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## Deconstructing intergenerational politics between ‘Young Turks’ and ‘Old Guards’ in Africa: an exploration of the perceptions on leadership and governance in Kenya

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Arguably, political leadership in Africa has been characterized as an occupation of the old. This has spurred heightened intergenerational conflicts, which pre-existed the formation of independent nation states. Conflicts over power and leadership among young and older generations were evident, and still are, in many traditional African societies. Such relationships continue within contemporary social, economic and cultural contexts. Aside from ethnicity being at the heart of defining political developments in Kenya, the ‘generation card’ is often invoked in the unfolding of political reform and democratic space. This paper interrogates the emergent relationship between ‘Young Turks’ (those characterized as ‘young’, full of ideas and impatient for change) and ‘Old Guards’ (those believed to be unwilling to change and accept new ideas), and questions its relevance for social, political and economic policy. It reveals how public space in Kenyan polity has been controlled by its older generations, who maintain a firm grip on the country’s resources. It concludes by calling for a meaningful intergenerational dialog, where both young and old share ideas on how best to proceed on Kenya’s path to social, political and economic development.

**Keywords:** conflict; intergenerational; generational politics; governance; Young Turks; Old Guards; Kenya

### Introduction

This study is an illustrative exploration of some of the intergenerational conflicts that have manifested among different generations in Kenya. It considers how various generations are perceived, constructed and how they interact with one another. This study focuses on intergenerational conflict in so far as it relates to matters of governance and development in general as well as in Kenya. Therefore, it adopts a case study perspective in order to employ a closer look into how relationship between generations unfolds in order to define social, political and economic realities. This paper underlines remarkable developments in power shift from older to younger generations in Kenya. Nevertheless, in order to achieve significant balance in power, there will be a need for momentous policy dialog between young and older generations. Therefore, this paper ends up by calling for an intergenerational dialog where both young and old share control over policy regarding social, political and economic phenomena.

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### Conceptualizing intergenerational conflict in politics

The conceptual framework for understanding the power relations between the different generations in Kenya is that of intergenerational conflict. An analysis of generational politics enables one to *explore how age shapes political outlooks*. Kingships and social structures have been identified by social anthropologists in Africa as very critical elements in defining social, political and economic realities in traditional and contemporary societies in Africa (Whyte, Alber, and Van der Geest 2008, 1).

It is argued here that, unlike the typical generation gap between the old and the young – in Kenya, it is primarily an intergenerational conflict over political control and views over national policy direction.

The relevance of intergenerational conflict on social, political and economic policy in Kenya is not devoid from the broader African context or how it manifests itself in various other parts of the continent. As it is generally agreed that the main focus for any country is how to drive development, in Kenya, the question of ‘who’, ‘which group’ or ‘which generation’ to steer this developmental agenda remains very critical.

There is a common trend among many African traditions that link age to particular roles within their societies. These roles are linked with either greater or fewer rewards. Apparently, it is the most dominant group, normally the older generation, which ends up occupying and controlling the most prestigious roles in the society. ‘It is the desire to gain access to or hold on to these rewards that provide an important motivation for social conflict or individual grievances’ (Foner and Kertzer 1978, 1099). In addition, these inequalities among age grades produce power conflicts and tensions.

On the one hand, for example, the older age-sets that stand on the verge of losing prestige and power though the transitions often manipulate existing structures and create justifications that only delay handing over of power, with some willing to die while holding these prestigious leadership positions. Equally, those who stand on the receiving end, the younger age-sets, exert pressure to expedite the rites. The struggles that follow these power tussles potentially affect the nature, formation and development of the whole society (Foner and Kertzer 1978, 1089). Le Vine (1968, 405) notes that the relationship that exists between the father(s) and the son(s) is largely a relation of controlled conflict dominated by elements of, among others, respect, obedience and fear. In this context, the father–son conflict is accepted, recognized and sometimes even ritualized. Ostensibly, as noted by Forti and Maina (2012, 70), age-sets are a characterizing structure in some African traditional social organizations. The transfer of power from one generation to the next is a socially sanctioned ceremony enshrouded with rites of passage.

Elsewhere in non-African states, particularly in America and Europe, the generational debate has taken center stage in political debates in recent times, particularly in the pursuit of intergenerational equity in the access or denial of public opportunities and resources (Wisensale 2013, 27). For example, in the USA, Obama’s campaign for the most powerful political seat in the world sparked very critical generational contention between the two presidential candidates: Barack Obama (who was seen more of a representative for the youth constituency) and his challenger John McCain, who was 72 in 2008. The campaign was clearly a demand for the old to move over and create political space for the new and younger generation. Obama, who is believed to belong to Generation X, appealed for votes especially from the Millennials (those born after 1982), urging them saying: ‘it is your generation’s turn’. He retaliated further to say: ‘[w]e hear plenty about people in their teens and twenties, and even more about people in their

fifties, but the stodgy old species known as the thirty something has been shuttled off' (Chaudhry 2007).

There exists literature loaded with claims, facts and opinions that either attempt to explain, analyse, justify or denounce the varied phenomenon associated with what seems to be a widespread and genuine power and leadership crisis between younger and older generations. Various generations perceive and act upon their economic, social and cultural context differently. As a result, this creates significant gaps and eventual conflict between generations. Apparently, it is the young people, less embedded in older networks of patronage and domination, who attempt to take advantage of new social and economic conditions (Cole 2004, 576).

