

**GENERATIONAL TENSION AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION
IN MEJA MWANGI'S *THE BIG CHIEFS***

By:

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DECLARATION

This project paper is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in another university.



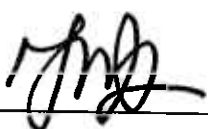
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This project paper has been submitted for examination with our approval as University Supervisors.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my father;

Mathayo Odeny Onduru who made me what I am today.

He sacrificed all to see that I had education up to the level he could afford. He started with me
and finished with me.

Also dedicated to my loving wife, Loice Atieno Onduru,

who bore with me, and supported me throughout my postgraduate studies.

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ABSTRACT

We recognize the fact that due to globalization and technological advancement new sources of knowledge have come to the fore. It should be remembered that the young are relatively advantaged in accessing this new knowledge than the old. Therefore, the traditional belief that the old are the main source of truth and wisdom as reflected in many of our traditional and current myths may no longer be the only truth. In Africa, democratic transformation and politics of transition are characterized by reluctance of the old to relinquish power peacefully something that has stirred the young into violence. Meja Mwangi in *The Big Chiefs* handles this important concept and roots that age remains a potent variable in democratic processes in Africa. This study analyzes generational tension between the young and the old and how it relates to democratic transformation and politics of transition. It also examines the artistic strategies employed by the writer to bring out his vision on democratic transformation in post colonial Africa.

The hypothesis guiding this study is that an analysis of generational tension and how it affects democratic transformation is critical to our understanding of Meja Mwangi's vision in *The Big Chiefs*. Meja Mwangi uses unique stylistic devices to bring out his vision on the role of inter-generational dialogue in political reforms.

The research utilizes formalism and postcolonial approaches in investigating the problem. Formalist textual strategies - choice of characters, old age motif, the journey motif, dialogue, reminiscences, symbolism, flashback, juxtaposition, the unique structure of the text, the use of songs - ably communicate the author's perspective on the importance of the views of the young and the old in democratic processes. Through post colonial criticism the study has focused on the conditions and environments that inform the views and experiences of the young and the old.

The study benefits from close textual analysis to bring out the fact that due to divergent experiences of the old and the young, their relationship is characterized by tension. In addition, it has shown that blending the perspectives of the vibrant youth with the experiences of the old would enrich political processes and democratization in Africa. The Old Man for instance, stands for tolerance, dialogue and mutual understanding; the Boy yearns for an immediate political change; and the Girl calls for calm reflection while handling political change. Besides, the study has shown that Meja Mwangi envisions a society where different generations engage in dialogue, appreciate each other and exercise tolerance. In other words, intergenerational integration is key to the search for democratic processes.

The research has revealed Meja Mwangi's vision on how intergenerational dialogue is critical to democratic transformation in post colonial Africa. It is instructive that, Meja Mwangi deploys the stylistic strategy of dialogue between characters at the textual level to amplify his vision of dialogue between the young and the old in society. It is my recommendation that further studies may enrich our understanding of this phenomenon - the reluctance of the old to relinquish power peacefully in Africa. Such additional research may involve the utilization of other theoretical perspectives. Moreover, to have a broader understanding of Meja Mwangi's vision of generational tension and political reforms in post colonial Africa, further research may consider studying *Going Down River Road* and *Kill Me Quick* which also deal with the same theme but from different perspectives. In aggregate my study has demonstrated that literature can be used as a site on which ideological differences are deconstructed. It attempts to separately look at the various opposing categories and views in order to understand the whole and achieve a hybrid perspective. By this submission, I hope to arouse more interest in the studies of gender, age, class and ethnicity among other constitutive categories.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Background

The elders stressed their customary, prescriptive rights which gave them patronage. The managerial monopoly is largely a function of the elders' control of traditional "knowledge," on which claims to land and resources are based (Terrance, Ranger *The Invention of Tradition*, 255).

This quote from a renowned sociologist implies that generational tension is a multidimensional (social, economic and psychological) phenomenon. Implicit in this is the fact that traditionally the elders, courtesy of their age, enjoyed patronage virtually on everything. This gave them unquestionable powers and privileges. These powers and privileges became the impetus for binary opposition between the old and the young because the youth felt excluded. From time immemorial, the question of who has the moral authority to hold, control and dispense state power between generations has been and still is the genesis of tension. Jon Abbink in "Being young in Africa: The politics of despair and renewal" confirms this by positing that, "tension analysis of youth and the old has existed for along time" (*Vanguard or Vandals: Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa*, 11). It is a fact that even today, generational tension still exists except that it has undergone a process of change due to modernism, population growth, globalization and imperialism. In most postcolonial African nation states that emerged in the early 1960s, generational tension has become a recurrent feature of politics (Abbink, 6). This is partly catalyzed by the young generation that has grown since independence.

In addition, he has argued that many promising politicians like Tom Mboya were undemocratically contained by the “elders” and “maneuvered out or eliminated” (7). He further adds “To be young in Africa came to mean being disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalized in the political and economic sense” (7). By way of illustration, Abbink refers to “Youth and Violent Conflict” a report by United Nations Development Programme (1999) which revealed that the youth are in a situation of “dependency, are economically marginalized and feel excluded from formal power and prestige, even when the time has come for them to be part of established society” (7). It is this exclusion and “othering” of the youth by the elderly that have consistently provided a fertile ground for the sustenance of generational tension or what Tom Odhiambo in an article “Gerontocracy and Generational Competition in Kenya Today” calls “generational competition” (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 96).

Phillip De Boeck and Alcinda Honwana in the introduction to *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, observe that although the majority of the population in Africa are children, youth and women, they are often placed on the margins of the public sphere and major political, socio-economic and cultural processes (3). In addition, they point out that youth and children are often perceived through opposition to adulthood and as “people in the process of becoming rather than being” (5). Furthermore, recent researches conducted by Peter Kagwanja (2005), Abbink (2005), Bayart Jean (1999) show that the youth have been “instrumentalized” by the elderly for selfish political gains. Bayart in *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* argues that the youth are socialized into violence that has so far replaced the process of political negotiation and nation building (5). It should be remembered that even regimes that are democratically elected, still devise other forms of political mobilization for the sake of power retention.

Kagwanja in an article “Clash of generations? Youth, Identity, Violence and the Politics of transition in Kenya, 1997—2002” explains how the “Mungikis” in Kenya, a creation of the generational conflict, have been used by the political class to terrorize others in order for the leaders to marshal and retain political power. Because of this “instrumentalization”, the youth invent violence and “re-traditionalize religion” in order to make plain their grievances. They begin to fight for what they believe is “theirs” but is monopolized by the old generation (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 93-98). A Similar study by Jok Madut Jok in “War Changing Ethics and the Position of Youth in South Sudan” has discussed how the youth are used in South Sudan by the political class to struggle for power (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 143-160).

However, Angela McIntyre in an article “Children as Conflict Stakeholders: Towards a new discourse on young Combatants” demonstrates that children have been used as conflict stakeholders. They are used as political and military agents where they influence the nature and trajectories of armed conflicts (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 228-242). Burgess Thomas similarly shows that the youth are also agents of change in an article entitled “Imagined Generation: Constructing Youth and Clients.” He argues that youth as an identity has bequeathed individuals a sense of dignity and recognized position in nationalist discourse and public life (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 55-80). From the foregoing arguments, it is apparent that on one hand, the African youth are viewed as people who should occupy peripheral space when it comes to state power and on the other hand, as a group that can influence change in political processes. These views are apt in understanding tensions arising from age differences.

Nevertheless, when James Manor wrote *Rethinking Third World Politics*, he was already implying the macabre nature of politics in the developing world.

Furthermore, his title presupposes the existence of the first and second worlds` politics. Implicit in Manor`s title is the fact that third world [sic] politics needs a second thought and perhaps a revolutionary approach. Oyugi Walter in *Democratic Theory and Practice in Africa* echoes Manor`s argument but gives another twist to it by arguing that third world [sic] politics is profoundly affected by the intervention of colonialism. He says that, “The colonial situation at once brought with it a new form of authority to which all had to relate” (44). The same argument is advanced by Ngugi in *Decolonising the Mind* where he observes that third world [sic] politics is immensely affected by the history of colonialism and slavery (5). In addition, Ngugi says that Britain and France created institutions that were first and foremost instruments of domination. These institutions further institutionalized suppression and mental colonization as integral parts of postcolonial systems which made Africans puppets of the colonizers (4).

To point to the nature of politics in Africa, Robert Pinkey in *Democracy in the Third World* says that, “To search for democracy in the third world [sic] is to pursue a moving target” (ix). In this, Pinkey implies that democracy in the third world [sic] is very elusive. It keeps shifting positions and goals depending on who is aiming at it. It is rightly observed that democracy in the third world is basically an item of the political class. Said Adejumobi in “Identity, Citizenship and Conflict: The African Experience” reinforces Pinkey`s argument and says that, “In most African states in the postcolonial era, there was little real democratization of decentralized institutions” (*The Crisis of the State and Regionalism in West Africa*, 29). Similarly, Alade Fawole in “Colonial History and the Search for Democratic Nationhood” adds that, “The politicians who were in charge of the new states were themselves ill-equipped and ill-prepared to operate the inherited democratic systems” (*The Crisis of the State and Regionalism in West Africa*, 64).

Alade squarely puts the blame on the political leaders. Bayart Jean sums the nature of African democracy in *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*:

Africa is resistant to every conditionality and its democratization remains a great leap into the unknown, considering the degree to which popular sovereignty is alienated and the systematic creation of shadow networks of power being precipitated by privatization of both the state and the economy (116).

Here, Bayart views shadow power networks as the cause of an elusive democracy in Africa.

However, Patrick Chabal in *A History of Post-Colonial Lusophone Africa* provides a way forward and argues that in order to democratize the politics of the postcolonial African states, it is necessary that we first and foremost understand the multiple and complex ways in which postcolonial African politics has been foreignized (38). Similarly, Peter Wanyande in “The Politics of Alliance Building in Kenya: The search for Opposition Unity” argues that democracy and smooth transition in politics can only be realized if the postcolonial African states Africanize their politics and political parties which should include political negotiation strategies (*Governance and transition Politics in Kenya*, 189-193).

In the recent past, a number of studies have been conducted by Patrick Chabal, Tom Odhiambo, and Mungai Mbugua on whether age is a significant construct of democracy and transitional politics in Africa. Chabal in the preface to *The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*, points out that the issue of age is intimately connected with that of authority and power (40). Odhiambo Tom in “Gerontocracy and Generational Competition in Kenya Today” argues that age remains such a potent construct in socio-cultural and political relations in Africa (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 97). In addition, he advises that intergenerational differences should be taken as a serious analytical and discursive category in contemporary African societies (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 97).

Mungai echoes these arguments in “Iconic Representations of Identities in Kenyan Cultures” and says that, “The Kenyan society makes deliberated efforts to delegitimize any ideas that may suggest that the youth can legitimately hold power and wield it responsibly” (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 73).

In all the above arguments, we are persuaded to argue that there is a sense in which tension, arising from age difference, exists between the old and the young. This is the premise on which this study is based. The above arguments give us the bench mark on which we can understand generational tension, the search for democratic transformation in transitional politics not only in Africa but also in Meja Mwangi’s *The Big Chiefs*. Our study, therefore, finds these arguments quite profitable as they give insights on generational tension, the participation of youth in constructing democracy and transition in politics and how democracy has been and is constructed with specific reference to Postcolonial Africa on which our text is based.

Our focus in this study is to filter the generational tension as a framework and horizon through which we can comprehend and explain issues related to democratic transformation and politics of transition in Meja Mwangi’s *The Big Chiefs*.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The importance of age in constructing democracy and transition in politics cannot be gainsaid. The studies available on Meja Mwangi have not addressed the question of generational tension and how it relates to democratic transformation.

This research, therefore, seeks to analyze generational tension and how it relates to democratic transformation in Meja Mwangi's *The Big Chiefs*.

1.4 Objectives

The principal objectives of this study are:

- i. To analyze generational tension between the young and the old and how this relates to democratic transformation in Meja Mwangi's *The Big Chiefs*.
- ii. To examine the artistic strategies employed by the writer to bring out his vision of generational tension and the search for democratic transformation in postcolonial Africa.

1.5 Hypotheses

The study is formulated on the following assumptions:

- i. That an analysis of the generational tension and how it affects democratic transformation contributes to our understanding of Meja Mwangi's vision in *The Big Chiefs*
- ii. That Meja Mwangi uses unique stylistic features to highlight the importance of inter-generational dialogue in democratic transformation in postcolonial Africa.

1.6 Justification

Though scholars have undertaken studies on Meja Mwangi's *The Big Chiefs*, few have conducted a comprehensive study on generational tension and how it affects democratic transformation in post-colonial Africa. This is why an analysis of the generational tensions in the novel and how they affect the search for democratic transformation is justified.

A close reading of Mwangi's *The Big Chiefs* persuades me to suggest that the interplay of tension between the old and the young is a lens through which we can perceive, understand and explain the problems afflicting postcolonial African states. It is therefore, intended to add knowledge on the existing research and debates on the role of both generations in democratic transformation and politics of transition. This study is also important as it adds relevance to the understanding of the youth's participation in African politics.

The Big Chiefs is selected by virtue of being one of the few texts in which the young and the old engage in purposeful dialogue on social, economic, historical and political issues throughout the novel. The dramatized tension between the Old Man and the Boy is consciously sustained, which makes this text unique and worth studying. Furthermore, because of the importance of theme that it handles, it cannot be ignored. The novel projects a concrete social reality that calls for critical attention. Although Meja Mwangi refers to generational tension in *Going Down River Road* and *Kill me Quick*, *The Big Chiefs* is the most comprehensive exposure of the same and that's why I have chosen it.

In addition, the study is important as it helps to provide an avenue through which we can identify the constructive role and participation of the youth in the process of political negotiation and

nation building. This study indicates that the youth should not be viewed and used just as instruments of violence or stakeholders of conflicts but as equal partners in political processes.

The study is also significant as it induces the interest of politicians, youth, theologians and human rights fraternity who might be in a position to positively influence the national politics in one way or the other.

1.7 Theoretical framework

The study exploits two theoretical approaches in analyzing the text these are: Formalism and postcolonial approaches.

The Formalist interpretation of a text does not separate its content from style. Robert Davis and Ronald Scheleifer in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* argue that Formalism attempts to analyze literature not as constituted by its intrinsic “natural” content, as an imitation of reality, but by relational patterns that are meaningful in a particular work and genre –how it is constructed and it functions- so as to have meaning in the first place (19). This postulation emphasizes on form in literary analysis so as to understand the interior workings of art as belonging to a particular genre. Meaning, therefore, comes from form. This formalistic paradigm helps me to explore and interpret unique patterns that constitute the form in *The Big Chiefs*.

Gikandi, in *Reading the African Novel* posits that, “I do not believe that we can read the African novel meaningfully and effectively without bringing content and form into play as elements of literature which are equally significant” (ix). In fact, Gikandi sees literary form not only as being a means of transmitting message, but also containing logic of its own that calls for critical attention.

He adds that, “the process of form recreating reality in the terms set by authorial consciousness, constitutes a world which might resemble external reality, but is also the novel’s own universe” (x). In deed, this argument is in line with that advanced by Fredric Jameson when he talks of “the working of content in the realm of the superstructure” (70).

In addition, our interpretation draws inspiration from an argument advanced by Henry Indagasi in *Stylistics* that, “The relationship of form and content is of prime importance in our understanding of works of art” (5). This study finds these postulations quite profitable because they give both form and content prominence which is the benchmark for our analysis.

If we adopt Warren and Wellek’s argument in *Theory of Literature* that, “Literary text is a linguistic object which consciously uses language for both aesthetic and thematic affects” (74), then we accept the fact that literary works use the resources of language in special ways to create aesthetic affects and convey messages. Ferdinand de Saussure in *The Theory of Criticism* views language as a system of signs that expresses ideas, attitudes, ideology, philosophy (114). This paradigm helps me to interrogate the author’s philosophy and vision through artistic commentary. It will also help me clarify the meaning in events and ideas.

Ronald Carter in *An Introductory Reader in Stylistics* asserts that, “as readers of literature, we are interested first and foremost in a response to language” (4). This is a formalistic argument which elevates our interpretation of a text above the common analysis of the text.

Similarly, Viktor Shklovsky, a Russian formalist, in *Contemporary Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies* succinctly puts it that, “Art is thinking in images” (55). This implies that art is a special way of thinking and is precisely a way of thinking in images.

He adds that, “the purpose of the image is to create a special perception of the object” (61). This will help me analyze the text as an imaginistic thought that carries the writer’s world view.

Meyer Michael in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing*, argues that Formalism explores characters and their predicament by paying close attention to the words and images used in building an agenda. This theory, “pays close attention to intrinsic matters in a literary work, diction, irony, paradox, metaphor and symbol as well as larger elements such as plot, characterization and narrative technique” (241). This formalist approach to literature will enable us to appreciate and interpret the unique artistic strategies used in the text.

The Big Chiefs invites the necessity of an exhaustive analysis of its material. It is only then that we can perceive the depth to which the writer explores issues of generational tension and democratic transformation. The writer’s use of language is quite conscious. He carefully chooses his words and style to achieve a specific effect.

