Political Emancipation of Agikuyu Women in Central Kenya and their Shift from Tribal to National Politics

Lucy Mukami Mathai*

Department of Arts and Social Sciences, Institute of Social Transformation, Tangaza University, Nairobi, Kenya.

*E-mail: lucy.mathaischolar@gmail.com

Abstract

The study sought to examine the political emancipation of Agikuyu women and their shift from tribal to National politics, and to determine the role of Agikuyu women in Kenya's Politics. The scope of is confined within the boundaries of the three Agikuyu sub-tribes; *Metumi* (Muranga), *Karura* (Kiambu) and *Gaki* (Nyeri) also referred to as the Northern Kikuyu. The study is anchored on Interpretivism and narratology philosophy and underpinned on womanism and descriptive representation theory. A qualitative descriptive and exploratory research design is adopted while using a Purposive sampling approach. Data sources include Primary, Secondary, Material culture and Participant observation sources. The findings were as follows:

The political emancipation of Agikuyu women and the shift from tribal politics to national elections are intertwined with historical events of pre-independence and the socio-political changes shaping the landscape. Women advancement in education, women's movements, and the adoption of multiparty systems have played vital roles in challenging gender norms and expanding opportunities for Agikuyu and other women's political engagement and emancipation. The urban and rural divide among Agikuyu women also contributes to variations in their journey towards political emancipation. However, challenges persist, including violence, cultural barriers, and institutional constraints

The involvement of Agikuyu women in politics has brought new perspectives, priorities, and policy agendas to the forefront. Through their political engagement, they have been able to advocate for issues that are important to them and their communities, such as women's rights, gender equality, education, healthcare, and economic empowerment. Their active participation has contributed to a more inclusive and gender-responsive political landscape in Kenya. Moreover, the Agikuyu women's involvement in politics is not limited to electoral processes but also extends to their active engagement in community organizations. They hold leadership positions in grassroots initiatives, women's groups, and civil society organizations, working towards community development, social justice, and empowerment.

The findings show that as Agikuyu women gain greater agency and empowerment, they challenge the traditional tribal voting patterns that have long characterized Kenyan politics. Instead, they align themselves with national political ideologies, demonstrating a desire for inclusive and representative governance. Recommendations drawn from the findings are: Strengthening of women's networks and support systems, Addressing of non-cultural barriers to women's political participation, Implementation of gender-responsive policies, Transformation of inhibitive cultural barriers, and Adequate democratic choice of women political representatives.

Keywords: Agikuyu, Kikuyu, Women Emancipation, political shift, women in politics, Tribal politics, National Politics, Ontology

1. Introduction

The history and origin of the Agikuyu people has been captured well within the documented mythology and folklore of the Agikuyu people through the oral based knowledge transfer system to seal the vacuum of the absence of formal documentation of indigenous knowledge by the indigenes. Available historical phenomenon was written by the early church missionaries and the British colonialists and some important facts were either mis-reported or mis-interpreted hence losing actual meanings in context. This validates contemporary documentation based on interpretivist theory on all dimensions of the Agikuyu social systems' orality transmitted through folklore that help in defining the nature and culture of Agikuyu people. The Interpretivist theory, one of the sociology theories by Auguste Comte, aids in the discovery of meanings that people attach to the societal worldview, in this case through

the Agikuyu music, stories, proverbs and legendary tales to discover the truth behind the mysteries. In ontological sense, this means those who belong to Agikuyu society hold interpretative knowledge to unpack the true meaning of quantitative sensual things in specific scenarios and phenomenon. Thus, this paper is anchored on the historical episteme and Ontological perspective of the Agikuyu origin based on myths and folklore of creation of Gikuyu and Mumbi by God who bore nine daughters namely *Wanjiru, Wambui, Njeri, Wanjiku, Nyambura, Waithira, Wairimu, Wangari* and *Wangui* forming the nine clans within the Agikuyu social structure.

The Agikuyu myth of origin is derived from the epistemological approach to African knowledge system viewed from three angles, the Natural, supernatural and paranormal and are key constructs in traditional Africanism. The women were assigned house/homestead roles and were considered family matriarchs. Although the Agikuyu is a patriarchal nation, usually it is referred to as 'House of Mumbi' while colloquially, the Agikuyu people refer to each other as *'nyumba'* which means "house" as their collective identity. Hence the Agikuyu true wisdom lies in the ontological knowledge seen in the intelligence force of the cultural hierarchy and philosophy also based on virtues and core pillars domiciled in the House of Mumbi as explained in this paper. The invasion of neopatrimonialism post- colonial Kenya impacted the roots of the Agikuyu social system thus compromising the value systems that unified the house of Mumbi and created division within the clan system. This paradigm shift has disorganized the House of Mumbi social structuring by creating class differences when members of the community became part of the neopatrimonialistic hierarchy of the new state. In my view this shift created a self-conscientization of Agikuyu women to rethink their womanistic roles only explainable through the theory of dialectical thinking which explains the self-consciousness trait that drives analytical reasoning in pursuit of knowledge and truth in questionable situations which forms the basis of the process of emancipation of Agikuyu women.

