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**ENGENDERING POLITICAL SPACE:  
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN  
KANGEMA, MURANG'A DISTRICT,  
1963-2002**

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**BY**

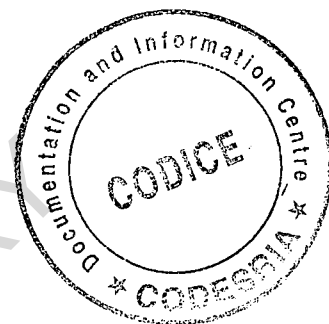
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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
ARTS IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS OF KENYATTA UNIVERSITY**

**2005**




## DECLARATION

I declare that this is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university.

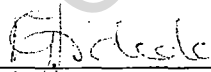
  
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27<sup>th</sup> February 2004  
**Date**

This thesis has been submitted with our approval as university supervisors.

  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	(ii)
Table of contents.....	(iv)
Acknowledgement.....	(v)
Abstract.....	(vi)
Dedication.....	(vii)
List of abbreviations.....	(viii)
Definition of terms.....	(x)

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

1.0	Context of the Problem.....	1
1.1	Statement of the Problem.....	3
1.2	Objectives.....	4
1.3	Research Premises.....	4
1.4	Significance and Justification.....	5
1.5	Scope and Limitation.....	7
1.6	Literature Review.....	8
1.7	Theoretical Framework.....	14
1.8	Research Locale.....	21
1.9	Research Methodology.....	23

## CHAPTER TWO

### WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL FORTHALL

2.0	Introduction.....	26
2.1	Pre-Colonial Social-Cultural Kikuyu Setting.....	27
2.2	Pre-Colonial Economic and Political Organisation of the Kikuyu.....	34
2.3	Colonial Penetration in Kangema.....	37
2.5	Women's Response to Colonialism.....	49
2.6	Summary.....	57

## CHAPTER THREE

### TRENDS AND TRANSITIONS IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN KANGEMA FROM 1963-1978

3.1	Introduction.....	59
3.2	Kenya at Independence.....	59
3.3	Kangema Women and Political Participation: 1963-968.....	66
3.4	Obstacles to Kangema Women's Political Participation: 1963-1978..	74
3.5	Summary and Conclusion.....	84

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TRENDS AND TRAJECTORIES IN KANGEMA WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FROM 1978-2002

4.1	Introduction.....	86
4.2	Remnants of the Women's Decade: 1975-1985.....	87
4.3	The era of Political Pluralism.....	91
4.4	The 1995 Beijing Conference.....	94
4.5	<i>Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation</i> .....	97
4.6	Hindrances and Successes in Women's Political Participation in Kangema.....	98
4.7	Summary and Conclusion.....	115

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

5.0	Introduction.....	118
5.1	Gender and Patriarchy; Pre-Colonial and Colonial Fort hall.....	118
5.2	Gender and Patriarchy; Trends and Transitions in Women's Political Participation in Kangema from 1963-2002.....	121
	Bibliography.....	127
	Appendix I: Sample Questions.....	138
	Appendix ii: list of informants.....	140
	Appendix iii List of tables.....	142
	Appendix iv: Maps.....	143

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines women's political participation in Kangema, Murang'a district from 1963-2002. It adopts an integrative approach where patriarchy, an offshoot of radical feminism, and gender as tools of analysis are employed. Within these two approaches, it is argued that it is the society that determines what roles are to be played by both men and women.

The study begins by giving an in-depth analysis of colonial penetration in Kangema and the impact that this had on participation of women in politics of Kangema. It is demonstrated that the penetration of the colonialists and missionary activities in Kangema had adverse effects on women political participation. With its patriarchal nature, colonialism had no place for women and this was later to be adopted by independent Kenya in 1963.

Though women engaged in the independence struggles, the Kenyatta government did not recognize their efforts. Further in 1978 after the death of Kenyatta, the president who took over-Daniel arap Moi- relegated women to the periphery. They therefore remained marginalized and exploited by the male elites in the then government. The reasons for their marginalisation as discussed are religion, culture, inadequate education, ignorance and poverty among others.

Women have however not been quiet. They engaged in various activities to enhance their political participation. They formed goal-oriented groups and this ensured their children's education and hence increased political and economic awareness of their rights.

## DEDICATION

To my Parents, Mr Julius Mwangi and Mrs. Esther Nyambura Mwangi, my Brothers and Sisters, Nephews and Nieces.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AAWORD</b>	Association of African Women For Research and Development
<b>ACK</b>	Anglican Church of Kenya
<b>CMS</b>	Church Missionary Society
<b>CODESRIA</b>	Council for the Development of Social Science Research and Development in Africa
<b>EAA</b>	East African Community
<b>FIDA</b>	Federation of Kenyan Women Lawyers
<b>FORD</b>	Forum for the Restoration of Democracy
<b>KADU</b>	Kenya African Democratic Union
<b>KANU</b>	Kenya African National Union
<b>KAR</b>	Kenya African Rifles
<b>KAU</b>	Kenya African Union
<b>KISA</b>	Kikuyu Independent Schools Association
<b>KNA</b>	Kenya National Archives
<b>KPU</b>	Kenya Peoples Union
<b>KWPC</b>	Kenyan Women Political Caucus
<b>LNC</b>	Local Native Council
<b>MCA</b>	Mumbi Central Association

<b>MYWO</b>	Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation
<b>NCSW</b>	National Commission on the Status of Women
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organisation
<b>O.I</b>	Oral Interviews in Citations
<b>PFA</b>	Platform for Action
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>YWCV</b>	Young Women Christian Voters

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

- CULTURE:** The totality of a people's way of living as expressed in their politics, ideology, economic activities, languages, music, dress and a variety of artistic expressions.
- ENGENDER:** Incorporation of perspectives, which consider the relationship between women and men as expressed in terms of power ideology and economics.
- FEMINISM:** The recognition of the systematic discrimination against women on grounds of gender and a commitment to work towards change.
- GENDER:** Socially constructed and culturally variable roles that women and men play in their daily lives. It refers to a structural relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets and in political structures, as well as in the household.
- KANGEMA:** For the purpose of this study, Kangema will include the current Kangema and Mathioya constituencies in Murang'a district. Therefore if the word division is added to Kangema it will mean the current Kangema division
- PARTICIPATE:** To take part or a share in the political social and economic activities in a society.
- POLITICS:** A purposive activity that embraces power relationships in all aspects of our lives, generally confined to a public decision making domain.

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:** The effective involvement of a person(s) in the affairs of the state or in public affairs in general. It involves deciding what the goals are and how to achieve them.

**POLITICAL SPACE:** The capacity to participate in decision-making processes, leadership, and to hold public office.

**SEX:** What one is born to be - female or male- thus it is a biological concept

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

Several studies have been undertaken concerning the political, socio-cultural and economic positions of women in Africa. Most of these studies demonstrate the fact that women's roles in pre-colonial Africa varied extensively across Africa's multiple ethnic groups. In some societies, women exercised extensive authority (Hay, 1995). For instance, Musisi (1991) observes that very few women in Buganda wielded much real power (notably princesses who were also exempted from marriage). A great many functioned as objects of exchange in relationships between men and groups of men. Boserup (1970) in her study demonstrated that African women were economically productive and independent. In Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, many women had achieved financial successes as market traders.

