

A HISTORY OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN KISUMU COUNTY

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Abstract: Globally, the participation of women in political leadership has been dismal with Kenya not left behind. This work studies a history of women participation in political leadership in Kisumu County from 1963 to 2017. The study considers both the county and national levels of government with regard to women participation in elective political positions. The study adopted gender and patriarchy theoretical frameworks to analyse the political participation of women. Using descriptive research design as a guide, data for the study was obtained through questionnaires, archival sources, focus group discussion schedules, interview guides, and secondary sources. The data was then analysed and reported using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings contribute to the advancement of knowledge about strides that women have made in political leadership participation. The study found that despite the low number of women who have taken up elective leadership positions at the national level from Kisumu County since 1963, there has been a great progress at the county level.

Keywords: History, Participation, Women, Political Leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

This article presents the analysis of women's position on the eve of colonialism, establishment of colonial rule and how it affected their political participation in Kisumu County. While some studies have been done on the participation of women in political leadership at the national level, this study is justified as a micro study at a county level that gives more insight on the plight of women with regards to political participation at local levels in Kenya.

Until January 2017, women only held 17% of government ministries globally most of whom were in charge of social sectors like family and education [30]. While the participation of women in parliamentary politics has improved in Europe, the continent is yet to achieve a gender balanced representation. According to Inter Parliamentary Union, the differences in engagement of men and women in politics are persistent in the USA and UK [30]. Despite the long democratic histories of the two countries and the high scores on the status of women, they still elect few women political leaders.

Most pre-colonial African societies were highly patriarchal but in some of the societies, women had significant political roles through the various institutional provisions [111]. The Kom women of Cameroon, for instance, made key communal decisions and had defined roles in political gatherings. Colonial powers in the continent failed to acknowledge diffusion of power in the various societies [25]. In many ways, colonialists fashioned the societies they colonized into entities that enabled men to dominate in a way that disadvantaged women [3]. Post-colonial African countries inherited the patriarchal colonial systems and have shown a very slow embrace of women leadership in political positions [37].

Kenyan societies were not left out in the colonial reinforcement of male patriarchy that subordinated the position of women in political leadership [39]. Post independent Kenya was expected to more gender sensitive regarding its

development policies. However, it took the provocation of ILO in 1972 for the Kenyan government to take measures to improve the position of women regarding poverty, education, and employment [74]. Over the past few decades, East African countries have made progress in promoting women participation in political leadership, surpassing Kenya.

The 2010 Kenyan constitution aims to promote participation of both men and women at all levels of governance [21]. Article 81b of the constitution provides that not more than two thirds of members of elective bodies be of the same gender. Considering that women constitute 50.1% of the adult population in Kisumu County [46], sidelining them in political representation is not only an injustice but also a setback to attaining two thirds gender rule which is a constitutional requirement in Kenya. This study is, therefore, justified as it provides an avenue through which women in Kisumu County can analyse their situation and develop strategies to enhance their participation in political leadership.

This study integrated Gender and Patriarchy frameworks to analyse women participation in political leadership in Kisumu County. Gender has been a major tool of analyzing social relations in the society [7]. Gender as a tool of analysis considers political and socioeconomic transformation to be one entity making it relevant for this study as the relation between political and socioeconomic spheres in Kisumu County is very close. Using Gender theory, this study was able to identify the challenges and opportunities that have shaped the history of women political leadership. In African societies, the allocation of tasks has often been based on the patriarchal ideology that gives all authority to men [23]. The patriarchy framework was therefore used in this study to highlight the structures that subordinate women.

II. RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study employed descriptive survey design to explore the history of women participation in political leadership in Kisumu County. Descriptive survey design was efficient for this study as it is restricted to fact finding that leads to problem solving and formulation of key principles [8]. The study used secondary sources and primary sources which included questionnaires, oral interviews, archival sources, and focus group discussions to collect data. The study was conducted in Kisumu County that covers 2407 Km² and has a population of 1,155,574. The county is divided into seven constituencies and 35 wards. The constituencies are KisumuWest, Kisumu East, Kisumu Central, Seme, Muhoroni, Nyando, and Nyakach.

The study targeted the adult population of 539210 who were registered as voters by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission in the county in 2017. The minimum age limit for participants was, therefore, 18 years but there was no maximum age limit. Using Krejcie and Morgan's table, a sample of 384 respondents was arrived at for the administration of questionnaires. Proportional sampling was then used to arrive at the number of respondents per constituency. Thirty two key informants who were interviewed were purposively sampled and they were comprised of chiefs, all the elected members of Kisumu County Assembly, women officials of major political parties in the county (ODM, Ford Kenya, and Jubilee), former female aspirants, church leaders, Kisumu County women representative, and officials of Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization. Also, the study purposively sampled Seme and Kisumu constituencies where 18 women officials of major political parties in the county took part in focus group discussions.

