some of the lecturers who were considered as part of the faculty left.²⁰⁹

The University was then reopened three months later on June 2nd and the students then resumed their studies.²¹⁰ The Minister for Higher Education, J.J Kamotho declared that the government had forgiven the students on condition that they would refrain from “engaging in uncalled for protests and wanton damage of university and private property.”²¹¹ This kind gesture, uncharacteristic of government in their relationship

²⁰⁴ Report of the Senate Committee Appointed to look into the Problem of Recurrent Student Disturbances at the University of Nairobi, March 1980 p.16.

²⁰⁵ Agenda for Special Meeting on 13th March, Events leading to the closure, p.7.

²⁰⁶ Nation Reporter, “Varsity Staff speak out,” *Daily Nation*, March 3rd 1980, pp.1-20.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

²⁰⁸ Cornelius Nyamboki, “Students are to blame – Mungai,” *Daily Nation*, February 28th 1980, p.1.

²⁰⁹ Oral Interview with Odindo Opieta. 1st August 2012, Golf Course Commercial Centre, Nairobi.

²¹⁰ Standard reporter, “University Campus back to Normal,” *Standard*, June 3rd, 1980. p.3.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

with the students, may have been influenced by the findings of the report of the senate committee which had been appointed to look into the problem of recurrent student disturbances at the University of Nairobi. The report revealed profligacy, negligence, incompetence and unaccountability in the operations of the catering services which gave the students' claims considerable legitimacy. It investigated other underlying causes for the riots that had taken place. According to the minutes of a special meeting between administration and the Student Halls' Chairmen held about a week before the riots, "the major issue as far as students were concerned was their union."

The students were to go to the streets again on the same month of their arrival. They went beyond national issues this time and protested against the repressive apartheid regime of South Africa on June 28th 1980. The students of Kenyatta University College, a constituent college of the University of Nairobi, took part in the demonstration as well. They walked around Nairobi carrying twigs and placards protesting the Soweto massacre, the assassination of Walter Rodney and to condemn imperialism in general.²¹² It is important to note that Walter Rodney was a former lecturer in the University of Dar es Salaam – a University that shared a heritage with University of Nairobi. The two institutions were former constituent colleges of the University of East Africa.

In the demonstration the students held, one of the placards they held up read "God Shave the Queen" wittily condemning Britain and by extension, the presence of expatriates in Kenya. They also condemned foreign firms such as Standard Bank.²¹³ In procession they went through Tom Mboya Street, Moi Avenue and City Hall Way singing "A people united can never be defeated." A spokesman for the students was quoted by the *Daily Nation* as saying that the demonstration was organised by the University Staff Union. This suggests the involvement of faculty in the students' activism just as the solidarity that was shown by some of the faculty with the students in their previous demonstration. A column of the account of what happened during the demonstration carried by the *Daily Nation* newspaper of June 29th 1980, betrays a leftist political orientation of the "alliance of sorts" between the student and faculty. The column, in part, stated:

²¹² Irungu Ndirangu, "Students in demo against South Africa," *Daily Nation*, June 29th 1980, p.1.

²¹³ Oral Interview with Walter Odame, 27th July 2012.

At a meeting held near Parliament Buildings, a spokesman for the students said the demonstration was organised by the University Staff Union. He said the workers and students at the two campuses had united to condemn the Soweto massacres of four years ago, apartheid in South Africa, those who killed Dr. Walter Rodney from Guyana and to condemn imperialism in general.²¹⁴

This leftist orientation may have informed their attitudes towards the west. Their procession halted outside the United States Embassy where a huge billboard of Ayatolla Khomeini, an Iranian, anti-American icon surfaced. The students also claimed that the CIA had played a part in the assassination of Walter Rodney and similarly condemned the “government of Guyana led by Forbes Burnham.” They subsequently protested outside the British High Commission.²¹⁵

On the surface, the issues the students were protesting against seem separate. However, examining their protests from what could have been their interpretations of reality, one gets a different picture. Randi Balsvik in his article “Student Protest – University and State in Africa 1960 -1995,” argues that students in African Universities had their interpretations of reality shaped by the heritage of anti-imperialism. In addition, their interpretations of reality were influenced by the writings of Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, and then by Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.²¹⁶

While looking at the demonstration from a prism of Walter Rodney’s ideas, the issues the students were demonstrating against were closely linked. Walter Rodney’s assassination triggered the students to demonstrate not only to condemn his assassination, but also against issues his book raised, such as imperialism. The students demonstrated against Standard Bank for instance, which was castigated for its exploitative role; profits produced by the bank facilitated the payment of a 14% dividend to its shareholders – most of whom were in Europe or were whites in South Africa. This profit was produced mainly by the “black people of South and East

²¹⁴ Irungu Ndirangu, “Students in demo against South Africa,” p.1.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.1.

²¹⁶ Randi Ronning Balsvik, Student Protest – University and State in Africa 1960-1995, Forum for Development Studies, No. 2, 1998, p.316.

Africa.”²¹⁷ The students were, therefore, demonstrating against the assassination of the author of a book which castigated the exploitation of Standard Bank which was a company existing in South Africa under an apartheid regime responsible for the Soweto Massacre. All these issues were taken up by the students, packaged and condemned in their demonstration. Walter Odame, a student at the time, gives an insight on how the students would organise the issues they would demonstrate against, “We would package issues that would take us to the streets.”²¹⁸

In the morning of July 16th of 1980, a group of University students was alerted that one of their lecturers whom they viewed as progressive, Peter Anyang’-Nyongo, had been arrested.²¹⁹ He had been arrested as he went out jogging near his University residential house. The students immediately reacted:

What we did was that we immediately went to all classes and stopped lectures... we told the lecturers that they couldn’t teach any more because the students were to gather at the great court immediately. After convening a *Kamukunji*, we explained to the students what had happened, that a lecturer had been arrested. We then went and called out the Vice-Chancellor Mungai to the great court and asked him to explain to us how a lecturer could be arrested. He said he would find out but we said the police had up to 12 o’clock or 1 o’clock; if he had not been released by then, we would go to town... he was released afterwards and then he came and addressed the students and then we went back to class.²²⁰

The students arguably felt aggrieved by the arrest of one of their allies and felt that the arrest was an attempt to muffle freedom of expression in the University. By giving the Vice-chancellor an ultimatum, the message may have been relayed to the government which then capitulated by releasing Anyang’-Nyongo. The students’ ultimatum was, therefore, a reaction to the closure of a democratic space. Their action was a demonstration of the camaraderie the students and lecturers from the ‘faculty left’ shared, one that persisted even after the Walter Rodney demonstration and that which had taken place in February of the same year.

²¹⁷ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1972) p.178.

²¹⁸ Oral Interview with Walter Odame, 27th July 2012.

²¹⁹ Nation Reporter, “Varsity Lecturer Freed,” *Daily Nation*, July 17th 1980.

²²⁰ Oral interview with Mathenge Karundi, 14th November 2012, Sianda House, Nairobi.

Save for a class boycott in October and November of 1980 at Kenyatta University College, there were no major incidences of activism in that year. These boycotts were largely focussed on bread and butter issues – the increase of teaching practice allowances.²²¹ There were, however, reports of scattered leaflets critical of President Moi in the University of Nairobi viewed by some students as the work of “outsiders” in a “bid to lobby for the support of the students”.²²²

4.4 The Students’ Interim Committee

With the students Union, NUSO, banned in February of 1980, a group of students in the same year took up the initiative to form the “Students’ Interim Committee” whose main objective was to facilitate the registration of a new students’ Union.”²²³ It can be argued that students, as a collective, in their relationship to the state are not a monolith. Pockets of resistance against student activists amongst the students were noticeable around this period, particularly in a planned class boycott and symposium in March 1981 in commemoration of the assassinated Member of Parliament of Nyandarua North, J.M Kariuki. At a students’ meeting a week before the planned demonstration, a group of students opposed the planned demonstration “questioning its validity and purpose.”²²⁴ The symposium was to go on regardless. Indeed, the students were proving to be a thorn in Moi’s flesh as evidenced by some of his remarks at a fund-raiser in Nairobi daring the students to go on with the planned symposium and class boycott. Moi remarked:

I have been too good for a long time and now I am tired of being good. I am waiting for that day. I want to see whether there are men at the University. I have been too good for a long time and my patience is running out. I am waiting to see those who will beat the others for failing to join in the boycott of lectures.²²⁵

The Interim Committee, a new democratic space, called for a demonstration but later backed down after its members realised that if they proceeded with the planned demonstration and symposium, there would be a bloody confrontation between the

²²¹ Nation Reporter, “Ultimatum to students,” *Daily Nation*, November 20th 1980, p.1.

²²² Nation Reporter, “Leaflets anger varsity students,” October 15th 1980, p.36.

²²³ Interview with Odindo Opieta, 1st August 2012, Golf Course Commercial Centre, Nairobi.

²²⁴ Mohamed Warsama, “University Boycott ‘On’,” *Daily Nation*, March 2nd 1981, p.16.

²²⁵ James Kimondo, “Moi’s Ultimatum to Students,” *The Standard*, March 2nd 1981, p.1.

students and the police. A former leader of the Interim Committee, Odindo Opieta, noted:

March 2nd was to be the date for the commemoration of J.M day organised by the Students Interim Committee. We had organised to have a demonstration but because of the tension between the students and government that had arisen as a result of our decision which had become public knowledge, we decided that it was in the interest of the students not to get out of the University because Moi had raised the stakes so high. We decided this with some of our allies... we felt that if the students would go to the streets there were going to be a lot of deaths. We backed off from direct confrontation and so did the government.²²⁶

The government also backed down from direct confrontation and resorted to closing down the University for a surprise early Easter Vacation on March 2nd that was to end on March 22nd. The students got to know of this through a radio bulletin on the state-owned Voice of Kenya and also through a holiday notice that they found pinned on the notice boards as they had their breakfast. The students read the notices individually, packed and went home.²²⁷ The closure of the University by government for early Easter vacation was a throwback to 1979 when the government closed the University for “Early Christmas” after the demonstrations against the barring of George Anyona and Oginga Odinga. There was a temporary detente between student activists and government, but it was not to last.

Developments in following months may have caused considerable disquiet amongst students. Public lectures to be given by Edgar Tekere – a Zimbabwean nationalist – and two weeks later on April 30th by Koigi Wamwere, were cancelled by the University administration under unclear circumstances. According to reports by the Daily Nation, students raised fears that their academic freedom was being eroded when the university administration cancelled lectures at the university in such a manner. A column in the *Daily Nation* newspaper captured one of the students’ concerns to the administration which carried an undertone of blame. The column stated in part:

²²⁶ Oral Interview Odindo Opieta, 1st August 2012, Golf Course Commercial Centre, Nairobi.

²²⁷ Ibid.

They asked the university administration to tell the student community if there was a new rule which required public speakers to be cleared before they could be invited to address the university community.²²⁸

The barring of Oginga Odinga from contesting in the Bondo by-election by the then ruling party – KANU – also caused some considerable discontent amongst the students of the University. A group of students who identified themselves as the “Luo students of the University of Nairobi” released a signed statement condemning this move by KANU. Part of their statement read as follows:

“The party should realise this act is in essence defeating the constitutional rights of the Bondo people to elect a man of their own choice and, specifically, their popular and persistent wish to elect Jaramogi as their representative.”²²⁹

Their statement, activist in nature, was protesting the closure of a democratic space – the refusal of the ruling party KANU to clear Oginga Odinga as a candidate for the Bondo parliamentary seat as well as its effective imposition of leaders on the Bondo electorate.²³⁰ Perhaps what especially betrayed the dictatorial nature of the party’s moves were the remarks of its secretary-general, Robert Matano who after making the clearance announcement, implied that KANU would brook no protest:

“No questions. This is the decision the country has been waiting for. The party has made its decision.”²³¹

Robert Matano’s remark – “what the country has been waiting for” – came under the background of an exchange between President Moi and Odinga. The latter had insinuated at a public rally in Mombasa that his predecessor – Jomo Kenyatta – was a land grabber and had asked Moi whether he would grab land just as Kenyatta did. According to Odinga’s anecdote, Moi said he would not grab land and had obsequiously called upon Odinga – calling him *Baba* or father in Kiswahili – to join him in building the country.²³² In his subsequent rebuttal, Moi implied that Odinga was discrediting Kenyatta’s legacy, denigrating the presidency and further implied that Odinga was not fully politically rehabilitated and, therefore, undeserving of a

²²⁸ Nation Reporter, “Koigi lecture is cancelled,” *Daily Nation*, May 1st 1981, p.3.