Other researchers have also established that in some societies women were leaders, councillors and/or spiritual figures for example Omu among the Delta Igbos of Nigeria commanded considerable respect and authority as a leader among her subjects (Uchendu, 1993). Strobel (1979) and Oduol (1992) also observe that some Kenyan communities assigned economic social and political roles and positions to both men and women on the basis of gerontocracy. Elderly women among the Kikuyu formed women's councils, which dictated behaviour patterns for their members and enforced sanctions as necessary. This provided women with fora for participating in societal matters. Oduol (1992) posits that the gender inequality that persists today was thus not chiefly a function of conditions of the pre-colonial era.

However, studies conducted in Central Province indicate that although women formed councils together with men in pre-colonial times, formal political power was vested in exclusively male

councils. In this arena of politics, women were perceived as subordinate. Nevertheless, although the Kikuyu women had no political rights, it would be utterly wrong to assume that they had no influence and status in the community. Senior women had a considerable position in the society. All rites and ceremonies in the homes were centred on them. They had to be consulted prior to the performance of such. Most scholars have argued that during the Mau Mau uprising, women actively participated in the liberation struggles in Central province. Nyakwea (1994) states that in the early colonial times, the legendary Wangu wa Makeri ruled large parts of Murang'a and commanded considerable respect because of her innovative skills in leadership. She adds that her grandmother Nyamunyi was a local opinion shaper in Koimbi. Likimani (1983), Kanogo (1987) and Maina wa Kinyatti (1980) note that some women were needed from Murang'a, Limuru, Kiambu and Nyeri to provide their menstrual flow for the preparation of oaths and concoctions. Further, they also observe that in Fort Hall as Murang'a district was called during colonial times, older women assisted men by being spies and providing food in the forests.

While there were no complete egalitarian societies prior to European control in Africa, colonialism exacerbated biased gender relations. Hay (1995) observes that in many parts of Africa colonialism altered the status of women and reduced their powers through the imposition of western conceptions of state and society, women, family and gender. The colonial administrative and economic systems introduced throughout Africa embodied a western notion of state and society with its distinction between public and the private spheres and its complimentary ideas about women, family and gender. Colonial officials all set out to make African women more like their European counterparts. When colonial authorities began to create a system of private property rights in Kenya, they extended those rights only to men because ownership in the West was historically a male privilege. Thus women lost both traditional access to land and failed to gain property rights (Kabira, 1997).

Despite the existence of all these studies, there are no studies on the forces that impact on women's political participation in the wider Murang'a district in the period between 1963 and 2002. Yet Murang'a is a very unique locality owing to the ascendancy of Wangu wa Makeri to power in the early colonial period and the active involvement of women in the Mau Mau struggle. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by studying a specific area in Murang'a, Kangema.

## **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In the light of the above gap, this study is a historical investigation of the forces that impact on women's political participation in Kangema, Murang'a district from 1963-2002. It investigates the contribution of factors such as colonialism, missionary activities, and legislations imposed by the post-colonial government, wealth, culture and the level of education to the political participation of women. Given the evidence of disparity in women's political participation in different localities within Kangema, this study also compares and contrasts the levels of women's political participation between the lower and the upper Kangema (Mathioya and Kangema Divisions respectively.) The study also establishes the contribution of the numerous transitions, both political and in other arenas like the emergence of activism in women's movements to the participation of women in politics. Lastly, the study establishes whether there has been any effort by the established political systems to enhance the levels of women's political participation in Kangema.

This study will be guided by the following questions:

- a) To what extent did colonial policies, practices and missionary activities affect women's political participation in Kangema?
- b) Are there any political, economic, or socio-cultural factors that have impacted on women's political participation in Kangema?

- c) How have the numerous political transitions in Kenya impacted on women's political participation in Kangema?
- d) Compare and contrast the level of women's political participation between Kangema and Mathioya divisions.
- e) Has the established political systems attempted to enhance women's political participation in Kangema?

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study is guided by the following objectives. It :

- a) Analyses the contribution of diverse factors such as colonial and missionary activities post-colonial legislations to women's political participation in Kangema.
- b) Examines the constrains placed on women's political participation in Kangema by political, social-cultural or economic factors.
- c) Assess the impact of the numerous transitions in Kenya on women's political participation in Kangema.
- d) Compare and contrast the level of women's political participation between Kangema and Mathioya division.
- e) Investigate participation efforts by the state and other forces to enhance women's political participation in Kangema.

## **1.3 RESEARCH PREMISES**

- a) Generally, the advent of colonialism impacted negatively on women's political participation in Kangema.



- b) Economic, political and socio-cultural factors have been chiefly responsible for women's peripheral participation in politics in Kangema.
- c) Although women's political participation prior to 1990's remained low in Kangema the re-introduction of multiparty politics witnessed the increased political participation of women.
- d) Women's political participation in Kangema division is higher than that of Mathioya because of the history of political activism in the former prior to colonialism and even after, in the earlier years of independence.
- e) The various measures to curb marginalisation of women in Kangema have been inadequate leading to their further marginalisation.

#### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

Whereas there is a growing body of literature on Kenyan women still, rural women have not received adequate attention from scholars. Pala (1978) observes that local level research is needed to bring to cognition the social, political and economic realities those local women are subjected to during their political participation. In Africa generally and Kenya in particular, Severe academic gaps exist at the local level and Kangema is one such area where this gap is very evident. As far as Kangema is concerned, the forces impacting on women's political participation from 1963-2002 have not been studied. What exists on Kangema are general economic, social and anthropological works and even in these studies, no attempt has been made to examine the forces impacting on women's political participation. The proximity of Murang'a town provided adequate conditions to study these forces.

Mama (1991) posits that perhaps it is because women are so marginally involved in government in Africa that scholars have been slow to examine the gender dynamics in statecraft and politics. Yet, she adds, it is precisely in the areas of statecraft, politics and government that at least until recently

the bulk of national resources and decision making power has been concentrated, and from which women have been excluded. It is because of this exclusion that the constitutional and legal status of women's participation in all levels of governance have long been taken as key indicators of the general level of a country's democracy usually on the basis that women constitute a historically oppressed and marginalised group inspite of the fact that they constitute a key national resource whose ideas, creative solutions and concerns for cohesiveness of the social fabric can help change the quality of life in the society.

Kabira (1992) also observes that women hold the winning vote in any democratic political context due to their numerical superiority. In spite of all their roles and the fact that all policies effected are likely to affect them more than any one else, they still are not fully involved in the political process. This gender imbalance is glaring. Thus by looking at the positions which women have globally been subordinated to, changing the long standing colonial practices and traditions which sustain and reproduce gender inequalities is therefore fundamental to the agenda of women's movement worldwide. This research is therefore a necessary instrument to effect some of these changes. Thus, the study contributes to knowledge and literature on the political participation of women in Kangema specifically and generally in Kenya and the world. The study will also open up new avenues for research among women in other areas in of Kenya in terms of theory and empirical approaches.