My second approach, Postcolonial criticism, is used in the scrutiny of conditions that exist in the novel’s setting. It interrogates the role and impact of imperialism on the colonized people. One of the major works which is generally acknowledged to have discussed postcolonial literary criticism is Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. In this work, Said reveals the Eurocentric universalism which is equivalent to Europe’s (or western) superiority and that anything short of this is inferior. The East is regarded as “others” and “inferior” to the West or Europe. His argument is that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European people and cultures (134).

Besides, he discusses how imperialists' powers were used to create an "other," an "Orient" in order to define themselves as the "Center." My study examines the colonial question as evident in the text. In addition, Said argues that the "Other" in the colonial construct is seen as homogenous, anonymous masses, rather than individuals (144). In this study I will adopt post colonialism and relate its terminology to the relationship between the power- holding old elite and the powerless youth. Cultural considerations and generalizations have often been brought to the fore to "other" the youth in political processes. This paradigm will help me deconstruct this "otherness" which is culturally imposed.

Bill Ashcroft in *The Empire Writes Back* uses the postcolonial approach as that which covers "all the culture affected by imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). In Africa, colonialism took political, economic and cultural forms. Colonization has also provided a rationale for binary opposition based on civilized or primitive, good or evil, young or old, male or female, majority or minority, marginalized or centered. Meja Mwangi, as a postcolonial writer, responds to the binary oppositions between the youth and the old.

The approach helps me to understand and contextualize the environment that has brought age-related differences in the perception of democratic transformation. Furthermore, it helps me to interrogate the author's vision on democracy and transitional politics. The approach further helps me to understand how colonialism and imperialism have impacted on democratic processes in postcolonial African states as well as the "othering" of the youth and women.

Homi Bhabha in "The Other Question" says that, "the point of intervention should shift from the identification of images as positive or negative to an understanding of the process of subjection made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse" (133).

The point of intervention to which Bhabha makes reference is the postcolonial approach. This forms the basis for evaluating characters. Considering that *The Big Chiefs* is set in the postcolonial era, Meja Mwangi can be seen to be concerned with conflict and changes affecting people in the postcolonial society. These concerns can be understood better by using the postcolonial approach. Moreover, Postcolonial writers reject the modern or contemporary which is tainted with colonial influences. They also emphasize hybridity and stress cross-cultural interactions. We are going to explore how *The Big Chiefs* exhibits these tenets of postcolonial approach.

1.8 Literature Review

This study reviews literature from two fronts: Firstly, Literature on youth and politics in Africa because the study is based on tension between the young and the old on issues relating to political processes in post colonial Africa. Secondly, I will review literature on the author's works.

Angela McIntyre in an article entitled "Children as Conflict Stakeholders: Towards a new Discourse on Young Combatants" argues that the ubiquitous involvement of young people in both peaceful and violent political transformation suggests that conflicts might be better resolved by more varied discourse where the youth are involved (*Vanguards or Vandals*, 228-243). She further observes that involving children in war only make them actors in conflicts rather than partners. She says that, "For military commanders and wartime politicians the welfare of children is a distant collateral benefit of victory, future peace and stability" (*Vanguards or Vandals*, 232). The youth are coerced by the elders into conflicts but the elderly do not know that the youth can be better used for intervention. Although, she hints at generational tension as a

germ that eats the rights of children especially when they are used in wars for victory, he does not delve further into it. Our study builds on Angela's research and goes further.

Yves Marguerat in her review of generational conflict in an article entitled "From Generational Conflict to Renewed Dialogue: Winning the Trust of Street Children in Lome, Togo" argues that the problem of street children is basically one of conflict between the generations. Her argument is that irresponsible adults and crisis within the nuclear family result in some children running away or being thrown out of their homes to fend for themselves on the streets of urban centres (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 190-207). This dimension of looking at generational tension between the young and the elderly is an important ingredient in my study.

Karel Arnant in "Re-generation the Nation: Youth, Revolution and the Politics of History in Cote d' Ivore" says that the youth are powerful instruments in any politics of history as they ambivalently encompass continuity and failure, inclusion and exclusion. Using an example of FESCI (Federation Estudiantine and Scolaire de Cote d' Ivore), a student movement of the 1990s in Cote d'Ivoire, she demonstrates that the youth struggle is a political project that sees itself as a new stage in the emancipation of the Ivorian people from neo-colonial oppression (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 110-143). Karel intimates that African youth are agents of political change. This study finds this postulation quite profitable for it will enrich our understanding of transition in African politics.

Burgess Thomas in an article entitled "Imagined Generations: Constructing Youth in Revolutionary Zanzibar," discusses how both vanguard and clients, "youth" as an identity bequeathed individual's sense of dignity and recognized position in nationalist discourse and public life.

The status of the youth had meaning in either local or global discourses of power (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 55-80). This is important in helping me to dig deeper into the youth and power discourse in Africa. The postulation opens a gap for us to explore.

Tom Odhiambo in “Gerontocracy and Generational Competition in Kenya Today” examines how gerontocracy and generational competition has impacted on transitional politics in Kenya. He argues that unless the elders provide the young with a language of translation and interpretation of intergenerational relations, then the tension between the two is likely to grow to disproportionate levels. In addition, he intimates that for smooth transition, we need a middle ground in the distribution of political and economic power between generations and gender (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 105-6). Odhiambo hints on the tension. It is in this light that the present analysis considers generational tension as central force in influencing transition in politics. The study explores further and adds to Odhiambo’s research.

Betty Caplan in an article “Truth and Reconciliation: A Reflection” examines how truth and reconciliation in Kenyan situation may not work effectively as the case was in South Africa. She argues that the Kenyan gerontocrats are solely driven by their own agenda of gerontocracy and as such ignore the youth. She intimates that generational conflict is a hindrance to transitional politics, truth and reconciliation (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 249-255). It is on this basis that the present analysis considers generational tension as a viable gap to explore in understanding political processes.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is a very influential text in the studies of how subjects constitute identity. It presents the orient. Said’s arguments are specifically anchored on the idea of “otherness” and not generational tension.

Nevertheless, our analysis benefits from the book's theoretical assumptions at various levels. Our interest in this study is the pursuit of tension between generations and the "othering" in political processes.

The above critical works have looked at the question of generational differences and transitional politics but they have not accorded a comprehensive attention to the subject especially in relation to the text under study. My study, is therefore, expected to contribute to the understanding of the work. It adds to the existing knowledge on this topic.

Tom Odhiambo in his article entitled "National Redemption Demands Collective Introspection" argues that Meja Mwangi revisits the old theme: Bad Leadership. He adds that Meja Mwangi's challenge is for the old to assume responsibility and save the nation and the people. Although, Odhiambo hints at generational tension as the genesis of the problems suffered by the society depicted by Mwangi, he does not conduct an in-depth analysis. This study builds on Odhiambo's research and goes further.

Tom Mochama in an article "Stereotypes Wrongly Judge Creativity" declares:

I loved the *The Big Chiefs* which tells the story of how greedy old politicians go the way of what Micere Mugo would call "The Long Illness of Ex-Chief Kiti" a sad reflection (in retirement) where nightmare and ghosts from the past wars return to haunt those who master minded ethnic hatred.

Mochama's declaration opens an opportunity which is relevant for this study. The declaration offers a basis through which *The Big Chiefs* can be examined.

Roger Kurtz in *Urban Obsessions Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel* notes that in Mwangi's writings, we find the full range of thematic concerns that run through Kenyan writing as a whole. Further, he says that, "Mwangi usually takes an event from modern Kenyan or African history or politics as his point of departure" (117). Kurtz highlights Mwangi's unique thematic concerns which this study explores more closely.

Another critic who gives the question of generational tension, the search democratic transformation a cursory reference in his work is Ayo Kehinde in his article "Post-Independence Disillusionment in Contemporary African Fiction: The Example of Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*". He examines conflict and urgency in Meja Mwangi's works and talks of various conflicts in Meja Mwangi's works, yet he fails to identify generational conflict as a prominent theme in Meja Mwangi's work. That is the gap that this study intends to fill.

As can be seen in the above critical works the question of generational tension and how it relates to democratic transformation and transitional politics appears not to have been accorded comprehensive attention and especially in Meja Mwangi's *The Big Chiefs* which is the text under study. It is expected therefore, that this study will contribute to the understanding of this work especially as far as generational tension, the search for democratic transformation and politics of transition is concerned.

1.9 Scope and Limitation

This study is based on Meja Mwangi's novel: *The Big Chiefs*. It is my intention to explore how the author treats generational tension, the search for democratic transformation and the politics of transition in his work.

1.10 Methodology

The study concentrates on Meja Mwangi's, *The Big Chiefs* (2008). As a text based study, we subject the text to close reading, focusing on generational tension, search for democratic transformation and the politics of transition.

I will use postcolonial approach to analysis how the work explores how colonialism and imperialism impact on the construction of democracy and transitional politics. The tenets of postcolonial approach will, no doubt be important in helping me to tackle the question of "othering" between different social groups. Furthermore, they will provide a benchmark from which I can explain the political, social and economic environments in postcolonial context.

Formalism shall help me to analyze the form and content of the novel as elements of meaning. Further, it shall help me analyze how through the use of unique artistic strategies, Meja Mwangi brings out his vision of democratic processes. I will begin my study by reading and analyzing Meja Mwangi's *The Big Chiefs*.

The Big Chiefs shall be useful in identifying the theme and style in the novel. I shall use critical works on Meja Mwangi's works on the related topic. Finally, theoretical reading shall also be done to reinforce the arguments during the analysis.

Ever since the appearance of Meja Mwangi's first novel, *The Taste of Death*, he has continued to write several novels. Among his novels are: *Carcass for Hounds*, *Striving for the Wind*, *The Last Plague*, *Kill Me Quick*, *Going Down River Road* just to mention a few. Besides, he has written short stories and children's books. Meja Mwangi's works have not only attracted reviews and critical works but have also elicited controversy as well. He has been roundly condemned for lacking commitment especially by over indulging in popular literature.

However, he seems totally undisturbed by this observation and he says during an interview with Nicols Lee that, “Well, the message that I want to give the audience particularly East African audience, Kenyan audience- a realization of the atmosphere around them” (197).

Among the themes that occupies a prominent place in Meja Mwangi’s novels especially his latest novels: *Going Down River Road*, *Kill Me Quick* and *The Big Chiefs* is generational tension. Meja Mwangi approaches the theme from different perspectives in the three texts. In *The Big Chiefs* Meja Mwangi dramatizes the generational tension through the sustained dialogue between the Boy and the Old Man. The Boy, the protagonist of the novel, is treated as being vulnerable to outside social and political environments. He is confronted with difficulties and is struggling against the old tradition ordered by the old generation. Through the dramatized dialogues, we learn of conflicts between the Boy and the Old Man. These conflicts result from the struggle between their ideological interests and differences. The young want to change the political and social landscapes by dismantling the old order. Contrarily, the old are chained in the struggle to maintain “status quo.”

However, there are indications in the novel that some “excluded” old would be excited to see the old hoisted from the lucrative power. It may be a fact or Mwangi’s mindset but he paints a picture of disillusioned young people. On this we concur with Roger Kurtz who observes that, “Mwangi usually takes an event from modern Kenyan or African history or politics as point of his departure” (117). Although, he is concerned with Mwangi’s first generation of novels, Kurtz’s analysis is in line with the content of *The Big Chiefs*, the text under study. This project, aims to examine the author’s treatment of generational tension, the search for democratic transformation and politics of transition in Meja Mwangi’s *The Big Chiefs*.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The working definitions for this study remain as follows:

Politics

It is the theory of practice of government especially the activities associated with governing, obtaining legislative or executive power, or with informing and running organizations connected with government.

Politics of Transition

This is the process of changing the legislative or executive power from one regime, state or stage to another.

Democracy

It refers to the freedom and equal rights given to every person to participate in a system of government that is, a government ruled by the majority.

Democratic Transformation

It refers to the process of creating free and equal opportunity for people to participate in a system of government to shape their own social, economic and political lives.

CHAPTER TWO

The “Diversity of Voices”

Introduction

This chapter is a study of the various perspectives of the young and the old on issues relating to democratic transformation and politics of transition. It begins by giving a synopsis of the text under study and proceeds to analyze and locate the various characters’ voices against one another. By analyzing the different voices, this inquiry seeks to not only deconstruct the simplistic view that the youth are merely instruments of violence (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 81-110) in political processes but also reveal the young’s and old’s views on democratic processes. The chapter further argues that divergent as the voices appear, they are simultaneously and continually in the process of enhancing democracy. Although, postcolonial scholars have always argued that the young are “othered” when it comes to national politics, the chapter examines how through use of various voices the youth are allowed entry into the field of democratic transformation and transitional politics. The analysis is done on the premise that the three chosen characters represent generations and gender. Their voices, therefore, are considered symbolic. The chapter, in addition, examines the points of convergence and divergence in the characters’ voices. It can be argued that the author’s depiction of the nature of relationship between these characters reflect their thoughts on issues relating to political processes. It is also in order to remember that in reflecting these thoughts, Meja Mwangi uses what Bakhtin calls “dialogism,” where several voices are continuously juxtaposed to one another.

Synopsis

After his successful career as a Government Minister, the Old Man breaks ranks with the Big Chiefs and is banished to a remote outpost in the northern front, the Pit. In an emotional recollection to the Boy, he reveals how the Big Chiefs used the colonial labels of tall and short to their subjects against one another. Although he is caught up in the genocide that ensues, the Old Man lives to tell his sad story with bitterness.

The Boy is perturbed and questions how people who lived together would suddenly rise against each other's kin and kith. Yet, like the Old Man who had made it to the top, gloated over power and wealth and came tumbling down to the pit, the young generation is only but searching for a spark of light to illuminate the inherent evil so evident in the hearts of people who believe in the right of might.

The Old Man's voice

The Old Man who had been wrenched out of his political power grasp at the moment of his greatest achievement now lives in the pit in stinging poverty. He formerly worked for the government as a doctor and a minister for Health. During his tenure, he actively participated in power brokerage and determined the destiny of the country. He had first-hand experience of the genocide during which time he worked as a government doctor and saved many lives. In an ironic twist we learn that his wife and children were butchered during the genocide.

After ninety days of the genocide, he turned blind and retreated to the back-street as a beggar before he got a sympathizer, the Girl's mother, who took him in to reciprocate the treatment he had given her during the genocide. He had saved the Girl's mother from dying.

Later, after the death of the Girl's mother, the Boy took the Old Man and has always taken care of him since then. Because of his wealth of experience, the Old Man is "the most respected man in the pit, the sayer of the unsayable and the singer of the unsingable" (12). Many come to him for consultation and they always leave satisfied that their problems have been solved. Like many other politicians of that time, the Old Man at one time romanced with power and wealth but then he came down tumbling in the pit where he now awaits his death. He is portrayed as a moderate, sensible and peaceful person. Currently, he has become a poet, a self-appointed hero of the masses and a singer.

If we were to adopt Wambua Kawire's argument in "The Problematic of the Quest for Identity in Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*" that poverty is the genesis of mental alienation (26), then we would be able to understand the Old Man's analysis of poverty as an incubator of vices such as corruption, theft, lies and sycophancy. Chabal Patrick in *The Politics of Suffering and Smiling* examines poverty as an object of the politicians that is consciously designed to enable them exploit the ordinary people. He succinctly puts it that, "I am only pointing out that ordinary men and women are often the pawns of politicians in whose interest is to exploit, or benefit from, poverty and ill-health" (153). Further probing of Chabal's argument reveals that poverty designates individuals as "others". It can rightly be argued that the politicians marginalize the ordinary citizens and "center" themselves. Because of the problems brought about by poverty, inferiorization and disillusionment emerge.

The Old Man's encounter with life has made him believe that a people who are heavily weighed down by stinging poverty can never be objective whatsoever. For poor people, he argues, living does not mean embodying moral values or participating in fruitful politics and development of the world but to keep on existing.

In other words, people who are plagued by chronic food shortages have a natural tendency to view democracy as a vague and meaningless abstraction. The narrative uses the Old Man's mind as a prism to reiterate Chabal's position that Poverty does not only make people lose their identities but also stereotypes. The society presented in *The Big Chiefs* is one where even a plate of food has become a symbol of status. Because of this situation, the leaders take advantage of the ordinary citizens and maintain their oppressive order through manipulation and repression. The ordinary people are forced to operate on prescriptive ideals set by the political class. The narrative uses the Old Man's voice to demonstrate that for people living on the edge of starvation, like the ones in *The Big Chiefs*, any government that is capable of alleviating the misery of their daily life is by any definition "a good government." To them, democracy naturally turns very elusive because their priority shifts to their immediate needs: food, shelter, clothes and health. They become vulnerable to political manipulation which Chabal considers "a weapon of violence" (Chabal, 153) and turn to anybody and anything that can give satisfaction to their immediate needs. To amplify Chabal's argument, Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, analyzes political manipulation as praxis of the dominator and cannot be used as a component of revolutionary praxis (107). This implies that attaining smooth transition politics in a politically manipulative environment is difficult. Through situational irony the text foregrounds the lack of interest that the leaders have in enhancing democracy. They take advantage of the ordinary people's unfortunate situation to kill justice, honesty and transparency and instead plant barbarism among the same marginalized poor.

The leaders appropriate slogans such as, "Once a beggar, always a beggar, Beg, beg, beg" (83) to psychologically marginalize the poor. By using this slogan, we are treated to the author's criticism of the leaders' capitalist obscenity.