²²⁹ Irungu Ndirangu, “Luo Students lash at Kanu,” *Daily Nation*, April 18th 1981, p.1.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1.

²³¹ Nation reporter, “Odinga barred,” *Daily Nation*, April 17th 1981, p.1.

²³² *Ibid.*, p.3.

position in his government.²³³ It was in this context that Odinga declared he would wait for clearance from KANU, effectively making the whole country look on with bated breath for the party's decision.

The content of the students' statement was later echoed by students of Kenyatta University College as well as those of Nairobi Medical Training Centre.²³⁴ Discontent amongst the students of the University of Nairobi was further fermented with the barring of a prospective candidate for the Busia South parliamentary by-election – William Difu – whose nomination papers were rejected.²³⁵ This happened amidst claims that “some influential people were behind the nomination of another candidate – Peter Okondo” and an assertion by President Moi that Kanu decisions were final and no one had a mandate to challenge them.”²³⁶

4.5 Doctors' Strike and Students' Response

The discontent that had brewed finally exploded on May 15th 1981 when the students went on a demonstration in solidarity with a doctors' strike which had begun on 7th of May. The doctors' strike had been declared illegal and in the ensuing days, a number of doctors had been arrested for “defying a government order to return to work.”²³⁷ Illegal as it was, the strike was to improve the terms of service for the doctors and, therefore, an assertion of democratic rights. The arrests arguably represented a closure of a democratic space as the doctors were effectively gagged – they barely had a union for their profession that could lobby on their behalf. The students' strike came in the heel of remarks made by one of one of their “allies” in the “faculty left” – Shadrack Gutto – who on behalf of other lecturers backed the doctors' strike.²³⁸

Over and above the aforementioned causes for the demonstration, the students cited a planned nine-month closure by the University Senate for reorganisation of the university as an additional cause of the demonstration. They also cited the failure by the university authorities to overhaul the finance and registrar section and some

²³³ KNA, “President Blasts Odinga,” *Sunday Standard*, April 12th, 1981. p.1.

²³⁴ Nation Reporter, “Medics Join in attack on Kanu,” *Daily Nation*, April 20th 1981, p.3.

²³⁵ Nation Reporter, “Busia By-election: Man ‘is to sue Tipis’,” *Daily Nation*, May 11th, 1981, p.1.

²³⁶ Standard Reporter, “Kanu Decisions are final – President,” *The Standard*, May 11th, 1981, p.1.

²³⁷ Standard Reporter and K.N.A, “Doctors in court Today,” *The Standard*, May 11th, 1981, p.1.

²³⁸ Nation reporter, “Lecturers back strikers,” *Daily Nation*, May 11th, 1981, p.16.

“offending and compromising” remarks attributed to their Vice-chancellor.²³⁹ The overhaul of the finance and registrar section had been recommended in a report done by the sub-committee of the University Senate in the previous year.

The demonstration did not erupt immediately. Reports of medical students harassing medical doctors reached the University administration. According to their sources, the students who hitherto were boycotting their classes and harassing working doctors at the Kenyatta National Hospital (where their medical school was situated), were being used as an “Action group” by striking doctors. The Vice-Chancellor, Dean of the Faculty and University Registrar in light of what had happened, decided to close the Medical school. According to the Hospital Administrator’s explanation it would not be “easy to deal with the striking doctors so long as the medical students continued to harass the working doctors.”²⁴⁰ The Students Interim Committee issued a press release condemning the closure of the Medical School, arguing that students were preparing for their final examinations due the following month. They also seemed to imply that they supported the doctors’ strike; a position they explicitly stated in a subsequent press release. The press release received a blackout from the newspapers.²⁴¹ Perhaps this blackout was as a result of fear of a reprisal from the then repressive government for supposed “incitement” of the citizenry.

Anonymous circulars announced a *Kamukunji* at the great court on the afternoon of 13th of May. The meeting was brief and not well organised – perhaps the Interim Committee was not behind it. Three speakers spoke at the meeting, one of whom seemed to imply that the students of Main Campus should have “joined” their colleagues at Medical school.²⁴² It was the *Kamukunji* of the 15th of May at the great court at the university grounds that a decision was made to hold a demonstration. The students then headed for the streets of Nairobi going through major roads like Moi Avenue, Tom Mboya Street later and on to Kirinyaga road. Once riot police intervened, the demonstration morphed into a riot. This turn of events is important to

²³⁹ Samuel Chege, “University Students go on rampage,” *The Standard*, May 16th, 1981, pp.1 & 20.

²⁴⁰ University of Nairobi Minutes of the 34th Meeting of the University Council, July 2nd 1981, Annexure 10.

²⁴¹ Ibid., Annexure 10.

²⁴² Ibid., Annexure 10.

note for one to understand the actions of the students rather than classify their demonstrations as a riot. One of the former student leaders noted:

Stoning of cars, shops were as a result of clashes between the students and Police. They were impulse reactions and were not planned. They directed their frustration at what they saw on their way. My view is... such things ordinarily wouldn't have occurred if the police were not so brutal in their response to the suppression of what the young men and women felt was their democratic right, the right to demonstrate and express their views. The students felt that the system was completely insensitive to the feelings of other people and intolerant of other people's views. I don't recall any single time that such things (stoning) ever happened until the police intervened.²⁴³

The university students went on the rampage, stoning cars, stoning glass counters of businesses and also stoning the riot police. After damaging and overturning a police car the students melted into the melee, dropping their placards and "disguising themselves as members of the public." It was further reported in *The Standard* newspaper that the students "had tried to hold a Kamukunji – or a rally – but were refused permission."²⁴⁴

The demonstrations later on metamorphosed into a hunt for "loyalist" students by "dissident" students at the University grounds a day later on the night of May 16th. This arose after a group of students declared their opposition to the previous day's demonstration. After a chase, the "dissident" students stormed into the rooms of all suspected "loyalist" students, collected their belongings and threw them outside their halls of residence.²⁴⁵ The students, in anticipation of a police raid, divided themselves into two groups, one to keep vigil while others slept later to replace the vigilantes. The police subsequently raided the University, dispersing the vigilantes as well as other male students who escaped into the night. On the 17th, the students gathered at the University's great court, and discussed plans to stage a big *Kamukunji* the following day. In their discussions, they resolved to summon the University Registrar E.N Gicuhi to ask whether his "dictatorial memos" were sent through the power of his office or at the instructions of government.²⁴⁶ These "dictatorial memos" the students

²⁴³ Interview with Odindo Opieta, 1st August 2012, Golf Course Commercial Centre, Nairobi.

²⁴⁴ Samuel Chege, "University students go on Rampage," *The Standard*, May 16th 1981, p.20.

²⁴⁵ Mohamed Warsama and Gideon Mulaki, "Police raid varsity halls," *Daily Nation*, May 18th 1981, p.1.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p.20.

were protesting were behind expulsions of some of the students on suspicion that they had engaged in the demonstrations that were held on the 15th of May. Eighteen students had been expelled as a result of the demonstration and this prompted the students to threaten to go on a class boycott unless the University authorities reinstated them.

Earlier on, many of the colleagues showed solidarity with the expelled 18 after “leaving the dining halls with unfinished lunch on the tables and converging at their rooms showing great concern and sympathy”.²⁴⁷ The newspaper reports of the number of the students expelled by the University administration may have been wrong as the minutes of the University Council meeting on 2nd July 1981 resolved to endorse the Vice-Chancellor’s decision to expel thirteen students.²⁴⁸

The University was subsequently closed after clashes between the students and the riot police on 18th of May 1981. The clashes saw some members of the public confused as students, attacked by riot police and suffer cuts and bruises. The announcement of the closure of the University was made over the radio at 11 a.m.; students were expected to leave the University not later than 12 noon. Kenyatta University College was not to be affected by the closure.²⁴⁹ Male students were to report to their locational chiefs, District Officers or to the nearest Police Station every Monday and Friday until the University re-opened.²⁵⁰

Over and above the expulsion from the University, student activists also had to contend with State repression. Mathenge Karundi, a student leader who was part of the Students’ Interim Committee, was amongst this group. He noted:

We had to go into hiding... it was very bad... when I escaped, the police were looking for us...it was in the papers. Our names were in the papers. Together with Saulo Busolo, we tried to go to Uganda but we were given a tip off; our names were posted at the border. We had to come back and we managed to go to Tanzania. In that lot I was the first one to arrive in Tanzania and I surrendered myself and I asked for an asylum and I was given asylum. I was put up in front of a committee but luckily they already had heard about the

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p.20.

²⁴⁸ University of Nairobi Minutes of the 34th Meeting of the University Council, p.13.

²⁴⁹ Nation Reporter, “University is closed down,” *Daily Nation*, May 19th 1981, p.16.

²⁵⁰ James Kuria, “Hunt is on For Rebel Students,” *The Standard*, May 20th 1981, p.1.

strike and it was in the papers... in their Daily news... and then the others came... Tanzania never hesitated to give us an asylum... Makau Mutua followed given an asylum by United Nations high Commission for Refugees. They are the ones who were giving us an allowance. When we got admission to Daresalaam University, I remember Micere Mugo who was a lecturer at University of Nairobi helped in smuggling our transcripts to Daresalaam for us to continue with our studies. She was a great lady.²⁵¹

It seems the relationship between the student activists and their allies in faculty persisted even after their expulsion. Willy Mutunga, then a lecturer at the Faculty of Law, recounted the role he played in getting help for some of the expelled Students after their strike in 1981:

In the case of people like Makau Mutua, John Munuve, Mathenge Karundi, Busolo Saulo and Miriti who later on died of Malaria in Tanzania... that group... it became my responsibility to make sure my contact would receive them.... and they were received and processed as refugees who were seeking asylum and after they got the UNHCR to accept them then the University of Daresalaam gave them positions to study....²⁵²

Godfrey Muriuki, then a lecturer at the Department of History, argues that lecturers generally were either Pro-government, anti-government or neutrals. This may have informed their moves in relation to the student activists²⁵³. However, not all lecturers were kind in their dealings with the Student activists – Mathenge Karundi recounted:

I remember when we were in Dar es Salaam, one of the lecturers came over and got asylum. I think today he is working in state house. He was given an asylum and in fact, he got a job with UNHCR and then one day he just took off and came back to Kenya. The commissioner called us, he was a man from Sudan, and told us “You know I’m very sorry this guy came and we gave him asylum and we employed him”... and he was staying at the University by the way...we talked to the lecturers there and he was given one of the tutorial assistants position....one of the tutorial assistants left his small university place for him because they were colleagues.... and he was a mole... he took off and came back to Kenya and he stole our files at the UNHCR...yes you can write that and it is true.... you see when you get asylum, you are interviewed and you give your story... so he had all those things. And the next thing we heard was him on radio Kenya talking about how hopeless those people were and what have you.... you can quote me on that... ask Opieta and the rest. The Commissioner called us - I think he was called Sayyid at UNHCR - and the

²⁵¹ Oral interview with Mathenge Karundi, 14th November 2012, Sianda House, Nairobi.

²⁵² Oral interview with Willy Mutunga, 26th October 2012, Supreme Court of Kenya, Nairobi.

²⁵³ Oral interview with Godfrey Muriuki, 16th October 2012, University of Nairobi.

Tanzanian CID told us “we are so Sorry he just took off to Kenya”... so he had been sent to infiltrate us...²⁵⁴

Over and above the hunt for the ‘rebel’ students key figures in the government blamed the student strike on “Marxist lecturers”. The Higher Education Minister, Joseph Kamotho warned lecturers and “other elements outside the University to stop inciting students.” President Moi, on the other hand, blamed “recurring disturbances at the University of Nairobi on Marxist lecturers” who were supposedly using students to spread anarchy. Some of the lecturers, under investigation for allegations of teaching Marxist ideology, were ordered to hand over their passports.²⁵⁵ Justifying this move, President Moi said that he had stopped these lecturers from moving out of the country so that he could punish them for their supposed role in the student demonstrations.²⁵⁶

4.6 The Birth of SONU

The University was later reopened in August of 1981 with most of the students being recalled “for readmission on August 6th 1981.” The students were to bring with them a letter of application for readmission and the letter duly signed by the provincial administration or the office where they were ordered to report to by the government.²⁵⁷

Detente ensued between the students and the government, with no major activist incidents taking place for the rest of 1981. However, there were still undercurrents of discontent which were fermenting. With the expulsion of all the student leaders from the Students’ Interim Committee, the students lacked a student organisation to voice their grievances. In addition, “by 1981, a presidential decree demanded that all student organisations wishing to hold meetings in campus apply for permits from the Office of the President for scrutiny by Special Branch.”²⁵⁸ Student activists worked with the parameters they had and were able to establish an electoral body was set up on January 8th 1982. The body was called the Electoral Commission and it was

²⁵⁴ Oral Interview with Mathenge Karundi, 14th November 2012, Sianda House, Nairobi.