This area was chosen for two major reasons. First, the disparity that exists in women's political participation in different localities within the wider Kangema, that is, high level women's political participation in the present Kangema division and low level women's political participation in Mathioya division since colonial times. The area was therefore chosen for comparative purposes; to establish the reasons for differences in the level women's political participation within the same area

when women were supposed to be passive recipients of men's political ideas. The study covers the period between 1963 and 2002. 1963 is significant as it marks a period in Kenya when political institutions were transferred into the hands of Kenyans. At this point, the constitution that was adopted, granted equal rights to both men and women in terms of political participation (Kabira, 1998). However in the years following independence women continued to lag behind in politics in Kenya. Kangema was no exception despite the precedent that had been set by Wangu wa Makeri in the early colonial times in Murang'a district. Again, the fact that women in this area actively participated in the liberation struggle cannot be underestimated, yet in the post-colonial era, women in this area have generally taken a political backseat. Thus it is significant to find out why in spite of the granting of political rights to men and women, women persistently lagged behind. 2002 marks the end of Moi era. It is also an election year preceded by a lot of political mobilisation in Kenya.

## **1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

The study will be confined to the geographical limits of the former Kangema division. Former Kangema division here includes the present Kangema and Mathioya division that was carved from the former due to political reasons. The study undertakes an inquiry into the forces impacting on women's political participation Kangema. Though 1963 is indicated as the earliest starting point of the study it remains however flexible. We will seek to probe into the nature of women's political participation in pre-colonial society that could have continued to impact on the later politics in the area. This will involve where necessary an examination of the period before 1963. 1963 has been chosen as it marks the gaining of independence by Kenyans. The year 2002 on the other hand serves as a convenient date to end our investigation and analysis. It is an election year marked by a lot of political mobilisation in Kenya.

Again this study will deal with women's political participation in Kangema. Their economic and social-cultural participation will be studied only as far as they have a bearing on their political life.

## 1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally, a lot of works exist on women in Africa. These cover religious, political, economic, cultural and social issues relating to women. However, at the micro level, there has been no study on women's political mobilisation in Kangema. This study therefore hopes to look at women's political participation in the area.

Charlton (1984) observes that in virtually every country in the world women are dependent upon men in formal politics at the local, national and international levels. Equally important in this conceptualisation, she notes, is the recognition that these three levels are increasingly interrelated. Thus, events at the local level whether in the private (family) sphere or public sphere are more and more influenced by the institutions of the national state. Moreover, the expansion of multinational organisations means that virtually no country can be considered impermeable to influences that originates from outside its borders. She concludes therefore that whatever their traditional condition, women in general have little or no formal institutionalised power at the local, national and international levels in comparison to men. Even when women do acquire public influence locally or nationally she observes that influence is often undermined by the limited autonomy of their national state. Although this study is too general and does not focus on any specific county, it does provide some relevant insights into the nature of political involvement of women in Kenya generally.

Coward (1983) notes that there is substantial evidence documenting the existing unequal division of labour between the two sexes in Africa. She observes that women constitute a majority of the

agricultural labour force as well as the majority of the informal labour force while occupying the lowest position in the formal sector as either semi-skilled or un-skilled employees. Moreover, at the household level, she adds, they perform most of the domestic or what is known as the reproductive tasks, that is child, bearing and rearing, food processing, care of the sick and spouses as well as most of the functions needed for the reproduction of human labour. However, she mentions this in passing. She does not elaborate on the origins of this subordination. This work is important as it provides insights to the present study, on the subordinate state of women.

Dealing with the issue of patriarchy, Lerner (1986), Kabira (1998), and Ruth (1998) posit that some of the identified obstacles to women's participation in politics include patriarchy where women in many African societies are not supposed to challenge men in the contest for political leadership. Ruth (1998) defines patriarchy as a society where men hold power and a system that reflects the values underlying the traditional male ideal. They all conclude that in such a case where societies are patriarchal in nature, it is this patriarchy that determines almost 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. These studies are important to the present work as they generally address the issue of patriarchy, an issue that is to be addressed in the present work of Kangema Division.

Lumumba (1996) in the CODESRIA bulletin observes that the current gender issues in African societies and the magnitude of the problems posed by gender inequality in every aspect of society in Africa today are as a result of a complex set of factors. She notes that while some of these factors are indigenous to African cultures, others were created by the policies and rules designed in the colonial context and the legacies of these have been perpetuated by African male dominated legislative and executive bodies that have developed little or no gender awareness. She further observes that

although Africa bears no responsibility for the historical patriarchal foundations of western societies, European colonial policies are nonetheless directly or indirectly a determining factor in gender inequality in every sphere of contemporary African socio-economic and political dynamics. Amadiume (1987) concludes that the Victorian concept imposed by colonialism minimised the role of African women. Although these studies are too general and do not focus on any specific African country, they all demonstrate the fact the gender inequality that exist in contemporary African societies is as a result of colonial legacies. These works aid this study in looking at how far colonialism impacted on women's political participation in Kenya.

Abena (1991) and Kabira (1997) examine the issue of culture. Abena (1991) defines it as the sum total of a people's way of life. They both observe that conceptually, language, gender and the law converge in culture and that by the time they are adults, members of each society have internalised or acquired specific values regarding the gender issues they have experienced. They add that it is in culture where specific values and ideas about male and female roles are found, what the society expects from each, codes of behaviour in various circumstances and the associations and the connotations that go with each genus. This work is important to the present study as it addresses the role of culture in socialisation.

Mbeo (1989) and Murungi (2000) note that no legislation in Kenya has ever been formulated in answer to the woman subordination or motivated by feminist concerns. They 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. In reality, Mbeo (1989) stresses, there are discriminatory laws in our statute books. They further add that the ideology of equality is a legal fiction, which helps legitimise the status quo. In theory, law is supposed to define

the norms of conduct by promulgating objective and value neutral rules applicable to all citizens, irrespective of their status. It is precisely this “equality” of treatment that results in or reinforces actual inequality. They conclude that in treating unequal persons equally, the law reinforces existing conditions and promotes inequality. Although the studies give comprehensive analyses of the issue of Kenyan legislation as impacting on women’s political participation, they fail to address other equally important forces impacting on women's political participation like patriarchy among others.

Lekuta et. al (1997) states that the reality of women of southern Africa is that they remain a vulnerable marginalized group that is yet to enjoy equality in status and access to services and resources with their male counterparts. They observe that women are found at the bottom line of poverty, illiteracy and landlessness and are concentrated in the rural areas where facilities and services are scarce. Further, they note that women are the most affected by negative impacts of economic adjustment programmes. In politics and decision making, women turn up in the largest numbers in every election year yet they remain conspicuously absent in decision making positions of government, parastatals and private companies while being concentrated in the so called female professions. This study which focuses on factors militating against women’s political and economic empowerment in southern Africa is important to this study because it gives a general picture of the position of women in Africa.

