

# Political, Economic and Socio-Cultural Impact on Women's Political Participation in Kenya (1963-2013)

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**Abstract:** The study was undertaken to assess whether there were any political, economic and socio-cultural factors that have impacted on women's political participation in Nyamira County Kenya 1963-2013. This study made use of the Marxist feminist and gender theories. The targeted population was men and women aged 18 years and above in Nyamira County. Respondents were selected from each constituency on stratified random sampling and targeted at least 10 respondents from each constituency of Nyamira County. Data collection was done through question guidelines and interviews. The study found out that the colonial policies, practices and missionary activities greatly affected the participation of women in political processes in the area. This study was important because it contributed to knowledge and literature in the area.

**Keywords:** Political Process, Participation, Economic and Socio-Cultural Factors.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study:

Notwithstanding low participation of women in political processes, most historical studies undertaken in Kenya have not been gendered. Zeleza (1999) argues that the documentation of historical change in Africa has been biased against women. He continues to note that even the regional histories displays the same tendencies. This is the same case with Kenyan. Writing about 'Gender Analysis', Ochwada (1995) asserts that Kenyan, women, are invisible in most of the historical works in Kenya. There were those that totally ignored women, and others just mentioned them in passing. Therefore, local level research is needed to bring to cognition the social, economic and political realities that grassroot women are subjected to (Pala, 1978).

In 1990s, the study of history of women in Kenya began to expand. Women were studied in Economics, Agriculture, Trade and Migration etc. as indicated in her study of Siaya Ndeda, (1991) notes that women were overburdened with various agricultural tasks they had to perform in the absence of the able bodied males. Ayot (1995) argues that land tenure systems changed drastically when government legally instituted land title deeds. The new land tenure systems affected gender relationships in respect to food production. Nasimiyu (1993) analyses women's self-help groups.

Major studies undertaken on political participation of women, cover the Kikuyu and to some extent the Luo. For instance, Kanogo (1987) demonstrates how the state was an instrument of actualizing male interest thereby enhancing men's power over women and offering women limited opportunities of ownership of land, participation in formal economy and the

exercise of statutory power. In her other work (Kanogo, 2005), interrogates political and socio-cultural structures and practices that shaped and controlled women's lives in colonial Kenya. She examines the dilemma of African women within the milieu of two oppositional legal frameworks – pre-colonial and colonial and how women dealt with them, with varying degrees of success. Mwangi (2004) asserts that when colonial authorities began to create a system of private property rights in Kenya, they extended those rights to men only because ownership in the west was historically a male privilege. Nyakwaka (2012) notes that Kenyan women constitute a vital national resource whose ideas, creativity and concerns for social cohesion can help bring about positive change in all spheres of the society. Therefore, their potential needs to be fully exploited if Kenya needs to forge ahead in development.

Most studies that have been carried out in Gusii cover the general areas of socio-economic issues. For instance, Onsongo (2005) has done a study on patriarchy and subordination of women among the Gusii. She argues that the traditional practices governing marriage among the Abagusii contribute to the subordination of women. Nyang'era (1999) has written on "The making of man and woman under Abagusii customary laws". He observes that there are traditional norms and values which regulate and inform much of their behaviour and ideas about gender, marriage and kinship. Hakansson and Levine (1997) have argued that the wife becomes a property of the clan into which she is married once dowry has been paid. Otoigo (1996) observes that the payment of dowry constituted the key to getting access to land for the wife. The wife gained managerial and user rights to husband's land, the right of maintenance as the right for her sons to become legal heirs to the land allocated to her. Silberschmidt M. (1999), in her study on "Gender Antagonism and socio-economic change in Kisii District", observes that patriarchy and socio-economic change have benefited men at the expense of women. She further argues that both customary law and some consequences of socio-economic and political change have put women in disadvantageous positions. Nyakundi (2009) has done on "Female Circumcision: Gusii Perspectives" and in his article, he has observed that there are several disadvantages of female circumcision. Omwoyo (2008) has looked into the effects of agricultural innovations and coffee farming on women's role in agricultural production among Abagusii of Western Kenya during the colonial period. The Ministry of Planning and National Development (2000), notes that contribution of the females in Kisii, in sustaining the economy of the district is enormous. Women provide almost all forms of labour but it is not factored into the national income.

Most of these studies deal with the Gusii in general and have not tackled specific localities in Gusiiland. This means there are often no studies on the small entities of Gusii. Yet local level studies can generate detailed information on issues that have merely been dealt with generally.