²⁵⁵ Donald Savage and Cameron Taylor, “Academic Freedom in Kenya,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 25, pp.298 – 317, retrieved 25th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/485222>.

²⁵⁶ Nation reporter, “Moi slams ‘Marxist’ Lecturers,” *Daily Nation*, May 25th, 1981.

²⁵⁷ Nation Reporter, “Varsity students Recalled,” *Daily Nation*, August 5th 1981, p.1.

²⁵⁸ Jacqueline M. Klopp and Janai Orina, “University Crisis, Student Activism and Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya,” *The African Studies Review*, Vol. 45, No1, p.50, retrieved 26th March 2012.

formed at a meeting licensed by the Nairobi Provincial Commissioner. Its mandate was to register a student's union and prepare for its elections.²⁵⁹ This opening of a democratic space could have been given the students impetus to be more aggressive in championing their rights. On January 19th Science Students of the University – Chiromo campus – forced their dean to draft a letter revoking some examination results that were released citing mass failures in some “key areas of study”.²⁶⁰ The students argued that some expatriate students were discriminating against certain students. Their Dean, G.K Kinoti, declined to append his signature on the letter but after being marched by the students to the University's main campus, he caved after being prevailed upon by the Varsity's Deputy Vice-Chancellor Philip Mbithi.

The formation of the electoral body was not the only means that was used by Student Activists to facilitate the registration of a students' Union. The students lobbied the administration to have the Union registered. One of the former student activists noted:

In the meantime we used to have almost daily protests at Kamukunji that was outside the library demanding for the registration of SONU...and then after that when we came back... Paddy Onyango, Murathe (now MP for Gatanga) , Oduor Ongwen, Shem Ochuodho and otherswe struggled for the registration of SONU... Joseph Mungai the Vice-Chancellor and Mbithi the Deputy Vice-Chancellor in charge of administration registered SONU...²⁶¹

SONU, an acronym for the Students Organisation of Nairobi University, was registered on February of 1982. The office of the President consented to its registration. This was a milestone in Student politics as Students were bereft of a registered Union, recognised by government, for two years. Elections were held on April 14th of the same year that saw Titus Adungosi, a third year architecture student, elected the first Chairman of SONU. Reports by the *Daily Nation* newspaper seem to suggest that the election may have had some irregularities and there may have been a third force that may have influenced the outcome of the elections. One of the newspaper's columns stated in part:

²⁵⁹ Nation Reporter, “Campus Polls Date Set,” *Daily Nation*, April 3rd 1982, p.4.

²⁶⁰ Nation reporters, “Students Mob varsity Dean,” *Daily Nation*, January 20th 1982, p.1.

²⁶¹ Interview with Mwandawiro Mghanga, November 12th 2012, Nairobi.

.... Prof Mutungi would not say whether or not there had been external influence on the election process. He said however that the University was part and parcel of society adding it would, therefore, not be unusual for university elections to be influenced by outsiders as would happen elsewhere in society.²⁶²

Mwandawiro Mganga then a student activist, who was also active in Student politics, argues that:

... Unfortunately the traitors of the administration were elected including Titus Adungosi... I was also elected student representative of the Faculty of Arts together with Isaac Ruto, now MP for Chepalungu...²⁶³

With a new students' Union, SONU, the students were better positioned to channel their grievances as well as comment on national issues.

4.7 Discontent and Repression

May of 1982 was characterised by a number of activist incidences by students in colleges around the country. On the heels of a demonstration by students of Egerton College, Njoro, students of Kenyatta University College went on a class boycott and held four college officials hostage.²⁶⁴ The demonstrations at Egerton College and Kenyatta University College were largely caused by grievances over their terms of service of the positions they would get after leaving the University and their teaching practice allowances, respectively. In the aftermath of the Kenyatta University College demonstration, the students damaged their Principal's car extensively and later dispersed when it was announced that the College was closed and riot police called in.²⁶⁵ The Higher Education Minister, Joseph Kamotho, condemned the students' behaviour promising that the Government would "deal with the firmness and declaration to root out criminal behaviour of the college."²⁶⁶

In solidarity with the Kenyatta University College students, the Students Organisation of Nairobi University issued a statement on May 9th criticising the way the Principal of the Kenyatta University College, J.K Maitha handled the demonstration by

²⁶² Nation Reporter, "Now Varsity elects Boss," *Daily Nation*, April 16th 1982, p.4.

²⁶³ Interview with Mwandawiro Mganga, November 12th 2012, Nairobi.

²⁶⁴ Mutegi Njau, "Varsity closed over riots," *Daily Nation*, May 8th 1982, p.1.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p.1.

²⁶⁶ Mitch Odero and Gideon Mulaki, "We'll Deal with Campus rebels – Kamotho," *Daily Nation*, May 9th 1982, p.1.

bringing riot police in and not allowing dialogue with the students.²⁶⁷ The statement further seemed to validate the students' complaints arguing that their teaching practice allowance ought to have been increased as the period for teaching practice had been increased from one to three months. As regards a proposed seven-month-closure for the entire University, the students demanded an explanation on the circumstances surrounding it. They also, in addition, demanded to know details of the proposed National Service Scheme which infringed upon "students' academic welfare and professional careers". The statement further implied that the students were ready to go on strike if the proposed changes in higher education were imposed on students as well as if any of the students of the Kenyatta University College were victimised as a result of their role in the demonstration.²⁶⁸

There was an underlying message in the statement – a warning to the Minister and the University administration to go easy on the students of Kenyatta University College. The students were in effect reacting to an intended closure of a democratic space – predictably an expulsion of students of Kenyatta University College who, hitherto, were expressing their views and demands.

Kenya Technical Teachers College joined the fray and also boycotted classes on 10th of May demanding an audience with Joseph Kamotho. Their grievances were similar to those of their counterparts in Kenyatta University and Egerton Colleges; they sought to better their terms of service as teachers once employed. The College was promptly closed as the two others – Kenyatta University College and Egerton College – within a week and students were ordered to report to their Chiefs²⁶⁹

Developments at the University of Nairobi betrayed an infectious quality of the boycotts of the three colleges. Two students – Paddy Onyango and Kiprono Rutto, Secretary-general and Vice-chairman of SONU, respectively, were "sacked" from their positions by the SONU Chairman, Titus Adungosi on May 14th. The two had reportedly made a statement contending that the students of the University of Nairobi would not take to the streets in solidarity with their colleagues at Kenyatta University

²⁶⁷ Nation reporter, "Students Hit at Kamotho," *Daily Nation*, May 10th 1982, p.1

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.1

²⁶⁹ Patrick Ngugi and Robert Ndungu, "Now Teachers' College Closed," *Daily Nation*, May 11th 1982, p.1.

College and the other two institutions which had been closed indefinitely after strikes.²⁷⁰ Adungosi argued that the two had “generally lost the confidence of the student community” and did not have a mandate to “speak for the students”. He added that they were expressing “their personal opinions which had nothing to do with SONU.”²⁷¹ Adungosi stood by the prior statement issued by SONU earlier arguing that the student community of the University of Nairobi would support Kenyatta University College students and by extension other students in Kenya. In his remarks he sought to qualify the SONU statement released earlier on May 9th. He stated:

We wish to clarify the fact that our original statement had in no way suggested anything to do with streets and it is unfortunate that the issue could be degenerated to such depth.

He added that the students were watching the situation in other colleges “in light of their wider implications to students’ rights in general.” Reports in the issue of the *Daily Nation* newspaper of 15th May seem to imply that Adungosi’s remarks were an about-face of the previous statement made which contained an undertone of warning.²⁷² It is likely that the chairman of SONU developed cold feet in making good the threat of the students’ body.

The Standard newspaper’s coverage of the above developments was more comprehensive. According to the daily’s reports, the Vice-Chairman, Kiprono Ruto was replaced by Mwandawiro Mghanga while Adongo replaced Paddy Onyango. According to the newspaper, the “sacking of the two leaders had now heightened the power struggle between a “militant group” and a “dialogue group” which had been simmering since the body was formed.” They argued that the militant group was bent on inciting the students to take to the streets whenever any controversial issue arose at the campus. A group of students further added that they supported their “comrades” at Kenyatta University College, but were not prepared to take to the streets in solidarity with them.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Ochieng’ Konyango, 2 Students leaders Sacked for Speaking out, *Daily Nation*, May 15th 1982, p.20

²⁷¹ Ibid.,p.20

²⁷² Ibid.,p.20.

²⁷³ Frank Ojiambo, “University Student leaders ‘Sacked’,” *The Standard*, May 15th 1982,p.1&3.

The student population's relationship with the government critics grew. Together with some lecturers, their involvement in underground movements like the December 12th movement caught on. Lectures in the University were given by leftist politicians. Some members of parliament from a group dubbed the 'Seven Bearded Sisters' by the former Attorney-General Charles Njonjo, were at the forefront of this, effectively forging a relationship with the University community²⁷⁴. The newly formed students' organisation – SONU – was not to limit itself to student affairs; it was later to weigh in on the ongoing confrontation between the former Vice-President Oginga Odinga and members of the ruling party, KANU.

Controversy surrounding a trip and a lecture Jaramogi Oginga Odinga made to Britain may have led to reports by a British fact- and-gossip sheet, *Third World Affairs*, that he had made an announcement in Britain that he would form an opposition party when he returned to Kenya. These reports made Odinga receive a barrage of criticism from a number of KANU members the most prominent being the Higher Education Minister, Joseph Kamotho and the Basic Education Minister, Jonathan Ngeno.²⁷⁵ Odinga's stinging rebuttal prompted the President to weigh in on the confrontation announcing that he, Oginga Odinga, had been expelled from KANU for his "recent activities in Kenya and abroad". Speaking at the opening of the new offices of the Lari Division District Officer on the 20th of May 1982, Moi castigated Odinga for his alleged announcement that he would form the Kenya Socialist Party and for "insulting his Ministers and attacking his Government."²⁷⁶ With more criticism coming from KANU members – including the then Vice-President Mwai Kibaki and Nathan Munoko, KANU's organising secretary - the logical thing for Odinga, a political force to reckon with, was to form another party. Odinga's co-victim in the 1979 general election, George Anyona, suggested the formation of a second party in Kenya, noting that Kenya was a *de facto* one-party state. He argued that the Constitution provided for a *de jure* one-party state.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Oral Interview with Willy Mutunga, 26th October 2012, Supreme Court of Kenya, Nairobi.

²⁷⁵ Philip Wagalwa, Humphrey Karega and William Onywera, Kamotho, "Ngeno blast Odinga," *Daily Nation*, May 17th 1981, p.2.

²⁷⁶ Irungu Ndirangu, "Odinga expelled from Kanu," *Daily Nation*, May 21st 1982, p.1.

²⁷⁷ Robert Irungu, "Second party needed – Anyona," *Daily Nation*, May 21st 1982, p.28.

These national developments provoked responses from the University. Mukaru Ng'ang'a, a History lecturer in the University of Nairobi, argued that people calling for the formation of another political party were not to be punished. Alluding to Anyona's remarks on the Constitution's provisions regarding party formations, Ng'ang'a said "that Kenyans should guard against the shifting of democracy by misusing the Constitution." He then added that the "country would be the loser if underground movements were forced to emerge."²⁷⁸ This statement was to later to prove frighteningly prophetic. Some parts of his message were later to be echoed by the students.

Through their newly-registered organisation, SONU, the University of Nairobi students called for the formation of a new party. The Organisation released a statement some of it which read:

We wish to make it known to the Kenyan public that the Kenyan Constitution belongs to all Kenyans, and should be protected from Fascist-oriented manoeuvres aimed at subjugating our Freedoms and rights... Any attempts to bulldoze Kenya into a *de jure* one party state can only be seen as a manifestation of the forces of retrogression at work plotting to kill democracy and plunge us into outright dictatorship.²⁷⁹

Shortly after their statement the students were challenged by Sharif Nassir an Assistant Minister for Labour and KANU Mombasa branch chairman, to resign from their studies and form a political party if they weren't satisfied with the present KANU Government under the leadership of President Moi.²⁸⁰ Nassir's remarks were echoed by Paul Ngei, Livestock Minister, who in reaction to the statement, warned SONU against indulging in politics since the organisation was only for airing grievances concerning educational facilities and student welfare.²⁸¹ Ngei's comments were reported alongside Nassir's as follows:

As expressed by his cabinet counterpart, he invited the students to come out and contest elections and not to "use SONU as a political platform. He also warned political failures of using the students to meet their goals.....Mr Ngei

²⁷⁸ Nation Reporter, "Lecturer backs New Party Call," *Daily Nation*, May 22nd 1982, p.14.