Pellizzoni (2022) defines emancipation as a process that frees individuals and groups from socio-economic, political, cultural or legal restrictions by breaking boundaries to overcome dependencies to fulfil own desires for self-actualization. Emancipation is about freeing human-beings and specifically women from the status of objecthood to enable them envision transformation into humanism (Mbembe, 2017).

In examining the emancipation of contemporary Agikuyu women and their influence on the political shift in Central Kenya, it is important to consider the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2016). Intersectionality recognizes that individuals' experiences and social positions are shaped by the intersection of various identities, such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity. This perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences and influences of Agikuyu women in Central Kenya.

Problem statement

The role of women in traditional patriarchal Agikuyu society has been a subject of study to gain insights into historical and cultural influences on gender roles and relationships. Researchers have explored various aspects of women's lives in this community, highlighting their roles in managing households, engaging in agriculture and economic activities, and contributing to social and cultural practices. Women are also involved in decision-making processes, child-rearing, and transmitting cultural knowledge. However, there are still gaps in our understanding, requiring further research to explore regional and temporal variations, as well as power dynamics and social structures that shaped women's roles. Bridging these gaps would contribute to challenging stereotypes, promoting gender equality, and empowering Agikuyu women in contemporary society. Understanding women's roles in the past can pave the way for more equitable and inclusive societies. By analyzing the life stories of women leaders, the study sheds light on the historical context and trajectory of women's involvement in electoral politics, challenging the marginalization of their experiences in their clamor for political emancipation.

Study Objectives

i)   To examine the political emancipation of Agikuyu women and their shift from tribal to National politics.

ii)   To determine the role of Agikuyu women in Kenya's Politics.

Scope

The scope of consideration for the paper is confined within the boundaries of the three Agikuyu sub-tribes; Metumi (Muranga), Karura (Kiambu) and Gaki (Nyeri) also referred to as the Northern Kikuyu.

Theoretical Framework

The study is underpinned on the following theories.

Theory1: Feminist theory and womanism are intellectual frameworks that focus on understanding and addressing gender inequality and the unique experiences and interests of women and social roles. Womanism is a concept often used as an African perspective in reference to emancipation of women and is viewed less radical than the western feminism context. The Feminist theory extends feminism into theoretical, fictional, or philosophical discourse aimed at understanding the nature of gender inequality by examining women's and men's social roles, experiences and interests. Feminist theory often focuses on themes such as discrimination, objectification, oppression, patriarchy, and stereotyping (Ahmed, 2017; Hooks, 2015). The theory emphasizes the need to challenge patriarchal power structures and advocate for gender equality in all aspects   of society, including politics (Connell, 2009). As Agikuyu women experience greater empowerment and agency, they are more likely to challenge the dominant tribal political system and seek greater representation and participation in national politics. This aligns with feminist theory's goal of dismantling gender-based hierarchies and promoting women's equal involvement in decision-making processes (Maloiy, 2020).

Theory 2: Interpretivist theory: One of the sociology theories by Auguste Comte that aids in the discovery of meanings that people attach to the societal worldview and the metaphysical. The theory posits that reality is socially constructed and meaning is derived from human interaction within a specific context (Smith & Osborn, 2015). By adopting an interpretivist theory, the study unravels subjective experiences of Agikuyu women in politics and their social realities.

Theory 3: The Descriptive representation theory. This Theory assumes that the reality of representation mirrors similarity in characteristics of those represented, in both outlook and experiences. According to this theory, when women are represented in decision-making bodies, their perspectives, experiences, and concerns are more likely to be taken into account, leading to more inclusive and equitable policy outcomes (Pitkin, 2016).

Methodology

Study Philosophy

This study was anchored on Interpretivism, Feminist (womanism) and narratology as explained below:

Interpretivism philosophy: It posits that reality is socially constructed and meaning is derived from human interaction within a specific context (Smith & Osborn, 2015). By adopting an interpretivist lens, the study aimed at understanding the subjective political experiences and social realities of Agikuyu women within a traditional political setting across political eras in Kenya. Feminism (womanism): This entails Feminist epistemology which allowed the study to challenge hegemonic discourses and give voice through narrated experiences of Agikuyu women, thus filling an epistemic gap (Harding, 1991). Feminism assisted in the understanding of how the Agikuyu indigenous systems influence women's' knowledge of feminism and how this knowledge catalysis political emancipation of Agikuyu women. Narratological Philosophy: Narratology aided in the creation of the study structure to allow conceptualization of human experiences as narrated and to investigate the meanings participants assigned to their experiences. Thematic narratologies provided interpretation of thematic references ensuring inclusion of human voices in the study. Coined by Tzetan Todorov in 1969, narratologies analyze patterns, their interrelationships and differences (Taum, 2018, Todorov, 1971).