Despite the existence of the studies on the history of Gusii women none directly deals with politics, and therefore is a scholarly gap which needs to be filled. There are no records of women in Nyamira who have been active in politics in the past hence it is necessary to undertake the study of this kind.

#### **Statement of the Problem:**

The participation of women in political leadership in Nyamira County remains minimal despite the resolutions passed in the UN Decade Conference of Nairobi in 1985 and the Abuja Declaration in the political sphere. This situation has persisted despite the fact that Kenya has ratified most of the human rights conventions the most prominent being the 1979 convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (Yoon, 2004). The literature on women in politics from a historical perspective seems to be limited despite the numerous studies on women and politics. Studies undertaken on the Gusii women in general do not also deal with the political involvement and no study has been undertaken on the involvement of Nyamira women. The documented works on Gusii women deal with the socio-cultural and economic issues. None directly deals with politics, there is a gap that needs to be filled. This study therefore, is a historical investigation on women's participation in political processes in Nyamira County from 1963 to 2013. It investigates the contribution of factors such as colonialism, missionary activities and legislations imposed by the post independent governments, culture, wealth and the level of education to political participation of women. Owing to the evidence of disparity in women's political participation in different areas within Nyamira County, the study investigates these disparities among women of Nyamira County.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

Assess whether there were any political, economic or socio-cultural factors that have impacted on women's political participation in Nyamira County between 1963 and 2013.

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In dealing with issues of subordination and marginalization of women, several scholars have identified patriarchy as a major hindrance against women's political participation. Walby (1990), Okemwa (2002) and Ruth (1998) all assert that in many patriarchal African communities, women are not supposed to challenge men in the contest for political leadership. Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Okemwa (2002) describing characteristics of a patriarchal society observes that in these societies, women were regarded as second-hand citizens, used and handled like personal property of men, exploited, oppressed and degraded. These scholars conclude that in such a case where societies are patriarchal, it is this patriarchy that determines entirely the character of all members of the society, the values and priorities, the place and image of women within it and the relations between the sexes. In this literature, women are portrayed as weak. These works are important to the present study as they address generally the issue of patriarchy, which the present work of Nyamira County addresses.

Norris and Inglehart (2001), Kenworthy (1999), Wollack (2010), Agbalajobi (2009) and Maina (2002) all observe that economic power and resources are essential in political participation. Norris and Inglehart (2001) and Kenworthy (1999) note that (non-) participation in labour force influences female political participation. They all note that women who find themselves in the formal wage labour force are more likely to enjoy political representation. They point out that these women have greater financial independence as well as higher levels of self-esteem. Kenworthy analyzes the role of formal wage labour by pointing out that technical representation and supervisory skills are skills that women in the formal economy bring to the political realm. "Jobs in such fields as law and journalism commonly provide the feasibility, financial resources, experience and social networks that facilitate running of elective office". However, women in Sub-Saharan Africa are frequently employed in informal sector or involved in subsistence agricultural activities. Active women in the formal labour force are thus in the minority (Kenworthy, 1999). Wollack (2010) posits that financial autonomy or access to economic resources is a very important factor for women's greater participation in political life. He further points out that, worldwide women's lower economic status and relative poverty are substantial hurdles to overcome. Because women control and have access to fewer economic resources, they are often unable to pay the formal and informal costs associated with gaining a party's nomination and standing for election.

Agbalajobi (2009) argues that political campaigns are expensive and require solid financial backing for success. Over the years sexual division of labour and job opportunities offered on sex basis has given men productive gender roles, enabling them to possess more purchasing power over their female counterparts. She continues to observe that societal value assumes that political activities are masculine and this makes it worse as financiers and sponsors of politicians prefer male candidates over female ones, since they believe they stand a better chance. As a result, women political aspirations have grossly hampered by lack of financial bedrock to subsist their endeavour. Maina (2002) observes that there is glaring gender gaps in access to ownership and control resources. Most African societies are patriarchal and almost all the family assets are owned and controlled by men. Men own cash crops, livestock and land. Women own household goods like cups, plates and sufurias. These items are associated with provision of domestic care by the woman and are not considered as assets. Maina continues to assert that land is the most valuable asset for most African families and yet, despite the fact that women constitute more than 52 percent of the population, they own less than 5 percent of the land. This study identified economic power and resource ownership and discussed the role they played in the low participation of women in political processes in Nyamira County. Although these works are general, they provided some relevant insights into factors that relegate women's political participation in the present study.