The most common conceptualization of generation within the perspective of African anthropology is the one that relates to the genealogical relation of kinship. In classic studies of genealogical generations, the focus on succession and in political sphere meant that conflict was very much on the agenda – conflict between generations concerning allocation of resources and within a generation over rights to succeed to office and property. This rivalry between generations over access to resources amongst various generations is therefore critical in understanding social, political and economic development (Whyte, Alber, and Van der Geest 2008, 4). Similarly, Jeffrey (2008, 2) believes that age plays an inevitable role in modeling people's experiences of social and political reforms. He pays particular attention to the key significance of new generation of young people in determining how changes in cultural and political processes unfold. This contribution, he argues, has become relevant in understanding political, social and economic dynamics (Jeffrey 2008, 2).

Goertzel (1972) identifies two basic theories of generational conflict. The first is identified as the structural-functional model, attributed to Eisenstadt (1956). This theory is derived from a functionalist perspective which assumes that societies are relatively stable and integrated social systems. Thus, it lays emphasis on static differences that exists in various generational perspectives depending on the various cultures. The second model is known as the historical conscious theory and it is attributable to Karl Mannheim (1952). It is identified as rather fluid and focuses on historical change. Unlike the structural-functional model, this one does not assume that societies are stable and consequently focuses on the role of the youth in social change. Referring to Mannheim's argument, Goertzel (1972) argues that the problem of generational differences is linked to other social and political differentiation and change.

Pilcher (1994, 481) claims that the notion of generation has been widespread virtually in every language, society and culture as a way of understanding differences between age groups. For example, some speak of 'my generation' or of 'older generation'. Those who were born, for example, in the 1980s are regarded as belonging to the generation of the 1980s. Others speak of 'a few generations ago', 'a new generation' and 'the generation gap'. Pilcher (1994, 483) associates the term generation with kinship relationship that denotes a parent-child relationship; Mannheim (1923; cited in Pilcher 1994, 483) uses generation in the sense of cohort (defined as people within a delineated population who experience the same significant event within a given period of time).

Mannheim (1952, 278) argues that a new generation emerges every 30 years. In addition, he contends that the effect of any emergent generation is visible in the way it influences society, culture and politics. Thereby, he argues that phenomenon on generational identity is based on the biological rhythm of birth and death. However, this understanding of generation does not quite conform to the dominant understanding of

generations in the USA. Their common categorization manifests every 20 years. For example, the 'Baby Boomers' generation (the people who were born between 1947 and 1961) and Generation X (the people who were born between 1961 and 1981) have 14 and 20 generational years, respectively (Firestone 1970, 15). Apparently, 'Baby Boomers' and 'Generation X' are commonly perceived as sharing common past of historical, social and political heritage, and that affects how they interact and define their future interests (Henry 2004, 5). Inevitably, these generations are liable to possess different aspirations and interests, and consequently a trigger of conflict between them.

Generally speaking, generational conflicts are as old as human society and cannot be attributed to any particular society. This tension and change occurs everywhere in the world, and are always significant in the social, economic and political definitions of a given society. It is a universal popular theme reflected in the literally imagination from across the world: the Oedipus myth, Old Testament stories, tribal myths and great novels like Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* (1862), Stendhal's *Vie de Henri Brulard* (1835), Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) or Ellison's *The Invisible Man* (1952; Abbink 2005, 4). According to Abbink (2005, 3), the concept of 'generation' is arguably a difficult one, in that it goes beyond the recognition of the psycho-biological factor that defines generation, to include the constant attribution and phrasing of the challenges that confront the young and the rebellious groups (especially in Africa) to generational opposition. More than often, they claim that they receive little or no attention from those in power, both in rural society (chiefs and other traditional authorities) and in the cities (political leaders and their so-called political godfathers). Thus, in as much as 'generation' can be considered and defined in heuristic terms, the concept has a close connection with other inequalities like class, ethnicity or religious domination, especially in the context of political and resource control.

No single dimension of generational conflict can be defined exclusively to capture the complex nature of Kenya's social, political and economic development. Therefore, a mix of two or more of these perspectives may come into play at any given time, given a particular political climate. In most cases, those who occupy the public positions of leadership, mostly the older generations, have often appealed to the youth, promising them precedence in any new political structure. Once they are voted into power, they reshuffle significant public positions among themselves and the youthful generations are locked out of meaningful policy-making positions.

### **A review of youth and intergenerational conflict in Africa**

Abbink (2005, 11) argues that generational conflict in Africa, characterized as a sociocultural phenomenon, has existed for a long time. Prior to independence, young individuals did not shun from political activism. At the age of 36, for example, Kwame Nkrumah had already played a major role and influence toward founding the West African Secretariat to work toward the decolonization of Africa. In 1924, at the age of 30, Jomo Kenyatta was politically active as a member of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), of which he became the KCA's general secretary (Ntata 2013). However, the face of youth in modern Africa has significantly faded as more and older generations continue to maintain a firm grip on positions that influence policy and development in the continent.