There is a sense in which the slogan can be viewed as a strategy of marginalizing the poor. Furthermore, these slogans are myths which are meant to delude the poor about their real interest. As Gikandi says in *Reading African Literature* myths are “false consciousness” which are used for exclusion (150). We are struck with irony to the realization that the poor who form the majority of the population, is technically denied the chance to decide on the democratic processes.

The poverty that afflicts the society presented in *The Big Chiefs* defines the people. In fact, it is usually easy to read a people’s lives from their setting. A man’s house can be interpreted as an extension of himself. The Old Man is best described by the poverty that surrounds him. The author’s description of the Old Man’s house is a pointer and it’s neither wasteful nor irrelevant. The houses in the pit are not only expressions of their owners but also their minds and lives. It is undoubtedly clear that the poverty that inflicts the pit people is the greatest cause of their lack of objectivity in democratic processes.

From the onset of colonialism, African traditional systems of acquiring, controlling and sharing resources changed. The traditionally defined systems of land acquisition, control and inheritance are dying. Currently, land ownership is majorly an individual’s or government’s something that reduces the chances of the poor owning enough for agriculture which is the backbone of economy in most of the states in Africa. However, traditional systems like “Ujamma” in Tanzania favoured communal ownership of national resources which helped to narrow the gap between the poor and the rich. There is a sense in which these communal systems encouraged dialogue and cohesion among the people and so favoured relatively fair distribution of resources.

With these structures like “Ujamma” on the verge of death, the gap between the rich and poor is increasingly widening. Today, the youth, which is the majority, has relatively limited access to national resources as compared to the elderly. This widens the gap between the young and the old and as a result intensifies generational tension. This tension, arising from age and experience differences, if well harnessed can be used to positively influence political processes. The harmonization allows for a hybrid language that accommodates each generation and gender. If the views of these generations and gender are harmonized, then a nation develops a “hybrid” perspective in approaching democratic processes. To reduce violence and ensure smooth transition in politics, we need to reduce hunger, poverty and lack of opportunities (Chabal, 155). This observation is in line with the Old Man’s. The dialogue between him and the Girl, reveals that he is walking on the same path as Chabal by arguing that poverty fuels violence to the notion that “greed” prompts people to use conflicts as a means of acquiring more resources. To sum it all we appropriate Thomas Magstadt’s argument in *Understanding Politics, Ideas, Institutions and Issues* that poverty is not conducive for democracy (3).

Chabal Patrick in his book, *The Politics of Suffering and Smiling* holds the view that, “Political manipulation of difference in a context of socio-economic hardship triggers ethnic conflict” (163). The Old Man’s analysis of ethnic divisions is congruent with Chabal’s. Ethnic division is a germ that eats the national fabric and impacts negatively on democratic processes. He is able to unpack the stereotyping messages encoded in the leaders’ speeches. The leaders are not only vent to demeaning stereotypical attitude, but also prove quite capable of using the stereotyping language. Stereotyped languages often define an exclusionary space. “Cockroaches” (88) is commonly used to refer to members of another tribe.

Stereotyping is a way of constructing an "a false" identity and as Homi Bhabha confirms in *The Location of Culture*, it is "a contradictory mode of representation" (100). This view automatically makes stereotyping an exclusionary enterprise. In a sense, the writer is silently criticizing the othering which in the actual sense narrows the democratic space. These leaders who are incapable of providing vision to the country and its people fall back to tribal alignments. In doing so, they deliberately build cracks that are harmful and prejudicial to national unity and democratic processes of a nation. Because of tribal alignments and demeaning stereotypes, hatred and envy develop among tribes and give impetus to tribal clashes. These clashes then invite consistent and endless violence among tribes in their struggle to revenge, counter attack and occupy political posts. Every tribe begins to ask for its share in the appointments of ambassadors and ministers in the name of integration but ironically leaders invite their moles to the central government in the name of ethnic balance for national cohesion.

In addition, situational irony is read from the leaders' actions as none of them front or even propose the youth in the national offices. Certainly, the tribalizing of the central government encourages regionalist ideas and separatism which put others in the positions of "gate keepers" to borrow Odhiambo's term in "Gerontocracy and Generational Competition in Kenya Today" . In fact, Chabal confirms this argument in *The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*, when he says that, "Since independence, politicians have played the card of political tribalism, mobilizing support and hatred along ethnic lines" (161). In a solemn tone, the narrator uses the Old Man's mind as a prism to criticize the irony in the Chiefs' and intellectuals' behaviour.

That is expressed in the following quote:

He had watched flabbergasted as arms were imported and stashed away, as machetes and strong bows for shooting steel arrows were flown into the country and hidden away in the homes of leaders and high ranking Government officials. The university don had bought one lorry full of machetes with his own money and delivered them for sharpening.

Then the ministers and other leaders had favoured the country deceiving short people that all tall people wanted to finish them all; talking in riddles and frightening people into arming their tribesmen to arm themselves and drive out cockroaches

Watawakatakata, katakata, "they said." they are going to chop you, chop, chop you until you are all finished. They will chop you all to dust, so that the land, your land, and the power that they have held for decades they can keep for centuries (30-31).

In the above quote, the reporting clause is to draw our attention to the incitements and killings that are instigated by the leaders and intellectuals. Therefore, repetition as a device of intensification (Indagasi, *Stylistics*, 58) is to underline the killing, which is reinforced by the word "chop." By repeating "chop" the writer reinforces the seriousness and the sense of urgency with which killing is treated. This repetition heightens our emotions and we are only left to criticize the inhuman nature of the Chiefs and intellectuals. Moreover, the leaders choose Swahili lexical which could probably demonstrate their low literacy. At another level, the Swahili gives the story local flavor that authenticates its identity as an East African literary creation. The use of Swahili can be viewed as a conscious strategy of widening democratic space because of the large number of speakers that swahili attracts. As an East African language used in an East African text, the writer is deliberately attracting entire East African community to participate in political process. This can be interpreted as strategy of constructing and sustaining democracy.

Paradox which according to Cleanthe Brooks in *The Well Wrought Urn* is a language of sophistry permitted in satire (1) can be read from the intellectuals' behaviour. Professionally, the intellectuals are not only supposed to show direction and ensure a democratic implementation of societal norms and morals but should also encourage mutual understanding and provide a language of cohesion and tolerance (Mkandawire, *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, 46). It is paradoxical that the University don who should fight for the enforcement of human rights is the one who imports machetes that are used in the abuse of the same. At this level, the Chiefs and intellectuals are seen as the killers of democracy. By penetrating the Old Man's mind and reporting what there is, the writer seems to expose the existence of limited democratic space. An ironic twist is added to the situation by the media. The media which according to Wanyande and Chweya Ludeta in *Governance and Transition Politics in Kenya* "has the capacity to disseminate information about human rights, raise popular awareness about a matter, instill the concern in the people's imagination, and secure the protection of those rights" (219) is ironically used as an instrument of popularizing animosity among people.

Professionally, the media is supposed to be used as an instrument of constructing democracy and to encourage democratic change. Contrarily, it is converted to a mere tool of incitement. It therefore loses its mandate of educating the masses on democracy and transitional politics as well as providing a wide avenue for vibrant public discussions on political issues. Globally, the media has been successfully used in constructing democracy and ensuring smooth transition in politics by continually creating fora where the young, both female and male, and the old discuss issues live. These fora have at least helped in resolving generational and gender ideological differences.

The media is therefore, an empowering device that shapes the decisions that people make in political processes. Irony, which is the most fascinating device in the story, is founded on the fact that the Chiefs used the media to urge fellow tribesmen to exterminate others whom they perceived as “competitor tribes”. Solemnly, the Old Man reveals the following:

I cowered in a darkened house, listening to my Government broadcast messages of hate, urging fellow countrymen and neighbours to take up their machetes and exterminate us all. Many died without knowing why (31).

This passage captures how the leaders domesticated the media as an agent of intimidation and incitement. The daunting fear that has been strategically spread by the media is captured by the image created by the words “cowered in a darkened house” which express high level of freight. The image of darkness here is suggestive of death. Through the horizon of the speaker’s impressions and experience vividly rendered in this quote, we are emotionally persuaded to condemn the tribal killings inspired by the leaders. The democratic realm is also widened by allowing the Old Man to personally recount his experience to the audience. In sharing with the Old Man, history, which is essential in understanding the present, is authenticated. There is a considerable irony to the realization that the leaders and intellectuals take refuge after they have lit the fire of tribal animosity. With what could be regarded as “clever blames,” they are welcomed in more secure territories. The narrator satirizes this “cleverness” in the following passage:

Most of the Big chiefs, the government officials who had unleashed the mayhem fled to Europe and America from where they protested their innocence. The University don was teaching African History at a University in Alberta. The mayor had crossed the boarder into a neighbouring country and registered with the United Nations Center for Refuges as a political refugee. The colonel who organized and led the murderous tribal warriors was

in the forest with his men, from where he continued to kill and maim, loot and plunder, and to accuse the new regime of trying to exterminate him and his people (31).

Ironic undertones are undoubtedly clear from the paragraph above. The perpetrators of crimes against the people enjoy impunity. The hypocritical nature of Europe and America is revealed. Internationally, they are considered more democratic yet they not only provide security to the “killers” but also condone them. At another level, the leaders and intellectuals can be considered “pawns,” acting on behalf of Europe and America and therefore it is easy for them to receive that kind of treatment. The text intends to reveal, through the irony in the above situation, the hypocritical trait of the whites.

It is in order to note that the Old Man holds the view that once people are divided along tribal lines, it becomes easier for the leaders to “instrumentalize” the youth for violence. This view can be read in the context of Kagwanja’s argument in “Clash of generations? Youth, Identity, Violence and the Politics of Transition in Kenya, 1997—2002” that “youths became pawns in the chess game of the dominant elders in Kenyatta and Moi states” (*Vanguard and Vandals*, 90). In a flashback, the Old Man recalls how the youth were used as militia groups during the genocide. The militia groups, which consist of the youth, are political constructs which are meant to work hand in hand with the police. In a painful recount, the Old Man expresses his disappointment with the leaders of his generation in the following passage:

It is inconceivable how our generation caused so much pain, scarred so many lives and got away with it. It is scandalous that we gave birth to such calamity, to so much despair, and to you. Such a thing should never have happened in a sane and a sensible world. Yet it did happen, and therefore, do you suffer? (16)

The use of “we” in the quote is an individual talking on behalf of other people. The plural voice is an indication of collectivity.

The Old Man is an individual speaking on behalf of his generation in attempt to accept the collective failure. Apart from that, the use of the words “we and “our” in this context can be interpreted as sincere confession by the Old Man and his generation by extension. This confession, which intensifies the tension between the old and the young, is a step towards truth and reconciliation which is actually a correlate of democracy. The Old Man can be considered an important instrument of confession in the novel. In addition, the confession creates an avenue for the young to understand the old order and possibly think of how to harmonize it with the new order. The writer enlarges the democratic arena by allowing the old generation to individually confess their historical and political injustices.

The “our” in this statement is in diametrical to “their”. Considering the diametrical use of the word, one may argue that this conforms to Said’s model of othering. The “our” does not only other the Boy but also his generation. At the end, he uses a rhetorical question, an interrogative construction that does not need an answer because it is a statement in the form of a question. In this rhetorical question the Old Man is foregrounding the suffering that people are currently undergoing because of the inconceivable pain that the Old Man’s generation inflicted on them.

It is apparent from the above discussions that the Old Man’s position persuades the audience to understand that ethnicity is a political label fixed on people and can be manipulated for political benefits. On the same breadth, the Old Man regrets the crimes committed against the people by his generation. These are clear indications that democracy has long been hanged. The Boy’s generation on the other hand, blames the Old Man and his generation for the crimes committed on people. Implicit in the Old Man’s arguments is that democracy is expected to solve crisis arising from ethnic and generational divisions.

Logically, it can be argued that sharp ethnic differences impact negatively on transitional politics because each tribe struggles to take over power. These struggles intensify hatred and encourage violence. Ethnicity, as exclusionary enterprise, is normally a source of violence (16). This argument which is advanced by the Old Man resonates well with Pauline Manwelo's in "The Politics of Identity in Africa: Diversity and Inclusion" that "ethnicity is an exclusionist approach and therefore one of the sources of conflict in Africa" (*Ethnicity Conflict and the Future of African States*, 114).

The story comments subtly on the continued colonialism. The Old Man's experience with the world has persuaded him to agree with Amilcar Cabral's argument in "Identity and Dignity in the Context of the National Liberation Struggle," that, "To be a colonial is to live with an identity that is incomplete, partial, and false" (7). This experience has provided him with a gadget that enables him to unmask the white man and discover the feigned philanthropy in him. He reads irony and contradictions when he realizes that white doctors have pitched a tent in the pit and are treating people freely. He displays cynicism and blames them as the cause of the problems that are currently chewing his country. In addition, he is able to expose their hypocritical nature as people who take advantage of the situations in Africa for their own interests. These claims are in agreement with Fanon's in *The Wretched of the Earth* where he argues that whites do not display true generosity but "loveless ness which lies in false generosity" (249). The Old Man reinforces his position when he asks the following questions:

Where were they when we were abused and misused? Where were they when we were butchered? Where were they when we needed them most? Where was their God when they cheated and robbed us? Where was their God when they milked and bled us in the name of trade? Where was their God then? (48)

The Old Man uses rhetorical questions, interrogative constructions that do not require answers because they are statements framed as questions. In these rhetorical questions, the speaker is foregrounding the question of continued colonialism. The speaker seems to persuade the readers to focus on the white man's coated generosity. He is full of sarcastic mimicry and he wants to present the white man's true portrait. By using this strategy, the speaker is able to vividly bring to the fore the hypocritical trait of the whites. In addition, the questions in the passage express the inquiries of the Old Man without being tagged to reporting clauses. They are brought to the readers unedited by the writer and by doing so the writer authenticates the Old Man's mindset. This in turn, creates a chance for us to share with the Old Man the inhuman and illogic side of the western world. As has been argued by Evan Mwangi in "Artistic Choices and Gender Placement in the Writing of Ngugi Wa Thio'ngo and Grace Ogot", being a white is a form of authority before which the non whites are expected to bend (176). However, the writer deconstructs this authority by allowing the Old Man to question it.

Wambua Kawive in "The Problematic of the Quest for Identity in Derek Walcott's Dream on Monkey Mountain" observes that the emergence of class-consciousness came with the denial of a bourgeoisie class of those people who had benefited from colonial education, accumulated wealth by exploiting their fellow blacks and embraced the ways of the white masters. This class of people thrived on "animalism" to safeguard their own interest. Frantz Fanon, in the *Wretched of the Earth*, says the following of this class of leaders:

These men, who have sang the praises of their race, who have taken upon themselves the whole burden of the past, complete with cannibalism and degeneracy, find themselves today, alas, at the head of a team of administrators who turn their back on the jungle and who proclaim that the vocation of their people is to obey, to go on obeying and to be obedient till the end of time (135).

As the Old Man do impress that the Chiefs have a responsibility of endowing their people with a sense of humanity and encourage them to take full charge of their own lives and rise from peripheral space. Through the Old Man reminisces, the narrative demonstrates that the leaders who took over from the colonial regime have always acted on behalf of the colonial masters and their “mother countries”. Engulfed with bitterness, the Old Man succinctly tells the Girl, “We were led like sheep and taught to follow the Chiefs’ ideological meandering...and finally they lost us to the white wolves abroad” (113). The ambivalence in the leaders’ behavior is a conscious marginalization strategy. It is ironical to discover that the leaders who are supposed to protect the people lose them to whites abroad. The use of the word “wolves” here is meant to reveal the greedy and corrupt nature of the whites. Furthermore, the continued loyalty to the white chiefs demands more questions than answers. He adds, “Our leaders kept saying, “Greater masters, what can we do? And white chiefs said, “Be subservient” (152). As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth* “Colonialism pulls every string shamelessly” (129). It can safely be argued that because of the bruises of the continuing imperialism, it is difficult for Postcolonial African states to achieve democracy since they are still heavily controlled by their “mother countries.”

The narrative profoundly foregrounds the Old Man’s experience. He is portrayed as being richer in experience and elaborated in his thoughts. His experience can be considered a national one because it is a link in the chain of national existence. Much as this experience is his, it is able to open out into the truth of the postcolonial African states and the continent by extension. It can be used to persuade people to understand that they must perceive the reality of history not as closed world from which there is no exit, but only as a limiting situation which they can transform.

In fact, the reality of history, captured by his experience, should act as an impetus to make people understand their past and if possible liberate themselves from any form of oppression. In his introspections, he demonstrates that history is essential in initiating change. Because he attaches importance to this knowledge, to which he is the custodian, he insists on disseminating it to the younger generation that he perceives as impatient and limited in experience. Irony in points of view is noted when even the Boy who dismisses the Old Man as “old and useless”(4) and does not want the Old Man to remind him of the “bitter past,” yet he relies heavily on the Old Man’s knowledge for guidance. The narrator demonstrates this when he says that, “It seemed he (the Boy) needed the old voice to guide him, to show him what to detest, what to disbelieve; what to strive for, what to hope for and even what to believe in” (9-10). This kind of syntactical choice, according to Indagasi in *Stylistics* captures the sense of “confusion, suffering, pain and alienation” that defines a character’s experience (65). It is indeed easy to interpret confusion and mental alienation in the Boy’s behavior and mindset. In addition, the syntactic choice in this case reinforces the moral and social obligation assigned to the Old Man. The writer also resorts to this style to depict the Boy’s dependency on the Old Man. Implicit in this is the fact that, although, the Boy views the Old Man as “too old and useless” (4), it is difficult for him to achieve political reforms without the experiential knowledge of the Old Man. It is this knowledge that the Old Man feels will help the Boy not only to resolve the tension between him and the elderly but also understand the leaders whom he is yearning to remove from power. His argument is that constructive political processes depend on history.

