

Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain: Abagusi Women's Quest for Political Participation Amidst the Survival of Patriarchy in Parliamentary Elections in Kenya Since 2010

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Abstract: This paper explores Kisii women's participation in general elections since 2013. Contrary to scholarship that overemphasizes how patriarchal mechanisms keep women out of the political sphere, the chapter explores the experiences of women in their local context to show the reality of how the interplay between patriarchal structures and processes within the realm of Abagusi traditions and state projects, and the persistence of matrilineal practices and ideologies has contributed to the way women navigate the political space in Kisii county. We focus on how women negotiated the patriarchal electoral terrain in their positions as political 'managers' – as mobilizers and convincing agents. We argue that women's political participation has been shaped by historical, social and cultural processes, and continues to be informed by gendered maternal ideologies that formed a crucial ground for negotiation and renegotiation of women's political performances in the general elections. We conclude that while the prevailing patriarchal climate in Kisii county inspired largely by tradition and kin relations, limits women's ascension into elective positions, it complexly provides them an opportunity to perform public politics.

Keywords: Abagusi, Patriarchy, Political Participation, Women's quest

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The status of women in society is increasingly recognised on a global scale. As a result, women's involvement in electoral politics has garnered a lot of scholarly attention in recent years all around the world. However, women are still notably underrepresented in elective posts in several nations around the world. According to UNDP (2010), there is a significant and ongoing gender disparity in women's participation in politics in general and electoral politics in particular. Women make up about 18.4% of the membership in world parliaments. It is frequently said that each gender should be represented in all decision-making organs in every public organisation where decisions that have an impact on people's lives are made by a minimum of 30 to 40 percent of each gender (CEDAW, 1997).

This demonstrates how crucial it is for women to participate in their nations' political systems. In recent years, the political engagement of women has advanced in various Eastern African nations. The first nation in Africa to incorporate a 30 percent quota in its national constitution was Rwanda in 1998 (Meena, 1992). Rwanda, which achieved gender parity in women's political involvement, came after Tanzania. According to Sirleaf (2010), Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda have reached the critical mass of 30 percent or higher women representation in their national parliaments because they recognised the value of gender equity in decision-making and made changes to their electoral and parliamentary systems.

Despite making up roughly 52% of the population, women's access to decision-making organs has remained generally limited and marginal in Kenya since independence (Kariuki, 2010) and Kenya is one of the developing nations with the lowest percentage of women participating in local and national politics. Since the country's independence in 1963, women in Kenya have been excluded and denied participation in its social, economic, and political activities. In addition to discouraging women from participating in politics, a strong perception ingrained in cultural ideas, customs, and practises has made politics out of the reach of the vast majority of women.

However, research has demonstrated that political engagement, representation, and voice are essential for both the egalitarian advancement of society as well as the protection and defence of women's rights and interests in democracies, particularly at the local level. Therefore, in order to progress democracy and gender equality there is a need to enhance women's engagement in politics because the highly ingrained patriarchal system in Kenya, in which women are viewed as inferior to males, has significantly contributed to the low representation of women in electoral politics.

Statement of the problem

Women are still underrepresented in political leadership in Gussiland, despite the fact that the new Kenyan constitution

(2010) encourages the participation of both sexes at all levels of government and mandates that "not more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender." Because no woman has been elected to the national assembly from the Gusii region since independence, this percentage has not been reached among the Abagusii. Currently in the thirteen constituencies in Gusii; both Kisii and Nyamira counties, all the elected members of national assembly, governors and senators in the two counties are male hence it is clear that deep lying and persistent obstacles still deter the progress of women as compared to their male counterparts. This situation has been further complicated by the fact that the constitution as well as parliamentary deliberations have not settled on the methodology to be utilised to ensure gender equalitarianism in political representation. It is therefore evident that women continue to face significant barriers to advancement relative to their male counterparts. The researcher has been motivated to investigate women's quest for representation in parliamentary politics in the region amidst survival of patriarchy

Purpose of the study

The study looked into what has kept patriarchy alive in Kisii County, Kenya, since 1945 and what drives Abagusii women to participate in electoral politics. This was done with the intention of outlining possible avenues for their support in order to fulfil their political aspirations.

The Study is guided by the following Objective

Determining the political interest of Abagusii women, the historical obstacles that prevent them from participating in electoral politics, and potential solutions (1945-2017).

Justification of the study

This study investigated the reasons for and outcomes of women in Kisii County electoral politics. Abagusii women in Kisii County have not been elected to positions of political leadership since Kenya gained its independence or even after multi-party elections expanded the country's political landscape. This is an intriguing case study subject worth investigating. In spite of their willingness and desire to participate in elected politics, women have not been able to climb to any political positions. It is therefore important to trace the history women participation in electoral politics in Kisii County as an essential means of understanding the challenges women face in their pursuit of political leadership in in Kisii County as well to provide for legislation of relevant policies to mitigate on the prevailing conditions throughout Kenya.

There is evidence that women still want to participate in electoral politics despite the many barriers they have faced. Because of the persistence of this desire on women's side throughout each election cycle, a deeper investigation of the underlying factors that have supported their efforts to participate in elections was required. In doing so, the study exposed the challenges faced by Abagusii women and recommended appropriate mitigation strategies to address and

minimise such challenges. This study was important because it exposed the challenges Abagusii women have had to overcome in order to participate in elective politics and because it assisted in preventing an occasion that might have sparked their interest in doing so.

A quick survey using print and electronic media revealed that Abagusii women's desire for elective political positions is a long-standing trend that is not going away. However, for Abagusii women who struggled to defeat men in election contests, positions such as governor, member of parliament, and MCA have remained elusive. It was vital to investigate the underlying factors that motivated Abagusii women to participate in electoral politics due to the disparity between Abagusii men and women, which favoured men over women when it comes to getting access to political leadership. It has been possible to develop workable solutions to the problems thanks to the historical framework that this effort has provided for the material.