Noticeably, soon after the independence of many countries, and in the latter years of democratic reform in Africa, many young people went abroad for somewhat different

reasons: one among which was to return and take up leadership positions in their respective countries and influence social, political and economic policy reforms. Mutula (2002, 112), citing Nyambala (2001), lays bare the fact that by 2001, there were more than 12,000 Kenyans studying abroad, many in Asia and Europe, particularly in India and the UK, respectively. Many others are enrolled in universities in America and other countries in Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Many young Africans have grown with the euphoria that with independence and democratic dispensation, they would be able to improve their own positions in important ways. In the new republic, they could represent their countries as ministers, ambassadors or other related positions in the state offices. While abroad, the youths are capacitated with skills of running a modern state. Unfortunately, the new political arena proves to have limited resources that would satisfy the dreams of these young hopefuls. They are subjected with the reality that there were already enough old national heroes to fill all these leading positions (Abbink 2005, 7).

The role played by the young people on the occasion of the Arab spring that spread across many North African countries cannot be understated. Particularly, they championed the use of social media to enforce the expansion of political space. This became a clear sign of the frustrations of the young against a protracted dictatorship of the older generation who were adamant to leave power. In Egypt, for example, the population rise of the young population is critical in explaining the unrest. In the last three decades, Egypt's population doubled, reaching more than 80 million. The glaring fact is that half of this population is below the age of 35. Majority of these young people remain economically underprivileged and vulnerable to social-political circumstances. It is these pressing demands that caused an impetus among young people to rebel against Mubarak's regime (Osman 2011, 5).

In Kenya, for example, due to these apparent frustrations, this hard reality has continued to see more and more youths and young professionals leave the country. By 2005, affirm Siringi and Kimani (2005), the government unveiled damning statistics which indicated that between 500,000 and 1.8 million Kenyans work overseas. This is despite their professions and competencies highly needed for the development of the country. In addition, despite the fact that there are more than 300,000 Kenyans who leave the country for further studies, only a bare less than 9000 return back to the country after completing their studies yonder. Mazrui (2005), cited in Siringi and Kimani (2005), alludes to the fact that most of these professionals leave the country due to some 'push factors' that include poor remuneration and lack of academic and career freedom.

Bratton and Van de Walle (1994, 453–489) argues that veteran politicians at the helm of political power in Africa have continuously avoided real commitments in driving meaningful reforms, advertently avoiding to recruit younger generations by revolving the ranks of power among the political elite. They do this by reshuffling cabinet and other government positions. He cites an example of Togo where President Eyadema announced an invigoration of the ruling party, The Rally of the Togolese People [in French *Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais* (RPT)] in preparation for national elections. While in Zambia, President Kaunda dismissed cabinet ministers and transferred provincial governors in an attempt to isolate dissidents and solidify political loyalty.

In both cases, such measures did not amount to genuine reforms because they simply rotated the members of the Old Guards among existing political offices, limited structural change in political institutions and curtailed political competition. As a consequence, many youths in Africa feel flouted by the older generation. Virtually everywhere in the African continent, and particularly in Kenya, youths form the largest numerical majority.

According to Jeffrey (2008, 5), approximately 85% of the world's youth, aged between 16 and 30, are distributed in Africa, Latin America and Asia. In fact, as recorded by the international database compiled by the US Census Bureau for the year 2013, the number of individuals aged 20–49 comprises of 38% in Africa and 39% in Kenya; while those aged between the ages of 50 and 79 comprises of 10.3% of the entire population in Africa and 8.8% in Kenya.

Yet, despite these glaring facts, the younger constituency remains in a situation of dependency, economic marginalization and exclusion from formal power and prestige. They are confronted with dominant power structures characterized by a rigid patronage network, and often a top-down organized structure favoring the veteran political elite. Raphael Obonyo, advisor to the United Nations on Youth affairs believes that successive Kenyan Governments have failed the Kenyan youth. He was quoted by Aljazeera saying:

I don't think the youth have been supported by successive governments in Kenya. Youth have actually been marginalized, neglected; they have been put on the periphery. During campaigns, you see a lot of politicians coming out to say 'we want votes from young people, we value young people, we are going to take into consideration their concerns, and we are going to deal with youth unemployment,' but once they get into power nothing happens. In fact I actually think that the government and politicians are actually antagonizing young people more, they are pushing them into positions of desperation. (Aljazeera 2013)

Abbink (2005, 7) argues that to be young in Africa has come to be equated with being disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginal in the political and economic sense. Unfortunately, however, these youthful individuals and groups have been subjected to a protracted history of authoritarian rule and have had to pay the consequences of failed states. Donal and O'Brien (1996, 55) rightly argue that Africa's young people are characterized with poverty and are very poorly equipped to make their opposition effective. This is due to the fact that they have been historically excluded from sharing economic benefits. Thus, with their limited resources, they are easily manipulated by their elders. The young are trapped in immobility and the monopolizing behavior of the elites in power, sustained through intimidation, which is blended with surrealistic and ruthless methods of power control. And in most African countries, the older generation that secured independence blocked the path for the youthful generation to enter political life and the state bureaucracy (Abbink 2005, 13).