As the story progresses, we realize that the Old Man’s view of change is totally different from that of other old characters in the pit. He believes that political change is a must for people and that the oppressed should be on the forefront in the struggle for their liberation.

Unlike the “elderly formers” he demonstrates that the fight for liberation is not limited to acquisition of wealth or even mere activism of any form but includes serious reflections, engaging in constructive and liberating dialogues as well as action packed initiatives at every stage of the struggle. The content of the dialogues, according to him, must be anchored on historical conditions and realities and the level at which people perceive reality. Furthermore, the political class should not treat the ordinary people as objects that are being salvaged from any form of danger but as equal partners when it comes to democratic processes. We can easily draw links between the Old Man’s view and that of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where he intimates that the political action on the side of the oppressed must be a pedagogical action (37). However, the “elderly formers” have yielded to the hegemonic class culture; they disapprove of the young people’s actions against the old order because they believe in the sanctity of the socially established laws whose validity they cannot question. They believe in the veto powers socially awarded to the old and as such would very much want to maintain “status quo.” Ironically, the “elderly formers” who have borne the brunt of violence following the just concluded genocide are still prepared to engage in violence which would definitely ignite police brutality and killings and bring untold sufferings to the ordinary people. Humbled by his dark experiences, the Old Man comes out as a peaceful person and tolerant in approaching political processes.

It should be remembered that even in situations where elections have been held through voting, which are taken for granted to be democratic, the elections can still be undemocratic. Through dialogues, the Old Man demonstrates that the process of electioneering is not only deceptive but also characterized by arm twisting. The leaders knowingly misguide the masses in order to ascend the political ladders.

They capitalize on the concomitant poverty to “bribe” the disparate masses to vote as the leaders wish. Even though, the masses have the power to refuse coercion, they cannot do so because of their wanting situation. They are susceptible to manipulations by the political class. To align his position with Magstadt’s argument in *Understanding Politics, Ideas, Institutions and Issues*, the Old Man agrees that Poverty is to blame and not the masses. He confesses that it is during feasts organized by the political class that they (the political class) decide on “who should misrule them” (20). Implicit in this sentiment is the fact that it is the political class that decides on those to be elected not the masses. The use of the word “misrule” here depicts the undemocratic nature of the leaders. The text treats the political class as people who are determined to maintain the “status quo”. Where better to capture this question of elections than in Kagwanja’s analysis in an article “Clash of generations? Youth, revolution and the politics of transition in Kenya, 1997-2002” in which he postulates that even in a regime which is considered democratically elected, the leaders devise new forms of mobilization such as armed groups in order to maintain the “status quo” (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 81).

Thandika Mkandawire in *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* and Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* have conducted research on the role of the intellectuals in African politics. These scholars have demonstrated that it is impossible for the political elite to succeed without the intellectuals and the opposite is true. They have further shown that in most cases, the intellectuals are “misused” by the political class for political benefits. In Kenya, for instance, people like Tom Mboya and J.M Kariuki are typical. In *The Big Chiefs*, the Old Man intimates that the intellectuals failed and abdicated their roles to the politicians. The intellectuals failed to practically link with the masses at the decisive moment of the struggle and this gave rise to the unfortunate mishaps of the nation.

Although, there were a few honest intellectuals, leaders used the many money-minded intellectuals to help them strategize for power. Ironically, the intellectuals who were used to strategize for power were later discarded by the ungrateful political class after they achieved what they wanted. The Old Man is an example of those who were “misused” before the genocide. He religiously worked for the chiefs and rose through the ranks to one of the most powerful positions. The “elderly formers” are also good examples. The Old Man perceives the intellectuals as sell outs to the country and its people and contemptuously says that, “They slept” (159). The word “slept” is used in this context to denote the intellectuals’ inability to make decisions at the right time. Ideally, intellectuals in every society are viewed as icons, who courtesy of their wit, are supposed to create and maintain socio-political and economic structures and strategies that ensure equity, order and justice. A paradoxical situation is seen when the intellectuals fail to be the expected icons and instead turn out to be “spoilers” and “betrayers”. An aspect of otherness is contained within the praxis of intellectuals’ behavior. Like the leaders, the intellectuals have become archetype of colonial masters. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* describes them thus, “the native intellectual accepted the cogency of colonial ideas” (40). Traditionally, the intellectuals showed directions and democratically ensured the implementation of the democratically constituted societal laws. Obiereka in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* can be typified. Conversely, this class of intellectuals is no longer there and by insinuation the writer appeals for a come -back so that stable democracy and smooth transition in politics can be a reality.

“As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their conditions, they fatalistically “accept” their exploitation” (46). This line by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* forms the basis of the Old Man’s argument when in his dramatized dialogue with the Girl he implicitly

asserts that providing education premised on people's experiences and history is the surest way of liberating them. He argues that a good education should begin by sensitizing people about their conditions and this awareness would give a spring board on which they can take charge of their problems and dilemmas. He advocates for personal experience which make people "know things" as they learn in relation to the world and through interaction with others. He views literacy as being irrelevant for the African people. With a tinge of sarcasm, he says that, "But, to give credit where credit is due, I never heard of anyone who died from illiteracy, and there was enough of that about" (95). He is convicted by the belief that the youth ought to be uplifted; their brains must be developed, filled with ideas that can change them positively. In order to bring up enlightened youth for the realization of democracy and progress of a nation, we need to elaborately domesticate the content of education that they receive. He can be seen to advocate for what Fanon calls "political teaching."

Besides, he demonstrates that his current problems can be attributed to his historical ignorance which failed to guide him. This blame is captured in his own words that, "If someone had told me about the truths when I was a child, I would not have had to learn them as hard as I did" (211). To applaud the benefits accrued from this knowledge, the Old Man argues that this knowledge will help the young generation, "recognize evil when it rises among them, know when demons begin to move against them, and they may even one day be able to thwart devilish schemes" (212). Needless to overemphasize he perceives education as a yardstick with which to measure, understand and sustain the democratic processes. In addition, he intimates that in order to alleviate the already existing tensions, the young generation needs education that would make them understand the past.

Today, in Africa, formal education has taken over from the informal traditional system of education. There are galore of debates out that there whether the inherited present formal education takes care of the needs of the African people. Nevertheless, it is clear that formal education has put African people a notch higher in terms of technology which is line with global development.

The Old Man's voice takes the stance of a spectator and scorns the political failure of his generation. Through flashback, he reflects on the old theme in African politics: Bad governance. He shows that the leaders have consistently remained short-sighted to the people's agenda and instead accumulated wealth and power. To this extent, he joins Chabal in *Power in Africa*, who argues that, "one aspect of African ruler ship--- in deed politics is the relationship between wealth and power" (209). Bayart in *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* not only reinforces Chabal's and the Old Man's arguments but also adds another twist to it. He declares that, "The use of private purpose of the legitimate state organs of state violence by those in authority, and the function of such violence as instrument in the service of their strategies of accumulation of wealth..." (22). Since African leaders took over from the colonialists, they have totally assimilated the colonialists' mentality in its crudest form and have established a country that is caricatured and which is extremely harmful to its own people. The Chiefs, in *The Big Chiefs*, have failed to mobilize people for a concrete task that can empower them politically and economically. In addition, they have declined to lead the masses to the path of democracy and national development even after people have suffered severe political injustices. Because of bad governance, the influence of the former colonial power increases as it lays more demands on the national government.

The authorial periscope goes mute and allows the Old Man in a sombre tone to reveal the following:

Go devalue your currency and declare your gods worthless. You must also reduce the price of your bananas, your coffee and your cocoa too. And, while you are about it, do something about your gold and diamonds too, and whatever else it is that your people sell us. Oh, yes, your women and children too. Are you willing to do that? (98)

The ironic quality of the quote above is seen when we examine the fact that with all these conditions, it is the ordinary people who are painfully forced to bear the repercussions. Paradoxically, these very ordinary people are the ones who are wallowing in abject poverty and a large population not only continues to starve and die but also to bear the extremely heavy burden of poverty. It is apparent from the conditions laid by the colonial that, women and children have been reduced to monetary items that can be sold and bought. These extremely dehumanizing conditions, which the leaders are ready to fulfill, can be seen to narrow the democratic space. Irrational economic decisions are made by the leaders at the expense of women and youth. Dissident voices are silenced as evidently illustrated by the Old Man's eventual relegation to the pit. These are signs of poor leadership, according to the Old Man. It is notably clear that because of the youth's large number, they suffer most and in the end they become defiant and resort to violence. Once violence comes to the fore, democracy naturally dies. By using the Old Man's voice, we may conclude that the narrator is widening the democratic space. As an old man, the Old Man commands audience from both the old and the young. The culturally held view that "old is gold" gives the Old Man benefit of doubt that allows him to draw everybody's attention.

Engaging in constructive dialogues and non-violent approaches are what the Old Man agitates for as means of political negotiations. Having experienced violence himself, he believes that it

cannot construct viable avenues for development, democracy and positive politics. He concurs with the Boy that because of political, economic and social injustices committed by Chiefs, the young and innocent generation is forced to bear the brunt. The young are brutally killed as a way of negotiating political power. Violence, threats, intimidation, incarceration of opposition voices are some of the ways used by the leaders to negotiate power. In his condemnation of these practices, the Old Man demonstrates that smooth transition in politics does not come from coercive instruments or the barrel of a gun but from norms that are rooted in moral and spiritual behavior of both ages and gender. He warns the young that, "Guns and guns only talk death." "You will get no sensible answers with guns" (146). He associates the gun with power, death and destruction. This is not to suggest that he does not support the Boy's fight for change but to reinstate his belief that, "Whatever it is you do, whatever tortures your soul, please don't die for it. There's no gain in death" (143). Using the Old Man's mind as a prism of our analysis, we realize that he perceives the young as people who do not understand the intricacies of transitional politics and because of this lack of understanding they easily resort to violence as presumably a quick way of realizing political change. Ironically, they (young) end up losing as the narrative reveals. There is a sense in which we can say that the Old Man is appealing for engagement in meaningful dialogue, regular consultation and appreciation between generations so that they can together participate in genuine and sustainable democratic processes. In this, the Old Man can be seen as deconstructing the myth of "old is wisdom" and challenges the old to accept and accommodate the young. This argument is line with Odhiambo's analysis of age question in the postcolonial power transitions, in which he says that, "The old should realize that it is erroneous to continue assuming that the youth will have to wait for some day to grow old enough before they can access political power" (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 106).

Odhiambo adds that, “The elders have to make available the idiom that would enable the youth transit from mere observers of power -“instruments of violence” to useful participants in it” (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 106).

Alcinda Honwana, Mats Utas, Ibrahim Abdalla in *Makers and Breakers* indicate that youth in postcolonial Africa have been used to agitate for transition in politics. These studies demonstrate that the youth are used as instruments of violence in negotiating political power and they end up being wasted in the process. Similarly, the Old Man demonstrates that pursuing a genuine transitional politics, demands trusted and responsible judiciary that will not only protect the youth but also provide goodwill. The text exploits the Old Man’s flashback to show the ironical nature of the judiciary.

Through these flashbacks, we are treated to the pathetic nature of the judiciary system. The courts of law in *The Big Chiefs* are a total let down, a real test of incapacity of the Chiefs. Irony hits the Old Man when he learns that these courts of law are unable to bring justice, equality, transparency and accountability which are their obligations. He recalls how corruption and impunity have deeply taken roots in the otherwise just courts in the following paragraph:

Our judges, they who were learned men of law, they who were our wise old men, they who were the custodians of our justice and the defenders of our innocence, laughed and said, “No one, at all, is ever truly innocent (62).

The underlying categories of “ours” and “theirs” are revealed in the paragraph. This opposition demonstrates how possessive the old generation is with the judicial system. It is this possession that can be interpreted to limit the democratic sphere. Ironic undertones can be read from the fact that the judges, who are considered “wise, custodian of justice and learned,” turn out to be the ones who deliberately promote injustices.

The Old Man's use of post modifiers to qualify the judges depicts disillusionment. Given the judges high level of education and wisdom they are expected to bring justice and equity, yet, this is not the case. By implication, democracy is hanged by those expected to be its "preservers" and custodians. Apart from the political class control over the law courts, we realize that the courts use orthodox methods of instilling justice. This ironic situation arouses our sympathy and persuades us to condemn the judiciary that has failed to faithfully accomplish its obligation.

The debate about police state and its effects on the people is widely discussed by Fanon. Similarly, the Old Man observes that when civilians are forced to live with police's brutality, then the search for democracy becomes but a dream. Inter-mingling his voice with that which the writer only describes as "The voice," the narrator walks us through the Old Man's past and says the following:

Then he had lived to see innocent men perish at the hands of a trigger-happy police, as the law was misused and abused by those who had grudges and scores to settle, and by those who had to fear for an end to their supremacy. But even that was as nothing compared to what they did later with machetes (41). And the voice adds that, "What blunders! He moaned with deeply felt remorse.

"What injustice, what a great, great badness! (41)

The use of the exclamation marks, reveal the speaker's mind, for it is he who is depressed by the events described. Moreover, the exclamations indicate that the writer's feelings are filtered through the "voice". The perceptions of the "voice" and that of the writer are framed within this. The flashback provides a historical context that enhances our understanding of the injustices meted out on people. The repetition of "great" intensifies the seriousness with which the writer treats the question of unjust police force under which people suffered profusely.

In addition, the Old Man tells the Boy that the Chiefs use the police force to command respect but then he warns that, "Respect is not a lesson easily learned at the barrel of a gun." "They didn't know that, and neither did the police" (167). The central government is seen to have personalized matters of national interest like security, economy and politics. Ironically, the same government, which is supposed to provide security to the people, is not equal to the task. It imposes, what Achille Mbembe in "Power and Obscenity in the Post-colonial period" calls "banality" and balkanize the oppressed to support non-people driven agenda. Implicit in the Old Man's argument is the fact that "hard power" applied by the Chiefs is primarily an indication of subjugation and as such it should not be used on people.

Political scientists say power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The story comments subtly on the dynamics of power. In fact, there is a sense in which this text could be considered a subtext which writes ideological and historical "knowledge." Undoubtedly, through the Old Man's flashback we are treated to the fact that there are no true leaders but there is only a greedy caste with corrupt minds who are interested in obtaining absolute power and wealth. The Chiefs shamelessly act like gods. They are power drunk and have forgotten about the masses who directly through their votes handed over power to them. The Chiefs govern with inhuman laws and are principally preoccupied with the pleasures of their everyday life, cocktail parties, their deals with the white chiefs and profits made exorbitantly from unclean deals. To vividly create a mental picture of the Chiefs, the Old Man draws an analogy of the hen. In his analogy, he shows that unlike the old hen that scratches for itself and children, the leaders purely scratch for themselves. "Unlike the old hen, they had neither scratched for their children nor for posterity. They had scratched solely for themselves and only for the present" (14). It is easy to read the selfish and non-visionary nature of the Chiefs.

They neither care about the young generation nor the future of the people. This is how far power can go as it blinds, destroys people and encourages separatism. The narrator uses the Old Man's mind to reveal what power can do in the following quote:

The old man anguished over the sins of his peers, the wrongdoings that his generation had reviled in, when they were young and immortal, power drunk and so full of themselves. They were all old men or dead now. He sighed with deep regret (15).

From the quote we are struck by the ironic overtones of the narrator. The old generation, that is expected to have prevented the sins committed against others courtesy of their knowledge and experience, are the ones who reviled others in order to maintain state power. In addition, the Old Man observes that evil lurks within people who eat much and they are obsessed with the "monstrosity of power." It is observed that absolute power of the leaders cannot be used in constructing democracy and ensuring smooth transition in politics. If we bend Fanon's argument in *The Wretched of the Earth* that to "set the country well on the road towards development and progress, it must first and foremost nationalize the middle-man's trading sector" (145), then we are only left to do what Odhiambo proposes in "Gerontocracy and Generational Competition in Kenya Today" that for transition, we need a middle ground in the distribution of political and economic power between generations (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 105). When a particular social group is excluded from accessing national resources, then that particular group is likely to resort to violence. In fact, Chabal argues that since the youth is disenfranchised they are likely to drift through life seeking economic and political opportunities by means of violence (*The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*, 158). Because of the exclusion from accessing the national resources, the Boy and his generation resort to violence to take what they claim is rightfully "theirs."

In a nut shell, the Old Man, in his thoughts, comes out not only as a peace-lover but also sensible person. In portraying the Old Man sensibly, the narrative deconstructs the view held by the Boy that the Old Man is “too old and useless” (4). The Old Man views the search for democratic processes as an ongoing and mandatory exercise for a people in any society. However, he intimates that a hungry man is an angry man and that violence as a rebellion strategy by the oppressed can only be reduced or eliminated if poverty is reduced if not eradicated. Moreover, he considers violent approach to negotiating political power as ineffective and outdated. Continually accentuated by him is the fact that the young generation should stop violence and embrace a culture of engaging in dialogues, generational appreciation and tolerance. Moreover, he reiterates that people should be free to air their differences openly for this is the first step in the search for democratic processes.