Therefore, this study was justified since it provided historical context that might help in the development of germane or appropriate mitigation measures that could lessen gender inequity in women's aspirations for political leadership in Kisii County and other Kenyan regions. This work should therefore be viewed as timely because it provided the necessary knowledge to finally address this societal issue.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The amount of literature about women's involvement in political processes is occasionally growing. However, there is a dearth of literature on political participation in many regions of Kenya. One such region is Kisii County, where there is a dearth of literature about women's involvement in political processes. Before Kisii and Nyamira administrative regions were established in 1988 for political and administrative reasons, and before the new counties were enacted, the greater Gusiiland was covered by the literature. The literature that is now available on Gusiiland, such as Onsongo (2005), Nyang'era (1999), and Ochieng (1986), is primarily focused on socioeconomics and lacks historical background.

Voting alone is only one aspect of electoral participation. The ability to participate in public affairs, the right to free speech, assembly, and association, as well as the ability to register as a candidate, run for office, and hold office at all levels of government, all contribute to political involvement. According to international norms, both men and women are entitled to full participation in all facets of the democratic process. However, in actuality, women frequently find it more difficult to exercise this freedom. Women frequently face additional obstacles to involvement in post-conflict nations, thus it is especially important to take great care to ensure that their rights are upheld in this regard.

Political life has historically been structured in accordance with male conventions, values, and in certain circumstances, even male lives. For instance, rather than on respect for one another, cooperation, and reaching an agreement, the political

paradigm is founded on the concepts of "winners and losers," competition, and confrontation. Women frequently feel foreign in this setting. Women either reject politics altogether or reject male-style politics as a result of the male-dominated model's existence. As a result, when women do get involved in politics, it's usually in small amounts. The content and priority of decision-making, which are influenced by the interests, backgrounds, and work habits of both sexes, differ between men and women. Women typically prioritise societal issues like social security, universal health care, and children's welfare.

According to Charlton (1984), women are largely dependent on men in formal politics at the local, governmental, and international levels. She adds that the understanding of the growing interdependence between these three levels is equally crucial to this paradigm. As a result, national state institutions increasingly have an impact on local events, whether in the public or private (family) sector. Furthermore, with the growth of international organisations, almost no nation can be said to be impenetrable to influences coming from outside its borders. She comes to the conclusion that, regardless of their historic status, women generally have less formal institutionalised power than men do at the local, national, and international levels. Even when women do achieve local or national public prominence, she notes that their influence is frequently weakened by the constrained autonomy of their national state. Despite the fact that this reference material does not specifically mention any one country, it is nonetheless crucial to the current study.

In almost all civilizations, according to Campbell (2010), leadership is gendered as being masculine, and when women have the opportunity to lead, they are frequently viewed as ersatz men. When they are viewed as outliers and not indicative of the norm, many women in leadership positions are forgotten. She goes on to say that youngsters already have a strong idea of what it means to be a man and female in their community by the time they attend school. Gordon and Gordon (1996) note that politically active African women were prominent political participants in most pre-colonial African civilizations, albeit not through official political roles. They continue to note that men gained political advantage in Africa with the onset of colonialism as traditional sources of female authority were disregarded or diminished. By dealing with primarily male leaders, Europeans imposed their own views regarding the appropriate power of men over women.

Additionally, as a result of the availability of new economic opportunities in cash crop cultivation, males started to enforce their traditional rights to land and their wives' labour in order to generate revenue for themselves. This research is significant because it sheds light on the subordination of women in Kenya generally and Nyamira County specifically, which is a topic of the current study. Abena (1991) and Kariuki (2010) study how culture contributes to gender imbalances in African civilizations in order to further a similar point of view. According to Abena (1991), culture is the totality of a people's way of life. According to both authors,

language, gender, and the law conceptually intersect in culture, and by the time children of each community become adults, they have internalised or acquired particular values surrounding the gender difficulties they have encountered. They continue by saying that distinct cultural values and notions about gender roles, what society expects of each, standards of conduct in certain situations, and the associations and connotations associated with each genus can all be found.

According to Kariuki (2010), women are not treated as equals in the public sphere in the majority of Kenyan communities because they are seen as men's appendages and are hence unsuited for leadership roles. The gender inequalities that are common in most Kenyan civilizations are not a product of one's sexual orientation but rather the outcome of patriarchal Kenyan traditions. Patriarchal elements of society were ingrained in a child's thinking through socialisation after birth. These writings are crucial to the current study because they discuss the part that culture plays in the marginalisation of women in Kenya generally and in Kisii County specifically. Numerous academics have noted patriarchy as a fundamental barrier to women's political engagement while discussing issues of female subordination and marginalisation. Women are not intended to compete with men for political leadership in many patriarchal African cultures, according to Walby (1990), Okemwa (2002), and Ruth (1998).

According to Walby (1990), patriarchy is a set of societal norms and structures in which men rule over, subjugate, and profit from women. When summarising the traits of a patriarchal society, Okemwa (2002) notes that women were treated as second-class citizens, utilised and treated like the men's personal property, exploited, oppressed, and degraded in these communities. These researchers draw the conclusion that in patriarchal cultures, the character of every member, the values and priorities, the status and perception of women within it, and the relationships between the sexes are fully determined by the patriarchy. Women are portrayed as being frail in this literary work. As they generally address the topic of patriarchy, which the current work of Kisii County addresses, these works are significant to the current study.