In the early years of independence in Kenya, for example, Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, consolidated his grip on political power, and heightened threats against any form of criticism. Many young politicians, like Tom Mboya, had to be contained by the elders and were manoeuvred out, or eliminated (Abbink 2005, 5–11). Moreover, during Kenyatta's presidency, Kenyan public space was dominated so much on maintaining the status quo, where older generations remained reluctant to hand over power to their succeeding generations. This created a tendency of managing public spaces without significant emphasis on efficiency, and there was little attention in the way of rewarding middle and senior public positions to those endowed with more technical skill. This is evidenced by the fact that older Kenyans in the public service, even though with relatively lesser educational qualification and technical expertise, continued to hold on to lucrative senior positions left to them by colonial administrators (Blunt 1978, 438).

President Mugabe has continued to manipulate the constitution in order to maintain his hold on the political power in Zimbabwe. His old cronies have provided him with a safety net through massive rigging of elections as evidenced by concerns raised by many

international observers in both 2008 and 2013. In Eritrea, President Isaias Afewerki, who led the Eritrean People's Liberation Front from 1991 to victory in 1993 – ending a 30-year-old armed liberation has since eliminated any opposition, delayed party formation and elections indefinitely, and imprisoned youths who contested against certain national policies. Owing to these phenomena, power in many African states is seen as indivisible and thus the old idea of the prerogative of the senior generation (having led 'the struggle' for independence or freedom) has come full circle (Abbink 2005, 14).

A recent example of power capture by the old generation is evident in South Sudan, a newly declared republic that was inaugurated on the 9 of July 2011. As noted by Zambakari (2013), the majority of its population – the youths – have noticeably been isolated from positions of leadership. The positions of power, like in other African counterparts, have been divided among old nationalists, who are believed to have led the struggle for independence. In addition:

instead of making room for and tapping the potential of the youth, investing in human capacities and infrastructure for the future, leaders have instead adopted an adversarial stance toward them, viewing them either as incompetent or as competitors for coveted government positions. (Zambakari 2013)

The religious notions to which African leaders appeal reinforce this dominance, a factor that escalates the conflict between the older and the younger generations. Mazrui (cited in Van Wyk 2007, 10) defines the African political system as patriarchal, that is, of a political father figure symbolized by a venerated elder and patriarch. This phenomenon, or belief, has resulted in crafted personal rule and personality cults (such as Touré, Banda and Mobuto), and the phenomenon of 'long distance men'. Van Wyk (2007, 10–11) maintains that African political leaders are on average older than leaders elsewhere in the world. For example, Namibia's president, Hifikepunye Pohamba, is 78 years old, while his predecessor, Sam Nujoma was 75 years old when he left office; the Cameroonian president, Paul Biya, is an octogenarian; Hosni Mubarak, the former president of Egypt ruled for three decades before being ousted from power after 18 days of public demonstrations championed by the youth during the 2011 revolution in Egypt; while Mwai Kibaki of Kenya assumed the presidency at the age of 71, and retired at the age of 81. Some of Africa's long-serving presidents declared themselves as life presidents (like the DRC's Mobutu Sese Seko), Emperors (like Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic) and others God (like Ali Solihi of the Comoros), while in Ethiopia, the emperor was called *Seyum Egziabher* (Elect of God), or amended the constitutions not to leave power (like President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Namibia's former President Sam Nujoma, Paul Biya of Cameroon and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe). Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya was almost 70 years old when he assumed power in 1978 and died in power at the age of 84. It is therefore important to note that the main reason for many of these presidents to continue holding power and resisting change is due to the perception that these prestigious positions provide enormous benefits of impunity.

Another strong indicator of how African leaders continue to impose themselves in leadership is the number of presidents and prime ministers who have died in office, majority due to natural causes associated with old age. Since the death of the first African leader to die in office, Gabriel Léon M'ba of Gabon in 1967, about 23 African leaders have died in power. Among those, Table 1 illustrates this phenomenon of African leaders who have died in office having spent more than 10 years in leadership.



Table 1. African leaders who died in office.

Country	Leader's name	Age	Years in office
Egypt	Gamar Abdel Nasser	53	1956–1970 (15)
Liberia	William Tubman	77	1944–1971 (27)
Algeria	Houari Boumediene	47	1965–1978 (14)
Kenya	Jomo Kenyatta	90	1963–1978 (16)
Angola	Agostinho	58	1975–2002 (28)
Botswana	Sereste Khama	60	1966–1980 (15)
Guinea	Ahmed Sékou Touré	63	1958–1984 (26)
Niger	Seyni Kountché	57	1974–1987 (14)
Togo	Gnassingbé Eyadema	71	1967–2005 (38)
Gabon	Omar Bongo	75	1967–2009 (41)
Ethiopia	Meles Zenawi	58	1991–2012 (21)

The dominant tendency of the African political arena being dominated by old leaders has somehow been broken by some countries, such as Tanzania. It was the generational factor that saw Kikwete win the polls with a landslide victory in Tanzania. As argued by Peter and Kopsieker (2006, 77–78), the Tanzanian electorate had remained resolute in balancing the growing power disparities between younger and older generations. The young generation of voters believed that their disenchantment was caused by the protracted grip on power by the Old Guard. Kikwete seized the opportunity and skillfully capitalized on this youth enthusiasm and aspirations without upsetting himself blatantly with the Old Guards. Even though he drew momentous support from the youth, he was also able to lobby support from the Old Guards.