In dealing with the issue of lack of education to girls and women, several scholars have identified lack of education as a major force militating against women's political participation. Machaffey (1981), Kenworthy (1997), Maina (2012), Onsongo (2005) and Kanogo (2005) all posit that in many African communities, men were given greater educational opportunities than the female counterparts. Kenworthy (1999) contends that education instills interest in political matters and educated women would be more adept to seek elective office. He explains that, over many years educational opportunities have been muted in, preference for education for the boys. Maina (2002) emphasizes that education is both a tool for entrenching gender inequalities and a tool for eradicating the inequalities. Onsongo (2005) observes that for education introduced by the colonialists was discriminatory to women therefore, majority of the women remained illiterate. Kanogo (2005) notes that the syllabus that girls were exposed to during the colonial period was designed to cultivate their domestic skills for their roles as wives and mothers. And as such, women were not expected to combine

marriage and careers. Moreover, these contradictions have continued to affect women's careers and indeed how work places and politics are structured. These works are important to the present study as they interrogate the effects of the colonial policies and practices.

Mbeo and Ombaka (1989) and Choti (2005) note that no legislation in Kenya was been formulated in answer to the women subordination or motivated by feminist concerns. These scholars observe that on the contrary most political leaders, both men and women argue that the laws of Kenya provide for equality of the sexes and that women should take advantage of this equality. But in reality, Mbeo and Ombaka (1989) emphasize, that there are discriminatory laws in our statute books. In addition, to them, the ideology of equality is a legal fiction, which helps legitimize the status quo. In theory, law is supposed to define the norms of conducts by promulgating objective and value neutral rules applicable to all citizens, irrespective of their status. They conclude that in treating unequal persons equally, the law reinforces existing conditions and promotes inequality. Although these studies give comprehensive analysis of the issue of Kenya legislation s impacting on women's political participation, they fail to address other equally important forces impacting on women's political participation like patriarchy, financial backing among others.

Butegwa (1995) and Ogusanya (2002) posit that the mass media has great influence in formulation of public opinion. They further add that the capacity to create, spread and perpetuate stereotypes as well as to alter them is undeniable. They continue to note that the image the African media has given women is rather typeset. Those women are presented as powerless victims of wars, violence, famine and diseases. They note that stories of successive initiatives launched by women hardly get a line in national newspapers. They, therefore, conclude that African women need to involve the media in every project and that on their part the mass media must improve the coverage, which they give to events that concern women and their organizations. Although these works do not focus on a specific country, they provide some relevant insights into the factors relegating women to participate lowly in politics in Kenya generally and Nyamira County specifically.

Lerner (1986) and Mlama (1991) argue that women have perpetuated their subordinate status in performing arts by agreeing to play a role that depicts their subordinate status as well as providing an applauding audience to such performances. However, the studies underscore the need for women to resist the subordinate position, which has been constructed for them in our societies. Lerner (1986) argues that women more than any other group, have collaborated in their own subordination through their acceptance of the sex gender system. Lerner argues that women have internalized the values that subordinate them to such an extent that they voluntarily pass them on to their children. Also the choices which women have in terms of providing audience to a performing popular theatre has to be critically addressed in view of the alternative entertainment available in specific socio-cultural context. These works are important references as they provide insights to the present study on how women are marginalized and subordinated in using arts.

Aduol (1992) observes that women's limited contribution to political leadership may be attributed to lack of political maturity and experience. She further observes that their preoccupation with domestic and family obligations and the existence of an ambivalent attitude towards political activities also militate against women's political participation. In addition, she says that their lack of experience due to their increased household chores makes them remain behind in most political activities. This work is important to this study as it portrays the situation of women in most parts of Kenya. Women have been underrepresented in all spheres of life including economic, political, religious, and other social spheres due to their inadequate experience.

The aforementioned studies are all explorations of how women are marginalized and subordinated group in many parts of Africa generally and in Kenya particularly. The studies acknowledge the fact that there are certain forces that impact on women's political participation in Kenya generally. It is evident that no research has been undertaken to establish the fundamental causes of women's low participation in political processes in Nyamira County.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Area of Study:

The study was carried out in Nyamira County, Nyanza Province. This county was carved out from the former Kisii district now Kisii County in 1988 due to political and administrative reasons. It consists of Kitutu Masaba, Borabu, West Mugirango and North Mugirango constituencies. It shares a common border with Kisii 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.