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive and exploratory research design. The descriptive aspect aimed to document and describe the material culture of Agikuyu women's emancipation and its relationship to the political shift. The exploratory nature of the research design allowed for the discovery of new insights, patterns, and connections within the data. Ethnographic methods were employed to gather qualitative data (Lamé et al., 2020). The qualitative approach, employed a combination of ethnographic methods and thematic analysis (Dyer, 2021; Goidea et al., 2022). This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, perspectives, and cultural dynamics surrounding the research topic. The research design also incorporated strategies to ensure rigor and validity. Triangulation, which involved using multiple data sources and methods, was employed to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings. The involvement of cultural experts, community members, and relevant stakeholders throughout the research process also contributed to the trustworthiness of the data.

Sampling

Purposive sampling approach was used as the most appropriate for this study due to its multi-phased nature

designed to yield a rich, diverse sample that is both representative of the community and alignment to the study's cultural epistemological foundation. This facilitated insightful in-depth exploration of the cultural phenomenon of political emancipation of Agikuyu women and their shift from tribal to nationalistic politics. To ensure confidentiality, the identity or names of those interviewed have been deliberately omitted for the fact that the participants were mature persons delightful to informally share their knowledge of the Agikuyu culture without much protocol.

Data sources

Primary sources

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with members of two Agikuyu women cultural groups comprising 25 members per group making a total of 50 women and an additional Interviews with 5 Agikuyu cultural elders and experts. This entailed physical meetings and application of semi-structured interviews with members of Kiama Kia Ma Kikuyu elders at Mukuyu Cultural Center in Mukurwe-ini, Nyeri. Interviews were also conducted with an exchange group known as "Githima kia Uugi wa Bururi Witu" (The well of Knowledge of Kikuyu nation) comprising of kikuyu cultural elders and historians.

Material culture

The identification of material culture played a crucial role in this study, as it provided tangible artifacts, objects, and symbols that represented the social-economic phenomenon of contemporary Agikuyu women's emancipation and their influence on the political shift (Falls, 2015; Presley, 2019b; Rix & Emmitt, 2021). This section outlines the process of identifying and documenting material culture items such as shields, pottery items, guards, animal skin drums, traditional clothes and ornaments.

To begin, an extensive review of relevant literature on Agikuyu culture, history, and women's roles including scholarly works, ethnographic studies, historical accounts, and feminist perspectives were analyzed as secondary sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance of material culture within the Agikuyu community (Dyer, 2021; Goidea et al., 2022; Jindal, 2016). The review helped establish a framework for identifying and interpreting material culture items. Furthermore, cultural experts comprising local historians and council elders and community cultural dance members, were thereafter engaged in the material interpretation process to assist in the identification of material culture items and the significance. Their expertise and insights were invaluable in recognizing artifacts, objects, and symbols that held cultural meaning and represented women's emancipation and tribal political shifts. The aim of the fieldwork was to observe, document, and analyze relevant material cultural artifacts made or used by women as symbols of power and authority. Through participant observation, the researcher was able to witness and document the use and meaning of material cultural items, as well as their context and significance within the Agikuyu cultural setup.

Secondary sources

Secondary sources consisted of relevant written literature on the study topic and objectives. A meta-analysis of data from existing research was gathered by reviewing Agikuyu historical books, academic books and journals on Agikuyu social system, Agikuyu women and. Other inter-disciplinary journals on the subject, publications and eBooks were reviewed while a select of un-published materials with relevant knowledge segments were also reviewed. The analysis of the material was grouped into thematic areas within the framework of selected concepts that included; Epistemology, Ontology, Democracy, Neopatrimonialism, Personalism, Contemporary society, emancipation of women and metaphysics and others that explain cultural mythologies found in Kikuyu social systems.

Participant observation

Participant observation involved immersing myself in Agikuyu communities in Central Kenya to observe and document the daily lives, rituals, and interactions of Agikuyu women. This method provided a holistic understanding of the cultural context and social dynamics in which women's emancipation and political shifts occurred. In addition to participant observation, interviews were conducted with Agikuyu women who had experienced or witnessed changes in their roles and empowerment. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility and the exploration of individual experiences and perspectives. Focus group discussions were also conducted to encourage dialogue and capture collective views on the social-economic transformations and political shifts within the community.