All of the authors mentioned above—Norris and Inglehart (2001), Kenworthy (1999), Wollack (2010), Agbalajobi (2009), and Maina (2002)—note the importance of financial resources and power for political engagement. Women's political participation is influenced by their (or lack of) participation in the labour force, according to Norris and Inglehart (2001) and Kenworthy (1999). They all point out that women who work for a formal pay are more likely to have political representation. They draw attention to the fact that these women are more financially independent and have higher self-esteem levels. By emphasising that women in the formal economy provide technical representation and supervision abilities to the political sphere, Kenworthy investigates the function of formal wage labour. The feasibility, financial resources, expertise, and social networks that make running for political office easier are frequently provided by jobs in professions like law and journalism.

However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, women commonly work in the unorganised sector or engage in subsistence farming. Therefore, there is a minority of active women in the formal labour force (Kenworthy, 1999).

According to Wollack (2010), access to economic resources or financial independence is a crucial component for women's increased participation in political life. He adds that women's inferior economic status and relative poverty are significant obstacles to be overcome globally. Women frequently lack the financial means to cover the formal and informal expenses related to securing a party's nomination and running for office since they control and have less access to economic resources. Political campaigns are expensive and need strong financial support for success, according to Agbalajobi (2009). Men have been assigned productive gender roles through the sexual division of labour and sex-based work opportunities over the years, giving them an advantage over women in terms of purchasing power. She proceeds to note that political activity is seen as a masculine activity in society, which is made worse by the fact that male candidates are preferred by financiers and sponsors over female ones since they are thought to have a better chance of winning. As a result, the financial foundation needed to support women's political ambitions is severely lacking.

According to Maina (2002), there are glaring gender discrepancies in who has access to resources under their ownership and control. The majority of African countries are patriarchal, with men often controlling and owning practically all family assets. Men own land, animals, and cash crops. Household items owned by women include dishes, mugs, and sufurias. These things are connected to the woman's performance of household services and are not regarded as assets. The majority of African families, according to Maina, view land as their most significant possession, however despite the fact that women make up more than 52% of the population, they own less than 5% of the continent's property. The low engagement of women in political processes in Kisii County was recognised by this study as being a result of economic power and resource ownership. Despite the generic nature of these works, they offered some useful insights into the variables that limit women's political engagement in the current study. Numerous academics have addressed the topic of girls' and women's lack of education and found that this is a significant barrier to women's political engagement.

According to Machaffey (1981), Kenworthy (1997), Maina (2012), Onsongo (2005), and Kanogo (2005), men were often offered more educational possibilities in African societies than women. According to Kenworthy (1999), women who are educated are more likely to be interested in running for elected office. He explains that over the years, options for education have been limited due to the predilection for boys' education. According to Maina (2002), education is both a tool for enforcing gender inequality and a means for removing it. According to Onsongo (2005), the colonialists' introduction of education was discriminatory toward women 16, therefore the majority of women continued to be uneducated. According

to Kanogo (2005), the colonial-era curriculum for girls was created to help them develop the household skills they would need as wives and mothers. Women were not expected to mix marriage and jobs because of this. Furthermore, these paradoxes still have an impact on women's careers, as well as how politics and the workplace are organised.

Because they examine the consequences of colonial policies and actions, these works are crucial to the current investigation. Mbeo and Ombaka (1989) and Choti (2005) observe that no legislation in Kenya was created in response to the treatment of women as second-class citizens or as a result of feminism. These researchers note that, in contrast, the majority of political figures, both men and women, assert that women should benefit from the gender equality provided by Kenyan law. However, Mbeo and Ombaka (1989) note that our legal system contains discriminatory laws. Additionally, they view the idea of equality as a legal fiction that supports the status quo. The goal of law, according to theory, is to establish objective, value-neutral regulations that all citizens, regardless of position, must abide by in order to determine the norms of behaviour. They come to the conclusion that by treating unequal people equally, the law only serves to perpetuate inequality. Although these studies provide thorough examination of the subject of Kenyan legislation's impact on women's political involvement, they neglect to examine other equally significant variables, such as patriarchy and financial support, among others, that have an impact on women's political engagement.

The mass media, according to Butegwa (1995) and Oigusanya (2002), has a significant impact on how the general public feels. They go on to say that it is undeniable that stereotypes may be created, propagated, 17 perpetuated, as well as changed. They keep pointing out how typeset the image of women in African media is. These women are portrayed as helpless victims of brutality, famine, sickness, and conflict. They point out that major publications hardly ever run stories about initiatives started by women in succession. They draw the conclusion that African women should involve the media in all of their projects and that the media as a whole need to do a better job of covering news that affects women and their organisations. Although these works don't particularly address any one nation, they do offer some pertinent insights on the obstacles that keep women from actively participating in politics in Kenya generally and Kisii County in particular.

Women have, according to Lerner (1986) and Mlama (1991), perpetuated their inferior standing in the performing arts by accepting roles that reflect it and by providing an enthusiastic audience for such performances. The research emphasise that women must fight against the inferior position that has been created for them in our communities, though. Women, more than any other group, according to Lerner (1986), have contributed to their own subjection by accepting the sex gender system. According to Lerner, women have willingly passed their subordinated ideals onto their offspring because they have absorbed them to such a degree. These works serve as crucial references since they provide light on the current

study's focus on how women are oppressed and disenfranchised when engaging in the arts.

According to Aduol (1992), women's limited involvement in political leadership may be due to their inexperience and lack of political maturity. She adds that their focus on domestic and family responsibilities as well as the presence of an ambivalent attitude toward political activities work against women's participation in politics. She also claims that because of their increased household responsibilities and lack of expertise, they fall behind in most political activity. Because it accurately depicts the position of women in the majority of Kenya, this work is crucial to this study. Due to their lack of experience, women have been underrepresented in all sectors of life, including the political, religious, and other social spheres. The aforementioned studies all investigate how women are a disenfranchised and oppressed population across most of Africa, and especially in Kenya. The studies admit that there are particular forces at play in Kenya that have an effect on women's political involvement more generally. It is clear that no research has been done to determine the underlying reasons behind women's poor political engagement in Kisii County. Therefore, the goal of this study was to explore these factors.