²⁷⁹ Gideon Mulaki, "Students call for another party," *Daily Nation*, May 24th 1982, p.24.

²⁸⁰ Nation Reporter, "Students Challenged," *Daily Nation*, May 25th 1982, p.5.

²⁸¹ Gideon Mulaki, "Ngei blasts varsity students," *Daily Nation*, May 29th 1982, p.20.

urged those students who did not share the views expressed by SONU to come forward and join Kanu and to unite to wipe out hooliganism.”²⁸²

The call for a second party by George Anyona which was echoed by Mukaru Ng’ang’a and later by the students of the University of Nairobi preceded a wave of detentions. This wave began with the detention of Stephen Muriithi, the former Deputy Director of Intelligence, who had been appointed the general manager Uplands Bacon Factory Limuru after serving 24 years in the Police Force. Muriithi had tried to use the courts to “challenge his enforced retirement.”²⁸³ His detention order was reportedly signed by the Minister of State, James Gichuru.

The challenges the government received from its critics – some in faculty, others public servants, students and politicians - may have sparked off decisive action against its critics. In an address on the occasion of the 19th anniversary of *Madaraka* (self-rule) day, Moi lashed out at perceived critics of the government, including Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Hinting at Muriithi’s challenge of his reappointment, Moi lashed out at “lawyers who argued that he had no power to sack any civil servant.... drawing such lawyers’ attention to Section 24 of the Constitution according to which every civil servant held his office at the pleasure of the President.”²⁸⁴

Moi spoke of a concerted attempt by a group of dissidents to ask trade unions and secondary schools to call a one-day strike. He implied that such dissidents would be detained for their “threat to Kenya’s security”. In a display of dramatic flourish, he asked for the whereabouts of the Police Commissioner, Ben Gethi – who instantly stood and saluted to him before the President’s audience – and ordered him there and then to “do his work”.²⁸⁵ Moi deftly built his case arguing that Kenya was a success story in Africa with regard to peace and stability and portrayed his government as a custodian of the same. The dissidents, who were part of the elite, would leave the country “if things went wrong” while the rest of the *wananchi* (common man) would suffer, he argued. This may have been a means of isolating the critics of his regime from the rest of Kenyans.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Daniel Branch, *KENYA: Beyond Hope and Despair*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) p.153.

²⁸⁴ Irungu Ndirangu, “Moi reveals Strike Plot,” *Daily Nation*, June 2nd 1982, p.1.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p.1.

In the text of his address, Moi described the students of University and training institutions as a lot well-looked after by Kenya arguing that they were better off than their Kenyan counterparts studying abroad.²⁸⁶ In his off- the-cuff Kiswahili address he said that parents of those studying in Russia, India, Australia, Canada, and so on, were spending Ksh 60,000 for the upkeep of their children, while the Kenyan government was paying upto Ksh 90,000 a year per student to maintain them at the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University College.²⁸⁷ Juxtaposing this against the demonstrations a number of them had taken part in, he portrayed the students as an ungrateful lot. By hitting out at the critics of the regime in one address, the given implication was that there was a common thread to all the moves of the supposed dissidents – they were out to create instability and chaos.

Connecting the student demonstrations with the lecturers, he blamed the lecturers for being responsible for “some of the problems at the university”. The association of radical lecturers with Karl Marx ideas and ideals may give an insight in analysing an excerpt of Moi’s *Madaraka* day address. He said:

I want to make it clear that we shall not allow a few individuals who regard themselves as revolutionaries, promoting foreign ideologies, to be disrupting our education and training programmes.²⁸⁸

George Anyona who had been arrested on May 30th just within days of his call for multipartyism, was detained after President Moi’s speech. The detention order was produced in the High Court by the Deputy Public Prosectuor, Sharad Rao, who was defending the legality of Anyona’s detention for over 24 hours. John Khaminwa, representing Anyona’s wife, was questioning its legality.²⁸⁹ Khaminwa was shortly afterward arrested.

Within days a number of lecturers were arrested including Maina Kinyatti, Kamoji Wachira, Al-amin Mazrui, Edward Oyugi, Katama Mkangi, Willy Mutunga and Mukaru Ng’angá, who had previously echoed Anyona’s call for the establishment of a second party in Kenya. Most of these arrests were preceded by two events. The first

²⁸⁶ “Moi’s Madaraka Day Address,” *Daily Nation*, June 2nd 1982, p.6.

²⁸⁷ Ndirangu, “Moi reveals Strike Plot,” *Daily Nation*, p.1.

²⁸⁸ Irungu Ndirangu, “President Slams rebels,” *Daily Nation*, June 2nd 1982, p.1.

²⁸⁹ Edward Rihnaa, “Anyona Detained,” *Daily Nation*, June 3rd 1982, p.1.

was the amendment of the Kenya constitution making Kenya a de jure one-party state from a de facto one-party state on June 9th 1982. This meant that by law the only party that was to exist in Kenya was the ruling party, KANU. The bill was moved in parliament by Charles Njonjo the Minister for Constitutional Affairs and was seconded by the then leader of Government Business and Vice-President Mwai Kibaki. The amendment was passed unanimously.²⁹⁰ Perhaps support for the bill might have snowballed from the President's strident attacks on the governments' critics, a number whom were proponents for the formation of an alternative party.

The second event was an allegation made by the President during a rally at Afraha Stadium in Nakuru. President Moi alleged that there was a plot by University lecturers to arm school and university students to cause chaos in the country.²⁹¹ This may have been done by Moi to build a case against the "Marxist" lecturers so as to justify their impending arrests. Indeed his message on *Madaraka* day mirrored the statement he made in the previous year on Marxist lecturers bent on causing anarchy. Willy Mutunga, one of the arrested lecturers, argues:

You know what our politicians do or the ruling classes here? They build their cases very slowly against people. Before they come to hit you, they start the propaganda. Moi had talked about 'Marxist lecturers' in 1981, we didn't get hit until a year later, in 1982. If you look at Hillary Ngweno's *Weekly Review*, there was a time he repeated this before we were arrested; maybe April of 1982 or May, he repeated the same thing. So it is a very clever tactic of building a case against people and they would repeat it.²⁹²

The magazine, *Weekly Review*, whose editor was Hilary Ng'weno, was perceived to be a pro-government publication and was, therefore, viewed as an extension of the government's repressive machinery. The repressive measures taken by the Moi regime between May and June of 1982 betray a systematic attempt to stifle democracy so as to further consolidate power at the expense of alternative political voices on the political front. Whereas there were anti-government elements in the University, there also was an emergence of a pro-government group. A group of students in the University reportedly from South Nyanza expressed their total

²⁹⁰ Gideon Mulaki and Robert Irungu, "One-party State: It's now Official," *Daily Nation*, June 10th, 1982, p.1.

²⁹¹ Chris Musyoka and KNA, "Moi Reveals Weapons Plot," *Daily Nation*, June 7th 1982, p.1.

²⁹² Oral Interview with Willy Mutunga, 26th October 2012, Supreme Court of Kenya, Nairobi.,

agreement with President's Moi move to expel Odinga from the ruling party KANU. A group of University lecturers, on the other hand, were reported to have sought an audience with President Moi to "express their loyalty to him, the government and the ruling party KANU".²⁹³

The repression only emboldened certain sections of the alternative opposition. *Pambana* – or struggle in English - an underground newspaper, circulated in May of 1982 in Nairobi denouncing the Moi regime.²⁹⁴ Students, who surprisingly were not a major target of the crackdown, got increasingly agitated. The students organised several rallies which culminated in the presentation of a memorandum to President Moi that called for a memorandum to ask Kenyans to decide on the one party rule. Student leaders like Mwakidua Mwachofi, Adongo Ogoni, Paddy Onyango and Mwandawiro also galvanised the University community to demand the release of all detainees.²⁹⁵ The government, however, did not capitulate to the students demands. With a severely curtailed democratic space and no formal outlet to offer an alternative political voice, the political situation in Kenya was potentially explosive. A reaction to the repression was bound to erupt.

4.8 The Attempted Coup

On August 1st 1982 junior Kenya Air Force servicemen staged a coup d'état to topple the Moi regime. The students woke up to the news with most students happy with the news as they did not like Moi. ²⁹⁶ Onyango Oloo, a student at the time, gives an account of the students' involvement in the coup:

It was just a carnival atmosphere; those of us who had been reading political science knew that coups are not things anybody who is a democrat should support. Usually the first thing the military government does is to suspend the constitution.... they impose a dusk to dawn curfew... they take all your democratic freedoms. But you know at that time people were just tired. We went later on through Kimathi Street... The Stanley... I remember one particular student seeing a shirt he had always liked breaking the window and putting on that shirt. But I remember Adungosi saying "Comrades please don't do this, we are better than this.... we are intellectuals. But then we went back

²⁹³ Irungu Ndirangu, "Lecturers Want to meet With President," June 28th 1982, p.1

²⁹⁴ Branch, *Kenya: Between hope and despair*, pp.153 - 154

²⁹⁵ Citizens for Justice, *We lived to Tell the Nyayo House Story*, (Nairobi, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003) pp.2-15

²⁹⁶ Interview with Onyango Oloo on 12th October 2012, Aga Khan Walk, Nairobi.

to campus, people were hanging at the Central Catering Unit.... In our Hall we played scrabble till around 3 a.m. when we heard that the coup attempt had been suppressed. Students began preparing... the next day everybody was thinking of an exit strategy.²⁹⁷

There were, however, a few students who knew beforehand about the impending coup. This prior knowledge of the coup could be a pointer to their active involvement in the coup plot. Mwandawiro Mghanga recounts:

I remember the previous night before the coup I was with my Uncle on 31st July; it was a Saturday. I was going to spend my weekend with at my Uncle's place in Karen; he was the then Minister of Health. As I passed near YMCA, I found Titus Adungosi and other boys... I later came to learn that they were from the Airforce. When I met them Adungosi asked "*Sasa Ndugu unaenda?*" (Comrade, are you going now?) and I replied that I was going to Karen and I'd be back on Sunday. He told me "*Usiende ndugu sasa unajua mambo yatafinyikaje bila wewe comrade... Hii vitu zote tumekuwa tukifanya nawe inaezakuwa.... we can* " (Don't go Comrade, how will things go on without you?... all that we have been doing together can materialise..) I was surprised with his newfound radicalism ... He introduced me to the men he was with ... I did not understand what he was saying until much later with the benefit of hindsight.²⁹⁸

Students from the Kenyatta University College danced "round the college carrying branches" and two air force soldiers who arrived at the college in the morning were received "with wild cheers by the students."²⁹⁹ Their counterparts in the University of Nairobi celebrated the news of the coup in the streets of Nairobi flanked by Kenya Air Force soldiers. The Chairman of SONU – Titus Adungosi – was amongst the students. According to accounts in the judgement by D.C Porter, Adungosi did not partake in the looting but later went to Kabete campus in a bus hijacked by students. Adungosi made addresses in the University and in one of the buses full of students that were reportedly inflammatory and were in essence blaming the government for not listening to the students warnings, hence being overthrown in a coup which caught it flatfooted. Together with other students in the two hijacked buses, Adungosi later attended a meeting in Kangemi (in Nairobi) that had Kenya Air Force personnel. He surrendered himself to the authorities after the coup attempt failed.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Interview with Mwandawiro Mghanga, November 12th, Nairobi.

²⁹⁹ Wacira Waruru, "Police Search Student Campuses," *The Standard*, 4th August 1982, p.4.

³⁰⁰ Safario Ouma, "Court throws out Adungosi Appeal," *Nairobi Times*, 2nd January 1983, p.1.

Accounts from various former students who were in the University at the time of the coup seem to invalidate the prevailing notion of Tito Adungosi's heroism amongst students or recent graduates of the University of Nairobi. Onyango Oloo argues:

..you know people... young people always assume that he was a hero. But he was not... no he wasn't. Adungosi was a very conservative student, he was a born again Christian.... he is notorious for the statement that he was against what they called "mindless militancy"... so he wanted students to be closer to the government. Unfortunately, for him it is just that he happened to be the SONU chair in the same year that there was a coup attempt... so he was just a sacrifice. I met him when he was still in remand and also had been arrested... even I think Raila was arrested at that time. We both in our different ways tried to challenge him... "*Usiende huko Ukakubali Kesi*"(Don't go there and admit your guilt) But of course he went... he was saying that "I'm a Christian, everyone knows I am pro-government.. they told me if I confess and plead guilty *wataniachilia* (they will release me) except they jailed him for 10 years and he died in prison."