Hyden (1992) and AAWORD (1998) note that women tend to lack finance, which is necessary to boost them in political leadership. Hyden (1992) observes that it is due to various cultural situations that women have less access to various resources among which are lack of income and family backing. They further add that economic empowerment through finances is a prerequisite to political participation and leadership. Although these studies address the issue of finance as a factor impacting

on women's political participation, they mention this in passing and moreover fail to address other equally important forces that impact on women's political participation.

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

Willis (1991) argues that the situation that comes from being the only or one of the very highly placed women in senior decision-making capacity also affects women's political participation. She adds that the 1987 UN study (UN 1987:35) notes that women are isolated in all managerial positions even in those so-called female professions, such as nursing. Not only does this "token" managerial status cause loneliness, it can result in decreased effectiveness. Nzomo (1987) advances a similar view about the minority behaviour of women in high positions in public life. She laments that minorities, such as women who are successful in a male dominated world, absorb the dominant culture to such an extent that they tend to disassociate themselves from other women, to underrate their success and to perceive any discrimination they meet as a result of their own shortcomings. These studies are important to the present study as they generally highlight the issue of isolation of women in Africa and Kenya particularly.

Ya'u (1997) and Ogunsanya (2002) note 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 note that the image the African media has given women is rather typeset. Those women are presented as powerless victims of violence, famine and wars. They observe 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 organisations. Although this study is too general and does not focus on a specific country, it does provide some relevant insight into the factors relegating women to participate lowly in politics.

Mlama (1991) argues 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. This study however underscores the need for women to resist the subordinate position, which has been constructed for them in our societies. Moreover, the choice that women have had has to be critically reviewed taking into account the employment status of women in different contexts. Also the choices which women have in terms of providing audience to a performing cultural troupe or popular theatre has to be critically addressed in view of the alternative entertainment available in specific social-cultural contexts. The study underscores the role of women in performing and visual arts. This work is important to the present study as it shows how women are marginalized and subordinated using art.

Tamale and Oloka (2002) note that the restriction on academic freedom of women begins very early in the educational cycle. They observe that the odds are stacked high against them right from primary school and thus come to have serious consequences for academic freedom of women in tertiary education. Mbilinyi (1990) argues that equity in education in terms of equal access and equal

performance is not sufficient in ensuring that education performs the fundamental role of transforming the conditions, which contribute to the societal problems, which face women. She concludes that mere equity is in fact non-existent. Ochwada (1995) suggests that in education, concerted efforts should be applied to retrieve women's history while at the same time producing a gendered history, which acknowledges the contributions of both men and women. Moreover, the process of engendering Kenya's history should involve changing the curriculum and the pedagogy to be more inclusive and balanced in according space to masculinity and femininity. Although these studies address the loopholes in the education system, they are silent on other equally important forces impacting on women's political participation such as the insider- outsider dichotomy.

The aforementioned studies are all explorations of how women are a marginalised 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. This study sets out to investigate these forces.

## **1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study utilised various aspects of the theory of patriarchy an offshoot of radical feminism. Further, gender, as a theoretical construct was employed in the analysis and interpretation of the work.

Feminism is a broad term for a variety of conceptions of the relations between men and women in society. Feminism takes meaning from the moment, has no fixed definition, and is governed by its context and researcher position and identities. Just as there is no stability or unity in the concept of 'Woman', the concept of feminism is unstable and varied. Feminists question and challenge the origins of oppressive gender relations and attempt to develop a variety of strategies that might change

these relations for the better. All feminism pivots around the recognition of existing women's oppression and addresses the prevailing unjust and discriminatory gender relations. Feminism does not just deal with issues of justice and equality, but also offers a critique of male dominated institutions, values and social practices that are oppressive and destructive. Even though feminists share the same ideas in terms of what gender oppression might mean, they differ widely in terms of analysing its origin and what constitutes women's liberation (Meena, 1992)

Liberal feminism has a long history stretching as far back as the 18th century. It questions those viewpoints about women, which are damaging and discriminatory. The questions it poses are related to women's dependency on men, their capabilities and capacities and their right. Liberal feminists demand equal opportunities and equal participation in the management of the societies. They therefore seek women's liberation through legal reforms and increase of their participation in education and training. Even though liberal feminism has a long tradition of fighting for the rights and opportunities for women, it rarely questions the structural inequalities prevailing in the societies that are gender blind.

The theory does not pinpoint relations between the sexes as specific power relations. Likewise, it does not adequately challenge non-feminist view of the inequalities between men and women. Its reformist approach to changing gender inequalities tends to perpetuate the status quo. The liberal framework's, women's party wings have failed to demonstrate that women are both political and social actors with their own agenda and strategies. Here, women are conceived as victims and appendages of men. Women's party wings have thus been compromising women's basic human rights for token measures provided by national governments through the patronage system

Marxist feminism, which represents a wide variety of scholars, has attempted to apply dialectical

materialism in analysing sources of gender oppression. They locate women oppression in social class, race and ethnicity. They challenge the attempt to isolate gender from social class. They consider capitalism, imperialism and sexism as inseparable. Liberation of women is thus linked to liberation of oppressive social class relations. Marxist feminists using Engel's theory of the "Origin of the family" for example, locate women's oppression in their inability to participate in the public sphere. It is thus assumed that the liberation of women from the domestic sphere to the public sphere would liberate them. However, in both socialist and capitalist states, participation of women in the public sphere does not automatically lead to their liberation because they occupy the lowly paid jobs.

Radical feminism emerged as a result of breakaway of Marxist feminists who were frustrated due to their inability to apply social class in analysing gender oppression. They located women's oppression in the social institution of gender. They launched a wholesale onslaught against male-dominated society and considered men as the enemy. They in addition believed that women's issues were part of a general revolutionary struggle that one could not change the system within the established economic and political system and its institutions. Women had to exclude men from their movement because they gained nothing from co-operating with their oppressors. Radical feminists put sexuality, reproduction and patriarchy at the centre of political arena. They challenge the conventional assumptions with regard to the place of women in society. Although demand for women empowerment, however, might explain why radical feminism has met hostility and has failed to have a significant impact on development strategies on women, some of its aspects have a significant impact on feminist activists and researchers. For instance, patriarchy an offshoot of radical feminism has tangible implications on the state of women in society. Patriarchy was introduced as a concept to differentiate the forces maintaining gender oppression and discrimination from other social forces such as capitalism and socialism. However, the concept obscures other differences. Sometimes, this

concept is used loosely with "sexism" to denote that there is one sex, which dominates and another that is subjected. But patriarchy, although a branch of radical feminist theories, has been advanced as a theoretical explanation on its own for the subordination of women. It describes the political and social control of women by men. Here, patriarchy chronicles to deliver the history of the relations between the sexes and explains the form and function of male domination.