Theoretical Framework adopted in the Study

Charles Fourier's notion of liberal feminism served as the inspiration for this study. According to the hypothesis, men and women are incorrectly believed to be physically and cognitively inferior to one another. This routinely discriminates against women in all areas of society, including politics and the economy. This theory's proponents contend that cultural norms that forbid women from succeeding in the so-called public domain are firmly rooted in the subordination of women. The emphasis on gender equality is strongly emphasised through political and legislative reforms. This idea supports the development of gender equality in the political, economic, and social realms. Feminists contend that the dominant patriarchal mindset causes women to be oppressed because of their sexuality. Women will become liberated once patriarchy is abolished in society. Through the use of social, economic, and political structures, patriarchy oppresses women.

Feminism contends that all sexes should be accorded the same opportunity, respect, and social rights. According to feminists, men have historically had greater opportunity and power than women in both the public and private spheres in the majority of civilizations. Men have created barriers and challenges for women in order to maintain their dominance, making it more challenging for women to assume positions of power. According to liberal feminists, oppression is a result of the socialisation of men and women, which perpetuates patriarchy and keeps men in positions of power, and that all individuals are created equal by God and have the same rights. Women ought to be free to select their own course in life rather than having it dictated to them on the basis of their gender. Liberal feminists' draught and promote legislation that eliminates

barriers to women's advancement. Liberal feminists contend that eliminating these barriers directly contests patriarchal ideology while simultaneously liberating women.

Our hypothesis is pertinent to this study because, despite their participation in politics in Kisii County for a variety of reasons, women have not achieved as much success as men due to the structures that are still predominately male. This proposal advocates for the removal of all obstacles that prevent women from winning parliamentary seats in areas where men outnumber women. These candidates' gender shouldn't be a factor in their election. This study aims to understand how women believe they can break free from the oppression of other women. Feminists are those who support legislation that eliminates limitations on women in all areas of life.

III. METHODOLOGY

In order to produce categories, patterns, and themes on historical events that would then lead to specific study findings and conclusions on the topic under study, this work used a historical research design to guide the study during data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of primary data as well as reviews secondary data sources for corroboration purposes. This was done to cross-validate, confirm, or corroborate the data that had been collected and to make it easier to address any potential flaws in one research instrument's use by utilising the advantages of the other approach (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2014).

The study utilised Kerlinger's (1969) argument that a historical research design made it possible to evaluate historical events using the information that was available, present the findings, define crucial knowledge principles, and offer answers to key problems in the research domain. This historical study design was inherently qualitative. This gave the researchers a great deal of flexibility when gathering detailed information from the respondents during face-to-face interviews. This design allowed for the acquisition of a detailed description and narrative of the phenomenon, which aided in its understanding (Giorgi, 2012).

This research was carried out in Kisii County, Kenya's westernmost county, in the former Nyanza Province, in longitude 34°-46'0" E and latitude 00°-41'0" N. Nairobi are 309 kilometres away, and the region is accessible by car. Kisii County has major urban centres that are close by or within the county. Kisii Town; Kisumu city is 114 kilometres north-west, Nyamira is 23 kilometres north, Keroka is 25 kilometres east, Kericho is 101 kilometres northeast, Kilgoris is 46 kilometres southeast, Narok is 165 kilometres east, and Migori is 67 kilometres southwest, all of which connect to the Kenya Tanzania border at Isebania/ Sirare town, 31 kilometres south.

Kitutu Chache North, Kitutu Chache South, Bonchari, South Mugirango, Bomachoge, Bomachoge Borabu, Nyaribari Chache, Nyaribari Masaba, Bobasi North, and Bobasi Central are the constituencies that make up Kisii County. Migori

County to the west and south, Homa-Bay County to the north, Kericho County to the north east and east, and Bomet County to the south east share a shared border. The Luo, Maasai, and Kipsigis are the three primary communities that border Kisii County.

Kisii County has abundant natural resources for agricultural development, including good arable land/soil, water, and a diverse flora and fauna. The climate is highland equatorial, with annual rainfall exceeding 1500 mm. Temperatures are lowered due to the area's high altitude. The proximity of the equator, on the other hand, boosts the temperature to a mean annual maximum of 270 degrees Celsius in the lowlands and a minimum of 160 degrees Celsius in the highlands. Tea, coffee, pyrethrum, maize, beans, finger millet, sweet potatoes, bananas, fruits, and a variety of vegetables thrive in the high and consistent rainfall combined with mild temperatures. Dairy farming is also a common practice in the counties.

The majority of the area has red soil. The soils are rich in organic matter and are deep. Clay, red loam, sandy, black cotton, and organic peat soils are also available. Organic peat soils are significant in the production of bricks, pottery, and tiles. Cash crops such as tea, coffee, pyrethrum, maize, bananas, and potatoes thrive in the red volcanic soils. Several permanent rivers and streams flow into Lake Victoria in the vicinity. The residents of the area have had long-standing trading relationships with their neighbors. They used to trade through barter during the pre-colonial era, and they still do so today (Otoigo, 1996). Kisii County has a population of 1,271,559 individuals, both men and women, according to the 2009 National Population Census. Kisii County has a female population of 660,612 people and a male population of 602,947. 790 people per square kilometer are the population density.

A stratified sampling strategy was utilized to choose 10 constituencies in Kisii County as a starting point in the sampling procedure. Purposive and snowballing sample strategies were used to pick responses from the targeted constituencies. The majority of these were women who had run for elected political office. The chosen respondents have firsthand knowledge of why they ran for office and why they did not win. The method was also used to find much older respondents (above 60 years old) and hence could recollect concerns from the pre-independent and early post-independent periods (Babie, 1995).