Data Analysis

The analysis phase of the study involved a careful examination and interpretation of primary data collected the

respective custodians of Agikuyu cultural historical knowledge in Muranga (Mukurwe- shrine) and Mount Kenya Council of elders. Secondary data was processed through desk-top analysis of research document, academic journals, online materials and Agikuyu historical books. Agikuyu social system, cultures and people within the framework of contemporary democratic systems in Kenya were reviewed and analyzed to validate observations and experiences narrated. Further a systematic analysis of data from existing academic research, historical books, journals and online content on Agikuyu culture and women emancipation were analyzed. The reviews and analysis aimed at uncovering patterns, themes, and insights related to emancipation of contemporary Agikuyu women and their influence on the political shift from tribal voting patterns to Nationalism.

Content analysis was systematically carried out to further examine the role kikuyu social systems have played in shaping the contemporary Kenya's socio-economic and judicial politics and Agikuyu women emancipation practices. The aim of data analysis as (Dyer, 2021; Goidea et al., 2022) explains is to provide a deeper understanding of the relationships, connections, and dynamics within the data set.

Thematic analysis was employed to categorize and organize the data according to recurring themes and patterns. The data, including field notes, interview transcripts, and focus group discussions, were carefully reviewed and apportioned appropriate interpretation as per the themes derived through an iterative process, where patterns and connections within the data were identified, reviewed, and refined. The themes provided a holistic view of the social-economic and political aspects of Agikuyu women's emancipation process and their influence on tribal political shifting patterns. The analysis involved comparing and contrasting the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of Agikuyu women in relation to their social-economic, political engagement and emancipation process. The process involved sharing the findings and interpretations of themes, sub-themes, and categories with selected members of women group participants and Agikuyu local cultural experts to validate the accuracy and authenticity of the analysis. Feedback from participants and experts in the field was incorporated into the final analysis, strengthening the credibility of the study.

Findings

The findings were based on the two objectives of the study:

Objective one: The emancipation of Agikuyu women and their shift from tribal politics to national elections in Kenya is a complex and significant phenomenon.

The role of Agikuyu women in politics has been a subject of significant historical analysis and exploration. Kenya's pre-colonial era has been documented largely by authors from the West and understandably so due to the academic literacy limitation of African, communities. The communities' social, economics and politics operated within cultural systems and structures and prescribed distinct gender roles. The pre-colonial polities of the Agikuyu women are descriptively understood within the ambit of the general phenomenon surrounding the house of Mumbi; family and homestead, clans and roles assigned to groups, age-sets and clan councils. This foundational episteme assumed that cross-generation traditional wisdom would sustain indigenous knowledge forever, hence instilled in people and not in formal documentation as practiced in latter- day Kenya.

The Agikuyu community was divided into nine clans and sub-clans that formed a family unit known as *Mbari* (kinship) headed by elders from each family and operated as civil polities governed by customized rule and regulations. The pre-colonial Agikuyu political systems were based on conscientized leadership with a communalistic frame of shared responsibilities, an indication that the Agikuyu had a futuristic political framework in place. A traditional political system consisting of councils led by *Athuuri a Kĩama* (council of elders) who served in the Councils with members representing each of the nine Agikuyu clans, while others were constituted as per emerging social political, religious or cultural demands (Kamenju, 2013). The councils practiced democratic leadership not as we define it today but one which was guided by the metaphysical concept of God through beliefs, norms and the drive towards achieving the common good for the community(ibid). Metaphysics is a philosophical study that uses concepts to define universal elements of reality that are not easily experienced in daily life.

The framework of the composition of council members was culturally described and was not influenced by personalism. Therefore, to become a member of a Council each member had to give a goat to the Council elders and this was after complying with other cultural requirements to assume such social status (Adams & Van der Vijver, 2017). This affirms the patriarchal nature of the Agikuyu society despite the cultural myth projected that the Agikuyu clan-system had placed the women at a vantage position as heads of family by virtue of clans bearing female names.

Similar to modern political appointment, pre-colonial Agikuyu women were invited to arbitrate on dispute

resolutions alongside elders and council (Muigua, 2018) however, this responsibility applied to women beyond child-bearing age (ibid). The original feministic naming of Agikuyu clans can arguably be considered an embeddedness of Agikuyu politics to the porter (Mumbi) the Agikuyu matriarch, though this should not be misconstrued to heighted the notion of Agikuyu being a matriarchal system. Agikuyu gender roles were not conflictive as besides the politically assigned roles, women were confined to the family nurturing roles, cultural maintenance and farming (Muigua, 2018).