The concept of patriarchy is commonly applied to explain the totality of the oppressive and exploitative relations between men and women in society. Several scholars and researchers have concluded that this concept of patriarchy has a narrow and wider meaning. Such scholars include Lerner (1986), Kabira (1992) and Abrams and Harvey (1996). In its narrow sense, it refers to a system whereby the male head of the household has absolute legal economic power over his dependants, male and female members of the family. In its wider meaning, it denotes the social, political and economic system that ensures, preserves and perpetuates male supremacy in all sectors of life. In most indigenous African societies, patriarchy defined social relations. Under this system, kinship was defined from the male line. Kinship ties were strengthened by the age set system that excluded women.

Given that male elders presided over the affairs of the members of the clan and doubled up as the political leaders, it followed that women were invisibilised. As a result, women were expected to find their place in the husband's clan since they were perceived as inferior to men, responsible to them and in need of protection by them. Patriarchal ideology operates upon the premise that men are superior to women and that women have to depend on them for their survival. Within this framework of patriarchal understanding, male leadership at all levels is seen as the only legitimate leadership. The most fundamental expression is in the patriarchal family where the man is the "natural head" of the

household (Kabira, 1997).

Weber (1978) applied it to refer to a system of government in which men ruled societies through their positions as heads of household. He adds that in this system of social structures and practices, men dominate, exploit and oppress women. He reckons that the application of the term social structure here is important because it implies rejection of both biological determinism and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and that every woman is in a subordinate one. In patriarchal culture, women are defined by those who subordinate them. These definitions may be seen as ideological; as defining women in opposition to, and as lesser than men. It may be argued, for instance, that it is in men's interests as a group, to confine women into the domestic sphere; not only does it reduce competition in the work place and ensure a servicing for men at home that facilitates their work and leisure activities it also renders women dependent on men, identifies women with the 'natural' world of the family and excludes them from those fields such as science, politics, wealth - creation and the arts which are seen as characterising the achievements of humanity. Patriarchy has over the years valorised hierarchy and dominance of men over women and empowered men to exercise male authority absolutely to the extent that they are perceived as 'natural' leaders both in the household and in the wider society. But the legitimisation of this domination as a principle of exercising power resulted in distortion of all institutions of power; thus when patriarchy is taken beyond the narrow meaning it can be an invaluable tool for understanding the position of women in the society.

A principle reason for the strength of the attraction of the theory of patriarchy is that it is a term with a history in those very theories that appear to be most important for feminism. Marxism talks of the crucial relations between patriarchy and private property. The issue of private property occurred due

to exchange and control of women, causing the 'world historic overthrow of the female sex'. Psychoanalytic theory cites the history of the patriarchal family as the crucial condition in imposing reproductive sexual identity. Anthropology records the social and political dominance of men in numerous societies and asks whether or not some sort of patriarchy is inevitable. In addition, patriarchy is explicit in the systematic subordination of women and how this subordination pervades the way in which people live and how this processes are conceptualised so that gender inequality can be analysed in its own right. Thus, if patriarchy is taken beyond the traditional meaning that focuses on the rule of the father, it can be an important instrument for analysing and interpreting the subordination and exploitation of women in the society.

One of the criticisms of patriarchy, an otherwise significant theory for feminist writing, is that it is too universalistic and non-specific. It was first articulated by radical feminists to express the systematic character of the oppressive and exploitative relations that affect women and the basic critique of radical feminism was that patriarchy takes all societies as essentially characterised by male dominance and female subordination at the peril of historically specific analysis of relations between sexes (Chhachhi, 1988). The danger here is that the institutions that need to be explained may be and /or can be used as explanations in themselves. That the Kenyan political scene is a legacy of colonial patriarchy cannot be overemphasised. Patriarchal relations have characterised the interaction between men and women in Kangema Division. This has resulted in subordination and marginalisation of women from the public sphere especially in politics. Their roles of child bearing and rearing and domesticity are seen as inferior to those of men. Subsequently, since independence there has been no woman member of parliament in the wider Murang'a District. Civic representation is equally timid with very few women holding positions of power. The theory of patriarchy therefore will in this study help explain this subordinated and marginalized positions of women in Kangema.

The concept of gender as a theoretical construct rose to prominence in anthropological and Marxist circles and in other disciplines and theories in the late 1970s as researchers looked for a way to conceptualise the social construction of masculinity and femininity. Attention was shifted from the biological given-female/male, woman/man to the social relations between and among women and men. Gender analysis moved out of the home, the private and personal world to explore the construction of gender relations in the community, the school, the government and the 'economy'. The dichotomies constructed in dominant discourses which support male supremacist relations were questioned and critiqued in theory and practise: public/private, personal/political, base/superstructure, production/reproduction, nature/nurture, real/ideal and of course male/female (Stamp, 1989).

The term gender simply refers to the distinction of male and female. It refers to that which constitutes femaleness and maleness and the social constructs and expectations that influence the way in which gender identity and differences are perceived. According to Hartman (1979) gender relations are socially constructed and deconstructed as a result of behaviour of men and women themselves. In this arena of social construction, the structure of patriarchy has been used to ensure the continued dominance of men over women. This dominance, which usually expresses itself as oppression manifests in three ways: androcentrism, exclusion and subjection. Through exclusion, women are restricted from certain responsibilities for instance political, religious and economic participation among others. Men as the 'natural leaders', as Kabira (1992) puts it, tend to control the access to decision making processes. They devalue or exclude female contributions and perceptions. On the other hand men and women themselves think about the world and all that is in it from the male perspective. Women therefore, because of these gender constructions are not permitted to define and categorise their roles. They simply discover that others have defined them as non-men in terms of their relationships with other people.



All these forms of oppression are imposed by men and hence are encompassed under the rubric of patriarchy. Given that most African cultures are patriarchal, it is difficult for its members to view women and men as equal partners. However, gender as a theoretical construct assumes that the relations involving domination and subordination in a society are just caused by patriarchy and society's expectations. Unfortunately, these relations tend to be equal in more than one way. Power is conflated making it difficult to sort out what is happening as a result of gendered structures and what needs to be attributed to the social class ethnic background or nationality of the concerned. This shortcoming notwithstanding, as a theoretical construct gender will be especially relevant to this study. It will be applied to analyse the, colonial policies and practices imposed allowed European officials to govern through male authorities and hence formalising male institutions while ignoring the female counterparts. Though independence was granted to Kenyans, women still remain oppressed and excluded in most economic, social and political decision making processes. Thus, this theory together with patriarchy will be used to analyse and interpret the factors responsible for women's peripheral position in politics in Kangema.

## **1.8 RESEARCH LOCALE**

The locality of the study is what formerly used to be Kangema Division. In 1997 however, the division was divided into Kangema and Mathioya divisions due to political reasons. Currently, Kangema division lies on the upper part of Mathioya River while Mathioya lies on the lower side of the river. This is the river that marks the boundary between the two divisions. Prior to colonialism, and even after, women's political activism has been higher in Kangema division than in Mathioya division. The study therefore seeks to probe into these disparities in political participation among

women of the same former Kangema division. Thus, for the sake of this study, the area to be studied will be referred to as Kangema and will comprise both Mathioya and the present Kangema division.