Because not everyone in Kisii County was aware of women's political participation, the study used snowballing to find potential responders. After dividing Kisii County into ten sub-counties, ten (10) respondents were chosen as having the most political expertise in their respective sub-counties. Those who were identified as having expertise in their various sub-counties were asked to find others in their areas those who were knowledgeable about the history of women's participation in politics. The ones found were utilized to find other respondents with a lot of information. As a result, these respondents were included in the study as respondents in order

to provide the necessary data on women's engagement in elective politics.

Oral interviews were conducted with a group of 20 people, ten of whom were women and ten of whom were men. From each constituency, one old man and lady were chosen to answer to the interview guide. That explains why the study used twenty participants, two each constituency, each consisting of an older man and woman over the age of 60. A sample of 60 responders from each of the ten constituencies provided qualitative data. This was determined by selecting ten responders, five women, and five men, from each constituency. As a result, a total of 80 respondents were used to collect qualitative data.

Purposive and snowballing procedures are non-probability approaches, hence the criterion of equal chance of selection was not followed because the study's target demographic was not evenly distributed throughout the population (Moore, 1991). However, the technique's disadvantage is that the chosen group may not be representative of the full population, limiting any generalizations (Siegel & Cashellam, 1988). Nonetheless, they are viable strategies in some situations and are preferred in our study. Respondents are employed in snowball sampling to identify individuals who have the same information. In this situation, once one respondent has been interviewed, the respondent requests the identification of the next respondent who can supply the valuable information required (Siegel & Cashellam, 1988). This technique was appropriate given the size of Kisii County and the nature of the respondents who needed to be interviewed via oral interviews.

Each of the ten constituencies had a different set of responders. Those chosen had to be at least 18 years old and able to vote. Even those in positions of political power were chosen. Those who held political office at the time, as well as those who had run for office but lost, and the agents who campaigned for the candidates, were all chosen. In order to identify the respondents, those that were recognized were asked to identify others, resulting in the usage of the snowball sampling approach.

Data for this study was obtained through key informant interview guides, and secondary sources. This is because the information required was mainly concerned with facts, views, and opinions. Such information was best obtained through the use of oral interviews (Oso and Onen 2008). The interviews gave respondents an opportunity to provide their own unrestricted views and opinions hence giving the opportunity to obtain more information on other research problems. Interviews were used to understand the deeper meaning of the information the respondents gave based on their experiences (Patton, 2002). Interviews also gave the respondents freedom to express themselves elaborately and freely respond to the questions asked. This method of data collection allowed for probing for clarity and accuracy of information. Questions were rephrased and given the respondents in cases where it was sensed that they were not fully answered. Follow-up

questions were also used to get answers that were not easily obtained from the respondents.

Secondary sources were also used. Data was obtained from theses, journals, government policy documents on women, professional publications by women organizations, parliamentary reports (the Hansard) and political parties' constitution and manifestos, as well as, the print media. Secondary data were analyzed, and together with the interview responses given to respondents, interpretations were done and conclusions drawn. Thematic and Content analysis were used to analyse the data (Creswell, 2014). The recorded interviews were initially transcribed with extraneous information removed.

The raw data was examined and re-read in order to create an understanding of the major concerns that surfaced. The raw data was then used to generate lists of issues identified during the interviews, which were subsequently noted on the transcripts to link statements with issues. A non-repetitive list of each participant's descriptive statements was then recorded in a table. The data was then further condensed and reorganized into main and sub themes. The phenomena was verified through a thorough literature research, written notes of the process, transcribed interviews, and interviewing till saturation was achieved. For validity, library research materials were submitted to a thorough and accurate content analysis.

Study findings

This study set out to examine women's quest for political participation in Kisii County from 1945 to 2013. It has been argued that despite women constituting more than half of the Kenya's population, political representation and participation has been an uphill task throughout Kenya generally and in particular Kisii County. It has also been noted that in Gusiiland particularly in Kisii County, women participated fully in political spheres together with men before the advent of Europeans. Their roles and responsibilities might have been different but not inferior to those of men. The roles of men and women were complementary in nature. The society recognized their participation and the aspect of age determined what roles a woman was to play in society. For instance, older women who had gained power by dint of the number of their sons and daughters-in-law were often in-charge of negotiation between fighting parties. Women expressed their political interests by casting a vote, campaigning in a political election, subscribing to a political party, and communicating with politicians and leaders.

Various interviewees presented a picture of women participation in both general and elected politics in Kisii during fieldwork sessions.

It turned out that, as in the pre-colonial period, women's engagement in politics and later electoral politics, which led to independence, was quite limited. This was because of two major considerations. The first was the patriarchal system that existed among the Abagusii, which put women in second

position when it came to political activity and leadership. This system existed before to the colonial period and was carried on by the community in later periods (colonial and post-colonial periods). The Victorian Doctrine, which was implemented by colonial rulers drove women away from political engagement and leadership in society. The philosophy held that women's roles as homemakers and mothers were to care for their houses and nurture their children. They lacked the ability to lead and, as a result, had no place in politics, particularly elected politics. These sentiments influenced women's participation in politics in Kisii during the colonial period. Nonetheless, women had reasons to wish and demand that their participation in political activities and processes be recognized in some way.

Women had several constraints during the pre-colonial period, not only in the political realm, but also in the social and economic realms. They were not allowed to possess land, for example, because it was considered a man's domain, just as it was in politics and leadership. Women were only involved in land concerns while the produce was being grown and harvested. Gusi women were not supposed to speak in front of men (KII: 019, 20th September, 2018). As a result, they were denied the opportunity to communicate their opinions, particularly their political ideas and perspectives, in front of males, and thus could not freely discuss issues affecting society in open rallies or places where men were present. This practice persisted during the colonial period, when women were expected to be obedient, bear children, and work on farms while also caring for their children.

