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Women in Politics: Gender Dynamics in Kenyan National Politics

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to address the research question, what are the perceptions of women's representation in political leadership in Kenya? This topic touches largely on elements of identity as being a big part of the attitudes that are adopted either towards leadership or support female leaders. In many ways, they become central to the development of ways in which improvements can be made. Studies around this topic focus on gender and gender roles as important parts of the discussion with a look at conversation about cultural identity. By definition, womanhood is a culture and is born on the experiences that people within that culture go through. Tackling the discussion using the concept of empowerment, feminism, mothers, and power, there is a focus on the contextualization of leadership positions for women in Kenya. Using the historical backing of some of the women in politics in Kenya since the 1960s, the paper provides a look at the journey of women in politics in Kenya. It also contextualizes the challenges that women have faced and the support within the system that is available or lacks. With an empirical example using Martha Karua, there is a more recent depiction of the political events in the country and the perspective that is currently taken about women's leadership in Kenya. Finishing the paper with a discussion and analysis of the theoretical perspective, the conclusion arrived at is that scarcity of resources, lack of enough support, and male domination in power are seen as a barrier to women's careers in politics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of the women's movement has changed over time as new contexts emerged either due to the recognition of broader narratives or due to the need for the recontextualization of positive and negative ideals. The contexts are both cultural and political based often in line with social-economic change. However, over a long time, the perception of women's socio-politics has had ties to feminism. Over the last few years, the concept of feminism has raised controversy and changed the perception of women's empowerment in leadership positions no matter how small or big their responsibility and influence.

When looking at the discussion specific to women's participation in politics, there is a need to look at gender and femininity as societal constructs. This means understanding what women are defined as by standards of the culture they belong to, by references compared with other cultures, and by the roles, they play within the smaller group that expects something from them. In the culture and environment of Kenya, femininity as a construct varies across different themes as it is defined by physical features as well as roles expected of the individual. In the context of physical attributes, it's common for femininity to be linked with vulnerability and delicate features often associated with seduction such as hourglass shape, big bosoms, and large behinds. It is not uncommon to hear a biological male with such features teased for being feminine. On the other hand, femininity in terms of roles is linked to expected attributes of motherliness, emotional fluctuating, and carelessness. The females are expected to be a mother by the cultural role assignation and hence expected to only holds roles that would support that perception.

However, in the position of power, the opposite attributes are expected and thus the femininity baseline that has been set is used to perceive women as unfit to hold power. The attributes of femininity become tools used in a power play against females seeking to lead in political positions by their male counterparts. This is present both at the smaller institutional levels of something as basic as home to the national level evidenced in this paper as politics.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

Organizations like the United Nations have several SGDs that are geared toward the empowerment of women and girls. Within their goals, there is the integration of many highlights on the transformative power of participation. This is especially insisted on when it comes to equal rights and justice geared towards empowerment. The resoluteness of women

on the frontline in many movements and actionable goals are pointed out as good examples of why they have the capability of leadership. At the same time, the United Nations points out that marrying culture and change is something that should be recognized for sustainability (United Nations, 2021). There is thus a significant explanation that female leadership in Kenya like many parts of the world has matured enough that it is at par to compete with the male. The insistence is on the need for equity rather than equality which is a great way to bring to attention that. The expectations of meeting the cultural roles are not mutually exclusive with the ability to perform as political leaders. Hence power should be facilitated and capacitated rather than forced. Thus, the recognition of societal instruments to support positive change is necessary.

African feminism takes a look at the historical and diversification of the African continent, A child brought up with an element of the separation of ideals as western and traditional differ in their building blocks. This makes it a little different when it comes to involving them in the conversation because while they may want to empower women, self-preservation is a survival need. While there is the empowerment of women, there is also a continuation of the cultural ideals and traditional mindset and as such encountering day-to-day life challenges in leadership can be historically traced. As such, the school of thought advocates for a relook at the ideology of "*motherism*" and thus exemplification of the positive qualities attached to it. There is within this a proposition of dimensional contextualization of the developmental, mental, and sociological attributes incorporated in leadership aspects (Huis et al., 2017). By looking at all these angles, feminism can be understood from the perspective of local norms. As such, there is an innovative approach to remove the negative connotation associated with femininity and sentiments. This framework facilitates a recapture of the identity within female empowerment and the importance of gender roles in the scope of leadership hence political careers.

With the conceptualization as an important part of contextualizing the themes of positioning women's leadership, it is necessary to point out that women seeking political participation in Kenya often face different barriers. These barriers often stem from prioritization of cultural needs, lack of resources, and lack of empowerment through support systems. As such, much of the advocacy for women's rights and justice within politics is built on the on-foundation feminist goals and the priorities set outside the recognition of the impact of the Kenya culture (Kabeer, 1999). With many of the developmental agendas seeking to mainstream women empowerment as an appeal to reach an innate recognition of women as a force to be reckoned with, where are women themselves positioned in this conversation?