Kangema lies between latitude 0 degree 34's and 1degree 07's and longitude 36 degrees E and 37 degrees 27'E. It covers an area of 341 square kilometres. The area is inhabited by members of the Kikuyu community and a few immigrants from the neighbouring communities such the Aembu, Ameru and the Akamba. The area has vast economic resources including rich volcanic soils abundant surface and sub-surface water, rich flora and fauna conducive for agricultural production and beautiful scenarios. The soils in the area correspond entirely to the typical Aberdare Mount Kenya toposequence. About 50% of the area is composed of red loam. These nitsoils have great agricultural potential though agricultural potential generally decreases from the Northwestern to the South- eastern side of the area. Coupled with a relatively high rainfall regime in the region, tea, coffee, pyrethrum, tropical fruits and food crops such as maize beans and potatoes are the most common sources of basic household income and for domestic consumption. The rest of Kangema comprises of the shallow imperfectly drained and in some instances stony soils, which consist mainly the sandy soils and black cotton soils. The area has low rainfall regime and harsh environment, which are suitable for, only draught resistant crops. These crops include cassava, and hardy cereals.

The geology of the area consists of volcanic rocks of the Pleistocene age and basement system rocks of archean type. Volcanic rocks occupy the western side of Kangema bordering the Aberdare, while rocks of the basement system are in the eastern part. Porous beds and disconformities within the volcanic rock system form important aquifers, collecting and moving ground water, thus, regulating water supply from wells and boreholes. Soils emanating from the volcanic activity are generally fertile and important for agriculture. The slopes in the rich volcanic soils on the higher attitude area

are particularly suitable for tea growing.

In the past, grass-thatched houses dominated the area, but of late, very few can be traced. Iron-roofed houses dominate the place with few tiled houses coming up.

## **1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Both primary and secondary sources of data were applied in this research. These were broadly categorised into oral and written sources. Secondary sources included mainly written works, such as published books, journals, unpublished theses, periodicals and seminar papers. Local Newspapers were also used extensively. These were obtained from libraries, including the Institute of African Studies library, Catholic University library, Kenyatta University library, Egerton University Library and the University of Nairobi library. Online journals provided an important contribution to the secondary information for this research. Data from these secondary sources enabled us to situate the study theoretically and also provide the conceptual framework with which to work on the primary data. Secondary sources also provided a general background on the place of women politically in Africa and in Kenya.

Primary data was gathered from annual reports of the province, district and several other reports. Archival data, which constitutes first hand records from the participants, and observers 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 Kangema.

Oral interviews were conducted principally in the wider Murang'a district. However, the research sample was drawn from Mathioya and Kangema divisions. 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 three periods of our study. Others included government officers from the ministry of culture and national heritage, legal consultants, women groups, and NGOs working within Kangema. The selection of informants was done using snowballing and purposive sampling of the non-probability sampling strategies. These techniques were advantageous over probability sampling because not everybody in the target population was knowledgeable as far as this research was concerned. For the purpose of this study, all informants aged 50 years and above were treated as elders. In most cases, informants or respondents were interviewed individually but sometimes group discussions and interviews were administered. A question guide (Appendix I) constituted an important tool, especially to one research assistant that this project hired.

All these methods, it was noted had, their own shortcomings. Oral interviews were subject to problems of interviewees having a short memory or fabricating and distorting the information. Inaccuracy in terms of dating also arose. Archival sources may be rich but were not fully reliable and regular. Thus critical analysis of its contents was important. Written sources usually underwent editing and related processes, which could change the meaning of the information.

After data had been collected it was analysed in a number of ways: -

- a) The recorded interview (in vernacular) was translated into English
- b) The similarities and differences of various respondents were noted
- c) Data from secondary sources was subjected to textual criticism in order to establish their accuracy.
- d) Document analysis was employed to determine the relevance of the document to the study.

After the analysis and corroboration of both primary and secondary data and with the guidance of the research questions, the writing of the thesis began.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 WOMEN AND POLITICS IN PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL FORTHALL.

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we examine the imposition of colonial rule the missionary activities and the impact these had on the people of Kangema. Issues relating to women's involvement in politics during this period are addressed. A brief insight into pre-colonial Metumi (present day Murang'a) is given as a springboard to the chapter.

As has been mentioned, the imposition of colonial rule in Kenya had profound effects on the Kenyan populace. The worst affected were women. In Kangema the indigenous roles of women as long distance traders were reduced as their household duties increased. As men left homes to work in the settlers' farms and in the factories, their domestic responsibilities were left to women. Women were therefore overburdened yet their responsibilities were not rewarded, as they were considered valueless due to the fact that these duties had no monetary value. On the other hand men were recruited and those who refused to work in the settlers farms were initially coerced and later forced due to the introduction of poll and the hut tax which were to be paid per hut by heads of a household; in this case men.

In addition to the colonialists, the missionaries also impacted on women's political participation in Kangema. After 1910, when most Christian mission stations were in place, missionary influence played a vital role in transforming Kikuyu society. Women were pawns in the struggle for domination between missionaries and traditional Kikuyu interests. These missionaries were the first Europeans to pay attention to female education. Despite the fact that educating males was given greater priority,

the missionaries began a program of female education well before the government. However on realising that women were not ready to adopt their teachings of discarding the already entrenched Kikuyu traditions, they began funding the training of boys. They thus discouraged the education of girls as they considered this a waste. According to them, education of girls would have resulted in arrogance, and this was not allowed in the religious setting. Consequently, they concentrated on educating few girls only to enable them become good, caring and submissive wives to the elite husbands. Further, they discouraged the education of girls by authorising all uncircumcised girls not to enrol in their schools. This, the Kikuyu regarded as insult on their culture and it marked the beginning of protests by Kikuyu women. The circumcision controversy also resulted in the loss of adherents by the missionaries and hence the springing up of Kikuyu independent and Karing'a schools. Although Kangema women participated in these protests and further in the Mau Mau insurgencies their efforts were not rewarded as those of men at independence. They therefore remain relegated to the periphery particularly in the politics of the Kenyan nation. This is herein elaborated.

Before the imposition of colonial rule in Kenya, the present day Murang'a district was called Metumi. This was where major disputes from the locality were settled hence the name. Colonialists ignoring the cultures and traditions of the Murang'a people discarded this name and renamed the district Fort hall after the first white man who set his foot here. However, the locals due to their discontentment renamed the place Murang'a district after the departure of the Europeans. This is the name that is used up to date and will consequently be used in this work.

## **2.2 Pre-colonial social-cultural Kikuyu setting**

According to the kikuyu tribal mythology, in the beginning of times when mankind began to populate the earth, the man Gikuyu the founder of the group, was called by the *Mugai* (the divider of the

universe) and was allocated as his share the land rivers, forests, the game and all the gifts that *Ngai* (God) bestowed on mankind. Ngai later took Gikuyu to the top of a big mountain, which he called *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga* (Mount Kenya) as his resting place. Here God later provided him with a beautiful wife whom he called *Mumbi* (creator). Both lived happily and were blessed with nine daughters and no sons (Mugo, 1982). Gikuyu was disappointed for not having a male heir. In despair, he called Ngai and after a sacrifice of a lamb and a kid from his flock, Ngai sent nine young men near the *mugumo* (Fig) tree where Gikuyu got them and took them to live with in his *thome* (home). The young men were attracted to the nine daughters and wanted to marry them. However Gikuyu told them that if they wished to marry his daughters, he could give his consent only if they agreed to live in his homestead under a matriarchal system. They soon married the nine daughters and established their households in Gikuyu's homestead. The nine small families lived together with their parents and acted as the heads of the *Mbari ya mumbi* (Mumbi's clan). As each family increased rapidly it was became impossible for them to fit in the small homestead Gikuyu and Mumbi had established. The families thus moved out and each established their own *ithaku* (homes) (Kenyatta, 1938).