There are two major communities that are neighbours to Nyamira County – the Luo and the Kipsigis. Nyamira County is endowed with natural resources such as soil, water, rich flora and fauna for agricultural production. The district has a highland equatorial climate, rainfall over 1500mm per year. The high altitude of the district is expected to lower temperatures. However, the proximity of the equator raises the temperature to a mean annual maximum of 27°C in lowlands and minimum of 16°C in the highlands.

The high and reliable rainfall coupled with moderate temperature is suitable for growing of crops like tea, coffee, pyrethrum, maize, beans, finger millet, sweet potatoes, bananas, fruits and variety of vegetables. There is also the practice of dairy farming in the county. Most parts of the county have red soils. The soils are deep and rich in organic matter. There is also clay, red loam, sandy, black cotton and organic peat soils. The organic peat soils are important in brick making, pottery and manufacture of tiles. The red volcanic soils support the growth of cash crops such as tea, coffee, pyrethrum, maize, bananas and potatoes. The county has several permanent rivers and streams that drain into Lake Victoria. The people of Nyamira County have had along trading relations with their neighbouring communities. They practiced barter trade during the pre-colonial era and even now they do trade among themselves (Otoigo, 1996).

### Research Design:

Quantitative data was also utilized to capture figures as how many women have vied for parliamentary election, how many have vied for civic seats, how many have ever won and also voting patterns in the period under study among other issues. Primary and secondary sources of data were consulted for this research. Primary sources included oral (in-depth) interviews, observation and question guidelines.

Secondary sources included written sources: published books, theses, seminar papers, newspapers, maps and magazines. These were broadly categorized into oral and written sources. Secondary sources included mainly written works, such as published books, journals, unpublished theses and seminar papers. Local newspapers were also used extensively. These were obtained from various libraries, including; Post-Modern Library of Kenyatta University, British Institute in Eastern Africa Library Nairobi, Institute of Development Studies and Institute African Studies Library of University of Nairobi, the National Library Kisii, Macmillan Library, Kisii University Library, Maseno University Library and online journals accessible on the Internet.

Data from these secondary sources enabled us to situate the study theoretically and also work on the primary data. The secondary sources also provided a general background on the place of women politically in Africa and in Kenya.

Primary data was gathered from former districts' annual reports relevant in informing the study about the political role of women in pre-colonial and colonial Nyamira. Archival data, which constitutes first hand records from the participants, and observes that have been passed down to posterity was especially relevant in informing the study about the political role of women in pre-colonial and colonial Nyamira. Oral interviews were conducted principally in the wider Gusii region. However, the research sample was drawn from Nyamira County. Those interviewed included the youth above 18 years, who were judged by the researcher as having relevant political opinion and elderly men and women who may have lived through the four periods of our study. Others included government officers from the Ministry of Gender, Sports, culture and social services, legal consultants and women groups in Nyamira County. The selection of information was done using snowballing.

The main target population was the men and women aged 18 years and above in Nyamira County. Respondents were selected from each constituency on stratified random sampling targeting at least 10 respondents from each constituency. This sample is stratified for gender. The researcher stratified the sample by gender strata, making sure that the females are over sampled as opposed to males. This is because females rarely participate in the parliamentary electoral politics. This method was appropriate as the researcher was interested in issues related to gender disparities in the population Mugenda & Mugenda, (2003).

Elderly informants were those aged 55 years and above as thought by the researcher. This method is useful when population that possesses the characteristics under study is not well known and there is need to find subjects. For instance the few identified assisted in identifying others that they may know of.

**Research instruments:**

**Question guide (Appendix 2)** constituted an important tool especially to the research assistant that this project had hired. Detailed interview guides were used regarding women who have tried to stand for elective seats from the county and if they faced any challenges. Note taking was employed during the interviews.

Recorded interviews were fully analyzed and grouped according to the similarities and differences in response. These data was fully transcribed and typed by the researcher. Secondary sources data was subjected to textual criticism to test the relevance and accuracy of the documents that were identified as appropriate for this study. Question guidelines were qualitatively analyzed with attention being paid to the reasons for varying response. After the analysis and synthesis of both primary and secondary data, with the guidance of research objectives, writing of the final thesis commenced.

