THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Gendered Politics in Post-Independence Kenya: The Case of Lower Eastern Region

Ambrose Kimanthi Vengi, D
Assistant Lecturer, School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Tharaka University, Kenya
Isaiah Otieno Oduor
Lecturer, Department of History, Archaeology and Political Studies,
Kenyatta University, Kenya

Abstract:
Women make up a significant proportion of the population, accounting for over half of the global population. Despite this, their participation in politics has always been lower than that of men. In Kenya, women constitute more than half of the entire population and form a sizable part of the electorate, yet they still face political exclusion. Political participation of women in politics is of great significance. This is because it is within the political realm that resource allocation and conflict resolution takes place. People join politics to individually or collectively pursue their interests and if women as a category are not equitably represented, it would mean that key policy and decisions are made without considering their aspirations. The objective of the study was to examine patterns of women's political mobilization in Kenya between 1963-2022. The study was guided by Social Relations Gender Approach. This theory is underpinned by the following assumptions:

- *Human well-being is the primary goal of development,*
- *Social relations determine people's roles, rights as well as their power over others and*
- *Societal institutions play an integral role in perpetuating social inequality.*

The research employed an exploratory research design. It is held here that the Jomo Kenyatta regime perpetuated the colonial patriarchal ideology anchored on gender bias. The independence regime conceptualized the role of women's organizations as mainly useful to improve the nation's economy but deliberately muzzled their political aspirations. The Moi regime opened political space for women and it is the Kibaki administration through the promulgation of the 2010 Constituion that gave women the requisite platform towards achieving gender equity in politics.

Keywords: Patriarchal ideology, politics, gender, social relations, political participation

1. Background Information and Literature Review on Gendered Politics in Post-Independence Kenya

Most African states acquired independence in the mid-1960s. The newly independent African states were deeply influenced by their former colonizers' implicit policies of gender exclusion. Consequently, African men perpetuated their colonial masters' ideology of colonial patriarchy. This was despite the fact that women had devotedly supported various political parties that fought for independence, and upon the attainment of independence, men dominated the political space. The Independent African states perpetuated the ad-hoc system of appointing women to political offices, thereby entrenching gender inequality (Gabriel, 1995).

African women provide the bulk of agricultural labour. Despite this, they lack sufficient political power; they are hardly allocated land but are given incentives to plant export-oriented cash crops. Loans and access to land allow men to gain from extension services that are also controlled by men. For example, in Burkina Faso, only men were granted new tenancies until 1983, despite the fact that women traditionally grew all of the family's subsistence food. A small percentage of Ghana's food and cash crops is grown by women. These women get little support from extension programs tailored specifically to their work. In general, women lacked the financial resources to invest in farm machinery. They could not get loans from banks or any financial institutions since they had no property or land to put up as security (Obbo, 1980).

After its independence in 1963, Kenya adopted an ideology that prioritized economic development above political fairness (Nugent, 2012). Kenyan capitalism was reinforced by the way land reform was implemented in conjunction with the transition of power. The land settlement program enabled most Kenyan men with strong political ties to get loans to buy vast estates. Bank loans and most arable land were made available to African farmers, the vast majority of whom were men. This exclusion of women from land and economic opportunities is attributable to two factors:

- First, Colonialism was based on the Victorian notion of a woman, which conceptualized women as mere extensions of men.
- Secondly, Colonialism reinforced existing patriarchal ideology by prioritizing the interests of men in education and employment.

Women's engagement in politics suffered as a result of the fact that men had the upper hand in terms of economic power at the time of independence.

Socio-economic position in Kenya plays a critical role in politics. Elites use their political clout to maintain a grip on the country's financial and political resources. It would be an uphill task for someone with little personal resources to run for public office (Thaddani, 1976 & Midamba, 1990). At independence in 1963, The ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), pursued the philosophy of patronage-based domination over women's political mobilization that required that women's groups remain politically neutral. To achieve this, the leadership of KANU ensured that Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO), founded in 1956, deviated its focus from its core mandate of championing the rights of women to purely developmental –type and its leadership believed that the top political positions ought to remain in the hands of men as a sign of respect for the organization's members (Kamau, 2010 &USAID, 2014).