The Boy’s Voice

The Boy is the protagonist in the novel. He is an orphan but takes care of the Old Man and Girl at times. Although he was there when genocide took place, he was too young to effectively comprehend the events and he is currently in search of the evil that lurked within. He relies on the Old Man’s experiences to understand himself and the community at large.

Throughout the story, the Boy is treated as one who perceives life as a constant struggle. His childhood experience is significant for a better understanding of his current situation. He is an active participant in life with an aim of creating a difference. In fact, the Old Man confirms this when he tells the old soldier that, “The Boy does not believe in charity” (48). Like most people in the pit, he struggles to give meaning to life. He displays self-confidence in spite of the numerous problems that he is going through.

His struggles are meant to have profound meaning for his larger community. Although he is young, he plays the roles that are socially assigned to the elderly. It is the dialogue between him and the Old Man that is the focal point of the story. The different ideological and philosophical views relating to democratic transformation and politics of transition expressed by the two are the major focus of the author.

The dialectical relationship between the Boy and Old Man is best assessed in the context of Ashcroft's argument in *The Empire Writes Back* where argues that the dialectic of self and other, indigene and exile, slave and free, language and place is an expression power (171). In other words "otherness" that always defines each of them does not completely exclude the other but ambivalently maintain sufficient identity with each other. In fact, until that is sustained it would not be easy for any of the group to exercise authority. The Boy believes that because of political, social and economic injustices committed by the leaders, young generation is forced to be rootless, powerless and disconnected. Coupled with the problem of being out of familial homes, the young are confronted with stinging poverty, violence and marginalization. In an attempt to construct a democratic nation in a discriminative environment, the young are ruthlessly and brutally killed. The leaders have domesticated unorthodox methods of governance: violence, torture, deception, intimidation and "special" police forces. However, there is a sense in which the Boy can be seen to be advocating for unity that will help them fight the oppressive structures. He considers power in unity as a tool that if harnessed can be used in building a democratic society.

There is nothing that powerfully captures the Boy's notion of change than the words of Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* expressed thus, "The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (36).

He adds that, “No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates” (36). Inevitably, the Boy yearns to be free from the yoke of oppression in which he is fixed not only by the historical and political injustices but also by the old order which is perpetuated by gerontocrats. But, this yearning can only be realized as a reality when the same yearning is aroused in other oppressed people.

To this extent the Boy joins Freire’s argument in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that, “it is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role” (108). However, we realize that most of the oppressed in the pit, at least the ones he tries to inspire, are dominated by the fear of freedom and so they are not ready to face the reality of fighting back. Because of this fear, people prefer conformity and are only preoccupied with how to get what to eat for the day and continue surviving. Indeed, they are subdued by hunger and old age. This situation is ironical because we would expect the oppressed to be more than ready to liberate themselves. Indeed they should be profoundly converted. Rebirth of the people is the first step in creating change and until that step is made and people discover themselves accordingly, then it would not be easy for them to initiate and even bring any form of change. The numerous meetings held by people are manifestations of democratic processes. However, we note with a heightened disappointment that these meetings are always obliged to suffer disagreements. The Boy who is disappointed by failures of these meetings scornfully says the following:

You are no men at all but cowards and common thieves; unprincipled and despicable creatures that would steal eggs from a sitting hen, men who would eat while children starve. (135)

The Boy's condemnation of the "elderly formers" in this passage draws attention to the irony and tragedy involved in what appears, on the surface, to be a simple comprise. One cannot fail to read masculinity in the Boy's categorization of people. The word "men" is meant to underline the emphasis the Boy puts on the word as he thinks about the betrayal of masculinity in the political process. The Boy has an exaggerated notion of what men are. In his narcissistic attitude, he uses the analogy of the hen to reinforce the greedy nature of the "elderly formers".

In protest, the Boy walks home and tells the Old Man that, "I realized that men were no men at all but a pack of hungry hyenas" (113). Through his actions, the Boy implicitly demonstrates that no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone but one needs the efforts of others to do so. His view is that the process of transitional politics requires a combined effort from everyone. In the struggle to create a change, age, gender or status should not be an impediment.

Much as the Boy agrees with the Old Man that history is essential in negotiating transition in politics, the Boy believes that people are makers of their own history, he hates hearing about his heritage. Every time the Old Man tells him about his past and the political injustices that were committed by the previous political leaders, he becomes uneasy and angry and asks, "Why do you tell me these hurtful things?" (10) His past is laden with evil that stirs bitterness, hatred and contempt and therefore should be forgotten for the time being. The Old Man's songs and stories do not only make the Boy bitter but also haunt him. He keeps telling the Old Man that, "I'll never understand you and your lot" (113). He does not want to be told about his dirty heritage, "when it's about madness and death" (55). Unlike the Old Man, the Boy feels that the past especially "the bitter past" has no place in the search for democratic processes.

Tarimo Aquiline and Manwelo Pauline in *Ethnicity Conflict and the Future of African States* have stated that, “The process of building democratic institutions will succeed insofar as it starts with what people are and from where they are” (28). Implicit in this quote is the fact that democracy is people driven and thrives on the willingness of the very people to maintain it. The Boy can be seen to concur with Manwelo’s postulation when he argues that political power is a people- owned object. It is the people who own political power and they only extend gratitude to the politicians by handing over the power to them.

What cannot be disputed is the fact that irrespective of the people’s social class: “short or tall, thin or fat, wise or foolish, rich or poor” this power does not desert one. It is the people who fail to reprimand and recall the politicians so as to redirect them and the nation. Through the dramatized dialogue, the Boy demonstrates that it is the collective failure of the people that eventually brings down the nation. The masses, instead of exercising their powers only shower the political class with praises. As I mentioned earlier, the political relationship between the politicians and the masses has assumed the relationship of the colonizer/colonized something that the Boy rejects. In fact, he perceives “soft power” as the only instrument that can be used to enable people exercise transparency. He deconstructs patronage enjoyed by the old, courtesy of their age, in African traditional society by challenging the Old Man’s wisdom. He candidly tells him that “You are too old and useless” (4). He squarely blames the Old Man and his generation for failing to use the people’s power to stop the Big Chiefs from dividing and killing the masses and bitterly reminds the Old Man that, “You were the disease; the malignancy that eats us this day” (145). Sarcasm in the last trail of the sentence draws attention to the irony of the old generation. The cliché “old is gold” provides a framework of perceiving the old as the custodian of knowledge and as people who have enough wisdom to prevent or stop evil.

Ironically, the Old Man and his generation are the ones who ignited the fire of the genocide. It can be argued that because the Boy considers the old generation a total let down, he proposes a people driven initiatives. They organize and attend various meetings to discuss, propose and design the directions that they wish to take. His argument is congruent with Fanon's assessment of people's power that a deserving people should take charge of their own destiny by controlling their government and political parties that run the government and that if that does not happen, then a nation-state stagnates in progress (160).

Despite the Boy's criticism of class division, the text suggests a compromise between the rich and the poor by extending the dialoguing space. The poor who are totally blinded by poverty ironically see the exploitative leaders as icons. In fact, the nation in *The Big Chiefs* is divided in two: the rich nation and the poor. The pit, which is symbolic, is for the poor, unprivileged and unsupported. There is a sense in which the pit can read as an expression of the poor's mind and lives. It is notable that the pit people have no leader to engage them in a concrete task that empowers them. The city, which is bursting with wealth and privileges, is a place full opportunities. State power and state resources are objects of the city people. Indeed, the city is a place full of hopes and promising future. The rich, in the city, do not only exploit the poor but they also dominate them. The tensional relationship between the two classes narrows the democratic space. This division between classes does impulsively and unconditionally stir rivalries between the groups. Social stratification can be seen as a strategy of "othering". These social groups view each other as "others." With divisions on the surface, each class treats the other with suspicion and in the process cohesion crumbles. The Boy calls for unity engraved in the principle of one nation; one people. It is this unity that brings people on the table to discuss and as result enhance democracy.

In summary, we can safely conclude that the Boy in his thoughts demonstrates intelligence especially if we consider his age. By his thoughts and actions, he comes out as one who is committed to initiate the process of transition in politics. It should be noted that he perceives the search for democracy in transitional politics as an obligation that is politically assigned to the people. In addition, we are treated to his view that democracy is not inborn and so it is the people to bring it forth. Through dialogues and actions, he deconstructs the culturally held view that “old is wisdom” and intimates that patronage courtesy of age has been overtaken by time. He calls upon the youth to come up and dismantle the old order by initiating political reforms.

The Girl’s Voice

The Girl is a mother of three though her exact age is not clear. The narrator hints that she is still a girl although she has acquired the status of a mother. She is described as follows:

She was of a slight build, was fed by hunger and grown hard. He knew too that she was young but he could not tell her age, not without asking. But he knew that she had three children by three different men (53).

The ambivalence in the creation of the Girl’s identity is a conscious marginalization strategy. This as Ashcroft argues “disrupts the apparently axiomatic signficatory system which has invested itself with absolute authority over those it has constructed as “other” (102). Moreover, Spivak as quoted by Ashcroft, in *The Empire Writes Back* posits that, “Women in many societies have been relegated to the position of “other,” marginalized and in a metaphorical sense, “colonized,” forced to pursue guerilla warfare against imperial domination from positions deeply imbedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from, that emporium” (171).

It should be remembered that the Girl's experience can be considered different from that of the Boy and the Old Man. She lives alone with her three children and like others struggles to survive and support her family. Though young, she plays the roles that are socially assigned to adults. Philosophically, her views are not mutually congruent with either the Boy's or the Old Man's. This can be attributed to her experience as a mother and youth at the same time. There is a sense in which her views can be considered to represent female perspective. The narrator says that, "she is always calm and patient when she listened to the Old Man. She did not break out angry boils like the Boy or fill her heart with thoughts of violence" (80). It is worth noting that one of her children was fathered by the Boy. The Girl is dynamic and changes with circumstances. She even acts a man, performing the duties that are socially assigned to men.

Psychologically, children are very important people not only to their parents but also to the society. Honwana and De Boeck in the introduction to *Makers and Breakers* argue that children are always "portrayed as dependable, immature, and incapable of assuming responsibility" (3). However, the Girl disputes this sentiment and feels that the method of child rearing is faulty at some stage. It is the society that uses poor methods of child rearing that gives rise to irresponsible, violent and unwise citizens. She advocates for what Fanon calls "political teaching" that would mould all-round citizens who are able to confront their problems. She condemns emptiness in the children's live, emptiness that breeds barbarism. When the narrator penetrates her thoughts, we learn that the Girl does not want her children to grow up with "empty minds and hearts" so that they end up being rapists and butchers. She dreads violence. Although, she perceives the "bitter past" as told by the Old Man as something that is beyond her children's comprehension, she nevertheless, gives credence to the power that history possess. She insists on people being told the truth about their past so that they do not "die" again.

Children become “spoilt” and resort to violence because of poor grounding in history. She therefore intimates that history is part and parcel of the children's upbringing. The narrator walks us through the Girl's mind and says the following:

She knew deep down that the things he (the Old Man) said were true, and that, though truth could be denied, ignored or forgotten, it cannot be erased or altered by mere silencing no matter how brutally or how long silence was applied (180).

The passage reveals the power of history. The Girl also implies that telling the truth is a way of opening the democratic space. The truth makes people understand their past and construct a viable transition.

For one thing, as we have mentioned before, is Fanon's analysis of the power of the masses in political processes. He has often stressed that the masses are important in any democratic process. In fact, he succinctly says in *The Wretched of the Earth* that, “The masses should know that the government and party are at their service” (160). This view can be interpreted in the context of the Girl's, who holds that the masses have decided to abdicate their roles to dishonest Chiefs. She is hit with irony to the realization that even though the masses have power, they do not make the right decisions at the right time. These decisions and choices which the masses make direct the country. Through dialogues we are treated to her condemnation of the old generation. She declares to the Old Man that, “You made killers of everyone” “You had a choice; you just chose not to choose” (86). The Girl intimates that the limited space that the ordinary people enjoy in decision making demonstrates that democracy is elusive. She advocates for a tensed free atmosphere where people are allowed to make decisions.

As a woman who understands the problems of women, the Girl is very concerned about women's and children's position in the society. Drawing from the Old Man's experiences and explanations, she feels that women and children are deliberately treated as "others" by and with regard to men. However, she sees women as makers of a nation and equal partners to men in matters of national interests since they are the most affected sex. Like many other women's voices, she advocates for women's involvement in matters of national interest. On the same breadth, the Girl concurs with De Boeck and Honwana in *Makers and Breakers* that children are very important members of the society (3).

A part from treating them with care, they should also be given first priority. Through the Old Man's flashbacks, she learns that children were and are badly treated and asks, "How could you drink when children had no milk (96)?" She is hit by irony when she realizes that the old who are supposed to care for children ignored the very children. On a different plane, she views men as the scam on earth. It is the men who are entirely responsible for the problems that ordinary people are currently facing. In her own words she says the following:

It was the men, not the boys, not the women nor the children but the men, not the hunger, nor the poverty nor the disease, not even God or the Devil, but the men, who had helped abomination on the earth (67).

Implicit in the Girl's argument is the fact that men have failed because they failed to involve others especially women and children in the search for democracy and transition in politics. She hints that calm reflection among different social groups is the best way to initiate and sustain democratic processes.

Points of convergence

Philosophically, both the Old Man and the Boy agree that much as the search for political processes is the responsibility of every citizen, it should be devoid of sharp ideological differences between generations. They argue that the lost humanity by both the oppressed and the oppressor can only be achieved through an upward thrust of the people, and under the leadership of the people themselves, that is to say that the people should stage spirited fight for democratic processes. This calls for combined effort from everyone. Moreover, revolutionary principles ought to be the driving forces to bar harmful and self-driven interests from coming into play.

Drawing from the analogy of the foundation digger, they demonstrate that nobody should be othered when it comes to political processes. In this analogy, the builder cannot stop worrying about what happens to “every weed and seed, every worm and life-form and the things that crawl in the dirt” because these are the things that would eventually destroy the building when it is completed (171). What is implicitly revealed in this analogy is the fact that everyone is important. In addition, it draws attention to the fact that leaders should be wary of the people’s voices however insignificant they may appear to be. To reinforce the message encoded in the analogy, the Boy adds that, “It is suicidal to build such a massive structure as liberty on such a rotten foundation as greed and avarice” (171). He compares liberty to a building and greed and avarice to the earth on which the foundation is supposed to be built. Just like the stability of a house depends on its foundation, he intimates that real liberty, on which all human rights are premised, heavily depends on justice and equity. This analogy, at another level, can be interpreted as highlighting the sorry state that the country is now in, and thus helps to better convey the message of corruption and greed.

Social stratification is a strategy of “othering”. It designates people as others and creates ambivalence in the people’s identity (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 100). The Old Man and the Boy condemn social stratification because, they argue, it assigns people certain demeaning stereotypes and labels that are prejudicial. Apart from stirring a sense of enmity among the people, it also affects the search for democratic processes. As we discussed before, the society presented in *The Big Chiefs* reveals that it thrives on two classes: the rich and the poor. The pit is for the poor and resigned. The city is for the rich and optimistic. Irony hits us to the realization that the rich still exploit the poor for personal gains.

In a bitter tone the Old Man vividly paints a picture of dominance by the rich in the following quote:

Criminals and beggars, and those who looked criminally hungry, were turned back and refused entry in the city. All objectors and dissenters, and such like disgruntled elements, had their residential, existential and human rights revoked and were condemned to live the rest of their lives in the pit (71).

The above quote best demonstrates how the poor are defined by the rich. It is clear that the poor are considered second class citizens by the rich. They are stereotyped and marginalized. In this sense, we benefit from Bhabha’s argument in *The Location of Culture* that “othering” is an object of desire (96). The poor, otherwise referred to “criminally hungry,” have their human rights revoked. Bitterness and ironic overtones can be read from the Old Man’s tone especially owing to the fact that it is these very people who handed over power to the rich. The rich believe that their existence is not in any way dependant on the poor and when the poor ask for food, they are treated as a nuisance.

The narrator hands us over to the Chiefs' declaration that:

You need more police to maintain law and order; to protect your peace and stability. And from this time on, it became illegal and seditious to cry from hunger or beg for food. It was treasonable to say that there was not enough food in the country (72).

The statement is loaded with ironic undertones. We expect the leaders to provide for its subjects and most importantly provide a conducive environment where people can articulate their grievances. However, in this case people are intimidated even when they ask for such an essential need as food.

The old say has it that experience is the best teacher. Because of the Old Man's experience, he dreads violence and advocates for a non-violent approach to political negotiations. He concurs with the Boy that a new society which thrives on dialogue and generational appreciation should be should be (re)formed. Through the dramatized dialogue, we learn that the Boy believes that since people are already dehumanized due to the genocide and oppression, no amount of violence should be applied whatsoever. The process of bringing transition in politics should not be dehumanizing at all. What is fore grounded when we examine the perspectives of the two is the fact that violence is something that endangers an entire way of life. It is on this basis that the Old Man advises that, "No good can come from settling arguments with guns" (136). For sure, the Old Man had witnessed the devastating nature of guns "deployed on unarmed demonstrators by the government of which he had once been an honorable minister" (5). If we adopt Chabal's argument that violence is produced by poverty (*The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*, 155), then we need to question the validity of the Old Man's and the Boy's argument.