Despite this state of affairs or mindset, there were exceptions, as some women became involved in societal decisions and, as a result, in politics. For example, in Kisii, a lady named Moraa rose to openly fight colonial rule. Moraa took part as an inciter and a very courageous Kisii woman. She was also a prophetess, having predicted that Abarumbasi (Europeans) would arrive in Gusiiland and seize their animals and country, as well as a Gusi named Ombati betraying the tribe. As a result, the Abagusii commonly say, "Chaga osire buna Ombati asirete" (Die the same way Ombati did). When conflict broke out in Gusiiland, Ombati betrayed Otenyo, a Gusi warrior, who was being sought by Europeans for spearing a European, the prophecy was realized (Onsongo, 2004). Moraa called for resistance and urged males to act, or else put-on women's clothes and let women put on men's clothes and battle for their land, which was a source of subsistence for the Abagusii. A legendary Gusi warrior by the name of Otenyo was challenged and speared one of the European chiefs, who unfortunately did not die (KII; 19 21st, September, 2018). Later, the Europeans reorganized and massacred numerous Gusi males, dubbed the "Gusi genocide" by Mama Sabina.

During the colonial time, women in Kisii actively participated in political activities, such as lobbying for a fair allocation of resources in the society. They also attempted to improve their working conditions by organizing strikes and harvest boycotts in order to increase their wages from settler farm work. These boycotts and protests could be interpreted as women

negotiating for the ability to exercise their own production rights. This caused Europeans to have an unfavorable impression of Kenyan women and to seek ways to subdue them. As a result, the Europeans used women's loose moral behavior to regulate them. As a result, women were barred from working on agricultural farms where only men were permitted, forcing them to stay at home. The Europeans regarded women as a menace and an unruly lot (Okemwa, 2005).

Women played an important role in the movement for political independence from colonial authority in several sections of the country. They mostly served as spies, counselors, healers, mothers, and/or wives. This was demonstrated in Kisii during the Gusii Massacre of 1908. (Ochieng, 1974). Despite the critical role's women played, women's participation in political leadership remained below expectations when Kenya attained independence in 1963. Despite a Sessional Paper no.5 on African Socialism that called for equitable participation by men and women in all spheres, the autonomous governments that came in continued to marginalize and subordinate women (Kabira, 1998). Men dominated the socioeconomic and political structures, cementing the patriarchal connections that had typified the colonial rule (Nasongo and Ayot, 2007). Women continued to participate in political activities notwithstanding their marginalization. In Kisii, we find a dedicated group of people seeking political leadership despite the backdrop.

At the time of independence, women were still victims of the colonial heritage, which was typified by institutions run by men nominated by the president's office. President Kenyatta's regime concentrated power in the provinces, which served as administrative centers. Provincial Commissioners were in charge of eight provinces (PCs). The provinces were divided into Districts, which were led by District Commissioners (DCs), and then into Divisions, which were led by Divisional Officers (Dos). The Locations and Sub-Locations, which were led by the Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs, were a lower-level division. The final subdivision was the Villages, which were led by Village elders. During the Kenyatta period, women were rarely considered for posts in this administration. All of the roles were filled by men who utilized them to further their male domination and perpetuate women's marginalization. This haunted women in Kisii County as they sought political leadership. Many people still believe that authority belongs to men, and that women in Gusiland are meant to play a secondary role when it comes to political leadership (Nyakwaka, 2012).

One of the responders who aspired to be a political leader stated:

Women in Kisii County are objects of use. Most people in the County believe that power belong to men. Omokungu noyokogamberwa (a woman is to be led). Just because you came to somebody's compound through marriage, you were required to led in all ways including politically being led. This is a perception that seems to be deeply

rooted among the Abagusii in Kisii County and seems to be persistent (KII: 07, 6th, August, 2018).

Women were clearly represented by men in all decision-making sessions, therefore anything that favored women was overturned. In an interview with one of the elders it came out clear that the position of women is far away from political leadership as he stated that:

You know what, even when a woman is extremely educated; she heavily consults men when she wants to execute certain duties. She is never sure of her decisions and has to consult. If she is a widow or single, she consults a man friend, brother, or uncle. When she wants to acquire property like land, she has to seek the approval and support of a man. This therefore subordinated women and this has not left the minds of electorates (KII: 014, 18th, August, 2018).

This confirms and informs the behavior of subsequent governments after independence, which believed women were not supposed to hold public office, and even those few, such as Margaret Kenyatta and Jane Kiano, who were appointed to head the women's bureaus and the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO), owed their allegiance to the president or his close allies who were men and were supposed to consult with him (Mwangi, 2004). Most women only participated in politics as voters, in the preparation and distribution of food in meetings, leafleting, and as dancers and mobilizers during the Kenyatta era (1963-1978). (Ndubi, 2009). The National Plan for Community Development, which was introduced in 1964 to support and accelerate economic development, avoid social problems, promote community welfare, strengthen family life, and improve the care of children and women, also urged them to form self-help groups. Women's dominance was further cemented through self-help groups.

In terms of politics, these women's organizations had a significant impact on election results. Once political leaders contributed to these organizations, they were able to persuade women to campaign and vote for them. This had an influence on female candidates since they were perceived as economic dwarfs who were at the mercy of men, and voters were hesitant to vote for them (Ondieki, 2014). One woman stated:

Even today, men are very bright because they use ebiombe bia abakungu (women groups or chama) to show their financial might. Instead of women using the ebiombe (women groups), to propagate their agenda, they become tools of use by men contestants who give them some little handouts for them to sell their right of electing a woman into a political position. They normally ask, ninki omokungu oyo angeire inkoria (what has this woman contestant given me to eat). This is because women contestants in Kisii County are not generous as men when seeking political positions. In this situation, do you expect electorates to vote for them? (KII:04, 4th, August, 2018)

Because the majority of these organizations were run by men, women's chances of rising to political power were hampered. According to a Member of County Assembly,

How do you put hyenas in the butchery to guard meat? If the purpose of initiating projects is to empower women economically, why put them under men. This is pure hypocrisy and lack of goodwill and underestimation of women's ability to run affairs. The impression it even creates is that women are not yet ripe for leadership. Who can trust them with political leadership when this picture has already been created (KII: 013, 15th August, 2018)?