By both covert and overt means, the KANU regime was able to make MYWO a virtual party wing and coerce its top leaders to quit Kenya's National Council of Women (NCWK) in 1981. MYWO was elevated to be Kenya's exclusive representative of women in an effort to guarantee the KANU administration's support of all Kenyan women and their votes (Nzomo, 2006; Kiragu, 2006 & Kamau, 2010). Moi regime used KANU's state sponsorship, financing and programs to exert ultimate control over the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Social Relations Gender Approach and the Articulation of Mode of Production.

Social Relations Gender Approach (SRA) was developed by Kabeer (1994). This theory identifies systemic and structural causes of gender inequality that must be addressed at their root. It argues that the subordination of women is a social process that begins with socialization from birth and is perpetuated at the family, societal, religious and state levels. This SRA scrutinizes the allocation of resources, roles, and power and how these reinforce gender inequalities. Social relations encapsulate the institutional connections that establish and perpetuate systemic disparities in the status of diverse social groups. These institutional relationships define our rights and the extent of control we wield over our lives and those of others. Social relations are critical in creating wide-ranging inequalities that assign each individual a particular position within the societal structure and hierarchy. The proponents of this theory contend that social movements must challenge the existing power relations that perpetuate inequality and social injustice, and that the state is a critical site for that confrontation.

The proponent of Articulation mode of Production theory is Claude Mellasoux (1975). This theory posits that social relations form a structured system that organizes and directs the forces of production as they transform nature. In this view, the mode of production provides the basis for the entire social structure to determine the organization of power relations, distribution of resources, and division of labour within society.

These theoretical tools provide a powerful lens through which we can analyze the structural and systemic nature of gender inequality in capitalist states. By examining the ways in which social institutions and historical structures perpetuate gender-based disparities, we can identify opportunities for politics to challenge and transform these systems. Ultimately, the goal is to create a more just and equitable society in which all individuals, regardless of gender, have the opportunity to live fulfilling lives.

3. Methodology

The study employed the exploratory research design. Mugenda, O & Mugenda, A (2003) explain that exploratory research includes structures, strategies and measures that produce qualitative data. A qualitative approach is advantageous since it gives an opportunity for the marginalized group to share experiences (Uwe, 2009; Creswel, 2014; Babbie, 2014). The research design was descriptive, informative, and interpretive and captured informants' unique experiences in a particular historical context.

The research adopted cluster sampling, snowballing, and purposive sampling. Research instruments included questionnaire guides, interview schedules and Focus Group Discussions.

Data were collected from the Kenya National Archives, Oral interviews and FGDs. To ensure accuracy, data collected were corroborated with other sources to rid it of biases and prejudices.

4. Research Findings

Kenya achieved self-government in 1963 as a multi-party democracy with Kenya African National Union (KANU) and Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) as the main political parties. In 1964, KADU, led by Daniel Moi and Ronald, dissolved their party to join Jomo Kenyatta administration and therefore, Kenya became a de facto one-party state (Nyanchoga & Amutambi, 2014). Kenya's first regime was dominated by men, with just a few women in the ranks. This was a consequence of the Sovereign state inheriting colonial Victorian ideology, which was anchored on gender prejudice. Men in the first regime held the firm belief that women lacked the necessary qualifications for positions of power (Alidou, 2013; Kamau, 2010 & Nzomo, 1997). This was despite the fact that women took an active role during the struggle for independence.

In the months towards the attainment of independence, women had put forth spirited agitations demanding to be included in the committee planning for Kenya's independence celebrations and also demanded nomination slots in parliament (Nyabola, 2018; Maxon & Thomas, 2014). However, neither the outgoing colonial power nor the incoming African governments reacted to these concerns since there were no provisions for women's representation.

Although the independent regime did not see the need to include women in the political arena, the state incorporated women's collaborative efforts into its economic expansion programs as it viewed women's contribution to the economy as essential to the country's economic success. The progress of the nation's economy was seen as dependent on the participation and collaboration of women (Udvardly, 1998). Women's organizations became a significant civic endeavor through which the state sought to influence how individuals acted in support of government development initiatives not as political but as economic actors (Lzar, 2004).