**4. RESULTS****Colonial Penetration in Gusiiland:**

While the Gusii people were busy settling down in their present home towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and evolving their socio-economic and political ideas and institutions, imperial European powers had already embarked on the system of carving out the continent of Africa into pockets of their respective “influence” (Ochieng, 1974).

It might be probably, instructive at this stage to point out that although no European traveler, trader or missionary had visited the Gusii country in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the Gusii people, like several other African groups had known, through their diviners, that “strangers with white skins” would visit their country. Names of Gusii prophets like Sakawa of Nyakoe, Moraa Ng’iti of Bogeka and Bonareri wife of Ogowora, rank high in their traditions, Sakawa for example had foretold the advent of “white strangers” and like the Kikuyu and Luo diviners, had advised strongly against any hostilities against them. The greatest and most beloved of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Gusii diviners, Sakawa had often collected his admirers at the sight of present day Kisii town and prophesied where the police lines, the hospital, the offices and churches would be. He also prophesied, that the Gusii warriors would be disarmed by the “white strangers” if they showed any resistance. All these, prophesies, are believed to have come true (Ochieng, 1974).

Uganda was declared a British protectorate in 1894, which soon extended to include Gusiiland and it became part of the Eastern Province of Uganda. The Gusii people were never informed about all those transactions, and therefore were unaware that they had gained “free” admission to the European Empire (Ochieng, 1974).

Despite the fact that by 1900 most of the Eastern Province of Uganda had come under British sway, the opening up of Gusiiland did not commence until 1904. In 1902, the Gusii people were transferred together with the rest of the other tribes in the Eastern Province of Uganda to the East Africa Protectorate (Kenya). A year later, the British decided to set up a small administrative outpost at Karungu. Ostensibly Karungu was to act as a base from which to bring the entire former South Nyanza (including Gusiiland) under firm British control (Ochieng’ 1974). On their part, the Gusii had also made some stealthy efforts to understand the nature and motives of the white people, who they had been told had forcibly entrenched themselves in the territories of their neighbours.

The missionaries established churches and schools and also mission stations in the area for instance at Nyanchwa, Nyabururu and through these schools and churches, the missionaries condemned indigenous Gusii cultures and practices such as polygamy and female circumcision. They forbade their adherents against bride wealth. The Abagusii practiced circumcision of both sexes at puberty. According to Abagusii such cultures as female circumcision, polygamy and bride wealth were central to the fabric of the society. As a matter of fact, according to (Kerubo, O.I 2012) no proper Gusii man would dream of marrying an uncircumcised girl. She adds that a man who did so became a laughing stock of the community. In case the man married and later discovered that the wife was not circumcised, he could ask for the dowry to be returned and this was considered bad omen (Maina and Oyaro, 2000). Thus the Abagusii female circumcision at initiation was not only an important part of Abagusii culture but also a symbol of subordination of junior women to senior women and to men.

The very first mission to be established in Gusiiland were by the Catholics in 1911 and the Seventh Day Adventist SDA) in 1913 at Nyabururu and Nyanchwa respectively. Another very important station was established at Bonyunyu in Nyamira County in 1921. Mission activity was initially not very successive, several stations were looted. Active SDAs

were oriented towards European family ideals and they practiced a form of protestant ethic. The SDAs afforded women some space in the missionary work but Catholics were rigid in their teachings which did not allow women to do any missionary work in Nyamira County just as it was in other areas.

In the years following the end of the First World War, many Gusii people became followers of Mumboism in growing numbers. Some of the contributing factors to this were frustrations with the colonial government due to deteriorating agricultural, trade and health conditions among the Gusii people, fluctuating currency value and the colonial administrations increasing burdensome demands concerning taxation labour owed to colonial government and requirements for registration. The colonial administration was threatened by the anti-European message of Mumboism. The colonial government ultimately banned Mumboism in 1954 (Maxon, 1989).

While the colonial administration was busy pursuing its end by force and through its agents, the missionaries were busy “domestically” people especially women and teaching them to accept the new ways. Preaching and simple education were to be used. The missionaries were to make a conquest of ‘native’ thought and habit (Mwangi, 2004). They therefore, using religion taught women to be submissive and obedient to their husbands as the latter were portrayed as the ‘heads’ of the families as Jesus is the head of the church.