Mwandawiro Mghanga, who was a fellow student leader, recounts:

He was a traitor... he even wanted to recruit me...I was his Vice-Chair... Whenever we organised press conferences that demanded for multipartyism he'd absent himself and I'd be the one who would read our statement as the Vice-Chair. Later on he would call me aside and tell me you know you could be getting money from the university administration.... Moi's money... you would get a good job..... there was a time he talked to me together with the Dean of Students... he was an opportunist....what do opportunists usually do? Here's a coup... and the young men of the Air Force talked to him and convinced him that once they took over they'd make him a Minister or a senior official in government. That's no wonder why the next morning after the coup he had an Air Force car and he was travelling around and people were calling him "Yes Sir".... you know the coup attempt took a number of hours..... when the coup failed, he was arrested... and after he was arrested he was told by the interrogator that if he would confess his crime he would be released or if he would be given a short sentence.....³⁰¹

For his role in the attempted coup, Adungosi was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment after pleading guilty to the charge of sedition and taking part in the demonstration on the August 1st coup attempt. He died in 1988 from deliberate mistreatment, including the denial of adequate medical attention, "a common form of torture in Kenya's

³⁰¹ Interview with Mwandawiro Mghanga, November 12th 2012, Nairobi.

prisons”.³⁰² Peter Oginga Ogego was given the same sentence for sedition while other students like Wahinya Boore, Francis Kinyua, Muga KÓlale, Jeff Mwangi Kwirikia and David Onyango Oloo were “convicted and jailed for terms of five to ten years.” Ogego’s sentence was originally six years but it was later increased to ten after the government prosecutor, Guy Muli, said he “had not shown remorse”.³⁰³ Scores of students were arrested, detained and taken to the General Service Unit headquarters where they were “continuously tortured by the Special Branch Police.”³⁰⁴ Sixty one students were later released alongside 412 men of the disbanded Kenya Air Force after being held in custody for “nearly seven months.”³⁰⁵

Some columnists in the newspapers expressed their displeasure at the students’ celebration of the coup. In one column, for instance, they were accused of being anarchists and “agitators who would like to live a system which provides manna from shops.” As much as the students behaviour was not beyond reproach, their jubilation of the news of Moi’s dethronement may have stemmed from the repression that preceded it.³⁰⁶ The public’s ‘traditional’ perception of students as hooligans may have been brought to the fore at the time, hence the public may have viewed them as hooligans and law breakers.

In Onyango Oloo’s case, his University identity may have been one of the reasons for his arrest and subsequent conviction. He was apprehended on his way to his Mombasa home after the coup. He recounted:

I boarded a train in Nairobi and headed for Mombasa. We passed Mtito Andei onto Voi. The police stopped the train and asked for some ID. I produced my University ID as opposed to my national one. I got into an altercation over a blanket – they accused me of looting it. I told them “If you live in Mombasapeople sleep naked... no fool would loot a blanket”.... they said “*Kijana we unajifanya unajua*” (young man, you think you know?) and then they took me out of the train. Later on they charged me with possession of a seditious publication but interestingly enough it was my own handwritten essay. Eventually I was jailed for 5 years....³⁰⁷

³⁰² Jacqueline Klopp and Janai Orina, *University Crisis, Student Activism, and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya*, p.51.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.51.

³⁰⁴ Maina wa Kinyatti, *Kenya: A Prison Notebook*, (London: Vita Books, 1996), p.31.

³⁰⁵ Chris Musyoka and KNA, “Soldiers Released,” *Daily Nation*, 5th March 1983, p.1.

³⁰⁶ T.O Otayalo, “The Nyayo spirit liveth,” *Daily Nation*, August 13th 1982, p.7.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Onyango Oloo, 13th August 2013, Aga Khan Walk, Nairobi.

The University was closed indefinitely – it was later to be opened after fourteen months – and the students were ordered to report to their area Chiefs on Mondays and Tuesdays every week during this period. The closure of the University was preceded by searches at the halls of residence at the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University College campuses by “plainclothes policemen accompanied by hundreds of armed GSU men.” The search, ostensibly for runaway KAF rebels, arms and looted goods was perhaps a means of identifying any radical students. It was a surprise search as it came immediately after the announcement of closure the University – students were found on the University grounds as they prepared to leave.³⁰⁸

The students’ involvement in the coup provided an excuse for the Moi regime to clamp down on them. There existed a thin line between their act of jubilation during the coup and what could be viewed as insurrection. With the government looking at the student community from such a lens, it may have been influenced to do all it could to bring them to heel as an act of self-preservation.

³⁰⁸ Wacira Waruru, “Police Search Student Campuses,” *The Standard*, 4th August 1982, p.4.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTAINMENT AND RESURGENCE (1983 – 1992)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at student activism in the University of Nairobi in the years after the attempted coup to the years that saw Kenya's return to multiparty politics after more than two decades. Sporadic spates of student activism were witnessed during this period with demonstrations generally becoming less intense than those the 1970s and early eighties. The chapter attributes this 'lull' in student activism to leadership styles of student leaders and steps taken by government and the university administration after the attempted coup and major incidences of student activism. The chapter argues that student activism reached a climax in 1987 with the expulsion of student activists and banning of the student union. Apprehensive at the prospect of future mobilization by students, the government and the University administration working in concert employed a raft of tactics to keep student activism at bay. These tactics, however, were overtaken by events on a national scale in December 1991 with the repeal of section 2(a) of the Kenyan Constitution that allowed for establishment of alternative political parties. This increased democratic space on a national level, which subsequently was used by students in their activism to successfully reinstate their Students' Union.

5.2 Putting out the Fire

In light of the attempted coup that had taken place, the government felt a need to preempt any activist incidences from the students. An 11-man committee headed by the former head of civil service, Geoffrey Kariithi, was appointed to look into the affairs of the University. The committee recommended the decentralization of the University of Nairobi into six colleges and the setting up of an autonomous body to manage the students' accommodation and catering services that were hitherto managed by the University.³⁰⁹

Perhaps the intended effect of decentralizing the University was an attempt to hamper the students mobilizing capacity. On the other hand, the setting up of an autonomous body to manage the students' accommodation and catering services would ensure

³⁰⁹Ochieng K'Onyango, "Varsity Split Into Six Colleges," *Daily Nation*, September 24th 1983 p.1.

better management that would minimize students' grievances which hitherto were a trigger to a number of student demonstrations in the past. The body set up as per the committee's recommendation was called USAB – University Students Accommodation Board. Its mandate was, therefore, to improve the students' living conditions and this would have a pacifying effect on the students. As a former manager of USAB explained:

Students' activism was not only based on the politics of your country. There was also politics of food and accommodation. So as far as the rioting goes we came in to put out the fire. As the University Student Accommodation Board we had to look into the students catering and accommodation issues. So we came and changed that and by the time I left in 1987, the students had not gone on strike over food or accommodation.³¹⁰

Over and above the setting up of an autonomous students' welfare body and the decentralization of the University of Nairobi, every new batch of students being admitted to the University of Nairobi had first to go through three months of quasi-military training at the National Youth Service. The training was designed at making students adopt the philosophy of a disciplined force. Through the training at the NYS (National Youth Service), the government thought the students would become subservient and nationalistic. They believed the students would, like the armed forces, follow their commander to the letter. It was, therefore, designed to reduce activism amongst the students and make them follow orders.³¹¹ The government was later to discover that the NYS programme ended up producing radicalized and hardened students with sharpened mobilisation skills.

The University's closure after the attempted coup was the longest ever lasting for fourteen months with "student activists put under close surveillance".³¹² The University reopened on October 3rd 1983 with a ban on the student union. Students reacted to the ban by holding peaceful demonstrations within the University; a rather tactical approach informed by the history of student activism. A student activist and

³¹⁰ Oral Interview with Daniel Mbiti, 12th December 2012, Nairobi.

³¹¹ Oral Interview with Nduma Nderi, 12th August 2012, Nairobi.

³¹² Jacqueline M.Klopp and Janai Orina "University Crisis, Student activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya," *The African Studies Review*, Vol 45, No.1, 2002, p.51, retrieved 26th March 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/1515007>.

former Vice-Chairman of SONU, Mwandawiro Mghanga was at the forefront of mobilizing the students to agitate for the reinstatement of SONU. He noted:

There were many demonstrations in the university. In terms of *Kamukunjis* (rallies) in the evening they were many and they would even go to Kabete Campus demanding the registration of SONU, the end of corruption in the university, its kitchen and even in the country. In 1983 we were demanding the registration of SONU but I was in charge and I was ideologically clear. So it was peaceful; we did away with anarchy because we said it wouldn't help in the struggle as stoning cars had nothing do with revolutions. In a revolution you have to win the support of the masses... and you cannot be supported if you are stoning cars in Uhuru Highway..³¹³

The University administration and the government later caved and SONU was later reinstated with Mwandawiro Mghanga, at the forefront of the demonstrations and student rallies that clamoured for its registration, elected its Chairman. SONU pushed for a rapprochement between government and students preferring to directly engage the University administration and government on their grievances. KUCSA - the Kenyatta University Student Association - led by Chombo Shete adopted the same policy of engaging with government. These two student unions would on occasion visit the President at State House who would in turn reciprocate by visiting them in their respective campuses. Some of the pleas made by the students during this period included: the release of jailed students, the reinstatement of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the creation of an atmosphere in the University conducive to academic freedom. The government remained adamant in its previous position on Ngugi wa Thiong'o and there was an increased presence of spies in the University. The jailed students, on the other hand, continued serving their terms.

The less confrontational approach of the two student unions stemmed from the increasing repression that had taken root in the wake of the coup. Critics of the regime were routinely arrested and subjected to torture and imprisonment. Perceived threats to the regime were subjected to the same treatment. Former government officials, such as the former Police Commissioner – Ben Gethi - were arrested and detained. Overt opposition to the Moi regime was virtually non-existent. Opponents of the regime, bereft of any formal outlets for discontent, were pushed underground. Student

³¹³ Oral interview with Mwandawiro Mghanga, November 12th 2012, Nairobi.

activists participated in these underground activities, such as pamphleteering, but it took almost two years before the government moved in against them.

5.3 Njonjo Affair

Perhaps the biggest political player to fall victim of the aftermath of the 1982 coup was Charles Njonjo, then the Minister for Constitutional Affairs. In 1983 it was rumoured that he had taken part in the 1982 coup. These rumours presented President Moi with an opportunity to get rid of his erstwhile ally who posed a threat to Moi's rule. Njonjo wished to displace the Vice-President, Mwai Kibaki, from his position as the pre-eminent Kikuyu figure within Moi's government. In addition, he would attempt to build up a coterie of supporters in parliament.³¹⁴ President Moi set up a commission of senior judges to investigate Njonjo for a raft of alleged indiscretions. The commission concluded that Njonjo had become a threat to the security of the country and that he had played a role in the 1982 attempted coup. In view of these findings, there was a probability of Njonjo's conviction if the state pursued the matter in court. President Moi, however, announced that he had pardoned Njonjo on 12th December 1984 in his Presidential address to the nation during the *Jamhuri* (Independence) day celebrations.

Students reacted to the pardon by erecting a roadblock on one of the roads close to their hostels – State House Road – forcing all cars using the road to turn back. In addition to their antipathy to the Presidential pardon, the students were upset over one of their unmet expectations in the Presidential address – the freeing of their former leader, Titus Adungosi who was then serving a 10-year sentence for his role in the 1982 attempted coup. The demonstration, however, was short-lived as the then SONU Chairman, P.L.O Lumumba, intervened and pleaded with the students to go back to their hostels. Police were deployed on the road, but they left after being assured by the SONU Chairman that the students would not continue with the demonstration.³¹⁵

The “Njonjo” demonstration, however, betrayed an ethnicised angle of student activism. This may have been a consequence of the ethnic based student associations that had taken root in the University at the time.

³¹⁴ Daniel Branch, *KENYA Beyond Hope and Despair*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) pp.158-159.

³¹⁵ Irungu Ndirangu, “Njonjo found ‘Guilty’”, *Daily Nation*, December 13th 1984, p.1&24.

What I know is that the demonstration against the pardon of Njonjo was mainly from those people in the rift valley who thought that Njonjo should be incarcerated for a long time and Moi released him. Kikuyu's were for Njonjo because he was their man.³¹⁶

The move by the SONU chairman to persuade both the students and police from confronting each other revealed a tendency by part of the SONU leadership to preempt confrontations between the students and the government. However, a few student activists were not in agreement with this and preferred to tackle issues head on. Most of their activities, however, were carried out covertly on account of the mounting repression of the Moi government.