When Gikuyu and Mumbi died, their daughters inherited all their movable and immovable property, which they shared equally among themselves. The daughters also decided that each of them should call together all her descendants and form one clan under her name. Thus, the nine principal Gikuyu clans were founded. The names of the main clans are:

Achera	Angari
Agachiku	Anjiru
Airimu	Angui
Aitheraandu	Ethaga
Ambui	



After the system of kinship was extended from *mbari ya Mumbi* to several *mbaris* and *mihirigas* (clans), it became necessary to bring all these groups under a strong bond of kinship in which they could act in solidarity as members of one big family. This large group was formed and given the ancestral collective name of *ruriri rwa mbari ya Mumbi*, meaning, children or people of Mumbi.

This system it should be noted was headed by women and through them later generations emerged. They therefore commanded a lot of respect unlike today. This arrangement survived for sometime until when men felt threatened by the rule of women. A Kikuyu legend has it that, men hated the ruthless and unjust rule of women and they planned to revolt. The men therefore planned a bloodless *coup de tat* because they could not overcome women physically. They had observed that pregnant women avoided physically strenuous activities and so they planned to impregnate all of them at the same time. They also embarked on a flattery campaign, seduction and marathon lovemaking with successful results. After six months when most of them were in their third trimester of pregnancy, and paralysed into limited activity, the men seized their opportunity and overturned the matriarchal leadership. This change consequently accorded the men the status of the head of the families and associated privileges. They were however not able to change the clan names as they remained so upto date. This may explain why though the Kikuyu are a patriarchal community; the clan names bear the names of women (Wangari Mbaa, O.I 2003, Nyakwea, 1994).

Initiation is a significant feature that cannot be ignored. This practice was regarded as one of the most important customs among the Kikuyu. It was regarded as the main factor that endowed on a boy or a girl the status of manhood or womanhood respectively. The Kikuyu name for this rite of passage from childhood to adulthood is *irua* (Cavicchi, 1977). The dance and songs accompanying this rite are called *mambura*. This custom was adhered to by almost all Kikuyu. It is necessary to examine and

understand the value attached to it despite the fact that in the eyes of Europeans, this was a horrible and painful practice suitable only to barbarians.

Significantly it was the moral code of the community was bound up with this custom and it symbolised the unification of the whole community organization. The *irua* therefore played an important role in the life of the Kikuyu people. *Irua* also marked the commencement of participation in various governing groups in the community administration because the real age groups (*riika*) began from the day of physical operation. During the initiation ceremony, the history and the legends of the people were explained and this was chronologically linked to the names given to the various age groups. Moreover, names of the various age groups were determined by the events that were taking place. For example if there was a devastating famine at initiation, the name of that particular age group would be *ng'aragu* (famine). Historical events were also marked and recorded in the same manner. As Gatuku, an informant posits without this custom, a community that had no written records would not have afforded to keep records of important events and happenings in their lives.

For years there had been much criticism and agitation against *irua* by certain misinformed missionaries in Kangema as in other parts of Kikuyu land, who saw only the surgical side of the custom and without investigating the psychological importance attached to it, these missionaries drew their conclusion that circumcision of girls was nothing but a barbarous practice and as such needed to be abolished (Robertson, 1997). On the other hand, the Kikuyu looked at these Europeans with great suspicion. They argued that it was the secret aim of those who attack this centuries old tradition to disintegrate their social order and thereby hasten their Europeanisation. The abolition of girls circumcision, as will be discussed later in this chapter, would destroy the community symbol which identified the age groups and thus prevent them from perpetuating that spirit of collectivism and

national solidarity which they had been able to maintain for a very long time (Kenyatta, 1938; Lambert, 1965).

After initiation the transformed boys and girls were allowed to marry at any time. Men could also be involved in hunting, and in warriorhood. Women on the other hand could engage in both short and long distance trade. In many cases, these women sold their surplus in local markets and thus dominating commercial activities and demonstrating their business acumen. In Kangema some travelled as far as Mukuyu, Gakira Kiriaini and Othaya in search of markets for cereals like lablab beans (*njahi*). Such vital roles normally translated into high status for these women and more autonomy than in most regions of Kenya (Staudt, 1987; Parpart, 1988). Once they had sold their produce they retained the proceeds. This enabled them to amass certain amounts of wealth, which enabled them to sustain families without the help of a husband. Moreover, since wealth determined how many wives one could marry and in this case a man or woman with large tracts of land, cereals and flocks of animals had a chance of marrying as many wives as possible.

It should be mentioned here that once a husband; a man or woman was accorded more respect as he/she was perceived as the breadwinner of his homestead, responsible for protecting the home from any intruders. Again the attainment of the rank of a husband automatically entitled him/her the headship of the household. Women, particularly the barren single or widowed could thus travel for long distances in sale of their products in order to amass enough wealth to enable them to marry. The ability of women to acquire wives in this way has led scholars to portray pre-colonial African conceptions of gender as highly situational, subject to change during an individual's life cycle and generally more flexible and less tied to biology than in modern western institutions (Amadiume, 1987).

The age group and age sets as earlier mentioned, was significant in marking which age group an individual joined and who lead whom in the entire groupings. The men formed their own councils based on the age group (*ciama cia athamaki*) while women formed the secret councils of women (*ciama cia aka*) (Lambert, 1965). Two male age groups existed; the Mwangi and Irungu age grades formed by elder and younger men respectively. Likewise, elderly women formed the Nyakinyua age group while younger ones formed the Kang'ei age group. The Kang'ei age grade consisted of young women whose firstborns had not been circumcised. From each of these two age groups the senior most members was appointed to be the spokesperson. In cases of disputes, this spokesperson together with other senior members of the group passed judgment over the wrongdoers.

More generally, parallel authority structures allowed men and women to exercise authority over their own sex and activities. Women from the *Nyakinyua* age grade ensured that social order prevailed in the whole society. These senior women had roles to play in the rituals; they were responsible for the education of children, circumcision of girls, settling of minor disputes and selection of women fighters in times of war. In general, the assignment of separate tasks to men and women stresses the complimentary nature of these responsibilities. Superiority of one sex over the other was not implied in this division of labour and where inequalities arose, there was almost always compensation in some area (Gordon, 1996).

The Kikuyu education system begins at birth and ends at death. The child has to pass through various age groupings with a system of education defined for every stage of life. Before the advent of Europeans the parents took the responsibility of educating their children until they reached the age of community education when every member of the society was expected to take part in the provision of education. The parent's aim was to instil into the child what the *utari wa mucii* (education for family

purposes).