1.2. Purpose Statement

As the question has been raised, looking at politics as an institution with governance as its basis, it is possible that gender ideals can be weaponized. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to address the research question, **what are the perceptions of women's representation in political leadership in Kenya**? This question intends to expand further on the underlying factors that hinder the support of women in politics in Kenya. This looks at the cultural and societal norms that shape the image of femininity and the ability of women to lead Kenyan politics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section looks at the different conversations around women's politics and the perspective of different researchers, authors, and writers on attitudes toward women in politics. It then narrows down to a look at the historical background of women in politics in Kenya. It concludes with a discussion on cultural attributes affecting leadership instrumentation for women in Kenyan politics.

2.1. Historical Background of Women's Participation in Kenyan Politics

The idea of strong leadership has often been conceptualized as an instrument of gender and gender roles. With the typical African culture giving the idea of rule and rulership to patriarchy, there is often the misconception that feminine attributes affect leadership attitudes. One research, Cornwall & Rivas (2015) contextualizes the conversation of gender dynamics in the region as a thematic area that is affected by language use. The use of 'women's empowerment and 'gender equality as noted in the discussion implies that the wordings are tied to the insistence of attributes of leadership as being at par in both genders. Therefore, the terms are a way to focus on the multicultural aspect of the discussion.

What does this mean exactly? For the conversation of women in politics in Kenya, the variables to look at may not necessarily fall within the institution of leadership leading to government positions There is a need to look at the base culture that informs the primary focus of perceived demand for rights and justice as trajectories that affect leadership developments. This means that looking back at the late 1900s mobilization there is an opportunity to recognize the positioning of women as an agency of communication (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). There is thus a direct examination of the compromises that have a political or conceptual leaning in the path to the development of new frameworks. The leadership

frameworks that look at gender attributes within an old cultural setting may follow the rules of a culture that have been idealized differently by the language used (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015).

A paper by the World Bank Group (2014) advocating for women's voices points out that, there is a basic assumption that women engage in politics to advance the agenda of providing better goods and services to the masses. It continues the conversation by pointing out that women are forces that can stimulate equal participation on varied policy issues. However, the delivery can be used to purport and equate their drive to sentimentalism. In Kenyan politics, sentimentalism is misconstrued as a barrier to important agendas, right to accessibility, and meaningful accountability with women attacked for failing to be the better gender (Kamau, 2010). By extension, it can be argued that emotional connection is a feminine trait and disadvantageous to strong leadership. Therefore, sentiment is linked to motherhood which can often be misused to dissuasion of women from positions of power and active participation in political bodies. Cornwall (2007) acknowledges that indeed there is a feeling that there can be a superimposition of notions of gender which can lead to clashing identities. This is especially more burdening when further responsibility of women is seen as the determiners of fates within a society, saviors, and emotional allies even in tougher situations. It creates additional baggage of expectations that women even in leadership have to carry and failure to be any of that, they are likely to be deemed unfit even by their female counterparts.

2.2. The Numbers in the Eastern African Politics

UN Women (2022) statistics have shown that gender parity within national legislative bodies is still far from ideal, with only about 27 African countries surpassing the 40% women quarter in action. Rwanda stands at a high of 60%, Congo at a low of 8.4%, and Uganda at a medium of 46% (UN Women 2022; JICA 2017; Economic Policy Research Centre, 2021). Despite the rise to 23% in the 2022 election as there was the election of 6 women into the Kenyan national Assembly, the country fails to meet the two-thirds gender principle stipulated in the 2010 constitution (The Nordic Africa Institute, 2022).

Historically, pre-empowerment of women, and throughout the empowerment period to the recent past, there were few women in the Kenyan parliament. Between 1960 and 2002, in the first parliament, there was only one woman elected. However, active participation can be traced to as early as the 1960s with Grace Onyango, and Ruth Habwe the leaders for *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (the Progress for Women). Ruth Habwe vied for an elective seat in

the 1960s where she would face patriarchal attitudes throughout her candidature. In one instance she was even told to go back to the kitchen to cook for her husband and kids after contesting an election without her party's mandate (Maloiy, 2017). Her struggles would continue until 2013 as she paved way for strong women's representation. On the other hand, Grace became the Mayor of Kisumu in 1960 which prompted her to vie for Member of Parliament for Kisumu in 1969 becoming the first female MP in Kenya (Maloiy, 2017).