Over the years, there have been efforts by African governments to engage youths in policy development. According to the United Nations Program on Youth (UNPY), various youth fora have been created such as African Youth Parliament, as well as those that are involved in regional youth-based advocacy groups. Nevertheless, these are mere caricatures as they are poorly resourced and often limited to once-off events. Apparently, there is no tangible evidence of current ongoing activities (UNPY 2011). However, even after 50 years of post-colonial African history, there are not yet significant indicators of a takeover of power and leadership by the young, or any substantial improvement in the life of the youths in Africa in general (Abbink 2005, 7). This can be attributed to the few opportunities, skills, tools and resources that exist to enable youths to actively participate in decision-making processes. Often, there is a clear lack of understanding among governments of the benefits youths' involvement could impact on social and political development (UNPY 2011).

### **Intergenerational conflict in Kenya**

#### *A brief review of leadership fabric in Kenya*

It is important to note that apart from Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, who became president at the age of 70, and third president, Mwai Kibaki, elected president at the age of 71, the other two Kenyan presidents, Daniel arap Moi, Kenya's second president and Uhuru Kenyatta, the fourth president of the Republic of Kenya, ascended to power at a younger age, 54 and 51 years, respectively. Since independence in 1963, the

'young and the old' discourse has been used as the buzzword in an attempt to shape Kenya's political future. In the 1980s, a troupe of politicians, labeled as 'Young Turks',<sup>1</sup> spearheaded reforms against the Moi-led government, calling for multiparty democracy.

In addition, it is important to note that in recent years, there are increasingly younger leaders being elected and nominated in positions of political leadership in Kenya. According to the information published by the Government of Kenya (GoK 2013) on the National Assembly, out of first listed 100 members of the National Assembly (80 of them males and 20 females), 56 biographies available indicates that only three of them are at least 35 years and younger, and a whopping 94.6% of them above this age. The average age of these sampled parliamentarians is 65.6% for males and 64.2% for females. Yet the constitutional age for being elected into the National Assembly is 18 years. These damning indicators only present glaring existing reality that the desire for youthful leadership is still elusive in Kenya.

Seemingly, Kenya's social and economic disputes are not only shaped around ethnic rivalries as many would commonly think, but antagonisms also stem from intergenerational tensions between youths and elders. Among ethnic communities in Kenya, and indeed in most of the African continent, there is a great deal of respect accorded to elders. They are treated with reverence as traditional authority continues to be largely associated with advancement in age. Although this emerges as less recognized, it is an equally important factor while attempting to understand the existing power generational conflict between Africans of different ages (Blunt 1978, 438).

### *Young Turks and the second liberation in Kenya*

Rasmussen (2010, 304–305) opines that the 'Young Turks' must be understood in relation to post-independence politics in Kenya, where the same generation of politicians have been leading the country since 1963. This set of politicians has been defined by their role in the struggle for independence, and are associated with the struggle and campaign against Moi's protracted and oppressive regime. According to Ochieng (2008), the anti-Moi soldiers of the early 1990s were commonly known as 'Young Turks'. The key defining element was not due to the fact that they were young, it was mainly because they behaved like young juvenile delinquents, powered by their rampagous impatience with the Moi Government to initiate reform. Some of these renowned politicians included Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Masinde Muliro and Charles Rubia, Raila Odinga, Anyang Nyongo, James Orengo, Kiraitu Murungi, Martha Karua, Gitobu Imanyara, Paul Muite, Willy Mutunga, among others.

Throup and Hornsby (1998, 107) observed that Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, chairman of Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD), was determined to win political power by strategically recruiting Young Turks in his trail of campaigns. His strategy was therefore to win existing power structures from various parts of the country. As such, he recruited Young Turks and ex- Kenya African National Union (KANU) recruits into key positions within the party despite the opposition from party incumbents like Martin Shikuku, who was for the idea that the party constitution should be used as a tool to invite new recruits other than Oginga Odinga's political scheme. Nevertheless, Odinga succeeded to assemble a well-balanced team in FORD leadership. The team included both experienced politicians (Old Guards) and younger professionals (Young Turks) who were instrumental in the campaign against KANU since 1986. Two of Kenneth Matiba's<sup>2</sup> close allies – Rubia and Gachoka – headed the finance committee and organization and recruitment, while

Shikuku was charged with the responsibility of devising party's policy as head of the public policy committee. Young Turk Imanyara was put in charge of publicity and information, while Anyang Nyong'o who was working for the UN Economic Commission for Africa was given the post of executive officer. Due to his reputation as a resolute leader and reformist as an old man of 80 years, he was able to assemble an impressive team of younger men. 'Several of the Young Turks, of course, were friends of Odinga's son, but others like Muita, were supporters of Matiba' (Throup and Hornsby 1998, 107). Odinga was seen as old and in frail health, and arguably had played little part in mainstream politics for more than two decades. His record as an advocate of socialism, however, made him unattractive to the business community. Neither of the leaders, Odinga and Matiba, wished to surrender to the other, and the Young Turks lacked the authority and popular prestige to repudiate their patrons (Throup and Hornsby 1998, 107–108).

Throughout the second liberation, the 'Young Turks' decreed that they would end corruption and streamline governance if Kenyans would vote them into power. They went ahead to promise a new dawn with expanded spaces for democracy if President Moi allowed multiparty democracy. In efforts to silence these voices, the Moi-led KANU Government harassed, arrested and detained some of the activists while others fled the country (Onyango 2011).