A set of questionnaires that had both open ended and closed questions were used to obtain information from the respondents. They were designed as per the themes and the historical periods under study. Key informant interviews were conducted to collect information that could not be directly observed and could not be well captured by the questionnaires. Although the researcher prepared a set of questions, the interviewees were given room for flexibility to allow new information to arise. Focus group discussions were conducted in English language which all the participants were fluent in. Each discussion lasted for 80 minutes with the researcher as the moderator and a research assistant as the note taker. Tape recorders and notebooks were used to capture information obtained from the interviews and focus group discussions.

Archival sources were also used to gather information on the history of women participation in political leadership in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Archival data was obtained from the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi which consisted of correspondences of colonial officials and Kisumu quarterly and annual reports. Secondary data used for the study included published books, periodicals, local newspapers, published theses, election reports, online journals, and publications by government departments and non-governmental organizations. They were collected from the university's library, Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library, Kisumu County Government, and key government departments.

The data from interviews and focus group discussions were reported in verbatim as per the various themes following Braun and Clerke's principles of thematic analysis [13]. The study employed descriptive statistics to analyze data from

the questionnaires as it allowed the researcher to meaningfully describe a distribution of scores using a few statistics [64]. Tables were the mainly used form of descriptive statistics. The researcher sorted, edited, coded, and classified the collected data to various categories that were tallied and changed to percentages for analysis according to frequency of responses.

The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participants before they gave their consent to be part of the study. The participants therefore gave their informed consent with full knowledge of what the study entailed. Confidentiality and anonymity were achieved by identifying the participants with serial numbers instead of their names.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Position of Women in Kisumu County before Colonialism

The predominant community in Kisumu County during the pre-colonial era was the Luo. The allocation of tasks in this community was guided by an individual's age and sex [79]. Land ownership in the community occurred through inheritance from the fathers to the grown-up sons. As such, grown up and married daughters did not inherit land from their fathers but only had access to land through marriage.

Education among the Luo was offered by parents and grandparents. Women had a key role in educating children but as they grew up, boys and girls were educated separately [6]. Also, elder brothers and sisters took part in educating the younger brothers and sisters respectively. The girls would sleep in the grandmother's house where they continued with their education until they got married [62]. Girls were majorly educated on sexual education, rules of marriage, and respect. The boys on the other hand, joined the senior boys in the boys' dormitory (*simba*) where the education they received was about discipline, hunting, wrestling, planning courtship, and keeping secrets [62]. Therefore, as men received training on bravery and leadership roles, women's education was confined in domestic chores and discipline.

The Luo community was headed by '*ruoth*' (chief). The community also had '*jaduong'bura*' (Judge), and *ajuoga* (medical practitioner). The community's smallest political unit was *dala* (homestead) headed by *jaduongdala* who represented the home in the village council headed by a village elder. The leader of *dhoot* (clan) was known as *Jaduong' Dhoot* who together with his counsellors maintained the clan's land [62]. This study found that all these leadership positions were reserved for men as no woman in the Luo community held any of the positions before the colonial period.

Women Participation in Political Leadership during Colonial Period in Kisumu County

The colonial period in Africa strengthened patriarchy in the continent through restrictive laws [77]. The British, for instance, created the position of the paramount chief to effectively run colonies like Kenya. However, the paramount chiefs were predominantly men all through the colonial period. In Kisumu County, some of the paramount chiefs included Chief Oduu and Chief Owuor Kere of Nyakach (KNA/NZA/1/4). This study, therefore, found that Kisumu County did not have any female paramount chief during the colonial period. The District Commissioner further manipulated the election of African nominees to the Luo native council as directed in the South Kavirondo Crampton's letter to Hemsted that read:

"The question of this council was exhaustively discussed yesterday with all chiefs and headmen and a representative number of elders from every location. The elected members were produced and it was once noticeable with only one or two exceptions very young men, many of them mission boys, had been chosen... I informed the meeting that I would not accept all these representatives and that half must be replaced by men of mature age," (KNA/PC/NZA, 1925).

The letter clearly indicates that no woman was to be in the Luo Native Council as only mature elderly men were to replace the mission boys. Also, the members of a native tribunal that was formed in 1932 in Nyanza to administer native laws and customs in the area were all men [KNA/DC/KSM/5/3]. The African court in Kisumu also constituted only of men, yet, it had the mandate to hear several cases including those that involved women. As such, this study found that women in Kisumu County were completely left out in the local leadership positions in the county that were created by the colonial government.