5.4 Bloody Sunday

On February 10th 1985 officers from the General Service Unit violently dispersed a peaceful prayer meeting within the University grounds killing one student, Jack Wandera, and injuring sixty-five others. Nineteen students were arrested for participating in an illegal assembly. Unlike other demonstrations in the past, the students did not retaliate against the General Service Unit personnel; they either dispersed or surrendered themselves to their fate. This event was to be dubbed by the students "Bloody Sunday." The prayer meeting was a culmination of a three-day boycott in the University that had been mounted following an arbitrary expulsion of three student activists and withdrawal of scholarships from five others by the government.³¹⁷ The prayer meeting was also to feature a guard of honour mounted by first year students in honour of Mwandawiro Mghanga, one of the expelled student activists. This was a symbolic move meant to show the incumbent Moi government that the students had formed their own state with Mwandawiro heading it. It was precipitated by the unwillingness of the Moi government to engage with the students over why the expulsions and withdrawals of scholarships had been necessary.³¹⁸

Mwandawiro Mghanga, then a postgraduate student, had firmly established his credentials as a student activist and leader. He was, therefore, respected amongst the students of the University of Nairobi. As a postgraduate student he had kept a low profile and was not involved in overt student activism, but was actively involved in

³¹⁶ Oral Interview with Daniel Mbiti, 12th December 2012, Nairobi.

³¹⁷ Editorial, "Nairobi University Closes Once Again," *Weekly Review*, February 15th, 1985, p.3.

³¹⁸ Oral Interview with Nduma Nderi, 12th August 2012, Nairobi.

underground activism. He was in the process of forming a national union of students in Kenya that would be used as a lobby group. He was also part of an underground movement called Mwakenya. The movement was formed amidst the closing up of democratic space in Kenya in the wake of the coup that forced opponents of the Moi regime to go underground. It distributed leaflets critical of the Moi regime on the streets of major towns, but mainly in Nairobi and Nakuru. The group condemned various ills and excesses of the Moi regime, such as inequity of land access, corruption, the slow encroachment of commercial ranching on pastoralist grazing areas and social inequality. The movement caused panic in government on account of its activities.³¹⁹

Mwandawiro together with two other student activists, Tirop Arap Kitur and Karimi Nduthu, were expelled in connection to the movement. Together with the five other students whose scholarships had been withdrawn, they were known to be ardent opponents of the Chairman of SONU, P.L.O Lumumba.³²⁰ Tirop and Karimi were at the forefront of convening the *Kamukunji* on January 28th to level charges and accusations against the Student Representative Council, an integral part of SONU. In reaction to the meeting that was held, the Student Council held a meeting to discuss the moves of these students and alluded to Mwandawiro's Mwakenya activities. The meeting also noted that the student *Kamukunji* held on the 28th lambasted the SONU leadership for "preventing students expressing their views on the Presidential Pardon of Charles Njonjo" which implied a double standard by the President for not pardoning jailed students and "not having taken a stand on the controversial activities of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o".³²¹ The minutes of the SRC were reportedly leaked to the University authorities, a move that led to the expulsions and withdrawal of the scholarships five days after the Students' Council meeting.³²²

The fate of Mwandawiro, Tirop and Nduthu and the other students was attributed to Lumumba and his allies, who in their leadership approach preferred to be closer to the

³¹⁹ Edwin A. Gimode, "The Role of the Police in Kenya's Democratisation Process", in Godwin R Murunga & Shadrack W Nasongo, eds, *Kenya The Struggle for Democracy* (Zed Books: 2007) pp.244-245.

³²⁰ Haven Of Repression: A Report on The University of Nairobi and Academic Freedom in Kenya, p.4.

³²¹ Editorial, "Nairobi University Closes Once Again," *Weekly Review*, February 15th 1985 p.5.

³²² Ibid., p.3.

government. The real reasons for the expulsions and withdrawal of scholarships were not given by the University administration and this forced the students, who rallied behind their embattled colleagues. The students began the boycott by camping at the University's Great Court demanding from the administration reasons for students' sanction and later on audience with the Minister For Education, Science and Technology, Jonathan Ngeno. Students also tried to challenge the University's move in court by attempting to file an injunction against the expulsions. To meet the cost of filing the injunction, the students raised funds amongst their ranks and also attempted to get to Kenyatta University College to raise more funds. To do this a group of 14 students commandeered a University vehicle, but were arrested on their way to the college.³²³

The four days of student rallies, did not only address University issues. The students also delved into the country's politics. At a certain point during the four days of student rallies, the students demanded from the government, a return to multi-party politics. This was a throwback to the calls of students in 1982 to hold a national referendum for Kenyans to decide whether they were in favour of one-party rule. The students, a bellwether of the tension following the government repression in the wake of the 1982 coup, saw a need to react to the closing up of democratic space. On account of the peaceful tactics used in their boycott, they were supported by the public. The government lost face in confronting the students violently.³²⁴

In the aftermath of the events that took place on Bloody Sunday, the government reacted in its trademark way. It closed the University and ordered the students to report to their respective locational chiefs every week. Students, such as Mwandawiro Mghanga, were tried, tortured and jailed for a year for taking part in an illegal assembly. On the other hand, P.L.O Lumumba had to do his examinations under police guard and live outside campus when the University was opened four months later. This is because he was regarded as a traitor by his fellow students.³²⁵

³²³ Editorial, "Nairobi University Closes Once Again," *Weekly Review*, February 15th 1985 p.4

³²⁴ Oral interview with Mwandawiro Mghanga, November 12th 2012, Nairobi.

³²⁵ Oral Interview with Nduma Nderi, Valley Arcade, August 12th 2012, Nairobi.

5.5 Uneasy Peace

Following the events of bloody Sunday and their aftermath, the government began a Mwakenya crackdown a year later putting in students and lecturers alike who fitted their criterion of Mwakenya agents. Lecturers, such as Katama Mkangi, Gibson Kamau Kuria, Ngotho Kariuki and Kariuki Gathitu, were detained. Students, such as Gupta Ng'ang'a Thiongo were also detained. The students' response was lukewarm; a few demonstrations were held in reaction to the wave of detentions. During this period, an "activist fatigue" was witnessed by sections of the students. A majority of the students, especially those in their second and third years, felt that the two protracted University closures – 14 months after the coup and 4 months after Bloody Sunday – had impacted negatively on them. As a result of these closures, they had lost a lot of time. There felt a compelled to focus on their studies, finish their degrees and move on with their lives. It was under the banner of "Peace and continuity" that two SONU Chairmen, who favoured engagement with government, were elected. Omondi Aloyo served as the SONU chairman between 1985 and 1986 while Nduma Nderi served as the Chairman from 1986 to 1987.³²⁶

Meanwhile, a general sense of restiveness was noticeable from the first year students who had gone through the National Youth Service that seemingly had a radicalizing effect on its graduates. Intermittent protests were held by this group but were contained within campus during the two terms of Omondi Aloyo and Nduma Nderi. To the first years, the students viewed the SONU leadership as pro-government and pro-administration. The leaders tried within their means to avoid a University strike that would see the University get closed. University activism was alive but was contained within the University to prevent confrontations with government. As Nduma Nderi recounted:

There was a lot of activism; that time there were a lot of allegations of Mwakenya, of students – Buke and his group – visiting the Libyan Embassy, a lot of pamphlets in the University. I can tell you I worked day and night to ensure that these students were not suspended, arrested.... I would plead with them. That was the greatest role as a chairman. If you don't want trouble, your greatest role was to ensure no student is arrested, expelled or suspended. And that was the only way I could maintain peace in the University. And I managed to do that. People graduated and that is what they elected me for. I

³²⁶ Ibid.

had done my job. I did not tell them I was going to do something different in my campaigns.³²⁷

Of the notable demonstrations held in 1986 by the first years was an “attempted coup” to get rid of Nduma Nderi’s administration and a demonstration against the bombing of Libya by United States on April 7th 1986. The latter involved the following student activists: Kaberere Njenga, Wafula Buke, Ben Odambo and Bildad Okeyo. While Kaberere and Ben Odambo were the only demonstrators, Wafula Buke and Bildad Okeyo were involved in trying to get materials from the Libyan Embassy that shed light on the bombing.

5.6 SONU 1987

The second group of students who joined the University of Nairobi from the National Youth Service (NYS) had a distinctly different orientation than those who had preceded them. The group had built camaraderie while at NYS and had steeped themselves in Marxist literature. In addition, like minded individuals in the group had also picked themselves out and had even begun political organizations, some of which found their place in the University’s democratic space. As Kaberere Njenga recounted:

At NYS we started forming organizations which, once we arrived at the University, evaluated whether SONU was going the in the direction we wanted. We concluded that it was not and one of our agendas became to take over the leadership of SONU to get the kind of orientation we thought it had during Mwandawiro’s time.³²⁸

Two main factors distinguished these first years from the rest of the students. Unlike their predecessors, they had no anxiety over the time they would take to finish their degrees. The students had not been directly affected by the attempted coup nor had they been affected by the closure of the University in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday. Secondly, the group had never been involved in violent confrontations against the arms of the state – the paramilitary and the police. The students had only heard about what had happened in 1985 and were eager to join in student activism. The rest had been pacified and hard-pressed to continue with their activism.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Oral interview with Kaberere Njenga, August 2nd 2012, Nairobi.

The banner of “Peace and Engagement” that the student administrations of Nderi and Aloyo had been elected with lost its lustre amongst this group of radicalized students. The University administration and government generally favoured such approaches as they gave the government a semblance of stability. Standing in as the interim Chairman of SONU after Nduma Nderi’s tenure, Maina Kiranga represented engagement. A student activist, Wafula Buke, known to be a firebrand since his days at NYS, represented a more radicalized brand of leadership. The two contested for the leadership of SONU in 1987, with Wafula Buke winning with a landslide.³²⁹ The win was not only limited to the Chairmanship of SONU but a host of other positions. There was a widespread perception that the University administration had increasingly become involved in determining the leadership of SONU and that Maina Kiranga with his less confrontational approach was their preferred candidate. The win, therefore, galvanized the students as they believed they had outsmarted the University administration in the elections.³³⁰

In the afterglow of their win, the students received an invitation from the International Students Secretariat based in Prague, Czechoslovakia to attend a World Student Conference that would take place in Havana, Cuba that was taking place between November 6th and 25th. Two of the students who tried to apply for passports to travel were harassed and intimidated by officials from the State’s intelligence service – Special Branch. Realizing the government would not grant them passports to travel, the students abandoned their mission to travel to Cuba. The students realized that their moves were being monitored by the dreaded Special Branch agents, some of whom posed as students in the University.³³¹

The student leaders held a *Kamukunji* on 13th of November to take their oaths of office and to give inaugural addresses to the student population. In their speeches, the students made devastating critiques of the excesses of the Moi government. They condemned detentions and tortures of suspected dissidents, mentioning the names of some of the former students who were amongst the detainees such as Mwandawiro Mghangha and Gupta Ng’ang’a Thiong’o. They decried the lack of academic freedom

³²⁹ Editorial, “A Predictable Pattern,” *Weekly Review*, November 20th 1987, pp.17&18.

³³⁰ Oral interview with Kaberere Njenga, August 2nd 2012, Nairobi.

³³¹ Miguna Miguna, *Peeling Back the Mask*, (Nairobi: Gilgamesh Africa, 2012) pp.59-61.

in the University effectively ‘banning’ the presence of security agents in the University lecture halls and halls of residence. Students were also informed about harassment of two student leaders – Miguna Miguna and Munoru Nderi - who were to travel to Cuba for the World’s Student Conference.³³²

For the most part, the common thread of the issues they raised was the closing up of democratic space in the University, which was systematically took root in the mid to the late 1980’s. The students also banned district-based student associations which, in their opinion, made the students more parochial in their outlook and greatly limited their mobilizing capacity. This did not go well with the agenda of the elected student leaders – they wanted to unite the students of Kenya and ultimately form a lobby group.³³³ Students from these organizations would have patrons in government who would give them largesse and make them think as an ethnic group divorced from the rest of the student community that had students from diverse backgrounds.

The students resented the governments’ control of the University - particularly the presence of Special Branch agents in the University posing as students. Reports of the killing of a Special Branch agent in the University did the rounds this time. The threat issued to suspected Special Branch agents was not an idle one, therefore. In the addresses, students were also instructed to inform anyone in the Student Union about any suspected Special Branch agents, fraternising of students with the head of state or activities of ethnic-based associations in the University.³³⁴

Perhaps the most scathing speech came from the Chairman of SONU, Wafula Buke. In light of President Moi’s announcement of an increase in student allowances by Ksh.300, he refused to thank the President and attributed the increase to “changed economic conditions.” The chairman stressed that the SONU’s agenda was national and it would not limit itself to university issues. He then promised to mobilize all the democratic forces in the country under the leadership of the former Vice-President Jaramogi Oginga Odinga.³³⁵

³³² Ibid., p.64.