On 2 July 2008, Kiraitu Murungi admitted in the *Standard Newspaper* that at a particular moment in time, they were at the center of the movement that called for the second liberation. He recalls the vituperations and political intimidation during the time of Moi. However, he took an argumentative turn against the generation that fought and sacrificed so much during the second liberation, and now as an *Old Turk* commits the same crimes as did the Moi regime (Ochieng 2008).

### ***Moi and the appeal to generational politics***

When Moi alluded that he would prefer a youthful leader as his preferred flag bearer for the presidency under the KANU ticket, several young hopefuls awaited approval of the kingpin. These included Uhuru Kenyatta, whose father was the first president of independent Kenya; Musalia Mudavadi, son of a former minister; Raila Odinga, also son of a veteran politician and former vice president Jaramogi Oginga Odinga; William Ruto, an influential assistant minister, and member of an ethnic group linked with Moi's own Kalenjin group; and Julius Sunkuli, a Maasai who was security chief. Apart from Odinga, all these men were either in their 30s or early 40s, fitting with remarks that Moi had made taunting gray-haired politicians. However, despite their dynamic nick name, the 'Young Turks' represented no new ideas, but only old expedience – a creation of Moi to advance his patronage, loyalty and corruption that benefited and protected a few political elites (*The Economist* 2001).

Since President Moi highlighted the need for the 'young blood' in steering the government, with the claim that it was time for the young people to govern. He demonstrated this when he hand-picked 40-year-old Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Kenya's first president, as his favorite presidential candidate. However, the formula did not work as Kenyans sought regime change from KANU protracted rule since independence, and went ahead to endorse Mwai Kibaki as president under the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC). Arguably, it has been interpreted by many Kenyans that Uhuru Kenyatta was young and inexperienced to take up the role of being president, and

preferred politically experienced Mwai Kibaki who was assumed to have been in the political arena long enough.

Even after Moi had ended his constitutional presidential mandate and succumbed to national and international pressure to step down, he still remained rooted at the political center stage, defining the unfolding of politics in Kenya. Rather than using the ethnic card to woo KANU voters, he was fast to reinstate generational politics as a significant winning strategy to maintain the ruling party in power. He unilaterally endorsed Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of his predecessor, to be his *de facto* successor, with an attempt to perpetuate his patrimonial rule by proxy.

Nevertheless, the reintroduction of generational discourse as a blueprint for political reform in Kenya won the support of some of the youth movements like the Mungiki (Kagwanja 2005, 52). Forti and Maina (2012, 69–70) construe that the rationale behind the Mungiki movement's endorsement for Uhuru Kenyatta as Moi's choice for the 2002 presidential candidate was not necessarily because he is from the Kikuyu community (the community where the majority of Mungiki members are drawn), but that he saw it as a support strategy for a generational transfer of power. Others saw Uhuru Kenyatta's candidacy in 2002 as the emergence of a new era – the *uhuru*<sup>3</sup> generation. Similarly, as Kagwanja (2005, 52) argues, the presidential candidacy of Uhuru Kenyatta signified, to many young people, the quest for a transfer of power to the younger (*Uhuru*) generation. Thus, Moi's project, Uhuru, was an indicator that he was interested in whipping up generational sentiments by giving a new youthful outlook to the Kenyan body of politics, elevating the *Uhuru* generation to higher echelons of power to offset old guards both within the ruling party, KANU, as well as those among the opposition.

Consequently, Uhuru Kenyatta's defeat by the NARC under the leadership of Mwai Kibaki – a veteran politician – was perceived by the movement and their sympathizers as betrayal of the youth constituency. For Frederickson (2010; cited in Forti and Maina 2012, 70), generational transfer of power is central to the Mungiki's understanding of an ideal political culture.

### ***The 'Youth' dispute in Kenya***

'Youth' is not just an age factor in political development in Kenya. It is a politically charged ideology claimed by almost every generation. Kelly (2000, 302) argues that the concept of youth should be best understood as an outcome of a governmentality process of state's action that are geared toward regulating the functions and behavior of young people.

Notwithstanding that the constitution of Kenya defines 'youth' as the collectivity of all persons in the Republic who have attained the age of 18 years but have not attained the age of 35 years (CoK 2010, Section 260), the debate of who constitute the 'young generation' has remained a disputed phenomenon in the political playing field. This fluid understanding of youth as noted by Burgess (2005; cited in Rasmussen 2010, 305) does not only refer to the political leadership based on age, but rather on generation. For example, while addressing the National Youth Conference Odinga, then at age 57, referred to himself as part of the so-called 'Young Turks' in the 2002 elections (Odinga speech at NYC IV, 18 September 2008; cited in Rasmussen 2010, 304).

According to statistics by Mars Group Kenya (cited in Niyiragara 2008), persons under the age of 35 constitute 79.1% of the entire Kenyan population, of which 25.9% are between the ages of 20 and 35. He adds that people above the age of 55 make up only 6%

of the entire population, but ironically they are the ones controlling the country's economy and politics.