Nevertheless, we must also accept that protracted poverty is made worse by a culture of violence. No wonder the Boy insists on “there will be no looting or burning.” And there will be no raping or bashing never again” (129) during a meeting which he holds with the “formers.”

“Politics is a dirty game in which rules were invented as the game progressed, and altered and reinvented as need arose” (86). This view is shared by both the Old Man and the Boy. Because of their personal experiences, both have come to believe that reason does not prevail in politics but interests do. In fact, in the Old Man’s confession, we realize that he had learnt by experience that there is no hard truth in politics and that the road to power is full of evil and wickedness. He argues that politicians are the same just like bananas.

The narrator’s periscope walks us through the Old Man’s mind in the following paragraph:

Then he (the Old Man) had to see wrong had been done, lived to realize the hard truth about politics- the road to power was lined with dead minds and wicked hearts; that, like bananas, the only difference between politicians was their girth (147).

Using the metaphor of the banana, we are treated to the fact that politicians may be different in the physical sense but the same in every other way. The metaphor draws attention to villain and wicked nature of the leaders. In fact, they are portrayed as people who do not think and are only obsessed with power.

To draw our attention to the social and political responsibility of the African intellectuals, Thandika in *Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* assertively says that, “African intellectuals have to be at the fore front of responsible citizenship” (81). It is tempting to say that Thandika might have been possibly disappointed with the elite class to have made that statement.

The Old Man and the Boy seem to confirm this when they argue that intellectuals have betrayed the people. They perceive them as people who are easily manipulated by the political class to help perpetuate oppression. The politicians disguise in the name of seeking professional guidance but then they bribe and entice the intellectuals to support their unscrupulous schemes. The Old Man insists that the intellectuals deliberately “slept” providing avenues for the enhancement of corruption. The Boy on his part, describes the intellectuals as, “fools with torches, and wicked creatures...should never again be allowed near the seats of power” (160). Ironic undertones are glaring from both quotes. Further probing of the Boy’s quote reveals that although, the intellectuals are privileged to have torches, they are fools who do not benefit people given this advantage. It is also paradoxical to be a fool yet an intellectual.

In addition, they can be considered as people with dead minds given that they “slept”. It is hard to rely on the intellectuals to realize democracy. Both the Girl and the Old Man agree that poverty destroys the mind and even good people are forced to turn bad. The Girl concludes that, “Poverty is indeed, a terrible affliction. It makes even rubbish dear to the people” (219). The blinding character of poverty can be read from the Girl’s overstatement in which she shows that anything may be of value to a poor person. As we mentioned earlier, both the Girl and the Old Man view poverty as a killer of democracy and think its eradication will definitely make people focused, objective and democratic.

The text foregrounds the fact that political, social and economic problems of African states today are explained from the continued colonialism. There is a sense in which both the Boy and the Old Man see the colonial hegemony as an enterprise that creates leaders who pretend to be committed to their people’s destiny yet they are deeply engulfed in the colonialist’s mentality of

capitalism. This ambivalence reveals split personality which forces the leaders to “wear masks.”

Fanon vividly describes this masking when he says:

The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white men. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question (13).

This masking is a strategy of “centering” oneself. Blacks look at the whites as the center and would wish to share the privileged position with them. African leaders are seen to be acting on behalf of the colonial masters. The leaders do anything to please the west. The Boy directly addressing the African leaders says that, “You’d cut your noses to please your foreign admirers” (142). Implicit in this quote is the fact that the leaders are even ready to sacrifice themselves let alone their people for the sake of the whites. They receive “gifts” from the white community so as to allow them to use African states as dumping sites and to advance the course of science. The Boy critically reviews the continued colonialism in the following passage:

They never told you that the country, your country, was a world plantation? Asked the boy. “Leftovers from colonial feasts? Or that you were mere labourers and squatters on your land that was leased to the world for a thousand years? Tiny worms measuring your progress, according to the western measure, by how bags of coffee you picked and how many bales of cotton you produced?(2)

The west in this respect can be viewed as a metaphor of colonialism. The cynical attitude of the Boy is expressed in the rhetorical questions in the quote above. Implicit in this is the fact that Africans are working on behalf of the whites and their problems are brought and sustained by the exploitation that the whites have gagged them with. In addition, the whites obtain cheap raw materials from developing countries and use them to manufacture their high priced goods.

We are persuaded to conclude that both the Old Man and the Boy are suggesting that postcolonial African states have to be free from the continued colonialism in order to discover their own selves and construct a viable and sustainable democracy.

Points of divergence

The antagonistic relationship between the characters is better brought out through the dramatized dialogue. For instance, the Boy and the Old Man sharply differ on the power of the masses with regard to elections. The Boy's view fits well in Fanon's analysis in *The Wretched of the Earth* where he argues that the masses should take charge of the government and political parties since they have the power to do so (160). It should be noted that the Boy feels that over the years, the mass of people has done very little if any to exercise its power in changing the undemocratic electoral structures. Because he understands that the power to bring democratic change resides in the masses, he nevertheless, blames the Old Man and his generation for failing to exercise the right: to labourlessly remove Chiefs from their political positions through the electoral process. The Old Man, however, reads from a different script. He is hit with irony when he even imagines that people, who are sinking in poverty, should begin thinking of changing the electoral structures yet they cannot even afford what to eat. Like Chabal in *The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*, he squarely blames poverty for everything. In fact, his argument fits well in Chabal's analysis of poverty that the greatest cause of miseries is poverty (152). The leaders know this too well and are fast in taking advantage of the same. They organize feasts in which they entice the masses to decide on "who should misrule them" (20). The use of the word "misrule" here emphasizes poor governance. It should be remembered that the Chiefs are not very keen on exercising democracy.

Throughout the story the Boy comes out as person who is determined and courageous and one who is ready to bring generational change to himself and to his larger community by using all the available means within his reach. He is ready to face the challenges including confronting death if it happens to come his way. He is not only yearning to dismantle the old order but he is also overwhelmed with the urge to “remake” his heritage and fate and believes that dying while fighting for a right course is heroic and in a sense it is a way of delivering posterity. He is convinced that the oppressed should come out otherwise they would be “oppressed forever.” Through the dialogues, we are treated with his analysis of fear. Fear of death, to him, only invites the very death. On the contrary, the Old Man argues that death in the process of agitating for change does not pay. However much one is passionate about something one should not accept death. He advises the Boy that whatever one fights for, one should not die for it as “there is no gain in death” (143). There is a sense in which the two disagree on how to handle democratic processes. It can be argued that the Boy believes that the old have been overtaken by the young and unless they give way they will be pushed aside. This argument fits well with Odhiambo’s observation in “Gerontocracy and Generational Competition in Kenya Today” where he argues that the old should provide an idiom of interpretation to the youth before it is too late (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 106).

An antagonistic relationship between the Boy and the Old Man is evident through the dramatized dialogue in which they disagree on what constitutes good governance. The Boy’s perception on good governance is that it is characterized by people’s control of their own resources and security. The national government should work as a unit with its people and empower them. If the national government fails to provide essential services such as security, then the ordinary people should take charge.

He does not see anything strange with possessing a gun in order to protect himself if the national government cannot do so. However, the Old Man feels that the “soft power” to own lies in the docket of the national government and the same government should not only guarantee security but also peace. Good governance is characterized by fairness in the distribution of national resources and provision of services. A good government, according to the Old Man, is one which can provide for people’s immediate needs: food, shelter, health. He insists to the Boy that good governance does not entail an authority that flows from the barrel of a gun. The Old Man hints that democracy is imbedded in good governance.

The text foregrounds intense differences between the young and the “elderly formers”. First, they disagree on how to articulate grievances to the national government. Their meetings, which are signs of democracy, are always characterized by tensions and disagreements. To bring change, the young are pushing for a peaceful demonstration. They dismiss looting, raping, burning and bashing that had become synonymous with previous demonstrations. This can be interpreted as the youth’s proposal for engaging in dialogues which is a manifestation of democracy. It can also mean that the youth are more interested in changing structures and not accumulating wealth. Indeed, they want a genuine change. Ironically, the “elderly formers” refuse to participate in a demonstration devoid of looting. They are more interested in acquiring wealth than in bringing peaceful and meaningful change. The brand of political negotiation which they agitate for encourages violence and in the end kills democracy. It is also a strategy of “othering” that further alienates the othered. It is worth noting that the “elderly formers” introduce and justify the notion that the young are for the future. This notion, it should be noted, is often the archetypal image created by the old who are at the centre to control and marginalize the youth.

In the words of one of the elderly "formers" "Let's be realistic for once. This thing is not for the benefit of us old timers, is it?" (132). It is ironical to note that at the end of the novel the "elderly formers'" advice carry the day. The young are killed en masse and the elderly succeed in looting. This can be interpreted as the old's and Chiefs' conscious move to kill democracy and create a chaotic society where the youth are rootless and marginalized. It could also be a warning to the effect that transition in politics must involve all irrespective of age and gender.

It is ironical that the Old Man sees a tiny piece of hope and believes that the future can still be promising on one condition: that the chiefs should be convinced to renounce violence and be advised that differences can be bridged through peaceful means. It should be remembered that the Chiefs have domesticated threats, intimidation, corruption, greed and the act of ignoring the poor which lead to political instability. The Chiefs defend ill-acquired wealth and they use the marginalized poor to marshal ethnic support in the guise of defending "what is theirs." The Old Man's view is that once the chiefs guarantee peace, security and reasonable degree of equity in the distribution of national resources then the country would definitely be restored. However, the Boy does not see any hopes in the current leadership. His judgment is that these leaders have failed to play the noble role of searching for unity, stability and generational change. The leaders are power hungry and if left unchecked would only plunge the country into greater problems. He feels that a genuine generational change would ensure better life for everybody.

The Boy on one hand believes that no meaningful peace can be found without the elders, he on the other hand feels that seeking the same peace does not permit the reflections of the bitter past, which the elders are custodians. His view is that, this reflection reminds people of the bitter past and in the process (re)germinates the seeds of hatred, envy and fear which in the end hamper democratic processes.

Ironically, the Old Man feels that it is this truth that would encourage inter-generational dialogue and reconciliation which is essential in the search for democracy and smooth transition in politics.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the views of characters in relation to issues of democratic processes. It has demonstrated that the relationship between the young and the old is characterized by tension due to divergence in experience. However, there is a sense in which this tensional relationship between the two generations enlarges the democratic space. Through the various voices Meja Mwangi subverts the notion that old age automatically hands over knowledge and wisdom to one as held in our traditional and current myths. He also demonstrates that the elders are no longer the only “holy” patrons of knowledge never to be questioned.

In addition, Meja Mwangi implies that democracy thus becomes that which can be negotiated among a multiplicity of voices representing different ages and gender and not a series of differing perspectives on issues relating to the same.

The next chapter examines how through the use of artistic strategies in the text, Meja Mwangi brings out his vision of generational tension, the search for democratic transformation and the politics of transition. The examination will not only reveal Meja Mwangi’s philosophy but also his vision of political processes.

CHAPTER THREE

Mwangi's Vision

Introduction

In his artistic commentary on generational tension, the search for democratic transformation in politics of transition, Meja Mwangi uses a number of artistic strategies in his novel, *The Big Chiefs*. In this study, I focus on the dominant theme and how the writer has brought it out through the use of artistic strategies such as flashback, journey motif, old age motif, symbolism, reminiscences, unique structure, dialogues and songs. By using a unique style Meja Mwangi reveals his philosophy from which we are able to infer his vision for postcolonial African states.

Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* argues that literature is informed by the political unconscious and so an activity which “must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community” (20). This account of literature can be used in viewing social, political and cultural practices. Based on this sentiment, there is a sense in which a text can be considered as that which restructures the writer's vision. Closely related to the author's vision is his or her ideology. The artistic ideology in the narrative is one way in which the writer can counter the hegemonic culture, reading beyond apparent reality to a deeper, more significant reality that lies hidden beneath the ideology determined by superstructure which the text inherits from social reality (Gikandi, *Reading the African Novel*, 113). Kinara Kerubo in “Social Vision in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*” defines a writer's vision as, “a writer's ethical judgments, attitudes, and preferences relating to the principles of right and wrong in behavior” (3). This implies that a literary text may be taken as the author's artifact over which he/she reinforces his/her intentions.

Writers in reflecting the society, the way Meja Mwangi does, propose ways in which the society ought to be. In doing so, they not only consciously or unconsciously provide their philosophy and vision but they also perform the duties of social and political commentators. In an interview with Nichol Lee in *Conversations with African Writers—Interviews with Twenty Six African Authors*, Meja Mwangi explains his philosophy as a writer. He says that, “The purpose, I would say, is to change the audience’s outlook on life, on what is happening” (202).

One can argue that there is a sense in which a writer’s vision is deduced from the style of his or her work. The style of a writer can be interpreted on the basis on which certain features are uniquely and frequently used. These features are not only the best way of saying the right thing but they are also the most effective way of doing so. Style therefore, is an important tool in assessing a literary work. The effectiveness of the artistic strategies used by Meja Mwangi discloses his philosophy which can further be used to interpret his vision. As it has been observed by formalists, style cannot be dispensed from meaning nor can it be analyzed in a vacuum devoid of content. Diyanji Robert in *Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama and the Essays* puts it that, “style is the verbal identity of a writer, as unmistakable as his or her face or voice” (63).

The Big Chiefs’ narrative voice is mainly omniscient. An omniscient narrator is one who is able to be in different places at the same time and is familiar with all these events, characters and thoughts presented in the narrative. This kind of narrator has a life span that may be longer than that of an ordinary human being to echo Evan Mwangi’s argument in “Artistic Choices and Gender Placement in the Writing of Ngugi wa Thiog’o and Grace Ogot.”

An omnipresent perspective is able to penetrate the thoughts of the characters and reveal them to the reader. He observes every minute of the unfolding events. The third person narrator who according to, Ian Milligan in *The Novel in English* “has by convention a privileged access into the thoughts and intentions of his characters (58) comments on what the characters are doing and talk to the readers. However, it is notable that Meja Mwangi is able to move from unrestricted omniscient point of view to a much wider approach where he places dialogue as a centre from whose angle the characters’ and author’s perspectives can be interpreted. To authenticate his characters, Meja Mwangi invites the characters’ voices in order to bring out their perspectives on issues relating to political processes. The narrative technique in the text allows for several other voices or falls within the circle of what Bakhtin calls “polyphonic novel” where we find a plurality of voices, independent yet related (6). It is in order to remember that the authorial intrusion is fused with other voices and therefore validate them. As a result, the narrator adopts the role of a synthesizer, inviting and allowing divergent points of views, pinpointing the differences and similarities in people’s perception. Meja Mwangi through the eyes or voices of his characters brings out his vision. By attuning the reader to the various voices accentuating age and gender, Meja Mwangi attempts to recreate what Wambua Kawire in “The Problematic of the Quest for Identity in Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain*” calls “polyrhythmic voice” of the people. This “polyrhythmic voice” has the ability of accommodating divergent views.

The structure is important in fiction for various reasons. Dyanne Robert in *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama and the Essay* for instance, says that, “structure provides a clue to a story’s meaning” (28). *The Big Chiefs* is uniquely designed in its structure. The structure of the novel deviates from the standard narrative mode.

In this text, the story begins with an exposure of the conflict between the young and old generations. This is revealed through the dramatized dialogue between the Boy and the Old Man. It then proceeds to a point where both the young and old characters initiate actions and at this point we learn that both generations are committed to bringing political and social changes. Finally, the story ends in suspense as people are killed and there is looting and chaos. According to Diyanni, a conventional story usually begins “with an exposition (that provides background information) describes the setting and introduces major characters, it then develops a series of complications or intensifies conflict that lead to crisis” (27). Using a diagrammatical illustration, he shows that exposition builds to complication which then reaches a climax. The climax then slides to a falling action which finally invites a resolution (27).

The structure of the text accommodates sub-plots and individual characters’ voices which reveal the characters’ attitudes and ideological standpoints. In these sub-plots, the author is able to give detailed descriptions and full expressions of the characters. At the beginning of each sub-plot, there are quotations that also give insights on the content of the sub-plots. Moreover, the interpersonal interaction between characters in these sub-plots creates avenues of sharing, dialoguing and communing that can help to resolve ideological crisis between the two generations. Using this structure, Meja Mwangi succeeds in bringing different generations and genders together to discuss common issues relating to democratic transformation and politics of transition. At the end, the two generations are able to understand that each voice is important in order for them to at least forge a common front on democratic processes as illustrated in the text.

We are exposed to characters, their situations and places of action. We are introduced to the Boy and the Old Man whose discussion becomes the focal point of the story. From the beginning, the unequal relationship between the two is revealed. Their ideological differences set the stage for the philosophical battle between them on matters relating to political processes. The Boy contemptuously refers to the Old Man as “too old and useless” (4). This attitude, which is shaped by their experiences and ages, further complicates their understanding of each other. Although, the old generation views the city as a risky place, the Boy dismisses this view, sneaks in and becomes politically awakened. Because of this awakening, the Boy insists on bringing political changes and attempts to do so. Later, he disagrees with the old generation represented by the “formers” on the best course of action. At this level, Meja Mwangi introduces actions that demonstrate generational differences.