As noted earlier, the colonial system and missionaries had no place for women. Although Nyamira County women had certain powers in the pre-colonial period, Gusii traditional culture was predominantly patrilineal and patriarchal (Onsongo, 2005). In this environment men were the predominant force (Odinga, 1967). As the colonialists took over control of the country, they also emphasized male dominance by transferring men’s supervisory rights over land to individual legal ownership (Gordon and Gordon, 1996). As a result of this individual land ownership, women were denied access to land, something that was new and foreign (Gordon and Gordon, 1996). Therefore, women were left behind.

For instance, the 1954 Swynnerton Land Reform Plan bracketed land into artificial boundaries and stipulated that any claims of ownership could only be legitimated by title deeds (Bulow, 1992). These land tenure laws were greatly influenced by the Victorian and Christian family model, whereby the male household head was accorded an authoritative and paternalistic position as the “breadwinner”. Men were accorded title deeds to ancestral land, thereby stratifying the previously malleable access to, use and control of the land into a fixated bracket of male ownership. Gusii men’s obligation and responsibility to accord women custodial rights over their sons’ heritable property compromised this western ideology of exclusive rights of ownership.

The privatization and consolidation of landholdings disadvantaged women and this set the stage for their loss of rights to land after independence (Davidson, 1988). Such policies have continued in the post-independence period and they pose a major threat to way.

The colonial state in Kenya established a fiscal policy which would provide revenue for administration, infrastructure, welfare services and industry. This policy entailed taxing the citizens either directly or indirectly in order to raise the required money. For a fair taxation policy, the state requires progressive tax policy whereby those who earn more property pay higher taxes compared to the less fortune members of the society. This was not the case in the colonial Kenya. The state favored the white settlers and Asians who earned more and owned more but paid less direct taxes compare4d to Africans (Ekeh, 1994).

The colonial state imposed taxes on Africans as a means of removing them from their own farms order to seek employment in the European plantations, thus earning money for taxes. The arrangement was that the need for money to pay taxes would force Africans to get involved in modern economic pursuits which would not otherwise have interested them. Africans received very little in return for their taxes.

The colonial state legitimized itself through appointing chiefs in territorial divisions such as locations and head-men in the village. These chiefs were men who hitherto were ‘nobodies’ in their communities yet the colonial state gave them both executive and judicial powers hitherto unknown to their communities. This policy proved disastrous in most parts of Kenya and Gusiiland in particular. It was these chiefs and head-men who collected taxes on behalf of the state. The village was the unit of collection, and the village head was responsible for collecting taxes and taking it to the district head (Ekeh, 1994).

In Gusiiland, there were no women chiefs or village heads. All tax policy makers and implements were men and yet all women, widows and war-widows were not exempted from paying taxes. The colonial state undermined the women's participation in the political sphere even at the lowest community levels such as the village.

The British introduced a taxation system and established institutional infrastructure in the form of chiefs and headmen. The institution of taxation did not only lead to devaluation of women's work but also altered the women's role in economic activities. The native Hut Tax ordinance of 1900 stated that a tax was to be imposed on a man for each hut in his homestead. This meant that the man was being taxed for every wife he married; it thus implied that the British viewed women as men's property and consequently every homestead the man paid the woman's tax. In Britain, it was the man who was taxed for whatever property owned even if the property belonged to his wife.

Indeed, the payment of taxes was a burden to the Gusii to be avoided at all costs. For example, men knocked down huts in their compounds so that women would share huts and thus avoid tax payment. However, on realizing this, the colonial state issued instructions that hut tax was to be payable on adult women and not on their huts (Nyakwaka, 2012).

The colonial tax policies had a number of impacts on the Kenyan women and the Gusii were no exception. One main impact was that most women were separated from their spouses and sons, who joined wage-labour to earn money for taxes. Because men could not take their spouses to the towns, a number of them engaged in personal liaisons with prostitutes. Prostitution was common in the colonial towns because of the acute demographic imbalance of the sexes and the lack of wage opportunities for women (Zezeza, 1988). The price of these liaisons Gusii women were invisible in colonial political structures since public politics was basically men's domain.

Within this system, the English and their Victorian ideology forced the Englishwoman to believe that 'she was inferior to the man' and indeed aide the man himself to think and believe that he was superior to his wife. The Englishmen therefore succeeded in making the woman an inferior being. This system was introduced Gusiiland where the man as the head of the household paid the tax for each and every wife that he married. Both the missionaries for their own self-ends therefore exploited the system of taxation (Kanogo, 1987).