At the height of the Kenyatta administration's exclusion of women from political roles, just five women were elected to parliament throughout his 15-year tenure. There were no women in the first parliament (Migiro,2013). In Kenya's Lower Eastern Region, the elections of 1963, the mini elections of 1966 and that of 1969, all the elective positions went to males. In an interview with Agnes Ndetei, a retired politician, she informed the researcher that the lack of women in politics in the first republic could be the result of how colonialism was introduced into this country. She argued that colonialism was introduced in such a way that it reinforced existing patriarchal institutions and even though African cosmology did not have a clear dichotomy between gender roles and that gender roles in Africa were not mutually exclusive but rather complementary in nature, the colonial ideology was in line with the Victorian ideology that there was a clear dichotomy between gender roles and that, the women belonged to the private sphere and their male counterpart to the public sphere. She informed the researcher that the colonial state favored men in its administrative structures and that colonial education was gendered towards men (Ndetei, A: 04/05/2022). It was not until 1974 that the Lower Eastern region elected a female member of parliament, the Hon. Winfred Nyiva Mwendwa.

The Moi regime, too, perpetuated politics of tokenism, which he used as bait to get women support. President Moi's leadership, much like that of other African political leaders, seldom spoke against the culture of men's domination in politics. This position was captured well while following an International Conference on Women held in Nairobi, where women demanded equal representation of women in parliament. President Moi casually responded by asserting that God made man the head of the family (Gordon, 1996).

It is worth noting that during Moi's regime, there were notable changes that bolstered women's participation in politics. A case in point is the revelation of the contentious section 2(a) of the constitution that had been enacted in 1982 following the attempted coup de etat, which stated that Kenya was a de jure one-party state and declared KANU as the only legitimate political party. The reveal reverted Kenya back to a multi-party democracy (Noyes & Alexander, 2013). This opened up democratic space in Kenya.

The formation of Inter-Party Parliamentary Group (IPPG) prior to the general election of 1997 played a critical role towards gender inclusivity in politics. Women demanded to be allocated 6 out of the 12 slots for nominated members of parliament. Political parties were also compelled to consider women's representation during nominations for parliamentary positions (Kanyinga, 2014). As a result of the opening of the democratic space, Hon. Charity Kaluki Ngilu, a lady from Lower Eastern Region, made history by vying for the presidency in the 1997 general election. Her Party, Social Democratic Party (SDP), played an important role in promoting gender inclusivity not only in Lower Eastern region but Kenya in general. The SDP had the highest number of female candidates nominated to contest for parliamentary positions. The election of 1997 also witnessed the highest number of women elected and nominated to parliament since independence (Wanyande et al., 2007 & Mitullah, 1998).

In a Focused Group Discussions (FDGs), the researcher was informed that during the 1997 electoral period, women in Lower Eastern region were mobilized to be ambassadors of Charity Ngilu by being given t-shirts, caps and lesos inscribed with the portrait and symbol of Hon.Ngilu. Women also formed self-help groups for economic empowerment that served as centers of enlightenment on women's role in political processes. The self-help group composed songs to persuade all women to support their fellow women and also castigate men and women who looked down upon Ngilu's presidential candidature (FGD, 2022).

The Kibaki regime is credited with having opened democratic space for women's inclusivity in the political sphere. In 2002, the Kenyan political landscape experienced a shift from the Moi regime to the Kibaki administration. It was a period that ushered in a renewed and robust era of engagement by women in the political discourse. The National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) had campaigned on the mantra that it was going to be an all-inclusive government that would embrace all Kenyans, women included, in vital decision-making. The 2002 General election witnessed a significant surge in the number of women elected to parliament, where 18 were successfully elected to the national assembly (Wanyande et al., 2007). One-sixth of these 18 women members of Parliament were Lower Eastern Region (Kenya Gazette Notice no. 379 dated 22/01/2003). These were: Hon. Charity Kaluki Ngilu, representing Kitui Central; Hon. Nyiva Mwendwa, MP Kitui West and Adelina Ndete Mwau, Nominated MP.

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) designated Women, youth, and people living with disabilities as special categories. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) acknowledges women's rights as legal equals to men's and qualifies them for recognition regardless of political, social or economic circumstances. The discretionary framework should adhere to the accompanying two-thirds gender rule, which states that no more than 66 percent of the persons from elective or appointive positions may be of the same gender. Article 27 of the Constitution goes even further, requiring the legislature to develop and enact legislation on government policy on minorities in society and efforts to alleviate women's historical discrimination (CoK, 2010).