Suspense mounts when the boys are abandoned by the old generation during their demonstration in the city. Everybody seems unsure of what would happen and how the boys would contain the government. At the end the boys are killed and the city is invaded by people looting and bashing. The hopes that the Boy expected would come with the transition die with the symbolic deaths of the youth. The dilemma that engulfs the Old Man and the Girl at the end of the story when the boys are killed and the people take what is “theirs,” reflects the indecisiveness of the Old Man when faced with difficult situations that call for guidance and show of leadership. This can also be interpreted as the dilemma that postcolonial African states face in their search for democratic transformation especially in the first decades of African independence when the young “were carefully screened and contained” in the words of Jon Abbink in “Being young in Africa: The Politics of despair and renewal” (*Vanguards and Vandals*, 13).

It is ironical that when people have heightened hopes of achieving democracy and attaining desirable transition in politics, disagreements erupt.

In addition, the sub-plots within the structure are largely based on flashbacks. Through the flashbacks, characters in the text are able to conveniently interweave the past and the current events. In fact, Ashcroft in *The Empire Writes Back* analyzes flashback as a feature of traditional narration and orature and therefore an excellent way of engaging the text as an extreme example of hybridity (181-2). This is hybridity comes from the blending of the past and the present. Flashbacks in the text are largely used when comparing the experiences of the old and the young. It is these differences in experience and age that influence the ideological positions of the two generations. The Old Man for instance, reflects on his experiences before and during the just ended genocide. As a former minister for health and a government Doctor, the Old Man recalls his service to his nation in the two capacities. Through the flashbacks, he is able to expose the evils and political injustices committed by the government and the old generation to which he belongs. As he goes down the lane of his “former” life, he is able to juxtapose his earlier life with the one people are currently going through in the pit where he has been relegated to die. These flashbacks are what stir the Boy’s anger and makes him loathe the Old Man and his generation more for he feels that their views are outdated and they are also responsible for the poverty that is inflicting the country. Through the flashbacks, the Boy learns that it is the old generation and its order that created the problems that people are currently facing.

Through the episodic structure enhanced by the flashbacks, Meja Mwangi weaves connections that cement ideological bonding and standpoints between generations and genders. In doing so, he constructs a viable avenue which is essential for mutual understanding which directly correlates with democracy and positive transition in politics.

If we bend our argument to fit in Ashcroft's analysis of flashback as a strategy of enhancing hybridity, then we may argue that by using flashbacks, Meja Mwangi is "hybridizing" the perspectives through which we can genuinely search for democracy.

The Old Man reflects on his past and present, connecting his political experiences, focusing on the idea of inter-generational dialogue and national reconciliation. Courtesy of his age, he is linked in one way or the other to the failed leadership of the old. He genuinely shows the need for the involvement of the young in decision making for the sake of strengthening democracy in transitional politics. Indeed it is the Old Man's memories that construct the whole story. The story can be considered a statement by the Old Man on how to handle the process of democratic transformation and transitional politics in generationally and gender tensed environment. Here, Meja Mwangi provides a way forward for the young and the old to re-examine their past, engage in purposeful dialogues and reconcile.

Bartel Roland in *Metaphors and Symbols* defines a symbol as "any sign that has acquired extra meaning" (62). He adds that, "It may be an object, a gesture, an incident, a person, a plot, colour, sound, pattern or sequence of action—anything that reminds us of something else that in turn seems applicable to the text before us" (62). This implies that what symbols convey are beyond literal significance or beyond the more obvious actual reason for their inclusion in the story. Wasamba Peter in "Language in Marjorie Oludhe Mugo's Fiction" asserts that, "In a literary work, what makes an object or event symbolic is its being fixed as the focus of unusual attention, either for the speaker or for another character in the text (72). The Old Man's subsequent blindness can be interpreted to symbolize many things. First, it could be interpreted as his inability to lead any more. Today, there are galore of debates out there on whether the old still bear the ticket of leadership that is culturally assigned to them.

All in all we agree with Abbink in "*Being young in Africa: The Politics of despair and renewal*" when he says that, "Globalization and hegemonistic processes emanating from the contemporary world system are now also affecting African societies-politically and economically but also socially and culturally" (7). Bending this argument to this discussion gives us the leeway to safely conclude that globalization has blinded the old to an extent that they do not have the sight and capacity to see and manage the contemporary world culture.

Secondly, the Old Man could be used as a foil to the leaders who are blurred by their dark past and as a result land people in endless problems. A leader by virtue of his position is expected to see ahead of others and lead his or her subjects to the right direction. Once a leader becomes "blind," he or she automatically loses direction and abandons his or her subjects to unforeseeable dangers. The old may be said to be as blind as the leaders who can no longer be relied on to give directions. These leaders exclude the youth from "power" and to borrow Mbugua wa-Mungai's words in "Iconic Representations of Identities in Kenyan Cultures" "they enjoy their strangehold on power as de factor leaders" (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 74).

Thirdly, it could also suggest that he (the Old Man) has reached a point of defeat where he can no longer see the future and has to heavily rely on the guidance and assistance from the young.

Fourthly, this blindness can as well be interpreted to show that the Old Man's past, that has blinded him, remains indistinct, blurry terrain that he cannot read properly and connect to the present. After the genocide, the Old Man heavily depends on the Girl and the Boy for virtually everything. He can neither fend for himself nor survive in utter loneliness. Meja Mwangi, using this symbolic blindness implies that the old have been blinded by their dark and ugly past so much so that they require the ideological and moral support of the young generation in order to

realize sustainable democracy and smooth transition in politics. Besides, it can be argued that Meja Mwangi maintains that generational tension has to be broken and the different perspectives of the young female and male be harmonized with the old's in order to come up with a highly hybridized approaches of handling the process of political reforms.

There are various instances where the characters retrieve the events from memory, thereby, appearing as reminiscences or remembrances from the past. It should be noted that memory is selective and that characters only expose what they intend to portray. Reminiscence as a literary strategy transcends time and space. It enables characters to travel back in time and give information about the past. Although the Old Man's reflections can be considered to mirror societal problems, his memory which is informed by first-hand experience, could be used to elaborately enhance intergenerational appreciation. Memory is not entirely a private enterprise, but can be a collective activity to a certain degree. Acts of remembering are connected to how characters understand their past and make claims about it. The Old Man's experience, which is revealed through reminiscences, is not merely personal, but an interpretation of the people's past and the writer's comments on culturally and historically specific past and present. His personal experiences and the significance socially attached to old age permit him and his generation to guide the other members of the community. This is something that the youth strongly dispute. Because of different historical experiences between the young and old, the young are struggling to understand the elders. They blame them for being gullible, corrupt, slow and resigned. Through the Old Man's reminiscences, Meja Mwangi provides an opening through which the young can understand the old. Based on this understanding, the two generations can then forge a common front in the search for democratic transformation in politics.

What is foregrounded in Meja Mwangi's proposal is the fact that the two generations need each other in political process. He deconstructs the notions that "the future belongs to youth" and "old is always gold". In fact, he echoes Odhiambo's argument in "Gerontocracy and Generational Competition in Kenya Today" that for transition we need a middle ground for both generations ((*Re)membering Kenya*, 106). In addition, Meja Mwangi proposes that the process of democratic transformation and politics of transition ought to be understood: through reflections and history as revealed through the Old Man.

Meja Mwangi juxtaposes the two generations: the old generation is paralleled with the young. This parallelism on one hand exposes the young as inexperienced, angry, impatient with old order, marginalized, agents of change and open in their approaches to political negotiation. On the other hand, the old, are depicted as liberated, sensible, elaborate in thoughts and experience but resigned and undemocratic. Some of the old are the ones who have access to state power and resources. The young and the "excluded" old people are immersed in poverty and are seeking to reconstruct themselves and the society at large. The old who scheme to loot, eventually succeed. Though a few of them are killed, others manage to successfully accomplish their set objective: to loot and take back what is rightfully "theirs." Their success and the confirmation of their prediction, indicate that the old can never be ignored in political processes.

Meja Mwangi demonstrates that because of the elaborate experience of the old, they are better positioned to predict the future. At another level, this could be interpreted as Meja Mwangi's challenge to the old to give direction on how to handle political processes without paying attention to exclusionary strategies that are culturally and politically erected.

Characters signify a number of things in a text. Meyer Michael in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* observes that, “the life that a writer breathes into a character adds to our own experiences and enlarges our view of the world” (61). Similarly, Bradford Richard in *Introducing Literary Studies* reinforces this argument by stating that, “In practice, characters are often latched on to us as a glibly reassuring concept in a text” (31). Characters not only influence the development of the story but also reveal the author’s philosophy and vision. The choice and portrayal of characters is indicative of the writer’s intended vision, worldview and ideological standpoint. For instance, in postcolonial African states, using children as characters have become symbols of societies’ growth. Meja Mwangi, like many other African writers, reveals and enhances his vision by using characters. It is in order to remember that *The Big Chiefs’* characters are specially created and as such they have acquired symbolic significance.

Meja Mwangi’s choice of unnamed characters to convey his worldview can be termed as a unique style. Ironically, none of these characters is named and their experiences are loaded with meanings. Undoubtedly, there is some significance to the lack of specific identity. The Old Man, the Boy, the Girl, the Old Soldier and “the formers” are all reduced to a set of functions and their being unnamed emphasizes their representative identities. The fact that they are unnamed situates them in a position where they are typical characters representing many other people, age and gender.

Meja Mwangi presents his characters as members of a community or in relation to a social group that holds specific philosophies. This has the implication that the characters’ growths as individuals indicate significant changes for those very particular social groups that they relate to. It is interesting to learn that even the names he uses are denotatively representative. He, for instance, uses the name Girl to refer to a young female character and a mother of three.

The name Boy is used to refer to a youth. The Old Man refers to the old blind man. Each of these characters can be considered symbolic. Firstly, there is the Boy. He is the protagonist of the novel and does not only represent the youth but also a new order. He views the Old Man and his generation as the perpetrators of evils against women, children and youth and continues to wonder at the continued colonial and traditional mentalities that the leaders have persistently stuck to. He intimates that the Old Man and his generation are to blame for the current problems that the masses are facing, an argument that the Old Man does not share. He hates the old with its order and wishes to initiate an immediate generational change. Through the Boy's and the Old man's relationship Meja Mwangi recognizes Abbink's argument in "Being young in Africa: The Politics of despair and renewal" that, "generational tensions in the post-colonial age of modernism—as a comprehensive socio-cultural, not only political-economic, phenomenon—have led to massive recruitment of youths in revolutionary movements" (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 12) and therefore, highlights that generational tension can be best be resolved through continually engaging in purposeful dialogues and exercising tolerance and appreciation between the two generations. At another level, the confusion of the young characters can be equated to the problems that the young African states encounter in their search for democracy in transitional politics.

Besides, the Boy can be considered a generation of African youth who are eager to change the old political order. In fact, Abbink in "Being young in Africa: The Politics of despair and renewal" says that, "As the years went by and the older generations clung to power, youth became prominently involved in opposition politics" (*Vanguard or Vandals*, 13).

Secondly, he uses the unnamed Girl to refer to a young a female character and a mother of three. She can be considered “a girl” because of her age but at the same time this can be disputed because she is already a mother. The Girl’s experience represents that of women and the youth. Being a female, the Girl understands the problems of women and children and that is why she questions their treatment in the hands of men. She condemns the colonial and patriarchal mentalities that the leaders propagate against women and children. Being relatively young and innocent, Meja Mwangi uses her inquisitiveness to question and reflect on women’s and children’s plights in the society. In addition, Meja Mwangi demonstrates the important roles they play in constructing the very society that look down on them. By voicing the Girl, Meja Mwangi advocates for the inclusion of women and children in matters of national interest if we have to realize sustainable democracy and smooth transition in politics. Considering that countries are always “feminine,” then the experience of the Girl can be equated to that of the postcolonial African states. Like the Girl, these states are still deeply steeped in the struggle to “centre” themselves. As Spivak observes women have often been forced to express themselves in the language of their oppressors

At another level, the Boy’s and the Girl’s experiences can be interpreted as the experiences of the youth in postcolonial African states. It is these experiences of the young people that inform their world view something that puts them in an antagonistic position with old.

Meja Mwangi consciously uses “old age” symbolically. The repetitive use of “old age” can be read as significant. Here, we draw relevance from Aschcroft’s observation in *The Empire Writes Back* that repetitive insistence can be viewed as a way of “appropriating power from the organization and techniques of colonial and neo-colonial world” (111). Old age as a motif can be considered a construct of power and choice.

This motif is useful in demonstrating the fact that the process of “abrogation” and “appropriation” indispensably concern the dynamics of power vested on age. It is worth noting that the old characters are symbolically empowered. Their experiences are elaborate and can be interpreted in terms of historical times. In fact, their experiences are in themselves the history of the people. The Old Man, for instance, is perceived as the custodian of traditional knowledge courtesy of his experience and age. As we showed earlier, he is sensible but differs considerably with the young on how to handle democratic processes. Through the Old Man’s eyes, we can read the perspectives of the old on issues relating to democracy and transitional politics. His voice is authenticated by the dramatized dialogue between him and the Boy. He shares a diametrical relationship with the Boy, who symbolizes the youth and a new order. Meja Mwangi suggests that the experiential knowledge of the old should be harmonized with the new knowledge and order of the young generation in the search for democratic processes. On the overall, Meja Mwangi has chosen a unique way of conveying his vision especially by the choice of symbolic characters.

Dialogues are common components of our everyday communication. They are usually used in fiction to authenticate conversations. Indagasi in *Stylistics* asserts that, “characters talk in fiction and the author makes their conversation resemble real communication in life” (117). He adds that, “characters appear to hop from one subject to another, as they do in real life” (118). Moreover, dialogues in narratives enable the text to create an illusion of reality by reproducing speech as it supposedly was at the time the narrated events took place. Evan Mwangi in “Artistic Choices and Gender Placement in the Writing of Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Grace Ogot” says that, “It gives the text a heterogeneity that allows it to avoid the monotony of a single narrative voice” (74).

Through dialogues, characters are not only allowed to presentify themselves but also reveal their mindsets. They give the readers a chance to share in the experiences of the characters. On the surface the dialogues in *The Big Chiefs* may appear as spontaneous but in the actual sense they are laden with generational and gender marked perspectives and this can be interpreted as a way of widening the democratic space. By using innumerable dialogues, Meja Mwangi reveals the binary opposition between generations and gender. Take for example, the dialogue between the Girl and the Old Man. In the Girl's voice, we learn of her paranoid fears of the treatment given to women and children in the hands of men. She asks, "How could you drink when children had no milk? (96).

In these dialogues, Meja Mwangi deconstructs the notion that the old are patrons of knowledge and wisdom as the only truth as revealed in our traditional and current myths by voicing everyone. Culturally, the youth by virtue of their age would only be expected to listen to the elders and do as instructed. However, Meja Mwangi transcends this and creates characters who are able to dialogue irrespective of their age difference. This transcendence can be interpreted as Meja Mwangi's way of saying that the world has reached a point where it has to transcend traditional cultural barriers in its search for democracy. In fact, Abbink in article "Being young in Africa: The Politics of despair and renewal" observes that cultural considerations have developed a new dimension in the contemporary society (*Vandals or Vanguard*s, 17) comes handy in this interpretation.

It is notable that the dialogues show the indispensable roles played by each generation in building and maintaining democracy, smooth transition in politics and development in a nation. By choosing to use this important aspect, the dramatized dialogue between the young and the old, Meja Mwangi, therefore, provides a viable lens through which we can authentically

appreciate and understand the perspectives of these groups when it comes to democratic processes in postcolonial African states. Moreover, he proposes that dialogues are realistic ways of resolving ideological differences between generations and gender.

It should be remembered that the dramatized dialogue between the Old Man and the Boy is the focal point of the text. Throughout the novel, the dialogue between the two directs and develops the story. The sustained dialogue is symbolic to the author and he uses it to provide his worldview. The novel opens with the dialogue between the two in their small house and runs all through the text with different characters representing different social groups joining at times to contribute to the discussion. Through these dialogues, Meja Mwangi does not only expose the binary opposition between the two generations, which impacts on democracy and transitional politics but also tries to resolve it. We are brought into awareness about the existing tension which constructs political processes by the dialogues. From them, we are able to see divergence and convergence in the perspectives of the young and old insofar as political processes are concerned. We can safely conclude that by using the dialogues, Meja Mwangi visualizes a nation which is steeply dipped in inter-generational dialogues in order to successfully attain a sustainable democracy and smooth transition. This argument echoes Betty Caplan's argument in "Truth and Reconciliation: A Reflection" where she argues that dialogue, truth and reconciliation are the best ways of enhancing democracy.

Dividing people along ethnic, racial or generational lines in order to dominate them is a colonial idea. It can be viewed as a strategy of "othering". Psychologically, oppressed people suffer equal pain as the oppressor and this eventually heightens the tensions between the two parties. Albert Memi in *The colonizer and the Colonized*, explains this scenario (xvii). The concept of divide and rule is symbolically used by the leaders in the text.

The city is a symbolic representation of wealth, state power, national government and national resources. Conversely, the pit symbolizes stinking poverty, hopelessness, disillusionment and death. By juxtaposing the pit to the city, symbolizing the poor and the rich respectively, Meja Mwangi explicitly shows the gap that exists between the two social classes. However, Meja Mwangi castigates social stratification because it “others” and breeds hatred which narrows the democratic space. He deconstructs this “othering” because it makes people lose their own identity and become alienated. By deconstructing “othering,” he is also condemning colonialism. Like Bhabha, Meja Mwangi believes that “otherness” as an articulation of difference is an object of suppression. He is not only proposing integration of different social classes but also generations.