The study also found that women were denied land rights as men were entrusted with land ownership rights by the colonialists. The land tenure laws that operated in Kisumu County during the colonial period were highly influenced by the Victorian and Christian family model in which the male head of a household was granted a paternalistic and authoritative position as breadwinner of the family. Land is a major resource that can help an individual to amass wealth

which is necessary for participation in politics. Besides land, women were highly alienated in the colonial education. Education is powerful tool in preparing individuals for leadership.

During the colonial period, formal education in Kisumu County was mainly offered by missionaries, more so, CMS and the Roman Catholic. Initially, the only missionary school in Kisumu County was Maseno School for boys and, hence, women had no opportunity to get formal education. Eventually, when the colonialists decided to offer education to girls in the county, the focus was only on domestic training in preparation for marriage [37]. This study found that the education that boys received gave them an upper hand in attaining employment as women were left at home. The school curriculum during the colonial period was carefully constructed to suit gender ideals that the government had regarding the African male and female [79]. As such, the status of women in Kisumu County became less valued during the colonial period and they were left behind in all aspects making it impossible for them to compete favourably with them with regard to political positions.

The introduction of taxation forced African men to seek employment as casual labourers in Kisumu County. They majorly sought jobs at Asian plantations but the great famine of 1917 and 1918 highly affected Kisumu County, more so Kano and Nyakach [KNA/KDAQ/1918-1919]. As such, the African men were forced to migrate from rural areas to urban areas where they could seek wage employment. The migration left women with the role of heading their families. Besides migration, this study found that the colonial government came up with rules that restricted women from migrating to urban centres. Most women therefore relied heavily on their husbands rendering them powerless.

Even though there is evidence that the Young Kavirondo Association was popular during the colonial period in Kisumu County, this study found that there was no active involvement of women in the organization. Also, during the colonial era, only two African women served in the legislative council, a body that was established in 1907. However, none of these women came from Kisumu County, meaning that absolutely no woman held a political leadership position from the county during the colonial era. Similarly another study found that the colonial government mentored men at local levels so that they would take up higher political positions at independence while they deliberately locked out women from participating in colonial politics [68]. Before 1957, women were not allowed to register as voters or even hold political office [71]. The African District Council in Kisumu County received a memorandum that gave this directive. Part of the memorandum read:

Who is to be registered? Time is inappropriate for women to vote and only men of full age that is at the apparent age of 21 shall vote, on the understanding that at the moment women are subject to submission and at times are quickly moved by emotion.... Kenya African women will take an ample time to qualify to register...'(KNA)

This study therefore found that women were left out in the political affairs of Kisumu County during the colonial period by being excluded from the major political units like the council and position of paramount chief among others. Also the study reports that women from Kisumu County did not get the chance to serve in the national legislative council. The education system that was in place during the period was meant to shape women for the public sphere but it was to confine them to their domestic roles. Besides, the land tenure system and migration policies left women powerless, limiting their ability to compete against men for political positions.

Women Participation in Political Leadership in Kisumu County in the Post-colonial Era (1963 to 2017)

The post-independence government brought increased opportunities for Africans involvement in politics in Kenya. However, women were still not granted similar access to political leadership as men [76]. In Kisumu County, the first woman to take up a political leadership position was Grace Ogot who became the first female counsellor in 1965 and she also became the first female counsellor in 1967 [64]. Furthermore, she became the first female Member of Parliament in the whole country in 1969 when she was elected to represent Kisumu Town Constituency. As such, from 1963 when Kenya gained her independence to 1969, there were no women elected or nominated to the parliament from Kisumu County. While women constitute over half of the population of Kisumu County, this study found that only one woman Grace Onyango vied for elective offices between 1963 and 1978 in the county.

During the reign of Jomo Kenyatta, women were generally marginalized in political issues in Kenya. In Kisumu County specifically, the existing women groups at the time were clan based that focused on assisting the less fortunate members of the communities by providing them with clothing and food. Also, they assisted their members with tasks like building houses and farming. The groups were mainly under the guidance of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization besides

other bodies like Anglican Mothers, Young Women Christian Association and Girl guides that helped in organizing women in the county [65]. However, this study found that the groups only focused on economic and social activities and did not mentor women to take part in political leadership in Kisumu County.

As a result of the Harambee Spirit that Jomo Kenyatta had initiated, the women groups would organize Harambee fundraisings where political leaders would be invited to contribute money for development initiatives. The collected money would be put into development projects like education of their children, agricultural activities, and building iron roofed houses.