³³³ Oral interview with Kaberere Njenga, August 2nd 2012, Nairobi.

³³⁴ Oral Interview with Wafula Buke, October 4th 2012, Upper Hill, Nairobi..

³³⁵ Ibid.

The government panicked and moved to act. The following morning at 3a.m, Special Branch agents arrested 7 SONU leaders from their halls of residence. The students included Wafula Buke, Kaberere Njenga, Margaret Ben, Oyuo Ngala Amuomo, Miguna Miguna, Munameza Muleji and Munoru Nderi. Unknown to government and the University administration, the students had allies within the rank and file of the student body. These allies worked behind the scenes. Later on in the day, the students camped at the graduation square and demanded the release of the students. The students boycotted classes demanding the release of students. The boycott morphed into a two-day battle between the police and the students with casualties both sides . Kaberere Njenga recounted:

For days they did battle with Police. They were so well organized; I understand some of the students went to Hall 11 overlooking State House Road. They were the so called the airforce, and there were people supplying them with “ammunition” which really was bitumen - there was some tarmacking going on. Some of the students would strike the tarmac for them to get ammunition to supply the airforce which would throw at the GSU from above. And then there were also the ground forces... The thing is after Bloody Sunday, our group vowed never to engage the police in a non-violent means but through confrontation. Those other leaders who were not arrested with us really mobilized.³³⁶

In the aftermath of the boycott-cum-battle, 40 students were arrested while one was shot in the arm. SONU was deregistered by the Registrar of societies, Joseph Kingarui while the University Senate ordered all University students to report twice a week to their chiefs.³³⁷

Five of the student leaders – Oyuo Ngala, Kaberere Njenga, Miguna Miguna, Munoru Nderi and Munameza Muleji - who had been arrested earlier were detained for two weeks and were subjected to torture during their detention. The five were bonded to keep peace for a term of 12 months. Like the 45 others, they were expelled from the University without a fair hearing in front of the Disciplinary Committee as per the University rules.³³⁸ The government, however, decided to make an example out of Wafula Buke. He was tortured and forced to confess to a fabricated charge. Using his links to the demonstration against the American bombing of Libya during the

³³⁶ Oral interview with Kaberere Njenga, August 2nd 2012, Nairobi.

³³⁷ *Weekly Review* , “A Predictable Pattern,” November 20th 1987, pp.17&18

³³⁸ Miguna Miguna, *Peeling Back the Mask*, pp.66-75.

previous year, his interrogators got him to confess to spying for Libya. Buke was jailed for five years.³³⁹ The University was reopened after three weeks.

With expulsions of a large number of student leaders and activists, democratic space in the University was severely curtailed. The government and the University administration worked in concert to limit student dissent. Student activism had reached its climax in the eighties and much “campus opposition to administrative control had been violently confronted and tamed.”³⁴⁰

5.7 Containment

From November of 1987 to April of 1992, there existed no centrally elected Students’ Union to represent students of the University of Nairobi. The government was concerned that the existence of such a body at the time when repression was heightened in Kenya would expose the Moi regime for its dictatorial excesses. It therefore, had to work in concert with the University administration to neutralize any perceived voices of dissent amongst the student population. The University administration was singularly hostile to any attempts to revive the Students’ Union. Students, who were at the forefront of these efforts, were summarily expelled.

The University administration and the government employed a raft of techniques to manage student activism and protest. There was an increased presence of spies in the University who would report the activities of dissident students, who would subsequently get expelled arbitrarily. The presence of ethnic based associations in the University, whose patrons were Ministers in President Moi’s government also preempted the formation of a centralized multiethnic student body in the University.³⁴¹ In addition, student members of such associations working under the patronage of senior politicians were included in the government’s spy network in the University.³⁴² Another divide-and-rule tactic employed by the University administration was the restructuring of the mode of accommodation. Students in the same faculties were to reside in the same hostels. In the event of a riot, it would be

³³⁹ Oral Interview with Wafula Buke, October 4th 2012, Upper Hill, Nairobi..

³⁴⁰ Klopp and Orina “University Crisis, Student activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya,” p.54.

³⁴¹ Ibid., p.53.

³⁴² Oral interview with Benjamin Masila, October 11th 2013, British Institute, Nairobi.

mandatory for students who did not want to be involved to register their non-involvement with their respective deans.³⁴³

In the absence of a centralized Student Union, the University administration relied on college and faculty-based student organizations as a link to the wider student community. These organizations, however, proved to be redundant as they shied away from confronting the administration on issues affecting the students, such as arbitrary expulsions of students. With time, the organizations were viewed as stooges and extensions of the University administration.³⁴⁴

Despite all of the machinations of the University administration and the government to stem student activism, there were still a few bouts of activism that the students took part in. The murder of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Robert Ouko, in February of 1990 provoked student demonstrations in the University, for instance, as did the government announcement of an end to student allowances and the commencement of a cost-sharing programme that would see students pay their own University fees. The cost-sharing programme was a result of implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) in the education sector. In the aftermath of the protests, the University was closed from between July 1991 to March 1992 and once the students returned the new policy was fiat accompli.³⁴⁵ Closures were still a tactic that the University administration and the government could rely upon when all else had failed.

A prevailing sense of fear was palpable among the University students. Alternative methods, such as theatre, were now employed by the students to express themselves politically. An annual “Harvest of Plays” festival was banned in 1990 after it was considered too political for “criticizing the arrest of multi-party crusaders in 1990.” In addition, the University administration pronounced a ban on the activities of the Literature Students Association after one of its “poetry nights” featured poetic performances based on the murder of Cabinet Minister Robert Ouko.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Makau Niko, “Nairobi Varsity takes new Measures to Curb Violence,” January 6th 1990 p.24.

³⁴⁴ Kenya Human Rights Commission. 1992. Haven of Repression: A Report on the University of Nairobi and Academic Freedom in Kenya, p.7.

³⁴⁵ Klopp and Orina “University Crisis, Student activism and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya,” p.55.

³⁴⁶ George Odera Outa, *Performing Power Ethnic Citizenship, Popular theater and the Contest for Nationhood In Modern Kenya*, (Charleston: Book Surge, 2009) pp.117-122.

With the struggle for multipartyism taking root during this period, the government had to control the students' role in the struggle. The closure of the University, for instance, in July 14th 1990 was driven by such a consideration. Demonstrations demanding multi-partyism had taken place and the authorities wanted to preempt the students from taking part in the demonstrations.

5.8 SONU '92 and Resurgence of Student Activism

Calls for multipartyism, voiced or alluded to in previous demonstrations by the students in the eighties, dominated Kenya's political landscape from 1990 to December 1991 when section 2 (a) of the Kenya constitution was amended. Activism exhibited by multiparty activists on a national scale ultimately influenced the university students to embark on a new campaign to reinstate their hitherto banned Students' Union.

A group of law students in mid 1991 conducting their practical training decided to revive SONU as SONU '92. The name change was of significance as the students wanted their Students Union to "usher in a new aura and to divorce it from the past records that had been associated with SONU before the ban".³⁴⁷ The group was led by Francis Kajwang who formed an interim committee and organized students from other faculties and colleges to take part in the central body.

Kajwang was harassed for his efforts; trailed by plain clothes policemen, his residence bugged and was later asked by the University administration to appear before a disciplinary committee. Efforts to expel him flopped, however, as a letter purporting to expel him after the disciplinary hearing was discovered before the hearing. His efforts were, however, taken up by other students who formed alternative lobby groups to facilitate the registration of SONU '92. Two bodies were formed – STOP – Students' Opinion led by Godfrey Kabando while another thought to be – STUVO – Students' Voice led by Nelson Juma Otswana. The latter was thought to be the administrations' favoured body and was to be used to neutralize the impact of SONU

³⁴⁷ Oral interview with Awuor Ponge, 12th October 2013, Nairobi.

'92.³⁴⁸ The University administration then caved to the students demands and facilitated SONU 92 elections in May with Godfrey Kabando as its Chairman.

SONU '92 weighed in discourses regarding domestic and national issues. On April of 1992 it staged a demonstration condemning the ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley which at the time had left 750 dead and 20,000 displaced from their homes. To secure academic freedom and free the University from government control, it demanded the removal of the President as the Chancellor of all public universities. It demanded depoliticisation of the office of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor. In addition, it demanded the resignation of the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Gichaga, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor as well as the director of the Students' Welfare Authority, whose appointment was attributed to his ties to powerful politicians rather than his qualifications for the position. SONU '92, in addition, was to stage a demonstration on July 31st to demonstrate against the Presidential Election Bill that was debated in parliament then passed. The Bill, prepared months to the December 1992 election, demanded that for one to become president, they had to have the support of 25% of the vote in five of Kenya's eight provinces. The bill would give the ruling party KANU, undue advantage as the opposition parties were divided and each was unlikely to muster the stipulated support.³⁴⁹

Fearing that the demonstration could assume a nationwide face, the University was closed before the students could stage the demonstration. SONU '92 was banned in August of 1992 and the Student leaders of SONU were summoned for a hearing before the disciplinary committee. The leaders included: Godfrey Kabando, Kamau wa Mbugua, Michael Oliewa, Otieno Aluoka, Judy Muthoni, Moses Kuria, Jane Muigai, Allan Nguri, Canon Ponge Awuor and Moses Awili. In the hearings, the students were denied their right to have legal representation, a right that was protected by the rules and regulations governing the organisation, conduct and discipline of students of the University of Nairobi. The students walked out of the hearings and filed a suit for a judicial review of the above regulation.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Godfrey Kabando & Moses Kuria, "Institutions likely to remain dead," *Daily Nation*, September 24th 1992, p.7

³⁵⁰ Kenya Human Rights Commission. 1992. Haven of Repression: A Report on the University of Nairobi and Academic Freedom in Kenya. p.9

The fate of the SONU '92 leaders was not collective. Although they succeeded in their case against the administration, some of them later on became a target of the administration. Awuor Ponge, a former student, noted:

It was a long and winding judicial process which ended up with the University opting for an out of court settlement by unconditionally re-admitting the student leaders. However, on readmission they continued mount extensive surveillance on others... I was later expelled on trumped up charges of being disrespectful to the administration and I was not even given a hearing.³⁵¹

Student activism in the University of Nairobi in the early 1990s did not only result to gains in democratic space within the University only. The students also played a role in expanding the national democratic space. They picked up from where the student activists of the late eighties left off. One of the former students of the late eighties noted:

We continued to carry the torch of liberation and played our role in carrying the torch of liberation and even after our expulsion some of us in our group kept up with the momentum. We created a momentum that contributed to the liberation process in this country. Our activism was very important in making people more audacious. Today I meet young people who were in primary school and they tell me “You really inspired us.... We used to read about you in the newspapers”. .. Even in my village. You may not have very clear parameters on how much was achieved that time... To change a society is a process and usually these are small contributions, contributions this year, next year, the other year... a contribution from one region another region. But it also takes a leader to organize all these contributions into one big movement. Because in 1990, Saba Saba was almost like a public insurrection. It was like the culmination of the activities that had started in 1986... that time of Mwakenya and even our time. I think we played a role maybe that is why you still read about us. We played a role in the entire system – in the introduction of multipartyism, although we had aimed for a much greater objective – creating a more just, a more democratic society.³⁵²

The activists of the late eighties essentially played a conscientising role and also gave the student activists of the 1990s momentum in the fight for democratic space. The banning of SONU in 1987, itself, presented a cause for heightened activism which was also geared at opening up democratic space at a national level. Students in the early 1990s did not only clamour for the reinstatement of their Students Union, but also for the repeal of section 2(a) of the Kenya constitution which allowed the

³⁵¹ Oral interview with Awuor Ponge, 12th October 2013, Nairobi

³⁵² Oral interview with Kaberere Njenga, August 2nd 2012, Nairobi.

establishment of alternative political parties. In doing so, students therefore played a role in opening up the democratic space at a national level. A former student activist at this time noted:

The major demonstrations that were held at the university during the early 1990s were in solidarity with the forces of change which were calling for the repeal of the obnoxious and repulsive Section 2A of the Constitution which made Kenya a de jure one party State... There were a lot of demonstrations, processions and pamphleteering advocating for change.³⁵³

5.9 Conclusion

Student activism in the University of Nairobi between 1983 and 1992 was characterized by underground activism which later came to the fore in 1985 and climaxed in 1987. Student ranks were infiltrated by government agents and this preempted consistent, overt activism. After 1987, the University administration and the government worked in concert to limit student activism and this involved the use of coercive as well as divide-and-rule tactics. This again pushed activities of student activists underground, but the activism was then reinvigorated with the struggle for the repeal of section 2 (a) of the Kenya constitution, a struggle the student activists were part of. Students had taken part in demonstrations for the repeal of the section 2(a) in solidarity with other multiparty activists. Their collective efforts led to the constitutional amendment to allow for the establishment of other political parties.