The younger generation in Kenya has played a key role in the nationalist movement and in the struggle for social and political transformation under Kenya's post-colonial state. This notwithstanding, they have continued to occupy only a liminal position, without actually having any significant influence on issues regarding public policy. This liminal position is evidently reflected by the nature and trends in Kenya's political processes and developments. Kagwanja (2005; cited in Muthee 2010, 19) notes that the generational conflict between elders and the youth in Kenyan politics has a long historical pedigree in the gerontocracy politics of the national struggle that was overlaid with the generational conflict of post-colonial era.

Muthee (2010, 19) hints that while political pluralism in the 1990s widened the space for political participation, youth remained at the periphery, as the dominant elders in both the ruling and the opposition parties entrenched themselves. Old Guards and political elites, like Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Arap Moi and Mwai Kibaki, who had dominated Kenya's political arena from the 1950s onwards, assumed political leadership of their respective parties within the new multiparty dispensation. Politically eligible youth – the 'Young Turks' – were rendered powerless and kept in the service of their respective elders. Arguably, the youth constitute a powerless 'counter-public' to the hegemony of the elders who dominate the state, political parties and other instruments of power (Kagwanja 2005).

Similarly, and as argued by Muthee (2010, 19), youth violence and its consequent socio-economic and political instability often hinders the establishment and progression of a youth-based social movement. This development has led to the lack of a credible alternative to the seeming hegemony maintained by the older generation. It has also blocked attempts at mobilizing, consolidating and constructing a consistent youth identity capable of pushing forward their participation and public policy and governance. In addition, Muthee argues that devoid of an organized, unified and strong youth movement, public policies have either bypassed or impacted inadequately on the youth. In recent years, Rasmussen (2010, 305) notes that there has been an intensified call for generational change of power by the association of youth movements in Kenya, while denouncing detriments of generational exclusion from political participation and employment.

### *The new 'Young Turks'*

Apart from the traditional faces that have dominated Kenya's political landscape for decades claiming to be Young Turks, Barkan (2003) believes that there is a new emerging force that has begun to shape Kenyan politics, resulting to a new demographic shift that is producing a generational change within Kenya's political elite. Barkan (2004) refers to this new generation as the New Young Turks, thus distinguishing them from the original Young Turks, who in the Kenyan political context include many post-independence young politicians such as Paul Muite, Kenneth Matiba, Peter Anyang-Nyong'o, James Orengo, Raila Odinga, Gibson Kamau Kuria, Kibutha Kibwana and Willy Mutunga – all of whom led the revolution by pushing for an open governance through a heightened call for multiparty politics. The New Young Turks (Kiraitu Murungi and John Githongo) have been instrumental since the beginning of the new millennium. They can be regarded as highly educated and precocious, and yet they are not popularly known whether in Kenya or outside.

In essence, Barkan (2004) categorizes the civil society as the New Young Turks, given the role they played in setting a framework that eventually saw Moi leave power and unseated KANU's protracted administration. Civil society is associated with political demographic shift that is producing a generational change within the political elite. However, despite their remarkable combined effort against Moi and his government, this group has remained rather fragmented and lack a common vision that can shape Kenyan politics for the better (Murunga and Nasong'o 2006, 15).

Murunga and Nasong'o (2006, 15) criticize Barkan's criteria of putting a distinction between Young Turks and the New Young Turks, and refer to it as imprecise and unrealistic. They argue that Murungi cannot be conceivably in the same group as Githongo, since their convictions on corruption are completely opposite. They insist that the attempt to define New Young Turks on the basis of their age is a flawed premise:

In terms of consistent support for a new, just, fair and democratic dispensation in Kenya, age is not necessarily a defining factor ... [and thus], it is not enough to identify new forces facing Kenyan politics simply on the basis of age. (Murunga and Nasong'o 2006, 15)

### ***Kibaki's government and the age factor***

Following the campaigns leading to the general elections in 2002, the NARC mobilized the support of the youth with the promise of a considerable share in the forthcoming government. As argued by Oluoch (2004), the youth contributed immensely to the defeat of KANU, the incumbent ruling party of the time, through street protests and other forms of mass action. When Kibaki assumed power as president, he brought with him a group of close associates as a safety net to protect him from any political adversity. He cobbled together his first cabinet from his senior officials in his bureaucracy and parastatal heads, and reconstituted many to become his advisors. Some included people such as Njenga Karume, George Muhoho, Charles Njonjo, Matere Keriri, Joe Wanjui, Peter Kanyago, S. K. Macharia and Nat Kang'ethe (Murunga and Nasong'o 2006, 7). Similarly, Oucho (2008, 19) claims the new government that took over in 2002, those within the age limit of 60 years and above in the NARC regime dominated top-level appointments, while younger, better qualified and more energetic Kenyans were kept at bay, never to be seen closer to the corridors of power. Only youthful cabinet ministers remained, Najib Balala and Ochilo Ayako, including the most phenomenon Kibaki's appointment of the government spokesman, Alfred Mutua, at the age of 34 (Oluoch 2004).

In addition, even after the grand coalition was formed after the 2008 power sharing agreement, the older generation was fast to seize power behind closed doors and got away with the significant positions. Very few youthful politicians found a place in Kibaki's government (Oluoch 2004).

With the foregoing manifestations of power play in the history of Kenyan politics, the far-fetched dream that Kenyan politics could at one time be driven by young and educated personalities aged 40 and below, remains a mirage, even as there is a growing consensus that the older generation is starving Kenyan politics from new and innovative ideas to propel the country into the global realm.