In the colonial era, most Agikuyu women used their indigenous knowledge and wisdom as a leverage on learnt and observed foreign practices, educational opportunities, and economic competitiveness leading to mobility. This was based on their interactions with white settlers either as laborers or by observing the settlers' lifestyles. The cross-pollination of experiences between Agikuyu women and white settlers introduced new perspectives and aspirations for emancipation (Fenner, 2020). However, it is important to acknowledge that these interactions were complex, and while some Agikuyu women benefited from them, others faced exploitation and marginalization. The socioeconomic background and access to education also influenced the opportunities for Agikuyu women to participate in politics and assert their rights (Anyango et al., 2018; Taylor, 2018). Those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and with educational access may have had more avenues for political engagement, while those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds faced greater barriers due to economic constraints and limited resources.

The colonial period therefore did not find a political vacuum within the Agikuyu social structure which explains women voluntary engagement in the *Mau Mau* liberation movement from the homestead by cooking and delivering food, armory, information and moral support to the fighters. Central Kenya being the epicenter of the liberation war played a significant role in shaping the experiences and aspirations of Agikuyu women (Koster, 2016).

Kanogo (2005) examines the roles and images of the Agikuyu women in Kenya's *Mau Mau* liberation war and depicts the prevailing gender stereotypes targeting women and how women challenged and overcame these stereotypes during the struggle for self-emancipation. It sheds light on how women subverted their traditional role-status and challenged the patriarchal dominance in political power and decision-making in the Agikuyu society. The study highlights the transition of Agikuyu women from being guardians of the domestic front to becoming active participants in the political and military struggle, thereby forging new identities and adopting new and transformed gender roles. Moreover, the study explores the conflicts and contradictions that characterized the male-female alliance in the *Mau Mau* liberation struggle, as women took on roles such as warriors, political decision-makers and judges, challenging both traditional socio-political structures and colonialism.

Santoru and Presley (1994) explored the connection between Agikuyu women, the *Mau Mau* Rebellion, and social change in Kenya arguing that besides clamoring for independence, the Rebellion was a key driver for Kenyan's social economic transformation, and the expansion of political space for women participation. By actively participating in the rebellion, Agikuyu women challenged traditional gender roles and catalytically changing societal norms. Such women include Muthoni Nyanjiru, an Agikuyu woman who played a crucial role in organizing protests against the British colonial government in Nairobi and was known for her bravery and leadership during the war (Githuku, 2015). Through her influence, more Agikuyu women joined the liberation cause resulting to early emancipation of Agikuyu women not just in political front but also in social- economic decision-making engagements for the community.

In post-independence, evidence of remarkable women social, economic and political strides has been documented specifically through the lens of the changed Kenya's constitution in 2010 and the societal shift from the traditional social cultural order to a constitutional order comprising of laws and regulations adjudicated by a judicial system that embraced common law as opposed to the previous Agikuyu arbitration system by council of elders. The rise of Feminism around the world impacted on the African cultural gender worldviews bringing in the idea of individual rights and freedoms causing the emergent of social dissonance. This includes abdication of social gender roles, cultural collectiveness and family neglect.

The scenario has played out in dispensation of Justice in Kenya's Judicial system with a glaring shift from social order to constitutional order and to a changing gender environment. Kenya's Constitution brought laws alien to existing cultural social order of mediating culturally specific issues such as marital issues, succession, inheritance, equality and equity previously mediated by traditional judicial council of elders. Evidently, what the constitution tries and fails reverts to traditional council of elders a case in point is that of Impeachment process of the Meru Governor, Kawira Mwangaza which the court referred to the *Ameru Njuri Njeke* Council of elders for arbitration. However, with the new constitution, the political space has expanded due to the constitutional law on two third gender representation for women in all sectors which has seen more women effectively compete in elective politics than in the past.