When President Kenyatta's term ended in 1978, and President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi took over, the mindset and attitude toward women remained unchanged, and women in Kenya still lacked any political leadership privileges. By this time, Kenya had earned the distinction of being one of Africa's most democratic countries (Throup, 1998). The country's leadership, on the other hand, was mostly in the hands of a few male elites, most of whom were members of KANU, a party that had monopolized party politics. Women's representation in politics was still low at the time, owing to the fact that most organizations dealing with women's issues were led by men (Nzomo, 1998). Few women were involved in the operations of these organizations in Kisii County, primarily because they were busy on their farms, while males had departed for the cities. KANU and its actions, according to a response belonged to men, as was stated by an informant:

Although KANU was a national ruling party, it was mannish in nature because all the top brass were men. In fact, women in Kisii County were not involved in issues related to the party and therefore by extension could not be considered for political leadership anyway. The party only manipulated and used women as voters. It therefore perpetuated male political leadership using women as voters in Kisii County. (KII: 020, 1st October, 2018).

The reforms initiated by Moi had little impact on Kisii women. A proposal was introduced that would require all registered political parties to nominate at least a third of their candidates to be women was defeated in parliament, serving as a wake-up call for women. They learned that their course's success hinged on their working together rather than acting alone. The Kenya Women's Political Caucus (KWPC) was launched within the grounds of Parliament after a fast consultation, a significant gesture given that the KWPC's motion was to enhance women's representation in political offices (FIDA, 2002). The KWPC's rise was the clearest indication yet that women were more motivated than ever to unite their quest for political involvement as a political force. In August 1997, the Kenya Women's Political Caucus (KWPC) presented women's demands for participation in the constitutional review process in the form of "Women's Reform Initiatives," a paper produced by the Kenya Women's Political Caucus (Mugo, 2002). When a ministry of women's affairs was established in 1998 following the 1997 general

elections, women's hopes that this stage of things was changing were raised. It was, however, led by a male minister, Maalim Muhammed. Despite obvious evidence to the contrary, women saw this as a manifestation of the concept that women's leadership capacity was lacking.

Women in Kisii County, like those in rural areas, saw this as further proof that the government was not committed to women's advancement (Mwangi, 2004). An informant (KII: 04, 14th, August, 2018) had this to say regarding women in Kisii County during the 1997 elections.

It is not the many meetings' women can have in hotels in big towns that will change the situation. It is not the creation of the Ministry that will help women in Kisii County to ascend to political leadership. All these to my view will be a waste of resources. It is in the mind of the voters that has to be changed which I see as being far from being achieved. Even women in Kisii County have in the back of their mind that they cannot vote in mokanyarebe (somebody's wife) to lead them.

Kenyans made tremendous progress toward their goal of a new constitution order between 1997 and 2005. Unlike the Lancaster House constitutional discussions of 1962, women wanted and were granted multiple seats at the bargaining table this time around (Chesoni, 2002). They became vocal in their support for constitutional revision since they had a significant stake in the current constitution's overhaul. For women, the Kenya review commission's proposed bill of constitution carried a lot of promise. The bill addressed many of Kenyan women's concerns about constitutional equality by including women-specific provisions and mainstreaming gender, as well as directly addressing barriers to a culture of constitutionalism that had hampered all who sought to use the constitution to enforce their rights (Chesoni, 2002). In Bomas there were a few women from Gusii community among them were Clare Omanga and Wilkista Onsando both from Kisii County. It has also been observed that the new constitution came to fruition with the promulgation of the new constitution in the year 2010 during President Kibaki's tenure. It has also been noted that during Kibaki's era, the establishment of Women Enterprise Fund helped to empower women economically. Women were able to make more independent decisions due to the empowerment. It has also been observed that it was during Kibaki's era that education expanded tremendously. Following the introduction of Free Primary Education and Free Day Secondary Education in 2008, the number of universities also increased.

In the political sphere, the number of female legislators and local representatives has also risen dramatically. But there was still a lot to be done. As local women articulated the demands of their fellow residents, it was necessary to mobilize and appoint them. Women's groups and people were thus tasked with assisting these women in obtaining the qualifications necessary to serve as local or national leaders. Though President Moi's government vowed to be gender sensitive, it was the responsibility of women's organizations and

individuals to keep the government on its toes in order to ensure that this promise was kept. A former MCA of Ichuni ward, (KII, 017, 15th, August, 2018) said in a very categorical way that;

When we say about improved women representation in politics in Kenya, count Kisii County out. Successive political leaders will advocate for passing of legislations meant to empower women politically, but the deep-rooted culture among the Abagusii in Kisii County is a serious impediment. Even most women electorates in Kisii County can attest that they may not vote in a woman as an M.P. unless when things change in future, but as per now, the situation remains.