Frye Northrop in *The Harper Handbook to Literature* defines a motif as a small unit of work or shape arising out of the writer’s imagination whose realization is through images, words, symbols and actions that the author invests in meaning (297). According to, Kinara Kerubo in “Social Vision in Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack Monkey*” “A Journey motif in literature denotes both the physical and psychological distances that are covered by characters” (33). Richard Bradford in *Introducing Literary Studies* argues that, “a journey as a motif is in fact, the most common narrative pattern in literature” (29). If we adopt these arguments for the benefit of our analysis, then we can further argue that it is the journey motif that carries the author’s ideology, worldview or vision.

The Big Chiefs is heavily laden with psychological and physical journey motif. For instance, the Boy, as a protagonist is symbolically treated by the author. He begins his psychological journey by searching for a spark of light “to illuminate the inherent evil so evident in the hearts of men and women.”

Like many others, after the death of his parents during genocide, the Boy physically moves to stay alone. Though burdened with grief, he thinks that things will change and a better life will come thereafter. Interpreted as a representative character, the Boy's hopes and life symbolize those of others in the pit. Later, after the death of the Girl's mother, who used to take care of the Old Man, the Boy takes him in. We learn that the Boy takes the full responsibility of feeding and caring for the Old Man. Although, the Old Man advises the Boy against going to the city, he at times sneaks to the city. Any time he goes to the city, he discovers something about himself and the people in the pit. These physical journeys to the city open his eyes and he begins to question the leadership and the politics of his state. Through the physical journeys, he discovers many things one of which is the gap between the rich and the poor. He begins to question the anomaly in the state resources' distribution and discovers that although the pit people have a right to live, they live on borrowed mercy from the city dwellers. These physical journeys mark the start of his political awakening. It is after the political awakening that he decides to inspire others so that they can initiate generational change. At another level, the journeys can be read as symbols of impending failure. Although, he sneaks to the city, the Boy always comes back to confront the reality of his situation.

His journeys begin and end in the pit. These can be interpreted as endless search for democracy. The fact that the Boy is fighting it alone is Meja Mwangi's way of saying that it is not easy to bring change single-handedly. Through the Boy's physical journey motif, Meja Mwangi demonstrates that experiential knowledge is also paramount in understanding the social, political processes. This understanding is important in the search for democratic processes in postcolonial African states. He envisions a society where ideological differences between the young and the old are resolved through experiences gained by both.

Although the Boy disregards introspection as an avenue that can be used in the search for democratic transformation, the novel is consciously designed to cover the Old Man's psychological journey. His introspection reveals his inner feelings and perspectives some of which the Boy and his generation do not welcome. The Old Man's divergent views on issues relating to politics, leadership and life in general display self-consciousness. Moreover, his realization that his people live on borrowed mercy from the Big Chiefs has adversely changed his attitude towards the leaders and politics as a whole. This awareness drags him to not only support actions that lead to the realization of democracy but to encourage smooth transition in politics. The Old Man increasingly lusts for freedom but advocates for a non-violent approach in negotiating for the same. He intimates that the search for democratic processes should be free of violence. The psychological journey that he goes through compels him to adjust both emotionally and physically in order to understand and fit in his current society. Having enjoyed some of the most lucrative and respectable positions in the former regime in which he was exposed to national resources and privileges, the Old Man requires adjustments of both the mind and body in order to survive.

He is, therefore, forced to carry himself in a manner that makes him survive in the new situation, on low quality meals, in a small dilapidated house, enjoying poor medical support. His readjustment of this state of mind may be comparable to the changes the ordinary people undergo in their search for democracy. Similarly, it could also mean the same adjustments that postcolonial African states need in order to realize smooth transition in politics. Moreover, mental journeys and eventual readjustments are expected of the people and the state in order to achieve sustainable democratic processes.

This interpretation falls within the model of Abbink's analysis of the changing situation in Africa. He argues that African societies and politics need to be reconsidered in the light of globalization (Abbink, 11). Similarly, the Boy's psychological journey is packed with symbolic struggles. His journey is inspired by the fact that he, for instance, cannot understand why people who fasted and feasted together, lived and reasoned together, intermarried and integrated, should suddenly rise against each other. As young person, the Boy can be interpreted to symbolize postcolonial African states that are still going through journeys and struggles in order to achieve democracy. The Boy's psychological journey is a journey of self discovery. He is trying to adjust his thoughts to conform with that of the Old Man's who of course belongs to the old order. By using the Boy's psychological journeys, Meja Mwangi demonstrates that the process of building democracy demands introspection of both the young and old so that they rediscover themselves. Needless to say, the discovery helps in solving the ideological crisis between the two generations. The psychological journeys are considered as eye openers to the conditions that inhibit cohesion and the realization of democracy.

There are numerous instances of old age motif. Firstly, we encounter the blind Old Man who is currently dependant on the Boy for survival. The power of knowledge and experience possessed by the Old Man captures the attention of the members of his society. They regard him as "the sayer of the unsayable and the singer of the unsingable" (11). The tension between the Old Man and the Boy is a manifestation of power dynamics between the young and old. Meja Mwangi has used the Old Man symbolically to propose that knowledge and language of the old are important ingredients in constructing and sustaining a democratic society.

Secondly, there is the old hen that always appears when the Old Man and the Boy are tensed and have gone silent. The old hen is usually there to break this tension. It can be argued that it provides companionship to the two characters and motivates them to reduce tension. This can be interpreted as Meja Mwangi's way of bridging intergenerational tension through a symbolic gesture. In fact, Odhiambo in "Gerontocracy and Generational Competition in Kenya Today" challenges the old to provide an idiom of moral authority and wisdom to the youth and nation by extension (*(Re)membering Kenya*, 106).

Thirdly, there is the old tobacco tree, which attracts people from all quarters of the pit. They come to ask for the leaves. This tree also cements the relationship between the Old Man and the Boy whenever they are tensed. The Old Man intimates that it is the tree and the proceeds collected from it that determine their relationship. He understands that the Boy is intimately attached to the tree and so he takes good care of it in order to please him. He explains to the old soldier that the Boy would not be happy if the tree is misused. Destroying the tree, "destroys" the Boy. The tree reminds him of the past and it hurts the Boy to see the tree die. This tree is a place of solace for the people. There is a sense in which Meja Mwangi is suggesting that the old are a source of peace and consolation. Ironically, the same old have failed to encourage and bring peace. The old tree is also a symbol of unity. It brings together people from all walks of life.

Fourthly, we have the old blanket that belongs to the Old Man and ironically the only thing that he salvaged from his former job. This old blanket protects him from cold and other dangers. It is also a reminder of his job and experiences before and during genocide. Presently, the old blanket has become an essential commodity to the Old Man as a companion and protector. It emphasizes the Old Man's past and links it with the present. This linkage creates a better understanding of the power of history in constructing the present.

The magnitude of poverty can also be read from the old blanket. Ordinarily, blankets are supposed to protect us from cold and the dangers of the night. Like a blanket, the old are expected or looked upon to cover younger people. It is ironical that the gerontocrats do not display this quality.

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that language is a carrier of a people's culture (13). It can also be used to colonize and or marginalize others. Achille Mbembe in "Power and Obscenity in the Post-colonial period: The case of Cameroon" has also argued that African leaders have "banalized" their language that grants them a lee way to control the people (*Rethinking Third World Politics*, 166-182). Language can also be a tool for othering and oppression. In fact, Ashcroft in *The Empire Writes Back* says that, "The dialectic of self and other, indigene and exile, language and place, slave and free, which is the matrix of postcolonial literatures, is also an expression of the way in which language and power operate in the world" (171). The text uses animals to metaphorise class. Evan Mwangi in "Artistic Choices and Gender Placement in the Writing of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Grace Ogot" observes that metaphors that portray the negative character as an animal are used as constitutive strategies (182).

This strategy is noted to be effective in constituting otherness. Evan Mwangi illustrates this by quoting Shohat and Stam who say that animalization forms part of the larger mechanism of reducing the person portrayed to "the vegetative and the instinctual rather than with the learned and the cultural" (182). The equation of characters to various animals reduces them to non-human category. The leaders refer to the people as: "cockroaches, bitch and dogs" (139). These words define an exclusionary space. Meja Mwangi here criticizes the othering imbued in language and which narrows the democratic arena. This reflects the contemptuous attitude that leaders have against their subjects.

On the contrary, the subjects use polite and accepted language. This difference in language use creates a linguistic gap that enhances class division in the society. This heightens the tensions between the two classes. Furthermore, this animalization stereotypes the marginalized poor. We recognize Homi Bhabha's argument in *The Location of Culture* that stereotype is "phobic" and "fetish" and "it is a false representation of a given reality" (107). Meja Mwangi satirizes the use of vulgar language by the political class and desires a common linguistic behavior that enhances appreciation among people and in turn builds a sustainable democracy.

In addition, Meja Mwangi alternates from English to Kiswahili which as Ngugi argues in *Decolonising the Mind* demonstrates his attack on language of the colonizer (24-28). The political class chooses Swahili lexical probably to concretize their low literacy. Swahili also gives the narrative local flavor as an East African literary creation. The Big Chiefs, for instance say, "Nitawasagasaga kama unga." By these alternations, Meja Mwangi seems to suggest that power resides in the language of the masses.

Ashcroft recognizes the use of songs especially abusive songs as part of postcolonial writing. He puts it thus, "Another traditional form employed by contemporary writers is the song of abuse, which opens with a direct address to the person being abused" (180). He comments on Awoonor's explanation by way of quotation: "The purpose of using such traditional forms is to knit the existing motifs and forms in to an artistic whole so that the artist is ultimately restored, to a community sensibility, to a restoration of calm and quietude" (Awoonor 1973:88). The narrative couples song and politics as the voice of reason in a generationally tensed society. It is in order to remember that these songs are relayed through the Old Man. They are mediated through flashbacks and reminiscences. In the songs, issues of democracy are revealed. It is can also be argued that the songs reveal characters' attitudes and mindsets.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to evaluate generational tension and how it affects democratic transformation in postcolonial Africa. The study has shown that the relationship between the younger and older generations is characterized by tension due to their differences in experiences. It has demonstrated that there exist ideological and philosophical differences between generations and gender that have direct on influence democratic processes. The Old Man, for instance, sharply disagrees with the Boy on how to initiate political reforms. The Old Man calls for tolerance, mutual understanding and dialogue as the best approaches to constructing a lasting democracy and smooth transition in politics. The Boy, on the other hand, feels that generational change is long overdue and that further tolerance is unacceptable. He is even ready to die for such change. The Girl comes out as calm, and sensible. She perceives political processes as an activity that requires calm reflection and involvement of everyone.

It is notable that Meja Mwangi has deliberately used various individual character voices that give the perspectives of specific generations and gender. In the text, dialogue brings out these authentic voices. The dominant omniscient narrative voice allows for the intrusion of various characters' voices through dialogues.

In addition, the choice of characters through whom the narrative is relayed reveals generational and gendered commitment. Different ideological positions taken by the characters are influenced by their experiences, age and gender. The Old Man, owing to his age and experience, has depth and humility. He agitates for non violent approach to political negotiations. The Boy who is limited in experience is restless and impatient with the old order and yearns for immediate change.

The Girl comes out as calm and reasonable. She advocates for the inclusion of women and children in matters of national interest. In a nutshell the writer gives each of these characters a voice that is both personal and representative. By the writer's construction and choice of characters, we learn that each voice is focal in the search for democratic processes.

Throughout the text, Meja Mwangi has predominantly used dramatized dialogue as a strategy of voicing each generation and gender while enhancing understanding among them. However, the question of "othering" still comes into play. It is not completely erased. The young still view the old as "others" and vice versa. The Girl, a representative of women, considers men as the cause of women's and children's problems. Through these characters, Meja Mwangi finds a space where he provides his philosophy. In the process of illustrating this philosophy, he elucidates the role each generation and gender should play in the search for political reforms.

Moreover, the study has demonstrated that generational tension should be taken as analytical tool in understanding postcolonial African politics. As illustrated in chapter three, Meja Mwangi suggests that strengthening of democratic processes in postcolonial Africa ought to be inclusive of all generations. He suggests that co-existence between generations be founded on the basis of dialogue. The author perceives the search for political processes as an activity that should involve everyone irrespective of age or gender.

Meja Mwangi sets his novel in a postcolonial Africa context. To an extent, *The Big Chiefs* can be considered an allegory because it's an Old Man's walk down memory lane. Since literature reflects the society, literary artists are inclined to either justify or defy the existing realities in their art.

Through Meja Mwangi's reflection on postcolonial Africa, *The Big Chiefs*, we learn that age has a direct influence on the search for democratic transformation. This is demonstrated by the Boy (a representative of youth) and the Girl (a representative of women and youth) who on the one hand, perceive the old generation as the cause of the problems that are currently afflicting the young generation. The Old Man (a representative of the old generation and order) has a contrary view. He observes that poverty is the cause of people's problem. These ideological differences in the way these two generations perceive issues is as a result of their differences in experience. These differences enhance generational tension. As we have demonstrated in chapters two and three, this tension impacts on the search for democratic processes.

By setting his text in a postcolonial African state, Meja Mwangi seems to propose an avenue through which we can perceive and understand political problems afflicting postcolonial Africa. There is a sense in which Meja Mwangi doubles both as a writer and socio-political commentator.

Throughout the study, we realize that there is generational competition between the young and the old. The young are overwhelmed with the yearning to bring generational change. This yearning, which drives the Boy to begin inspiring other youth and the elderly, crumbles. They are overwhelmed with a widespread opposition from the government (which consists of the old) and the "elderly formers." Because of this opposition, the search for democratic transformation stagnates. In the end, the boys are brutally killed en masse in the city. The emotional deaths of the boys symbolize the death of hopes in postcolonial Africa.

As we have seen, in chapters two and three, continued colonialism has widespread repercussion on democratic processes in postcolonial Africa. The whites continue to impose their demands on postcolonial Africa. They cheaply buy raw materials from Africa and process them in their countries. Africa's economy is largely controlled by the West. Since the West controls Africa's economy, it controls Africa's politics and kills democracy. The Old Man and the Boy have demonstrated that the whites only show disguised generosity to Africans. This is why the young generation would wish to have generational change. The young are ready to pay the price of attaining this change. In fact, they are even ready to die. They insist that the old generation has brought the country down to its knees and rebuilding can only be done when a new generation (the young generation) takes over political power. However, the old generation argues that generational change may not count much. To them, the search for democratic transformation can only be founded on generational dialogue. In a discussion with the Boy, the Old Man warns that violence, which the young have instrumentalized, cannot be used to attain a meaningful democracy.

It emerges from *The Big Chiefs* that Meja Mwangi has a vision for postcolonial African states on the search for democratic transformation. Firstly, he demonstrates that colonial ideologies inhibit the attainment of democracy. He castigates bad governance by demonstrating that the old cannot handle the search for democratic processes by ignoring the young. Similarly, through the Boy, he shows that the young cannot attain this without the hands of the old. Meja Mwangi proposes intergenerational integration in the search for democracy in postcolonial Africa. He further shows this by the structural rendition of the novel.

The structure allows for several voices from individual characters on issues relating to democratic processes. His Characters are left to speak for themselves and in so doing, decenter the omniscient voice. The resultant conflation of multiple voices echoes the envisaged democratic space.

Considering that renown scholars like Ngugi in *Decolonising the Mind*, Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* have shown that many political and social problems in postcolonial societies can be understood and explained from the colonial legacies, the study persuades us to argue that the binary opposition between the young and the old is also key in appreciating, understanding and explaining the political and social problems in postcolonial Africa. Moreover, it proposes intergenerational appreciation where different perspectives from different generations and gender are harmonized in order to construct a more democratic society that can allow for positive political processes.

Another killer of democracy and smooth transition in politics is negative ethnicity especially the brand encouraged by the Big Chiefs, which has potential to divide and lead to class, ethnic and generational divisions. The Big chiefs (the leaders) are known to incite tribes against each other by using hate speeches and stereotypes. The study indicates that for postcolonial African states to realize democracy they must exercise tolerance and appreciation of generational and gender differences. In fact, it proposes the strengthening of existing gender and generational structures and organizations such as the council of elders, youth organizations and women's organizations, in order to realize smooth transitional politics.

The research has revealed Meja Mwangi's vision on how intergenerational dialogue is critical to democratic transformation in post colonial Africa. It is instructive that, Meja Mwangi deploys the stylistic strategy of dialogue between characters at the textual level to amplify his vision of dialogue between the young and the old in society. It is my recommendation that further studies may enrich our understanding of this phenomenon - the reluctance of the old to relinquish power peacefully in Africa. Such additional research may involve the utilization of other theoretical perspectives.

Moreover, to have a broader understanding of Meja Mwangi's vision of generational tension and political reforms in post colonial Africa, further research may consider studying *Going Down River Road* and *Kill Me Quick* which also deal with the same theme but from different perspectives.

In aggregate my study has demonstrated that literature can be used as a site on which ideological differences are deconstructed. It attempts to separately look at the various opposing categories and views in order to understand the whole and achieve a hybrid perspective. By this submission, I hope to arouse more interest in the studies of gender, age, class and ethnicity among other constitutive categories

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