According to a historical look at Kenya's political space since 1960, Maloiy (2017) points out that the major barriers to a political career for women were the patriarchal attitudes and the one-party system in Kenya. Some truth to the statement holds as with the new regime in 2002, 23 women were elected, and 47 representatives were chosen as affirmative action changed the conversation of women empowerment. However, history has pointed out that the different expectation of women and men regarding the perceived strength of holding their position is the biggest barrier. Men are seen as more powerful and more likely to strong-arm the opposition, unlike women who are easily intimidated from participation (Krippahl, 2022).

Notably, many women in politics would join the *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* as an initiative that was for women by women. However, other key events outside politics shaped the direction of women's participation. The first women politicians such as Philomena Chelagat Mutai, Phoebe Asiyo, Jemima Gichaga, Julia Ojiambo, and Eddah Gachuki became major household names in leadership (Maloiy, 2017). Philomena Chelagat Mutai was one of the strong voices fighting against political assassination, corruption, land grabs, and the inclusion of women in governance. She went on to become the youngest political parliamentary member who readily criticize the Kenyatta government earning her the title of the Lioness of Nandi. Phoebe Asiyo was a strong force that became Luo's first female leader. She fought for the education of girls and dedicated her political career to making sure that there is an improvement in positioning for women. She would then become the Kenyan ambassador to United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for four years until 1992. Supported by another strong voice of the 1960s, Jemima Gichaga a nominee for the member of parliament who was an advocate for women's voices in politics. She advocated for better representation against the male opponent fighting against discrimination and strong intimidating language against women in politics (Maloiy, 2017).

Eddah Gachuki was a champion for female education and laid the foundation for the continuous support of girl child education under the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE). As a scholar herself, she advocated for women's interests going as aft as bringing attention to family planning for women and support for affirmative action. She was

nominated in 1974 and stayed until 1984 after being nominated again in 1979. One of the more admirable and strong women who used both their leadership skills and culture to advocate for stronger positioning of women in politics was Julia Ojiambo who was a scholar, researcher, and activist for women's education and gender equality. She was the first African and Kenyan woman admitted to the Royal Technical College, and later went on to become its chairperson as it was renamed the University of Nairobi (Oketch, 2004).

All of these women began their political careers from their activist stance a women's rights position on gender and justice that seems to be the trigger for women venturing into politics in Kenya. It indicates that many of these women had already begun with a mindset of a heads-on approach to change and hence were strong in their space of activism before shifting into politics. The point of focus on activism not only gives the women a stronghold in leadership but cements their prowess against their male opponents as it is a space that not only attracts international recognition and resource support but cannot be easily hijacked as the men would not argue for and against as they do not understand it well.

As described by Maloiy (2017), one such woman who has left such a legacy is Wambui Otieno. She faced discrimination heavily for going against traditions when she fought for the right to bury her husband in their plot of land instead of the rural ancestral home. She not only went to court for it but she also refused to be inherited as a wife in addition to fighting for the ownership of property against her in-laws. She chose to go against traditions and took the case to court which was viewed as a very contemporary and western influenced move. Her voice and energy became the weapon she used in the foundation of her political backing. It points to a struggle for both identity and a voice of reasoning as her basis is the foundation of the right to familial claim and justice for women. She fought for the right to refuse to conform to traditional expectations hence one of the early voices of antipatriarchy. On the foundation of fighting for her right to bury her husband, she became a political voice for Kenyan women in seeking justice and changing laws hence, liberation (Maloiy, 2017). This led her to multiparty politics in Kenya and thus the beginning of a building block of women's participation in opposition. It is the resistance to intimidation by women like her that paved the way for more and more women's voices to be heard.

The most recent force that benefits it is Martha Karua who, in 2022 was vying for a parliamentary seat with the potential at being the first female vice president of Kenya. This is after her failure when she bid for the presidency in a previous election period, a race that was grueling not only by the intimidation she faced from her opponents but the way her personal life was picked apart. Ironically, her fighting with her husband, standing toe to toe per se in

her bitter divorce and allegedly causing bodily harm to her ex-husband was seen as her imitating being male. Her not being able to have a successful marriage was used to show she lacked the feminine touch and hence used to demonize her attributes of leadership (Gadjanova, 2019). So, whether she was successful as a woman with marriage, home and children, or having none of that and resorting to standing up for herself, she was still seen as unfit for leadership.

2.3.   The Implication of Clashing Ideals for Women in Politics in Kenya

According to Kabeer (1999), the lack of clarity within the definition of the feminist movement is something that most women in politics skirt around. The author points out that the instrumentation of women's empowerment around the same agenda of feminism is something that lacks clarity as there are competing needs. The intrusion of the concept of culture creates a gap that has yet to be filled as there is the implication that the value within the society itself would be affected. As such, it points to the fact that while women in politics fight for the aspect of equality, the agenda of feminism goes against the identity of femininity within the Kenyan setting, and thus ideals clash. Therefore, this lack of clarity on where a line can be drawn between culture and feministic movement is what causes a clash in the measurement of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999).