5. Conclusions

It is held that Kenya got her internal government in 1963 with His Excellency Jomo Kenyatta as the Prime Minister. The Jomo Kenyatta regime perpetuated the colonial patriarchal ideology anchored on gender bias despite the fact

that women actively participated in the struggle for independence and, therefore, qualified to be part and parcel of government. The independent regime conceptualized women's organizations as only useful to improve the nation's economy but deliberately emasculated their political aspirations. This was achieved by making the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) an appendage of KANU.

Daniel Moi became the president in 1978 following the death of Jomo Kenyatta on a mantra of Nyayo philosophy and perpetuated the idea of tokenism with respect to women and politics. It was during Moi's regime that two women from Lower Eastern region, namely: Hon. Winfred Nyiva Mwendwa and Hon. Agnes Ndetei, joined the cabinet as Minister for Culture and Social Services and Assistant Minister for Education, respectively. The repeal of section 2(a) of the Constitution reverting Kenya into a de jure multi-party democracy opened the political space for women's political mobilization in Kenya in general and the Lower Eastern Region in particular. The Inter-Party Parliamentary Group (IPPG, 1997) made it mandatory for political parties to designate half of the nomination slots available to them for women.

The promulgation of 2010 constitution under the Kibaki regime was a significant milestone in the history of gender-inclusive politics in Kenya. It introduced the two-third gender rule. The two-third gender rule, if fully implemented, would once and for all cure the historical marginalization of Kenya and the Lower Eastern in particular.

6. References

i. Alidou, O (2003). Muslim women in postcolonial Kenya: leadership, representation, and social change.Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin
ii. Babbie, E (2014). *The Basics Of Social Research. 6th Ed*. Boston: Centage Learning.
iii. Creswell, J.W (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.3rd*. Ed. Sage Publications.
iv. Gordon, A. (1996). *Transforming Capitalism and Patriarchy: Gender and Development in Africa.* Education Publishers.
v. Gordon, A & Gordon, D. (1996). *Understanding Contemporary Africa.* London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
vi. Kabeer, N. (1994). *The Institutions, Relations and Outcomes: Framework and Tools for Gender Awareness and Planning*. IDS: University of Sussex.
vii. Kamau, N. (2010). *Women and Political Leadership in Kenya: Ten Case Studies*. Nairobi: Heinrich Boll Stifung: East and Horn of Africa.
viii. Kiragu, J. (2006*). "Is there a women's movement?" Mapping Best Practices: Promoting Gender Equality & Advancement of Kenya Women*. Ed. Muteshi, J. Nairobi: Heinrich Boll Foundation, East and Horn of Africa.
ix. Midambo, B. (1990). *The United Nations Decade: Political Empowerment or Increased Marginalization for Kenyan Women*. Africa Today Vol.37. No 1. Indiana University Press.
x. Migiro, K. (2013). *Factbox: Women in Numbers Kenyan Politics.'* Thomson Reuters Foundation.
xi. Mitullah, W. V. (1998). "The marginalized Majority: Women Candidates and votes." In Tostensen, A. *Kenya Hobbled Democracy Revisited: The 1997 Elections in Retrospect and Prospect.* Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights.
xii. Mugenda, O & Mugenda, A (2003*). Research Methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches.* Nairobi: ACTS Press.
xiii. Nugent, P. (2012). *Africa since Independence*. New York: St.Martin's Press.
xiv. Nyabola, N & Pommerole, M (2018). *Where Women Are: Gender and the 2017 Kenyan Elections.* Makuyu: Don Bosco Printing Press.
xv. Obbo, C. (1980). *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Indepen*dence. London: Zed Press.
xvi. Thaddani, V. (1976). *The Forgotten Factor in Social Change: The Case of Women of Nairobi.*
xvii. UNESCO (2014). *The Women Soldiers of Dahomey.*
xviii. USAID (2014) *Women's leadership as a route to greater empowerment: the case of Kenya.* USA: Management Systems International.
xix. Uwe, F. (2009). *Managing Quality in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
xx. Wanyande, M, Omosa, M. & Ludeki, C. (2007) (eds). *Governance and Transition Politics in Kenya.* Nairobi: University of Nairobi.