In the 1970s, the women groups in Kisumu County took the lead in constructing houses with iron sheet roofs. Besides, the groups influenced election outcomes by campaigning for candidates who contributed towards their harambees. The groups were regarded as the major vehicle of empowering rural women in Kisumu County (O.I 17, 2019).

Following the massive contribution of the women's groups' to development, Jomo Kenyatta's government gave them financial assistance through a Special Rural Development Program [75]. However, the program was led by men and it eventually collapsed in 1971 due to embezzlement of funds. The government later formed a Women's Bureau in 1976 mandated to collect, analyse, and disseminate information and data for designing and evaluating women projects and policies [90]. This initiative up-scaled the number of women groups in Kisumu County. However, the study found that barely any woman emerged from the self help groups to take up elective leadership positions.

The self-help groups mainly served to empower women socially and economically. No single woman from these self-help groups in Kisumu County rose to elective positions during the era of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi" (O.i 15, 2019)

The 1980 UN Decade for Women Conference acknowledged the lack of improvement in the rural women's social and economic status since the decade's first years. Most women in the rural areas were cut off from better education, technological advancements, and better farm inputs [65]. Indeed, Kisumu County is mainly comprised of rural areas and hence had a high population that did not have access to opportunities. Nairobi hosted the 1985 UN Decade for Women Conference that aimed to further review gender relations [76]. However, most women from Kisumu County were not aware that a whole decade had been dedicated to them as they did not participate in any of them and hence their status remained unchanged after the decade.

Despite the re-emergence of multi-partism in 1992 and the lobbying by women groups, no woman was elected to parliament from Kisumu County in the 1992 general election. The results of the 1992 election were a great disappointment not only to women in Kisumu County but to women in the whole country [80]. The fatigue proceeded until 1995 when the international women's conference was held in Beijing which adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to call for peace, development, and equality. Some women from Kenya attended the conference. However the women were considered powerful educated urban women (Kerubo, 2012). Rural women, who make up the largest population of women in Kisumu County therefore, did not benefit from the conference.

Following the Beijing' conference, a women's ministry was created in Kenya but it was led by a man and its dismantlement after two months showed that the government did not care about the plight of women in the country including those from Kisumu County. However, there were several changes from 1997 to 2002 as the citizens became more aware of their rights [21]. Within this period, the media landscape radically changed with the emergence of some private media companies and as a result they started to advocate for the rights of women too. Unfortunately the private stations had frequencies that were limited to Nairobi and therefore they only disseminated information within Nairobi. As a result, this study found that women in Kisumu County remained misinformed about their rights as they majorly relied on rumours.

Besides, the privately owned magazines that were available in Kisumu County during this period followed the tradition of patriarchy and could only urge women to pray for the country. This study found that women in Kisumu County, therefore, continued to experience discriminatory practices like denied access to education and forced early marriages that limited their economic and political rights, relegating them to the periphery. Women even had to seek the consent of their husbands as a legal requirement before attaining national identification during the era of President Moi.

Even though the country witnessed a slight improvement in women political participation during the reign of Mwai Kibaki, this study found that Kisumu County was still lagging behind. By 2007, women constituted of more than half of the country's population. However, out of the 222 legislative posts, only 18 women were elected nationally an indicator of

underrepresentation [14]. Unfortunately, this study found that there was absolutely no woman elected to parliament from Kisumu County. The women who vied for parliamentary positions in Kisumu County in 2007 include Rosa Buyu for Kisumu West Constituency who lost to Olago Aluoch. According to the findings of this study, most women opted not to vie for any elective position in 2007 because despite the fact that the number of women votes in the county was high, the cultural mindset against the leadership of women remained widespread.

The introduction of the position of women representatives by the 2010 constitution created more slots for women in parliament towards achieving the two thirds gender rule [21]. As a result, the Kenyan National Assembly now includes the forty-seven women representatives from the forty-seven counties. However, this study found that the cultural patriarchy in Kisumu County views this position as a lesser political office. One of the respondents, for instance, cited an example of Hon Rosa Buyu who had previously vied for parliamentary position twice unsuccessfully but when she vied for the position of Women Representative she was voted in. The study, therefore, found that it is clear that the role of women representatives is yet to be understood among the public in Kisumu County.

Most people consider the position of women representative to be less demanding and fit for women, for instance, after failing to clinch the parliamentary seat twice, Rosa Buyu was considered fit for the position of women representative [O.I 10, 2019].