With the repeal of section 2(a) to allow for the establishment of alternative political parties, there was a reinvigoration of student activism in the University of Nairobi. To the student activists, increased democratic space on a national scale would logically translate to the same in the university thus, the successful push for a reinstatement of their students' Union. The activism displayed by student activists under the reinstated students' union – SONU '92 - did not only confine itself to issues that were particular to the university, but also wider political issues. Against the backdrop of a new political landscape the government felt threatened by the student union and therefore had to act against it through the University administration which ultimately banned SONU '92.

³⁵³ Interview with Awuor Ponge, 12th October 2013, Nairobi.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This study on student activism in the University of Nairobi represents an attempt to explain what caused or heightened student activism in the University. The period of study was between 1970 and 1992. The argument of the study was that student activism in the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1992 was heightened by opening and closing up of democratic space, both within and outside the University. In various cases, the study related democratic space and the activism exhibited by the students of the institution. Activism was, therefore, either a means of regaining democratic space that had been closed up, or partly a reaction to the closing of democratic space or a reaction to the opening up of democratic space.

The study also set out to determine the impact of university students in their activism. As argued by Philip Altbarch the students generally acted as a ‘conscience’ of Kenya during these years.³⁵⁴ By being victims of police brutality in their demonstrations, to galvanizing members of the public into action in reaction to the murder of J.M Kariuki, to expressing the need for political freedoms by demanding for a return to multiparty politics the students of the University of Nairobi played their role as opinion leaders, exposing injustices through their activism. Various players in their individual or collective capacities, such as the church, politicians and trade Unions weighed in public debates that were created as a result of the student activism.

The study, in addition, was also done to identify the challenges faced by student activists in their activism. State repression manifested by arrests, detentions, imprisonment and torture were some of the challenges student activists faced as a result of their activism. These challenges were coupled with arbitrary expulsions of student activists from the University, hence making it difficult for student activists to advance their education and career paths. In view of such challenges, activists would resort to underground activism that would enable them in their activism go undetected by the Special Branch. Ethnic-based student associations also provided a challenge to

³⁵⁴ Philip G. Altbarch, “Perspectives on Student Political Activism” *Comparative Education*, Vol 25, No.1, 1989, p.108, retrieved on 15th April 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3099006>

the student activists to unite the entire population under one body. As seen in the study, some activists went as far as banning such associations so as to create unity within the students that would prove to be an asset to their activism.

Though this study makes no claim to make periodic monoliths out of student activism, certain patterns of activism during certain periods have been identified throughout the research period, with activism taking various dimensions in different periods. Student activism of the 1960s generally betrays an activism that was generally driven by domestic concerns – concerns that were particular to the University College, Nairobi. These concerns ranged from quality and portion of food, accommodation space, to the students' safety when crossing Uhuru Highway - a highway adjoining the students' hostels and their lecture halls. There were, however, international and indeed national concerns that influenced the students' activism. International concerns were mainly of 'Pan-Africanist' nature where students would voice their disapproval of 'imperialistic' interventions in Africa, such as, the United States involvement in the Congo and the implied ties between Britain and the white minority regime in Zimbabwe. For the most part, students engaged in political activism against the government when political incidents of national significance directly involved them. This would come into play when the students were addressed or were to be addressed by speakers who had some political clout in Kenya. Student activism of the 1960s generally laid the foundations for student activism in future decades.

The period between 1970 and 1978 began with domestic concerns that the activism of the 1960s was generally concerned with. The demonstration in 1972 proved to be a climax of student activism in the early seventies. A number of students were arrested for their roles in the demonstration, their Union was banned but their concerns on the erection of an Underpass were addressed. Bereft of Students Union, activism was contained to a bare minimum. This activism, however, became more intense from 1974 onwards as the students had legitimate grievances but lacked a centrally elected Students Union to articulate them. This activism led to brutal confrontations between students and the police. These clashes created an impact that elicited reactions from other actors of civil society such as the church and trade unions in response to the students' activism. The murder of J.M Kariuki in March of 1975 politicized student activism further. This concretized an anti-government sentiment within the students

that had become palpable since the 1969 demonstration against the ban on Jaramogi Odinga Odinga's lecture. The murder of J.M Kariuki became a recurring theme in student demonstrations and was later in their activism, packaged alongside other issues such as the establishment of Ethnic-based associations in the University.

Student activism between 1978 and 1982 became increasingly politicized as a result of Moi's apparent recognition of the student community, as opposed to Kenyatta's indirectly indifferent approach to them. The release of Ngugi wa Thion'go from detention in December of 1978 by Moi secured his support among students and he began fraternising with them by receiving student delegations in his abode, State House. The 'honeymoon' between the students and the Moi regime later came to an end when KANU barred Jaramogi Odinga from taking part in the 1979 General Election.

In their approach to national politics, students thereafter became bolder and more assertive. This may be attributed to the initial pleasant relationship they had with President Moi which may have made the students believe that their voices were recognized by the President. Although they later reacted to domestic and international issues in the February 1980 riot and the Walter Rodney demonstration respectively, they became increasingly vociferous whenever the state moved to close up the national democratic space. This was demonstrated by the state's strong arm tactics in the Doctor's Strike of 1981 and the barring of William Difu and Jaramogi Odinga Odinga from participating in by-elections in their respective constituencies in the same year. The arrest and detention of University lecturers as well as the passing of a bill in June of 1982 to make Kenya a *de jure* single-party state were other events that elicited demonstrations from students who reacted to these closures of democratic space. University students, during this period, positioned themselves as an alternative political voice in Kenya. The attempted coup, therefore, found the students actively involved in the nation's politics and thus a number of them played a relatively active part in the coup attempt.

On account of the mounting repression in the wake of the coup, including detention of student leaders, there was a lull in student activism with some of the student activists preferring to engage with the government, instead of adopting an almost traditionally

confrontational approach. It is this period – 1983 to 1992 – that student activists engaged in “underground activism”, mainly through pamphleteering and joining underground political movements. Increased presence of Special Branch agents or student informers in the University also influenced this “underground activism”. There were spates of activist incidences – boycotts, student rallies and demonstrations – which in most cases are a gradual build up events and issues.

Bloody Sunday in 1985 and the inaugural addresses by student leaders in November of 1987, presented situations where “underground activists” emerged. These student activists challenged the government on its repression. The events culminated in to arrests of student activists and confrontations between students and riot police. In the case of the demonstrations of 1987, the government, aided by the University administration, tightened its grip on dissent in the University. A raft of techniques was employed to achieve this objective including the increased presence of Special Branch operatives on campus, the use of ethnic-based associations in the university and the restructuring of the mode of students’ accommodation which saw the student body divided along faculty lines.

The students later took part in the clamour for multipartyism alongside other activists in the early 1990s. In July of 1990, the government closed the University to control the students’ role in the struggle to make Kenya a multiparty state. Other low-key demonstrations were held within the university precincts when the students returned through which they demanded a repeal of section 2(a) of the Kenya constitution. The collective efforts of the students and other entities such as the church and other multiparty activists led to the amendment of the Kenya constitution to allow for the establishment of alternative political parties. The students, in their activism, therefore played a role in the opening up of the national democratic space.

The opening up of national democratic space, through the repeal of section 2(a) of the Kenya constitution, inevitably led to demands by the students to expand the democratic space within the University. To the students, democratic space on a national space would automatically translate to the same within the university, hence their clamour for the reinstatement of their union. The students were eventually successful in their demand for the creation of SONU ‘92 which later on was used as a

platform with which the students could express their opinions not only on University issues but also on national issues. The students' association with oppositional voices in light of the then upcoming General Election to be held in December 1992, however, made the government feel threatened. This ultimately led to the banning of the Students Union, SONU '92.

Theoretical frameworks used in this study proved helpful in looking at student activism. Both theories – the Marxist and generational revolt theories – provide a prism which can be used to view the relationship between two entities – the government and the University administration, on one hand, and the students on the other. Generally, the study depicts an antagonistic relationship between these two entities. In certain bouts of activism, the student activists portrayed their marxist world view in analyzing their grievances. Student activists, for instance, implied their “proletariat” status by arguing that the Loan Scheme which was introduced in 1974 would benefit children of the petty-bourgeoisie. To the students the government, as an oppressor, had imposed this policy on the students and in doing so, it would encourage the notion of education as a privilege rather than a social right that it was obligated to provide. The same Loan Scheme was also reframed by the students from a generational perspective, arguing their forerunners at the Ministry of Education had not taken loans when they were University students. It was, therefore, a double standard to expect their “children” to take a loan which they had not taken.

Various sources were used to get information in this study. Secondary sources such as academic articles, magazines and books on student activism were used to learn more on the student activism as well as to get the names of respondents for interviews on the same subject. Former students, student leaders, student activists as well as members of staff in the University of Nairobi were interviewed to get firsthand accounts of what took place during the research period. Archival work also played a significant complementary and supplementary role to the accounts of provided by respondents. Copies of minutes of meetings and letters between members of the University administration were obtained in the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library Archive and used for this purpose. Newspapers obtained in the same location as well as the Nation Media Library played a prominent role in giving a narrative on what was taking place on a national level when student activism came into play. They also

provided narratives on student activism itself. The various sources were used collaboratively to provide an accurate picture of what took place between 1970 and 1992. The data collected in the study was analysed qualitatively.

The study conducted brings other possible areas of research into focus. The study did not cover student activism in Kenyatta University College as a constituent college of the University of Nairobi till 1985 in detail. Further research on the former college can be done to add onto the existing body of knowledge on student activism in Kenya. Further research can also be done on the history of student activism in other public and private universities. Of particular significance would be a comparative study between activism of the yester years and of the 21st century which has been argued in some quarters to be stemming from self-interest.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ Dantew Teferra and Philip Altbarch, "African Higher Education: Challenges for the 21st Century", *Higher Education*, Vol 47, No. 1, p.46, retrived 11th October 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4151555>

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APPENDIX I:

File

P.O. Box 16228,
NAIROBI.

August 7, 1972

Chairman,
University Council,
P.O. Box 30197,
NAIROBI.

Sir,

APPEAL AGAINST EXPULSION

I wish to appeal against the
expulsion served on me on August
2, by the Vice-Chancellor through the
Registrar; on the grounds that as
one of the editors of "Platform" I
wrote articles which could be construed
as inciting students to breach
University Regulations.

VICE-CHANCELLOR
SEEN

APPENDIX II:

I deny very strongly that this is in fact what I did and hold that what was contained in "Platform" was opinions and not directives or suggestions for students to take any actions that would lead to breaking of regulations.

Had I been given a hearing by the Disciplinary Committee I would perhaps feel that justice had been done; but this was denied to me.

I request the Council to consider giving me a hearing so that I may explain myself, for I believe that even if the opinions contained in "Platform" ran counter to those of the authorities; this is no crime. Our Constitution gives all of us the right of expression within certain limits which I feel I did not overstep.

APPENDIX III:

Furthermore as an editor, I have a duty to be responsive to majority opinion which duly appeared in "Platform" in form of various articles.

I hope, Sir, this matter can be straightened out.

Yours faithfully,

P. Chelagat (Miss)

C.C.

Vice-Chancellor.

SUNU President.

APPENDIX IV:

Feb. 24th 1977

Comrades,

RE: J. M. DAY

Needless to say that we are all aware of the approach of one day that is a landmark in the political history of this nation and the world at large, a day when human blood was spilled by the perpetrators of political expedient cannibalism. We also realise the necessity of eliciting our ever increasing honour with which we remember those heroes who have fallen because of identifying with the oppressed, exploited and colonised and that we shall express our honour in any manner that we shall deem fit. It is with this in mind that I call upon everyone of you to be prepared for a mourning day on the 2nd March 1977. We will all stage a peaceful demonstration and gather at a place that we will decide, but within the campus and so mourn our unforgettable hero whose memory shall forever be haunting us.

There being no reason as to why we should not mourn this day, everybody is by this memo alerted to be on the look out for further communication from NUSO as to the details on the subject. BUT remember, divided we fall, United, we stand. Our solidarity will determine our survival.

In honour of J. M.


Okech J. Matigaro.

Chairman NUSO