Women were subjected to a variety of discriminatory policies that limited their political and economic rights and pushed them to the margins. The constitution guaranteed men and women equal protection of rights and freedoms, but it wasn't until 1997 that the constitution was revised to contain a particular bar on gender discrimination. The Abagusii remained patriarchal during the Moi era, and little was done to modify this because it was culturally established. Men owned and controlled almost all of the family's assets. Men were the owners and operators of cattle, cash crops, automobiles, land, and even residences. Women held household commodities that were not even recognized assets because they were associated with the supply of domestic care by women. For most Kenyan communities, land was/is the most precious possession. Despite the fact that women make up more than half of the population, they own less than 5% of the land. Despite this, women perform over 70% of agricultural work. Men asserted their customary rights to property and their wives' labor in order to amass wealth, but they were not compelled to share this wealth with their spouses. Women's participation in political leadership in Kisii County has been hampered by violence against them. Patriarchy, which gives men a higher social position than women, is primarily associated with violence, which has seeped into public life and is reflected in state actions. The family plays a crucial role in upholding the patriarchal order through the generations. Children's socialization to expect and accept various roles in life has established a social mechanism for the formation of values that lead to various forms of discrimination against women. Women in Kisii County, like women in many other parts of Kenya, have struggled to penetrate the patriarchal political decision-making structures and processes of the county and the state as a whole. Patriarchal forces were especially visible during Kenya's 1988 national elections, when the queue voting system was used. After that, a husband might successfully force his wife or wives, as well as other members of his household, to not support a female candidate (Odhiambo, 2005).

Six women were elected to parliament in 1992, with Catherine Nyamato from Kisii (now part of Nyamira County) being nominated by the KANU government. In 1997, eight women were elected to parliament, whereas the Kisii (County) electorate had never elected a woman. The highest number of

women ever elected to parliament was realized in 2002, but Kisii (County) never elected a woman to parliament, with most of them only participating as voters. As a result, during President Moi's reign, women in Kisii County were marginalized in terms of political involvement and leadership at both the local and national levels. With the 2010 constitution, various constitutional changes took place and encouraged women to participate in politics. Gender parity was encouraged in all aspects, and the Kenya Constitution 2010 put it clearly through the introduction of the one-third gender rule that was to be implemented at all levels. This ensured that women representation for all the 47 Counties was guaranteed making Kisii County benefit without any hindrance. This law also ensured women participation and representation at the local assemblies therefore improving women participation in the local politics within the Kisii County assembly where a one-third gender rule guarantees the presence of Kisii women. In the overall, however, these constitutional changes had little impact on women's election in competitive politics in Kisii County. They have remained low performers in the political arena with a myriad of challenges that prohibit their free and successful participation. This forms the subject of the next chapter which captures the challenges and what could be done to remedy this generational problem facing Kisii women in their pursuit of political leadership.

Women from Kisii County have faced challenges in their pursuit of political leadership from the colonial times. These challenges have been categorized into socio-cultural, economic, and political nature. With all these challenges right from the pre-colonial times, effective participation of Kisii women in political activities has been very minimal. Men have dominated the political arena using the patriarchal beliefs to relegate women to second place in society as far as political activities are concerned. It is, therefore, apparent that it may take a little longer before women effectively participate in elective politics where they compete with men for the same positions. In order to remedy this situation, a number of actions need to be undertaken so as to provide a near level ground for political participation and competition between men and women. Historically, this has been elusive and it is only hoped that things may be different in the near future.

IV. CONCLUSION

Despite the government's and the larger female population's efforts, it has been noticed that women in Kisii County generally have demonstrated a decreasing political involvement. Some of the reasons given for this include patriarchy, religion, a lack of education, deeply ingrained customs like the commercialization of bride wealth, and the overall commercialization of Kenyan politics. Furthermore, it has been shown that few party manifestos contain provisions for gender equality, and those that do tend to merely exist on paper. It has been noted that the North Mugirango Constituency has a lower percentage of female political participation than the other three constituencies. This is a result of the Catholic Church's supremacy and its strict views

on sexuality. High rates of poverty in the region and the low enrollment of girls in schools are two additional reasons that have been noted.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following advice is offered in light of the aforementioned facts and conclusions: The best strategy to improve the political engagement of Kenyan women in general and Kisii women in particular in all domains is to devise methods to end their discrimination and inequity. These could include the government taking affirmative action and corrective measures to close the gaps and remove barriers that prevent women from participating fully and equally in political leadership and decision-making, with a particular emphasis on the need to change social norms, prejudices, and practises that present women in political leadership in a negative light.

The government, on the other hand, should make sure that the electoral laws in place require political parties to follow the gender parity principles when choosing candidates for party offices at all levels and for appointments to governance bodies, developing or revising their party manifesto, and involving all members equally in party affairs.

To ensure that every girl and woman understands and values gender equality, internalises these rights, and asserts these rights, as well as every boy and man, vigorous sensitization efforts should be made for girls and women, boys and men, and boys and girls on the whys and hows of the goal of gender equality. In a same spirit, parents and educators should receive specialised training on how to implement and impart the ideals of human rights, equality, including gender equality, and democratic governance in the home and in the classroom.

More has to be done to support and advocate for the enhancement of equality principles, especially gender

equality, in the structures, practises, and programmes of generally hierarchical institutions like religious organisations. The backing of women's election campaigns and the rebuttal of preexisting stereotypes about women by the media help to represent women's political situation favourably. By encouraging a culture of peace and securing a level playing field free from any form of discrimination, threat, or intimidation

The government should work through the IEBC to ensure that the political climate at the local level is favourable for both men and women to participate in the democratic processes of the counties. Political parties should be instilled with their ideology, visions, structures, programmes, languages, symbols, and images by the government through the IEBC. This would guarantee that political parties must abide by the norms of gender parity when choosing party candidates for various levels of office and when electing or nominating representatives to the governance bodies.

If advancements are to be achieved toward equal political representation in the nation and Kisii County as well, it is necessary to change the deeply ingrained restrictive cultural practises and attitudes concerning gender roles in public and private life. Women should be urged to routinely participate in social and political events where it is possible that political information will be discussed.

As shown by Rwanda, South Africa, Mozambique, and Namibia, thoughtful electoral reform and constitutional revisions will increase the value of female participation. Affirmative action and quotas have been implemented in progressive nations' constitutions, and these nations have also passed legislation requiring female quotas in the leading political parties.