In recognition of this, it can be said that women in politics find their identities clashing within the societal setting, they must adhere to a specific criterion and within the feminist movement, they must also follow another. At the same time, they are associated with a specific definition, a lack of emotional attachment a boss-like culture that idealizes masculine attributes. Therefore, women must find a way to choose one over the other to succeed in Kenya politics for a long time. If the women in politics chose the societal norms of what being feminine means they would have to accept the title of mothers and the expectation of what that entails. This means that most likely, their views would often be connected to sentimentalist ideals and they would never be taken very seriously in every aspect of their political career. Although there are exceptions, like Phoebe Asiyo, who attained her position as both a political and traditional leader due to her "mother" nature going as far as being called that, it is not the norm in Kenyan politics.

Similarly, if the women in politics decided to take the feminist route and seek equality in all aspects, it goes against their identity as defined by culture and thus they lose themselves. It is thus a battle that is as individual as it is generalized for society at large. To find that balance, women need to be free of other pressures that are imposed on them for their

leadership qualities to shine through. This could be characteristically why the women who found support from family and relatives who were already in politics, such as the likes of Wambui Otieno and Julia Ojiambo, found their political careers thriving more than those who lack that backing (Maloiy, 2017).

2.4. Patriarchal Culture Affecting Leadership Instrumentation

Supporting the discussion that patriarchal culture affects the instrumentation of leadership for women is a discussion by Yoon and Okeke (2019). The discussion looks at gender-based marginalization as a tool used to marginalize the socio-political capability of both experience and opportunity for females. Most importantly, it looks at the significance of representation as an important element to perceive threshold barriers that can be defined as limitations of women in politics. In the Kenyan context, the authors argue that women are considered subpar to their men counterparts culturally, a perception that is translated into politics as well. Taking into consideration the highlights of women's participation in politics over the years, using key examples, the author advocate for the structuring of conversation away from the tools for gender equality. The observation is based on the notion that within the exploration of culture, there is a lack of inclusiveness limited by the strict role expected to play out. In this way, there is short-changing of the qualitative aspect of women's contribution as key players and political support to be relied on (Yoon & Okeke, 2019).

However, looking at researchers and conversationalists before, they do not intend to agree with this sentiment. Kasomo (2012) directly alludes to this intent by saying that women are forced necessary for posterity. While the discussion implies that women are given less opportunity to present their prowess in amassing political power, both Yoon and Okeke (2019) and Kasomo (2012) point to a recognized need that acknowledges the societal roles as impactful in leadership positioning. At the same time, however, there is an agreement that women are dominated in the political area and thus given less opportunity to succeed due to pressure. By pointing this out, the authors directly connect the perception of women as inferior to the reasons for the dismissal of their capability. This indicates a bias in their ability by nature of gender being a status rather than a construct (Kasomo, 2012). It puts an imposition on one to admit an understanding of the nuance of the culture of Kenyans as instrumental variables of assumptions of strength or lack thereof. Kasomo (2012) claims to look at the psychological and behavioral concepts to pose the argument for this as something that should be a cause of concern on some level as it on some level agrees that the assumptions are true.

At the same time, Mburu and Nyagah (2012) take a different perspective by looking at the continuous portrayal of gender roles as detrimental to empowering women. It can be argued that the paper points to the school, of thought, that education and upbringing lead to clashing ideals. The authors recognize that this cannot be a problem only found in the societal and education systems of Kenya. There is an indication that the roles are descriptive elements in a general structure of learning that affect role model visualization. It points the finger at attributes attained from education as operationalized and founded under colonialism. Westernization of ideologies within the concept of understanding empowerment is thus pointed to be inadequately applied within the environment, of Kenya. With stakeholders in the education system themselves defining the better education models as being western, it thus clashes with the traditional and cultural setting. There is a gap that fails to be bridged by the time the population is of age to become leaders (Mburu & Nyagah, 2012). In most cases, this leads to a failure in marrying the western and the traditional forcing the men to fall back on the societal norms of their time.

2.5. Perception of Male Power Leading to Domination and Violence on Women

By definition of power, it alludes to it being taken by one party to rule or subdue another. In a male-dominated field. Politics in Kenya has the added pressure of a culture that always backs the man to be the owner of power. This, therefore, points to a default state where being female is already a strike against you for wanting power. Many families in Kenya still live in rural areas and within that, there is a lack of exposure and thus traditions are taken very seriously. This works against women are they can quickly judge another by pointing out that they are in spaces that should be occupied by men. It is the main reason why it is also easy to see the lack of women in their few numbers as a norm. Therefore, when women complain of being intimidated or attacked for being in these aspects, there is the likelihood that their voices can easily be subdued or ignored (Nyabola & Pommerolle, 2018). Women entering the spaces are this expected to be resilient and hardened like the men to survive.