Colonialism had an impact on aspects of women's economic lives. Colonialism which coincided with the industrial revolution necessitated a demand for natural resources for industries back in Europe (Kameri-Mbote and Kiai, 1993). Since the subsistence economy of the colonized people was both self-sufficient and non-commodity based, the primary objective of the colonizers was to disrupt this self-sufficiency. The integration of cash crop trade in the local economy coupled with the introduction of taxes and land tenure laws, had the desired effect of disrupting their self-sufficiency (Okemwa, 2000).

Abagusii women continued to be involved in the household economy in ways that they had been during the pre-colonial period. In addition to the home and the childcare, they were active in trading (both local and regional) and played a primary role in food production. With the introduction of new productive relations under the British colonialism, the nature of women's economic involvement changed. New trade goods were introduced and the use of money infiltrated the economy in such an unprecedented extent that the market place ceased to be a bartering centre and became a place where surplus could be exchanged for cash (Robertson, 1997).

The development of an urban capitalist economy and the imposition of a taxation system had the desired effects of disrupting any semblance of self-sufficiency by artificially inserting a need for money. Initially the colonized people were reluctant to engage in labour migration because it involved working as cooks, houseboys and farm hands, jobs which were typically associated with women. Moreover the work was not only low-paid but it also compelled the labour migrants to be far away from their family for long periods of time. It is hardly surprising therefore that labour migration was at first stimulated by force and only later, by new cash needs such as taxation, clothing cash to purchase bride wealth cattle (Francis, 1995).

The wage labour was disadvantageous to Nyamira County women as they were overburdened with responsibilities as the men left for work in plantations and factories.

The overall inferior position of women in the modern sector reflects the fact that men are given preference in administration and clerical jobs as they had in the colonial state. In a situation like this, the attitude of men and women begin to diverge; the men begin to adopt 'modern' ways which confirm their important roles as well as women's largely domestic roles. As these changes begin to characterize the society, women become independent on men as their incomes in the trading sector decline.



The function of indigenous institutions in Nyamira County and everywhere else was abruptly altered by the colonial system. Women suffered from these circumstances more than their male counterparts because they were systematically excluded from public decision-making. The material and psychological bases of their authority crumbled and their privileges were not preserved in the construction of the post-independence society (Gordon, 1996).

For the British colonizers, power was vested in a colonial state that was in essence as a patriarchal heritage. Specifically colonial rule was highly authoritarian and supported by male police forces and colonial troops. Under these circumstances, power did not rest in legitimacy of public confidence and acceptance. Power lay in the hands of a few male elites. This was based on the principle that there was a public/private dichotomy and that the men's place was in the public while the women's place was in private (Cutrufeli, 1983). Women were therefore relegated to domestic chores, while decision-making was left to men.

The new patriarchal values imposed by colonizers and missionaries ignored the indigenous political and economic positions that women held, their freedom in marriage and their complementary shared responsibilities (Wright, 1993). The women in Gusiiland generally and Nyamira County specifically suffered out of authoritarian control as this authority was in the hands of men. For instance, local leaders especially chiefs were elected by lining behind a candidate. During one such exercise at Sameta Stadium, Tabitha Mogotu Ogega from Bobasi was elected by majority as chief. However, the colonial administrators refused to confirm her because she was a woman (Bonuke, O.I, 2012). Women lost their indigenous authority and they became subjects to male members of the society.

Generally, women were dislocated economically, exploited and politically dominated within a weakened indigenous order and in these spheres, women were rarely compensated in the new subordinated and politically marginalized (Gordon and Gordon, 1996).

#### **Women's Response to Colonialism in Nyamira County:**

Women contributed greatly to the struggle against colonialism and Kenya's self-determination. For instance the Gusii women participated in various ways including as spies, advisors, medicine women, mothers and/or wives during the chase away of the British administrators from Gusiiland. Though for a long time women lacked political articulation, they were acutely aware of the injustices and exploitation of colonialism (Kabira and Nzioki, 1993).