### ***The 2013 general election and the generational politics in Kenya***

The 2013 general elections were a contest of Kenyan veterans vis-à-vis younger and more popular politicians. The electoral competition was perceived as a battle between younger

'digital' (a new way of referring to Young Turks in Kenya, characterized with the ability to operate technology with contemporary electronic innovations) and more vibrant politicians, versus older generations, who claimed to have experience blended with modernity. Thus, the height of generational debate in the run up to the 2013 general elections where the two prominent coalitions (Jubilee coalition, led by Uhuru Kenyatta, aged 51, and William Ruto, aged 46; and Coalition for Reform and Democracy (CORD) coalition led by Raila Odinga, aged 68, and Kalonzo Musyoka, aged 59) were perceived by many as a battle between the Young Turks and the Old Guards. In fact, on the one hand, Uhuru Kenyatta, Jubilee's presidential candidate, and his running mate, William Ruto, expressly used this narrative to garner votes to seize the highest political office in Kenya. On the other hand, those rallying Raila Odinga believed that age should not be an issue in gaging the capability of leadership because issues such as integrity and the policies that a particular party stands for should be the focus (Mosota 2012).

For post-Uhuru children, especially those around the age range of 50, the 2013 general elections were a moment of reckoning, an opportunity for them to prove that it is their time to steer the future of political development in Kenya, and an opportunity to push the older generation to political retirement. Several politicians and policy-makers have stirred a generational narrative in post-mortem analysis linked with CORD's defeat in the 2013 general elections. The youth wing in the CORD coalition attribute the party's defeat to the fact that they were left out in decision-making regarding national campaigns. They blame Old Guards within the coalition for hijacking the electoral campaign and sidelining young members. The 'Young Turks', therefore, believe that in order to strengthen the party's alliance, there is a need for a total structural overhaul.

## **Conclusion**

Intergenerational conflicts, characterized by age disputes, rites of passage and binding historical experiences among individuals and groups have dramatically occupied Kenya's political history. As this analysis uncovers, there has not been a level playing ground between these generations regarding the sharing of political space and that has made a significant impact on development policy. Despite enormous resources in disposal to prepare youths for leadership through various education systems, the Old Guards have successfully stifled the Young Turks ascension to power.

Thus, political life in Kenya needs to transcend ruling elites and include new and youthful leadership. It is noteworthy that there is a gradual call to include the youth in decision-making arena. Contrary to former President Moi's sentiments that the youths are the leaders of tomorrow, time has passed, and the youths need to be involved to administering and providing direction to the social, political and economic development of their countries. The argument for the generational transfer of power in Kenya calls for a regeneration within the new power redefinition established by the New Constitution of Kenya 2010. Therefore, the space for the involvement of youth constituency in Kenya's political development must be prioritized. In addition, secure means and ways need to be put in place in order to absorb and engage youth populations meaningfully in order to curtail their marginalization (Abbink 2005).

The outcome of this study has revealed that there is a looming generational gap that exists between older and younger generations in Kenya. As this gap continues to widen, the older generation continues to entrench and consolidate their power, and consequently locking out younger generation from the core of leadership positions that have the potential

of influencing policy. As it has been established that majority of Kenyan population are youth, Kenya is likely not to achieve its full potential if majority of its members remains excluded from the realms of governance. Significant development in Africa can only be realized only if the youth generation, largest population in Kenya, is mobilized and capacitated to drive development agenda. Rather than the younger generation whine and wait to be handed power on a silver platter, they are to engage the status quo more constructively by actively lobbying for more spaces in political leadership.

Due to their numerical advantage, they have the strength and capacity within the existing legal and constitutional framework to fight for their rights and eventual significant inclusion in policy formulation and development. The transfer and share of power from the older generation must be conducted with diligence. Otherwise, if the young ignore the wisdom and experience of the old, they are likely to repeat past mistakes. Therefore, to achieve a meaningful social, political and economic development in Kenya, both the young and old must collaborate and work within the legal framework where all have the chance to contribute to the leadership and social economic progress of the country.

This collaboration calls for an intergenerational dialog where both young and old share ideas and contribute to building sustainable livelihoods for all. The inevitable emergent conflict among generations must therefore be mitigated through openly discussed solutions. This will avoid instances of various age groups using the 'generational concept' to manipulate the system for their own social and political interests. This will also limit the instances of segregation and isolation of one group by another. In addition, stereotypes that are perceived by various generations against other generational groups, particularly those that are coined with an aim of gaining certain selfish social, political or economic ends, should be continuously challenged. Thus, governments should create more policy interventions that enhance equity among all generations in accessing opportunities to participate in national building.

## Notes

1. The term 'Young Turks' originated in Turkey. It describes a political standpoint and a movement. It was first used to describe a movement of young Turkish people – who after they had spent time studying in Western Europe, returned home with innovative ideas and determination to reform their country from feudal despotism to 'liberal democracy'. This clique is known to mobilize against the incumbent regime and changing the status quo. Arguably, it is believed that this movement produced the Kingpin celebrated nationalist Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the military leader who founded the Turkey Republic in 1923, and ruled until 1938 (Ochieng 2008).
2. Kenneth Matiba is recorded to have led defiance against President Moi's government and the call for a multiparty system.
3. Uhuru is a Kiswahili word for freedom or independence.

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