In considering society and role expectations, the view of the powerful and weak become defined by the criteria of formality learned through education. Rather than formalities of culture taking root, undertakings of stratification of gender roles become skewed. A good example is the fact that the mother is respected and seen in some way as equal to the father and relatively above reproach when it comes to running the home. Yet she is unable to rule the nation a concept that clashes with the ideal rooted in equality. The first is

accepted as truth because there are protection and self-preservation elements attached to it. In the latter, self-preservation in a culture built for the ideal man is necessary hence the idealization of leadership by men. The clash of ideals is thus a foundation for which the confusion of gender roles and their impact is weighed in the interdependence of self-serving ideals which in the end imbalances expectations and reality.

This sentiment is echoed by Turner and Maschi (2015), who takes the approach of looking at aligning the socio-politics gender to the individuality-focused aspect of empowerment and feminism. The discussion approaches the understanding of practical solutions using social work as an example that exemplifies the value integration of gender-based attributes. The illustration of the ideals of feminism within the socio-political environment is deliberately made to look like a promotional tool of social justice in the human rights agenda and thus knowledge application. Ideally, the conversation of social justice and political participation of women cannot be fully understood if there is no central focus on the participation of all stakeholders. This also includes a look at emotional and physical violence used against women to both intimidate and injure (Nyabola, & Pommerolle, 2018).

In most patriarchal cultures, including the one in Kenya, there is an assigned jurisdiction where women and men are categorized by the efficacy in which they perform within that sphere. As such, it is very much tied to the identity of an individual and how they chose to move in the world. Most commonly, women will be attached to taking care of the home and being the emotional support as well as the conduit for emotional expression. Unfortunately, by that association, they are viewed as very vulnerable and thus exhibit attributes that are not attractive for leadership. This is used against them when survival tactics come to mind and more time than not, a reason for intimidation and violence against them to weigh their mete when it comes to leadership.

The recent election in 2022 has shown less than 2,000 women out of all the 16,000 aspirants, Kenya ranks as the lowest in women's participation in politics at 23% regionally (Krippahl, 2022). Even with the low population, women are more highly scrutinized than males and intimidated based on morality used to bar them from the positions that would lead to their exposure. At the same time, women even without the badge of political aspirations are at a higher risk of assault, and domestic violence which is an additional burden. Coupled with the financial burden that comes with political aspirations, and low financial stability in women in Kenya, the conversation on gender can be unilaterally focused if the participation of all asides is not enforced. This allows for segmentation that increases focus on a

dimensional look at gender, and gender disparity concepts in setting apart female and male political positioning in Kenya.

3. EMPIRICAL EXAMPLE

In the recent political arena, the prominent female figure has been Martha Karua. Her journey began a long time ago in the early 1990s backed by legal education and a previous career as a magistrate. Having come from a law firm she had left up to 2002, she had the backing of a household that stood for justice. She fought cases against the Moi government including famous trials like Koigi Wamwere who had been thought to have committed treason. This was just one of her works in human rights activism that pushed her to a career in politics as she heavily got involved in women's empowerment in property inheritance.

It was in 1992 that she first tried her hands at politics by joining the Ford-Asili party. This was the first time she ever stood up against all odds by refusing to compromise on her standing of equality and integrity, the value she has retained and vocally stands for. She left Ford Asili and joined Democratic Party after walking out of the nominations and with a DP she won to become a member of parliament for Gatundu. after failing to agree with political ideologies in 1998, she resigned as the National affairs minister. Over the years, she held different political positions where she held her stance in fighting unfairness such as walking out of parliament when the bill for the constitution failed. She was also a big advocate of supporting sustainable change which made her refuse positions such as becoming minister of culture as they failed to align with her skills. One of the positions that she held and has always been proud of is her being the minister of justice in 2009.

In 2017, she tried her first approach for a high position when she vied to be Kenya's president under her NARCK-K ticket. Even when faced with instances where her morality was questioned and her personal life was combed through, she was not intimidated but rather continued to campaign. In a field that was dominated by males, she stood out as the chose to go face to face with them campaigning for justice and empowerment of women. It is the strong ideals that she had right from the beginning she supported the multiparty system that saw her chosen as the running mate for Raila in the 2022 elections. Winning against an opponent like Kalonzo Musyoka, she would have been potentially the first female vice president in Kenya.

Looking at the case of Martha Karua the perception of women's representation in political leadership in Kenya is that they must be ironclad and stubborn. Facing intimidation

throughout her career, she still stands for human rights a vocation that she earned in 1991. It is with that in mind that she is adamant that there is a potential for failed justice as many cases are being withdrawn out of court at a rate that she deems alarming (Otieno, 2022). Dubbed the iron lady, she does not shun controversy, she refuses to attach her personal life to her leadership attributes. She is adamant that people see value in the policies she stands for and advocates for rather than worry about whether she is married or not which dissuades people from connecting her to the idea of "*motherism*". A strategy that seems to be working for her very strongly when handling her opponents as personal attacks have failed to shake her.

4. DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

This section will focus on highlighting the women's empowerment theory and the African feminist theory as a framework that will attempt to answer the question of gender dynamics in Kenyan national politics. Using women empowerment theory, the discussion in this paper will take a closer look at look at the multidimensional elements of women's empowerment as a tool that positions women for leadership success. According to Kabeer (1999), women's empowerment is defined as the process of getting the ability to make life choices strategically where the choices have been previously denied. There is an emphasis on the individualistic appeal to the choices offered hence empowering is seen as a way to provide support geared towards focused representation. This accounts for both positioning and gender role assignation at both cultural and political levels (Huis et al., 2017). An aspect that alludes to the situational controls that make systemic change to be more sustainable.

Taking into consideration the conceptual framework that societal instruments can hinder or support positive change towards women leadership, the theoretical perceptive of African feminism. According to Maathai (2006), this is the consideration of the additional burdens and realities of the diversification of Africa and the unique challenges that are faced daily by women. As such, there is a rightful placement of what is defined as priorities for women in a leadership positions and what would likely clash with ideals of feminism as viewed by the western world (Maathai, 2006).

Using the example of Martha Karua, the depiction of '*motherism*' and feminism within the patriarchal society shows a connection between the perceived notion of what women leaders are expected to be. Taking the fact that the celebration of marriage is considered a success only when the woman is less intimidating than the men, more maternal

and caring, anything that is the opposite can be used against women leaders or those aspiring to be. Martha Karua being the "iron lady", with a failed marriage and a no-nonsense attitude as she faces all her opponents, is no longer viewed as feminine. Her being a mother is not attacked as it is the only quality that her opponents see as valuable, but her failed marriage is used as an example of her potentially bad leadership capabilities. However, her accolades and experience in a leadership position over the years, which is backed by education in the justice system and business, have become arguably one of her best tools to fight back. This earned her the position of running mate to Raila Odinga in the past 2022 general elections.

4.1. Discussion

Gender and femininity affect the transformative action of leadership through effects that are closely linked to the foundation of societal norms. These norms have a heavy impact on the socio-political and socio-cultural concerns surrounding leadership, which in turn affect the political participation of women in Kenya. Gender dynamics in the larger African continent, it is difficult to separate gender from gender roles, an attribute that dominates the discussion of equality. Although this is not different in many of the world's patriarchal societies Africa as a whole, its presence is heavily seen within this environment as it is easily normalized and never questioned. Unlike the western patriarchy where questioning can easily be validated if not supported by the many organizations that have set root there with better resources to offer support (Nyabola & Pommerolle, 2018). Thus, the diversification of challenges on the path to political leadership within the local cultural norms is important as it speaks to the expectations of both the aspirant and the larger population.

It is difficult to separate cultural expectations from the gender roles that are specific to expectations but with clashing ideals of the western model being used as a prime example of 81better practice, confusion arises. By a basic definition, culture speaks to the defined traditionality and manifestation of customs and social behaviour. Meaning that there are basic foundational elements that are maintained even when there is change. While gender roles could be defined as assigned responsibilities that must be undertaken to better the lives of the whole community. In this way, contextualizing based on this paper, the cultural expectation would account for visible manifestations of gender such as dress codes and outspokenness. On the other hand, gender roles are a manifestation of attitudes that a specific gender must take such as masculinity represented by an authoritativeness, stoicism, and non-nonsense

attitude while femininity is seen as submissive to authority, empathetic, and easy to intimidate. Therefore, gender roles within cultural expectations speak to the norms that are defined by those in power within the smaller and larger institutional dynamics.

A good example that displays this distinction is the way in a patriarchal culture, women can only be considered as such when their prowess is exhibited in their ability to raise a family even with the added responsibility of leadership. Ideally, it is considerate to take into account the greater good of many women when looking at reinforcing positive gender expectations when relying on gender equity as a movement to ensure change. There is a need to look into these areas as part of the bigger conversation on the participation of women in politics.

4.2. Analysis

Contextualizing the cultural variables that make the societal norms of any culture different, the local environment presents different sets of rules for the challenges that can be encountered. Accounting for the regional aspects is necessary for that it allows an understanding of the past and current standing for power and attributes that make up a powerful individual. It is the same for understanding women in politics and the tools that are present either to support or facilitate focused positive change.