According to (Kiprop& Chang'ach,2016), political emancipation of women in Kenya has not been slippery. The pioneer woman parliamentary political contestant Ruth Habwe faced hostility from the male contestants and chased away from the ruling political party KANU in Kenya's one-party rule then and vied as an independent candidate but lost. The women political light did not shine until 1969 when the first woman parliamentarian Julia Ojiambo was elected while several others who contested in the caliber of Jael Mbogo and Wambui Otieno both from the Agikuyu nation vied and lost. The politics were highly tribal and the Agikuyu could not elect Wambui Otieno for bearing her husband's Luo name. Only four women joined and vied elective parliamentary posts in the 70s and included phoebe Asiyo, Eddah Gachukia, Philomena Chelangat Mutai and Jemima Gichaga (Kiprop & Chang'ach, 2016). Two out of the four were Agikuyu women. Thongo, (2017) attributes the low representation of women in parliament to patriarchal attitudes of political power brokers while nepotistic legacy of veteran political kingpins was an enabling factor to female ascending the political ladder (Maloiy, 2020). An affirmation of the contemporary Kenya's political dynamics captures by personalistic agendas and economic, political, cultural and development neopatrimonialism in sharing and distribution of national resources disenfranchising women in traditional social societies. According to the principles of democracy, power belongs to the citizens, but malpractices like electoral fraud denies the people opportunity through barriers created by political patronage networks of personalistic nature (Cheeseman, 2015). Personalism has been criticized for undermining the rule of law and suppressing political dissent. Neopatrimonialism is the vertical distribution of resources targeting networks of people within the circles of powerful state personnel and politicians and political parties (Fransisco,2020). This is a departure from the Agikuyu traditional governance structures and systems formed through consensus by the various tribal Councils and progressed horizontally making it accessible to women. Agikuyu women like environmentalist prof. Wangari Maathai through social activism challenged politics of neopatrimonialism by challenging state capture, corruption by state officers and land-grabbing of public open spaces. As the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, founded the Green Belt Movement, empowering women through tree planting initiatives and environmental conservation efforts (Maathai, 2003). Prof. Maathai stands out as an example of Agikuyu women whose social -economic and political emancipation history was steered through early access to formal education.

It's important to note that with Kenya's devolution more politically emancipated women have made significant contributions to empower their communities and the nation as County Government have created a platform for political trials by women at the local level. Memusi & Madsen (2022) in their analysis of the situation of women in Kenya's politics highlight the rise of gender issues, the limitations of gender quotas, and the threats of violence against women in politics. Regardless of gender limitations, in the quest for gender equality in politics, it is essential to recognize the societal transformative potential of women's participation. The Martha Karua's shot as a running-mate to a presidential candidate in the Kenya's August 2022 elections holds symbolic significance for women in Kenya (Ahmed, Elfversson & Höglund, 2022). Her appointment as running mate reflects a strategy to appeal to Agikuyu female voters specifically due to the high population of central Kenya and signals the importance of addressing the political interests of the Agikuyu nation. If Karua was successful she could have been the first female deputy president in Kenya, marking a milestone for women's representation in a high political positioning (Ahmed, Elfversson & Höglund, 2022) and a progress in the process of political emancipation of Agikuyu women. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that achieving true gender equality in politics requires more than just representation but also necessitates comprehensive transformation that addresses the underlying structures and norms that perpetuate gender inequality. The experiences and contributions of Agikuyu women in politics, both historically and in contemporary times, highlight the significance of their agency and resilience in challenging traditional gender roles and norms as well as systemic governance barriers.

The study by Tripp, Lott, and Khabure (2014) conducted for USAID/Kenya explores the broader theme of women's political empowerment in Kenya identifying key trends and challenges related to women's political participation, highlighting the significance of women's voices and experiences in decision-making processes. The report underscores the influence of various actors, including the women's movement, parliamentary associations, UN agencies, donors, political parties, and women's policy agencies, in driving women's political empowerment. It also addresses constraints faced by women candidates, such as violence, intimidation, campaign finance issues, and cultural barriers.

To further understand the correlation between women's political emancipation, tribal politics and the shift to national elections, it is essential to consider the research by Arriola and Johnson (2014). Their article examines the relationship between women's empowerment and ethnic politics in Africa, with a specific focus on Government's Ministerial appointments to executive cabinets. The study explores the impact of political institutions, socioeconomic factors, cultural norms, and the politicization of ethnicity on women's representation in executive

power. It highlights the importance of democracy and women's representation in parliament in increasing the share of Kenya's cabinet appointments for women.

The findings provide insights into the complex dynamics between ethnic politics, gender, and political representation in sub-Saharan Africa. Considering these sources collectively, it can be argued that the political emancipation of women in Kenya and their increased participation in national elections is an interconnected phenomenon hinged on historical events in political movements and institutional changes all which are factors that catalyzed the empowerment of Agikuyu women and at large the Kenyan women.

Similarly, women advancement in education, women's movements, and the adoption of multiparty systems have played vital roles in challenging gender norms and expanding opportunities for Agikuyu and other women's political engagement and emancipation. However, challenges persist, including violence, cultural barriers, and institutional constraints, and to Address these challenges will require comprehensive approaches that strengthen accountability mechanisms, promote women's representation in decision-making bodies, and address election-related violence.

The political emancipation of Agikuyu women and the shift from tribal politics to national elections are therefore intertwined with historical events of pre-independence and socio-political changes shaping the landscape for more women involvement in Kenya's political sphere. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to further advance women's political empowerment from other regions in the country and foster inclusive democratic processes in political emancipation of women in Kenya.