Accordingly, among the Gusii Moraa Ng'iti was a female freedom fighter against the British. Moraa was also a medicine woman who treated the sick or injured people especially the Gusii warriors. From the inception of British rule in Gusiiland, Moraa was undisguisedly hostile, and her influence was even more considerable since it was believed that she had magical powers and anyone who disagreed with her or refused to do what she wished could suffer severe consequences (Ochieng, 1974). Moraa was a prophetess who had prophesied the coming of the White man warning her people that if permitted even a single Whiteman to stay in the District, he would be joined by others and that eventually the Gusii would be enslaved. She offered to give warriors medicine "so that the bullets would turn into water". She apparently had gained her reputation in the old wars between the Gusii in the old wars between the Gusii and the neighbouring Luo and Kipsigis where her medicine is believed to have earned the Gusii several victories. This time she advocated the murder of Northcote. She advised the Abagusii to expel the British violently. Although there was general agreement among the Gusii that Northcote should be killed, nobody seemed brave enough to do it. But hostility and unrest in Kitutu, was increasing, especially since behind the disenchantment was the influential prophetess – Moraa. But the Gusii men did not take her advice seriously. Moraa conspired with her step son Otenyo to kill Northcote a British Assistant District Commissioner as an example for the rest of the Gusii men. Under the influence of beer and medicine given by Moraa, Otenyo ambushed and speared Northcote as he rode on a mule on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1908 (Ochieng, 1974). The prophetess mobilized people and they revolted in and around Kitutu, Nyaribari and Bonchari. Moraa was arrested on the eve of 1908 punitive expedition and brought to Kisii town for interrogation. She was severely reprimanded and set free due to her advanced age (Ochieng, 1974). Her action must be seen as an attempt to reassert Gusii determination against colonialism. Moraa continued administering to the wounded Gusii Warriors until she died in 1929 due to old age. Moraa is regarded a Gusii heroine for her courage and many songs have been composed in her tribute.

Although Moraa Ng'iti was the most prominent prophets and diviner, other women participated as spies, advisors, medicine women, mothers and/or wives during the chase away of British administrators and during the Gusii Massacre of 1908 (Ochieng, 1974). For instance Bonareri wife of Ogwora was a prominent diviner although not much is known about her.

The patriarchal vision constructed many areas during the colonial period has been perceived as the right model where women are seen as (homemakers) subordinate whose position is at home (Wright, 1993). The forms of gender inequalities are taking Kenya generally and Nyamira County in particular reflect indigenous pre-colonial and European influence expansion in Kenya during which the colonial period both undermined sources of status and autonomy that women had and strengthened elements of indigenous male dominance or patriarchy. At the same time, the Western gender ideology and practices that promote male dominance and female dependence were superimposed in Kenya. Since independence African male leaders have continued to add laminations to the patriarchal structures they inherited from their colonizers, often so with the support of Western investors and donors whose development assistance goes to men (Gordon, 1996).

## 5. SUMMARY

With the advent of colonialism in Kenya in 1894, and the ultimate introduction of capitalism and invention of private property, the independence of women was altered and most household duties were left to them. As already discussed, the colonial system with its attendant forces was exploitative and oppressive. With its Victorian ideology colonists considered the place of women to be the kitchen while that of men as the public. They therefore relegated women to the periphery as they were considered their appendages. The place of Nyamira County women was deconstructed and their independence denied. They were to rely on men for their needs and were therefore not to engage in public activities. The introduction by colonialists of the public and private spheres meant that women were not to join trade unions and other organizations that were redeemed political. Women were left out to perform domestic duties. Therefore, the division of labour that the colonialists introduced reflected a gender gap, which was not resolved at independence. Europeans also tried to force the natives to discard their valued traditions. For instance, the missionaries wanted the Gusii women to do away with clitoridectomy and polygamy, which the Gusii considered a fabric of their culture that could not be discarded. This resulted into antagonism between the missionaries and the Gusii who rioted against what they considered an abuse to their customs. The missionaries on the other hand refused to offer training to the circumcised girls. The study however established that Gusii continued practicing their customs. In early 1900s led by the Gusii prophetess Moraa Ng'iti, the Gusii revolted against the whitemen in which she was arrested. Moraa was severely reprimanded and set free due to her advanced age. This action must be seen as an attempt to reassert Gusii administration against colonialism. During these revolts Nyamira women actively participated by providing food and medicine to the injured warriors. Their participation in these independence struggles however did not change their status and they therefore remained marginalized by men in the society. It has also been observed that Nyamira women just like other women elsewhere in Africa did not welcome the European concept of patriarchalism and Victorianism. Most of them continued trading with their neighbours in the locality as well as with other communities including the Luo and the Kipsigis. The study has finally established that by the time Kenya was gaining independence, these women had organized themselves into welfare groups. Colonial administrators' wives had also started the MYWO, which most Gusii women rejected due to its association with colonialism.

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