It is prominently seen that, At the politically competitive level, the ability to portray the characteristics of a good mother can be used to judge their potential at being good leaders. At the same time, the same attributes can be used to point to their inability to outperform the male. A good example is the constant use of emotional attributes as being exclusively feminine and with that, a weaponization of femininity as being weaker and easily intimidated or swayed. This can often translate into violence as strong candidates are continuously badgered both emotionally and physically to prevent them from vying against male opponents.

4.2.1. Female Drive in Policy Change

Even though activism is the common drive for women's politics in Kenya, the aspirations of women leaders in Kenya are varied and thematically diverse. This fact negates the assumption of women are driven only by the agenda of providing better goods and services to the masses. Policy change is the drive for most of the political aspirants with a focus on justice, equality, and advocacy similar to their men counterparts Women can go

head-to-head with the males and have thoroughly thought about socio-economic strategies that they can implement when given the chance. It is however evident that most women identify as experts in their specific field and follow a specific inkling in their passion for leadership something that the men rarely feel the need to exhibit. The women are more singularly driven in terms of their specialization as evident and opt to put all their energies into their area of expertise. This comes as both a necessity driven by the motivation to overcome the barriers of societal norms and a focus driven by the fact that they could easily be intimidated and scrutinized.

4.2.2. Pressure on Women in Kenyan Politics

Women have therefore higher pressure than their counterparts in navigating and managing the contradictions that their platform raises. The political arena puts them on a scale where they can easily be scrutinized and subjected to both insults and pressure that may not be warranted. The societal expectation that they should exhibit in addition to their "political calling" is something that is constantly on their periphery. It adds an unsolicited burden that can often take an emotional burden onto the politicians and in the end may result in them becoming easily intimidated.

The fact that when it comes to the patriarchal society, other females have no allegiance to the females, it is likely that the ideologies supported by the patriarchy would be endorsed more by the public and thus attacks would likely come from everyone including other women. In addition to the expectation of adhering to traditional values and culturally driven stereotypes, the additional pressure for any female in politics is a heavier burden than most compared to other regions. As such, surviving in a position that has a significant voice that the likes of Wambui Otieno and Martha Karua have exhibited is a feat that puts down an excellent foundation for the future. They help revisit the aspect of empowering that is necessary to help women in a position of leadership ins a way that is different from the men but essentially broadcasts their voice even louder.

4.2.3. The Power of Community Participation

Looking at the definition of leadership as being the ability to harness the power to ensure that the welfare of a community is realized, empowering does not mean stopping at the women in political positions only (Kamau, 2010). The nature of politics in Kenya, especially in the multiparty system of Kenya which has tribal ties, requires that the whole community is educated. The legitimacy of the claim of the traditional concept of leadership should go back and look at the roles of women leaders within society. Long before the likes

of Martha Karua, there were the likes of *Mekatilili wa Menza* who held a position of power to influence change over a culture. The Mau had both female and male leaders who worked together hand in hand. It is the same models that can be brought to the forefront and emulated. The authoritarian nature of patriarchy that fails to recognize the power of support and a network of opportunities is something that can be taught early on. Beginning with the household, respect for the input of the matriarchy of the home should be something that is encouraged ensuring that protection against violence is enforced (Turner & Maschi, 2015). This could translate to a shared social value of shared power that is readily accepted and legitimized across the board. The enrichment of the social support networks become resources that back up leaders into spaces where the power to change is enhanced as power over others is diminished (Kabeer, 1999).

Therefore, there is a sense of integration of positive ideals in power-sharing which could go a long way in reducing intimidation of women in political spaces in the future. Masculinity as a prerequisite for leadership can thus be reduced as the desire is to have a shared understanding and support of policies from all perspectives. There is thus the convergence of ideals in a way that focuses on true leadership. The dynamics of change will thus shift to take into account sustainable factors of leadership outside the conversation of gender as expectations will be on the manifesto rather than power manifestation (United Nations, 2021).

4.2.4. Empowerment Perspective as Resource and Agency Strengthener

There is a distinguishing element that differentiates women in politics in Kenya from men, education. It is only recently that higher education is being asked of political leaders, but since long ago, women who joined politics in Kenya had the backing of an education. They would often be in higher positions in their profession or careers before venturing into politics. Education provides a platform of expertise that is attained on equal footing with them men as competition in education made it so. Therefore, increasing education among women provides them with the tools that they can use to get to the table of conversation. However, education support can only be given when the whole community participates in the sensitization of its importance. Family plays a big role in making sure that all children are educated and given the same tools to start life. Community awareness and sensitization through social work are the avenues that can allow both males and females to be part of the discussion on the importance of education (Kamau, 2010). The history of women in politics

is a testament that challenges were overcome with education as a ladder over a patriarchal barrier such as seen in Julia Ojiambo and Philomena Chelagat Mutai.

