Pre-Colonial Kamba People and Women's Political Mobilization

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ABSTRACT

Participation of women in politics is of paramount importance. This is because its within the politics that resource allocation and conflicts resolution takes place. People join politics to pursue self-interests and if women as a category are left out, it would mean that key policies and decisions made will ignore their aspiration. Women constitute more than half of the Kenyan population and form a sizeable part of the electorate, yet they still face political discrimination. Women are invisible as candidates for political office. The study was guided by Socail Relations Gender Approach. The basic tenets of this theory are, that human well–being is the primary goal of development, that social relations determines people's roles, rights as well as their power over others and that institutions plays an integral role in perpetuating social inequality. The researcher employed exploratory research design. The findings of the study are that the Pre-colonial Kamba women exercised some degree of political power. There was a women council locally known as *Iveti sya Ithembo* which was equivalent to the community's senior most council of the elder of the shrine (*Atumia ma Ithembo*).

Keywords: Politics, Political Mobilization, Political Power, Victorian Ideology

INTRODUCTION

This paper consists of five section as enumerated 1-5. Part 1 lays the background and literature on Pre-colonial Kamba People and women's Political mobilization. Part 2 is the problem statement. The methodology is discussed in part 3 where actual discussion form part 4.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LITERATURE ON PRE-COLONIAL KAMBA PEOPLE AND WOMEN POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

Politics can be understood as the process of bargaining , negotiating, conciliation, and compromise. Hawkenswort & Maurice (1992), Bentley (1995) and McNaughton (2001) held that power is typically held by the government and its agents. Politics is also seen as a study of power and conflict management and is related to the struggle of the state. Within this perspective , individuals partake in politics to pursue self-interest. For Women to have access to resources, they must therefore seek political power. This power can only be obtained through political participation.

Bentley (1995) avers that, the practice of excluding women from politics and other positions where decisions are made may be traced back to ancient times. Even in ancient Athenian democracy, which began around 5th Century B.C, Women were excluded from political participation and decision-making. Athenian women were not allowed to vote or participate in the democratic process. The priviledge to attend assembly meetings was the preserve of the priviledged men. Women's absence denied them the right to be heard and vote at the assembly, as well as the opportunity to decide what the law should be. The right of women to participate in exercise of political power and decision-making is of paramount importance.

The United Nation Organization (herein UNO) at its inception in 1945 recognized that women were being excluded from positions of power across the globe. This obscurity of women in politics prompted the UNO to take steps to address the problem of gender inequality. In this regard, the U.N established a number of legal instruments to recognize women's rights to equitable political participation. Notably, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 stipulated that every person, irrespective of gender, has a right to participate in their Nations administration either directly or through elected representatives. In addition, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1CCPR) adopted by the U.N in 1966 mandated the national government to create framework in which women may engage equally in all aspects of public life without discrimination. Thirdly, The U.N strove to promote women's political rights and ways to promote political participation by the adoption of instrument of Convention on the Eradication of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1966 (Abdi, 2007).

It was common for women during the Pre-colonial African society to serve as chiefs, queen mothers, and council of advisers who could make decisions directly or indirectly (Mokebo, 2015; Uchendu,2003, Atanda,2010). For example, the Queen Mother (*Ohemaa*) of the Asante of Ghana possessed equal political authority as the chiefs under the pre-colonial chieftaincy systems. A legitimate political leader, the *Ohemaa* had the authority to rule over the community as King (*Asantehene*) under certain conditions. The *Ohemaa* was in charge of selecting the future chief and advising the chief and elders (Stoeltje,2003). A similar evidence of how women exercised considerable influence in politics can be drawn from the Buganda of Uganda, where the Queen Mother and Queen sister had an important political role to play in advising the Kabaka (Kagwa,1968).

Diop (1987) avers that, prior to the imposition of colonial rule in Africa, women played a significant role in the continent's social and political structure. African bicameralism provided a framework for women's participation in public affairs through women's conferences. Although the women's assembly sat separately from the men, they shared influence and power as was practiced in the case of Benin and among the Yoruba of Nigeria. Accordingly, African bicameralism allowed for the flourishing of both men and women.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research on the Akamba people as a collective and women's political mobilizations, in particular has been inadequate. Although there are few studies on the history of Akamba women, few have been directly involved in politics and therefore there is need for more research on Kamba Women's political mobilization during the colonial period.

METHODOLOGY

The study embraced the Exploratory Research Design. Mugenda (2003) explains that exploratory research includes structures, strategies and measures that produce qualitative data. A qualitative approach was chosen since it gave the researcher an opportunity for the marginalized groups to share experiences (Uwe,2009; Cresswel, 2014; Babbie, 2014). The research design was descriptive, informative and interpretive and captured informants' unique experiences in a particular historical context. Inorder to gather enough data for the research, primary and secondary sources were consulted.

The Akamba occupies a broad area therefore, guided by Jwan (2011) who argued that, fewer participants results in higher-quality data as well as more thorough and extensive data analysis processes, especially when the sample location has access to knowledgeable informants, the reasercher used a sample of 55 respondents.

The research adopted cluster sampling, snowballing and purposive sampling to choose partiipants.According to Babbie & Benaquisto (2002), Bryan (2012), and Babbie (2013), the researcher uses snowballing to find possible research informants who satisfy the requirements and willing to engage. They are then asked to provide links to other potential informants based on the inclusion criteria until the researcher reaches data saturation.

Research instruments included Focus Group Discusions, Questionaire guides and interviews. Questionnaire guides used open-ended questions while Assistant Chiefs, village heads, religious leaders and members of the Independent Boundaries and Electoral Commision (IEBC) were interviewed in semi-structured interviews. Focus Group Discusion were composed of 8 elected women sampled from each of the Six Constituencies. The researcher had a pre-determined list of open-ended questions to be discussed.

The study drew upon a wealth of primary data collected from the Kenya National Archive, Oral interviews and questionnaire guides. Oral interviews comprised in-depth interviews of women actively involved in political processes. To ensure accuracy, rigorous cross-checking was undertaken to corroborate the archival sources with the information gathered from secondary sources and oral interviews.

Origin, Migration and Settlement of the Akamba.

The Akamba are Bantu Speaking group predominantly occupying the Lower Eastern Region comprising of the Counties of Kitui, Machakos and Makueni (Hobley, 1938). According to Kamba Oral traditions, by the beginning of the 16th C.,ancestors of the Akamba were settled around Mt. Kilimanjaro . they began moving out of the plains in the late 16th century (Ogot,1976; Zeleza, 1995). They congregated around Kibwezi, Chyulu hills and Kibwezi plains where they encountered long droughts.

Political Mobilization of Kamba Women in Pre-Colonial Era.

Among the Pre-colonial Kamba, the women had grades equivalent to the two most senior grades of the elders in the age grade system. These grades normally referred to as the *nzama* (administrative council of elders), were known as *Iveti sya Ithembo* or *Iveti sya nzama* for the women took part in rituals and sacrifices and participated in judicial issues. These functions could not be deliberated on by male elders on the lowest grade which formed the *nzili* or the inner circle (Lambert,1956; Kanini, O.I: 12/04/2022).

In an oral interview, with an elderly woman, the researcher was informed that women in pre-colonial Kamba were at the centre of societal politics and played an integral role. According to her, Syokimau was one of the most celebrated Kamba Prophetess. Seers constituted a well-established class of persons whose status in Akamba society depended upon their claimed ability to comphrehend and enunciate their comprehension of the future (Mwikali: O.I 23/03/2022). This position collaborated an earlier study by Jackson (1972).

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