The urban and rural divide among Agikuyu women also contributes to variations in their journey towards political emancipation. The urban Agikuyu women, due to their exposure to progressive ideas and opportunities, may have had different experiences compared to their rural counterparts engaged in family agrarianism. However, it is important to note that existing literature lacks a comprehensive exploration of how intersectionality influences the political shift in Central Kenya (Crenshaw, 2016).

Most studies focus on individual aspects of gender, class, or ethnicity without fully considering their intersections. This current study has addressed Agikuyu traditional political settings and the roles apportioned to Agikuyu women as an attempt to inscribe intersectionality of traditional political culture and social order and the constitutional order in Kenya's political dynamics and the experiences and realities of different groups of Agikuyu women in the quest for political emancipation. Understanding the intersectionality of identities among Agikuyu women, brought forth insights into the nuanced experiences and challenges faced by different groups of women in search for political emancipation which is essentially vital in informing policies and interventions that promote gender equality and women's political participation through their diverse knowledge base.

Research findings on this objective have indicated that as Agikuyu women experience greater agency and empowerment, they begin to challenge traditional tribal voting patterns and align themselves with national political ideologies (Bauer, 2021; Burrell, 2022; Klenke, 2017; Maloiy, 2020; Zabus, 2019). The analysis of the role of Agikuyu women in Kenya's politics reveals a significant and growing contribution to political leadership and governance. Research findings indicate that Agikuyu women are actively participating in local and national elections, contesting for political positions, and assuming leadership roles in community organizations (Bauer, 2021; Burrell, 2022; Klenke, 2017; Zabus, 2019).

Objective two: Findings are that the involvement of Agikuyu women in politics has brought new perspectives, priorities, and policy agendas to the forefront. Through their political engagement, they have been able to advocate for issues that are important to them and their communities, such as women's rights, gender equality, education, healthcare, and economic empowerment (Bauer, 2021; Burrell, 2022). Their active participation has contributed to a more inclusive and gender-responsive political landscape in Kenya. Cited cases of individual Agikuyu women who have achieved political success further support the analysis. The women serve as role models and inspire others within their communities to engage in politics and strive for leadership positions (Klenke, 2017). Women accomplishments challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes and demonstrate that women can be effective political leaders.

Moreover, the findings suggest that Agikuyu women's involvement in politics is not limited to electoral processes but also extends to their active engagement in community organizations. They hold leadership positions in grassroots initiatives, women's groups, and civil society organizations, working towards community development, social justice, and empowerment (Zabus, 2019). Their contributions in these areas highlight their commitment to effecting positive change beyond the realm of electoral politics.

Another important finding is that as Agikuyu women gain more empowerment, they exhibit a desire for inclusive

politics that transcends narrow ethnic-based political affiliations. Historically, tribal politics in Kenya have been characterized by strong ethnic loyalties, with voters aligning themselves primarily based on their ethnic identity (Bauer, 2021). However, as Agikuyu women become more politically engaged and emancipated, they demonstrate a shift towards embracing national political ideologies that prioritize inclusivity and diversity over narrow ethnic interests. This shift signifies a growing awareness and recognition of the importance of unity and shared national values in political decision-making (Burrell, 2022).

Cited cases of individual Agikuyu women who have emerged as prominent political leaders also contribute to the understanding of this correlation. The women serve as role models and inspiration for others, demonstrating that women can successfully navigate the political landscape beyond tribal boundaries and make significant contributions to national politics confirms (Klenke, 2017) assertion. Their presence and achievements challenge the notion that political participation is limited to specific ethnic groups and highlight the potential for women's emancipation to disrupt traditional political affiliations. The analysis of the role of Agikuyu women in Kenya's politics reveals their increasing participation in electoral processes, contesting for political positions, and assuming leadership roles in community organizations. Their involvement brings new perspectives, priorities, and policy agendas to the forefront, contributing to a more inclusive and gender-responsive political landscape. The descriptive representation theory helped in explaining the significance of women's involvement in politics, emphasizing the importance of diverse representation for inclusive policymaking. While the Feminist/womanist theory aided in determining that Individual cases of successful Agikuyu women in politics serve as inspiration and challenge traditional gender norms. Additionally, Agikuyu women's engagement in community organizations demonstrates their commitment to broader social change and community development (Bauer, 2021; Burrell, 2022; Klenke, 2017; Zabus, 2019).

Discussion

The emancipation of Agikuyu women and their shift from tribal to national politics in Kenya highlights the transformative impact of women's empowerment on the political landscape. The findings indicate that as Agikuyu women gain greater agency and empowerment, they challenge the traditional tribal voting patterns that have long characterized Kenyan politics. Instead, they align themselves with national political ideologies, demonstrating a desire for inclusive and representative governance.