4.2.5. Resource Trade-Offs; Pros and Cons of Marriage

Similarly, women would be at higher ranks within the social standing either as wives with children, widows, and older women who had supposedly accomplished their societal responsibilities. It can be deduced that at this stage the women are ready to face anything without regrets and hence likely to be unshaken in their position, but it is an observation that requires a further insightful look. Unfortunately, these women are likely to be heard more than younger females as they can be distinguished and easily placed in the mother bracket. This can be seen in political leaders such as Wambui Otieno and Grace Ogot. At the same time, there is a familial connection that is tied to many women in politics. Their careers were built on the foundation of accomplishment by their families who were already in politics such as Julia Ojiambo (Kamau, 2010). This pattern is common especially when a prominent male politician dies and the position of the term is not due. This is common with the opportunity often beneficial to females as a chance to get into politics.

There is therefore a need to look at the implication of position of power in the role a female plays in any relationship that they are in. In a patriarchal society where the man is the head of the house as is seen in Kenya, there is potential that men could easily get intimidated by a woman venturing into politics. This is because they would be seen as lacking in leadership and become a butt for jokes. As career women, politicians have the added misconception that they are sharks' attributes that they are assumed to carry everywhere. It is therefore easy for an assumption to be made public about the husband who is not in the limelight. As such the men put in this position would likely feel that they have been "feminized" and in retaliation pressure the women in the family to leave their position or get divorced. It is thus clear that the dynamics of the women who have attained social footing had children, been widowed, or divorced could have a longer career in politics than someone a female who starts young.

5. CONCLUSION

Connecting the direction of women's empowerment to the ideal of feminism is integral when it comes to policy change discussion around women in politics. The discussion points out that there are varied underlying factors that hinder the support of women in politics in Kenya. They include the lack of leverage in cultural norms, clashing ideals of the western

view of feminism and cultural views, the shortage of resources, and the lack of an empowered voice against ongoing intimidation and violence.

A major underlying factor that hinders support for women in politics in Kenya included the scarcity of resources in a male-dominated field. Kenya is the cause of the pressure to quit or to submit to political alignment that appeals to masculine energies. By observation of this, measures of empowerment cannot be defined just by looking at the position of women alone but also by the availability of tools that could back their political careers. One example is considering that self-financing is one of the ways that women could develop a sense of courage in their ideal and support of their political position. This would allow them to stand against any intimidation that would likely lead to more women coming out when discriminative action, the violence of intimidation is directed their way. By having more women coming out, there would be more testimonies that can be used to further the development of protective frameworks.

When we look at the research question raised on the image of femininity affecting the perception of ability of leadership in the Kenyan politics, it can only be said that the concept of direct empowerment for the position starts at home. A woman is the maker of the home yet is often portrayed as lesser than when it comes to major decision-making in the home. This not only limits their voices but also shapes the perception of the younger generation. Based on the cultural setting of Kenya, the need for the aligning of ideal treatment of women by both the women and the men begins with advocating for the independence of leadership attributes from feminine attributes. This study proves that there is not a mutual exclusivity between being feminine and being a leader, the two can coexist in a different setting and with two different sets of rules. Societal norms of today are shaped by the idealized concept of equality where what a man can do, a woman can also do, a view that in all its glory clashes with the reality of the impact of diversified cultures standing for a set of expected gender roles.

The study thus answers the question that what bridges the two is actualizing the valuation of women by stopping violence against women, the emancipation of women through education, and giving freedom by providing resources and giving power through equalizing the gender roles in decision-making (Kabeer, 1999). With financial autonomy, education, and indicative control through marital equality tabled by giving the same power of decision-making to their male counterpart, there is a high likelihood that there will be a shift in ideal leadership attributes.

This is the ideal scenario for making sure that women attained equality in Kenya politics and general power sharing. Though it is a very long way from coming to life, there is therefore a need to apply short-term solutions. This includes availing the tools of support in all aspects and across the board. In this way, it ensures that there is solidarity in lifting women and giving them a louder voice that they can use easily. Actionable change, therefore, requires a deliberate distribution of resources to the female population. One such resource is providing a safe space where women on political platforms can easily speak out. This would allow a man of the challenges that remain unspoken to come to light and confrontation of these issues would allow change implementation.

Therefore, globally, and in all patriarchal based society, undermining of women in a leadership positions is rampant and perceived as the norm. As such, the first curative measure is accepting that there is a problem. Also, in Kenya, women in politics rarely speak out about the challenges that they face. It is only in the recent past that there has been hints and conversation about the financial support that may women require to be successful in politics. A conversation about intimidation and violence against women in politics is still being whispered with no open cases being handled under the scrutiny of the public. As such, with a lack of information about the circumstances, even supporters would fail to justify taking up the cause. This is especially true in the Kenyan environment as activism is still considered a relatively high-risk venture.

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