In 2013 when Uhuru Kenyatta began his first tenure, the number of female parliamentarians rose to 86 including the women representatives. However, besides the women representative, no other woman was elected to parliament from Kisumu County.

Table 1: Elected Female members of Kisumu County Assembly, 2013 and 2017

Member of County Assembly	Ward
2013	
Benter Akinyi Ogola	West Seme
Carolyne Awino Owen	Kisumu North
Nereah Akoth Okombo	Manyatta B
Petronillah Achieng' Omondi	South East Nyakach
Pamela Amondi Omimo	Central Kisumu
Priscah Auma Misachi	Kaloleni/Shaurimoyo
Malin Akinyi Otieno	Kobura
2017	
Sally Okudo	Central Seme
Maurine Otiang'	Chemelil
Pamela Akinyi Odhiambo	Manyatta B
Judith Otieno Onganga	Central
Priscah Auma Misachi	Shaurimoyo

Source: Author

Out of the 35 wards in Kisumu County, only seven wards elected female representatives to the county Assembly in 2013 as shown in table 1. However, 11 women were nominated to the County Assembly which made Kisumu County Assembly to have the most women nationally in 2013. The six women who were elected to the County Assembly in 2013 defended their seats in 2017 with other women like Carolyne Ogot (Central Nyakach), Faridah Salim (Kaloleni Shaurimoyo), (Kolwa Central), Jane Nyawade (Ombeyi), Pamela Oyoo (Migosi) and Pamela Akinyi (Manyatta B) joining them in the contest for the MCA positions. However, out of the 35 wards, only 5 wards were elected female aspirants to the county assembly in 2017.

In the 2017 elections, women in Kisumu County also showed interest to vie for higher elective positions including Atieno Otiemo who contested for the gubernatorial position but lost to Anyang' Nyong'o. The key informants for this study reported that female contestants are often harassed and marginalized by cultural norms. Ms Ruth Odinga who wanted to contest for the gubernatorial position reported that besides financial constraints, she also faced gender challenges [14]. She added that women aspirants are highly endangered due to threats of violence from their male counterparts [14]. Citing her management record, Ms Odinga reported that women have what it takes to be governors [14]. The study also found that the voters in Kisumu County only consider women to be fit for certain positions. One of the key informants reported the challenge she faced trying to explain her interest in the senate position, yet, women were only deemed fit for the position of women representative.

Even though over twenty women vied for county positions in the 2017 elections, the study found that there were wards where absolutely no woman vied for the county positions. The wards are Kolwa East, Nyalenda A, North West Kisumu, South West Kisumu, Miwani, Ombeyi, South East Nyakach, South West Nyakach, Ahero, Kobura and East Seme. The respondents attributed this to the lack of support from political parties, more so, during the nomination process. Furthermore, the study found that some of the women who had interest in vying for the various elective positions were not able to gather enough resources for serious campaigns. The study revealed in Kisumu County, many women shy away from politics while those in politics suffer from discriminatory attitudes. Even though Kisumu County produced the first woman to be elected to parliament, she was also the last to be elected as Member of Parliament from the county from 1963 to 2017.

IV. CONCLUSION

Most of the colonial policies including, education, labour, taxation, and religion marginalized women in Kisumu County, hindering them from actively taking part in political leadership. This study has established that gaining independence was not an automatic ticket for women political participation in Kisumu County. However, women in the County remained marginalized and under male subordination. Nonetheless, they made efforts to elevate their status through self help groups that this study found to have been more oriented on the socioeconomic issues that the women faced and did not groom them for political participation. However, amidst all the challenges, the study found that one woman, Mrs Grace Onyango, emerged as mayor of Kisumu Town and first female Member of Parliament in 1969. The study has established that women in Kisumu County remained marginalized during Moi's era and were relegated to the periphery in politics. Power remained consolidated by the males and even economically, women remained marginalized. Women mainly relied on economic self-help groups to support themselves and their families. The study found that more women were elected to parliament during Mwai Kibaki's era due to the effort of MYWO. While the 2010 constitution was expected to have instant result on women political leadership in Kisumu County, this study revealed found that even in the subsequent elections, elected women leaders from the county to the national level was still low but a slight improvement was noted at the county level.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that the two thirds gender rule provided for in the 2010 constitution be followed to the latter from the nomination process by political parties to grant women full and equal opportunity to take part in political leadership at all levels. Besides, awareness should be created among all residents of Kisumu County on the importance of equality in political leadership and how to achieve it, for instance, teachers can be trained to instil confidence in both boys and girls that they can hold elective political positions. This way, a levelled playing ground will be enhanced making the political environment conducive and accommodative to both men and women.

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