This shift has significant implications for Kenyan politics. By breaking away from narrow ethnic-based political affiliations, Agikuyu women contribute to the diversification of political perspectives and priorities. Their increased political participation brings fresh ideas, alternative viewpoints, and a focus on broader national issues to the political arena. This, in turn, fosters political stability, unity, and national development.

The study emphasizes the importance of inclusive and representative governance in Kenya. It suggests that women's political emancipation plays a crucial role in dismantling the tribal politics that have often led to political divisions and conflicts. Aligning themselves with national political ideologies, Agikuyu women contribute to a more inclusive and cohesive politics y bridging ethnic divides and promotion of national unity by ensuring that the interests and concerns of women in diverse communities are adequately represented.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the need to continue promoting women's empowerment and political participation by providing women with opportunities to engage in political processes, access leadership positions, and have their voices heard within the political landscape instilling inclusivity in multisectoral political arenas.

The shift from tribal politics to national elections in Kenya reflects the transformative power of women's empowerment in the political sphere. The active participation of Agikuyu women challenges traditional voting patterns and contributes to a more inclusive, representative, and cohesive political landscape. It is crucial to continue supporting women's empowerment and promoting their political participation to ensure a more diverse, united, and prosperous Kenya.

The analysis of the role of Agikuyu women in Kenya's politics reveals their increasing involvement and contributions to political leadership and governance. Agikuyu women have actively participated in local and national elections, challenging traditional gender norms and seeking political positions. Their engagement brings fresh perspectives, priorities, and policy agendas to the forefront, contributing to a more inclusive and gender-responsive political landscape. However, the analysis also highlights the challenges faced by Agikuyu women in the political sphere. Gender-based discrimination, limited access to resources and funding, and cultural barriers hinder their full participation and representation. These challenges are rooted in societal norms and perceptions that underestimate women's political capabilities and confine them to traditional roles.

To address these challenges and promote women's political aspirations, the discussion emphasizes the need for gender-responsive policies and initiatives. It calls for the development and implementation of policies that actively support women's political participation and provide them with equal opportunities. Mentorship programs and supportive networks are also recommended to empower women, enhance their political skills, and provide a platform for networking and collaboration. Moreover, the analysis underscores the importance of challenging and transforming cultural barriers that limit women's political engagement. It suggests the need for education and awareness programs that challenge traditional gender norms and promote gender equality. By challenging societal perceptions and empowering women with knowledge and skills, Agikuyu women can overcome barriers and actively contribute to political decision-making processes.

The analysis highlights the increasing role of Agikuyu women in Kenya's politics and their contributions to political leadership and governance. Recognizing and supporting women's political aspirations is crucial for achieving a more inclusive and gender-responsive political system. By addressing the challenges faced by Agikuyu women, implementing gender-responsive policies, and providing support and mentorship, their political participation and representation can be enhanced, leading to more equitable and effective governance.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings and discussion of the research objectives, it is evident that there have been a progressive significant social, economic, and political transformations concerning Agikuyu women in Kenya. The traditional patriarchal norms that once restricted women to domestic and agricultural roles are being challenged, leading to increased empowerment and participation in various spheres of life. Women's emancipation has had positive impacts on their social status, economic stability, and political engagement, contributing to the overall development of the Agikuyu community and Nation at large.

i) Based on the objective of Agikuyu women's shift from tribal to national politics in Kenya the following recommendations can be made:

ii) Strengthened women's networks and support systems: Building strong networks and support systems for Agikuyu women is crucial for their empowerment within the patriarchal social system. These networks can provide a platform for sharing experiences, offering mentorship, and advocating for women's rights and equal opportunities. Collaborative efforts among women's organizations, community leaders, and policymakers can help establish and strengthen such networks.

iii) Address non-cultural barriers to women's political participation: Identify and address the barriers that hinder women's full participation in politics, including cultural norms, gender-based discrimination, and limited access to resources. Education and awareness campaigns should be conducted to challenge gender stereotypes and promote equal opportunities for women in political leadership.

iv) Implementing gender-responsive policies: This can be achieved through recognition and support to women political aspirants both from traditional societies and the enlightened urban which is crucial in achieving a more inclusive and gender-responsive political system.

v) Transformation of inhibitive cultural barriers: Some traditional practices rooted in societal norms and perceptions limit women's political engagement underestimate women's political capabilities confining them to perpetual traditional roles.

vi) Adequate and democratic choice of women political representatives: Politics of neopatrimonialism disenfranchise majority of politically ambitious women in Kenya's politics due to their lack of identity and belonging to legendary political power wheeling class.

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