The Kikuyu education was mainly informal with no special school buildings in the Kikuyu sense of the word. It took place in the homestead, under sacred trees and sometimes in the bush, especially for boys who went out hunting. This education was carried on through the medium of lullabies, songs and recitations. It encompassed the entire history of the family and clan traditions absorbed by, listening to recitations, lullabies and songs. It was easy for the children to assimilate these early teachings without straining. This kind of education was provided from generation to generation (Kenyatta, 1938; Lambert, 1965).

As the young girls and boys grew, their future roles became clear as it was replicated in their play. The boys played the role of the father and therefore behaved in the same manner as their father. On the other hand the girls also learnt to behave like their mothers. They made small baskets, made and carried toy babies and cooked imaginary dishes as their mothers. The father took the responsibility of teaching the boys while mothers taught the girls all domestic roles. The grandparents were in charge of the coeducation of the children. This they did in the form of folklore and ethnic legends.

In all the community education, the emphasis lay in a particular act of behaviour in a concrete situation, while little emphasis lay in the sphere of behaviour. It is nonetheless through this that the growing child acquired a mass of knowledge all the time. It is worthwhile to mention here that the Europeans did not realise the importance of Kikuyu education and thus they attempted to abolish it by introducing their own kind. Moreover they did not understand the importance of educating both sexes. To them, the woman's responsibilities were those in the homestead and thus they only needed to be taught the duties of housewifery. The missionaries therefore in their attempt to discourage the girls from attending schools, authorised all circumcised girls not to enrol in schools. For instance, in

1929 in Fort hall the Church Land Mission issued an order demanding that all their followers and those who wished their girls to attend schools pledge themselves that they would not in any way adhere to or support female circumcision. This raised great controversy between the missionaries and the people of Forthall. Both educated and uneducated Kikuyu took up the matter. Children of those who did not denounce the custom were barred from attending the missionary school. Consequently, people petitioned the government and educational authorities.

During the petitioning period, many of the circumcised girls departed from schools. An agreement was later reached between the government and the missionaries. The ban of girls attending school was lifted but the missionaries maintained that teachers were to be only those men who had denounced the custom, for they hoped that teachers with this qualification would be able to mould the children in the way favourable to the missionary attitude. People were indignant to this decision and at once demanded the right to establish their own schools where they could teach and train both girls and boys without interference from the missionaries. The cry for schools was high, and the result was the foundation of Gikuyu independent and Karing'a schools which were entirely free from missionary influence both in education and religious matters (Kenya, 1938).

### **2.3 Pre-colonial economic and political organisation of the Kikuyu**

The chief economic occupations among the Kikuyu were farming, livestock keeping and trade. Each nuclear family i.e. man, wife and children constitute an economic unit. This was controlled and strengthened by the system of division of labour according to gender. From the homestead to the fields and to the tending of the domestic animals, every sphere of activity was clearly and systematically defined. Each member of the family unit knew perfectly well their roles, in economic

productivity and distribution of the family resources, to ensure the material prosperity of the group (Kanogo, 1987). At the family level, the building of houses was the responsibility of all members. However, each gender contributed differently, while the men cut down timber and put up the framework, cutting and carrying of grass for thatching and plastering the walls with clay or cow-dung was the work of women. Men also build fences around the homestead or gardens. Further, they were the night watchmen to protect the crops against wild animals. Women on the other hand, were responsible for the entire housework this included cooking, fetching water and firewood, and washing utensils. With regard to the cultivation of the fields, men cleared bushes and cut big trees. They also break virgin soil with digging sticks or hoes. Women prepared the ground for sowing while planting was shared by both men and women. Men planted bananas, yams, sweet potatoes, vines, and sugarcane and also provided poles for propping up bananas and yams. Women planted, beans, millet, sweet potatoes and vines. Weeding was also done collectively. Chiefly women harvested while men primarily tended livestock.

Both men and women participated in the long and short distance trade and while women sold cereals, men sold animals. Despite men's control over land and their ultimate control over the disposal of family resources outside the homestead, women's daily control of the food supply and commerce provided them with an opportunity to create some economic independence for themselves though such trade marked with surplus from the *shamba*, Kangema women entered trade network that connected their village to the wider world of east African trade and which ultimately reached across the Indian ocean (Presley, 1992). These women traders went as far as Ukambani, Nyamwezi and Maasailand. They carried red ochre, tobacco and cereals in exchange of skins and calabashes. This trade ensured their independence such that the health and education of their children lay in them.

Land (*githaka*) was considered the foundation rock on which Kikuyu tribal economy stood. Every member thus, desired to own a piece of land on which he could build his home and from which he and his family could get the means of livelihood. After the change of the system from matriarchal to patriarchal land was owned by men, as they were the only people who could inherit it from their fathers. However, cultivation and user rights were extended to women and they controlled any surplus produce (Kenyatta, 1938).

The Kikuyu system of government prior to the advent of Europeans was based on true democratic principles (Muriuki, 1996). Whilst it cannot be said that all women had equality with men at this time, a balance of economic and political responsibility did prevail between men and women and the work of both was valued in a largely non competitive division of labour. Men and women thus performed different tasks each of which was given due recognition. Parallel gender based institutions were common in such an environment and men and women's groups each managed their own affairs (Synder, M and Tadesse, M, 1995). Men and women participated in the day-to-day political activities of the community. In the household level one family group was considered as forming a family council (*ndundu ya mucii*), with the father as the president. The father therefore represented the family group in the government. The next group was the village council formed by several family groups from the same clan (*kiama gia itura*). The senior most elder from this group acted as the leader of the entire village. Further several village councils formed the district council, which was presided over by a committee (*kiama kia ndundu*) composed by district elders. Among these elders one was appointed as the judge (*muthamaki/muciiri*). Women also formed their own councils, as earlier discussed. The whole Kikuyu political system recognised the place and role of each and every member of the community and duties were equally assigned right from the household.



However, even though women had these positions of influence and power, males typically had more formal authority positions and so some degree of male dominance existed. They made all political decisions and had control over their families as a whole. The wives together with the children were answerable to him and thus the society regarded the man as the natural head of his household. For most women, power was exercised indirectly and informally as sisters, wives and mothers within the extended family system, and this power was closely associated with women's economic power. Where women had rights to land, animals, labour and products of their own or other's labour, their status was higher than if such resources were under male control (Gordon, 1996).

Women in Kangema in attempting to enhance their positions within the households became producers, tended animals and made tools and other household articles used by the family. They cooked, helped construct houses, hauled wood among others. Nonetheless, Europeans imposed their own prejudices about the proper authority of men over women by dealing only with male leaders.

#### **2.4 Colonial penetration in Kangema**

The imposition of colonial rule on the wider Kikuyu began with adventures travellers and caravan traders. This was mainly because they considered Kikuyu land a green land and a garden location where they could get raw materials for their industries. As Frederick Jackson posited, they also preferred Kikuyu land for its ready market and the trading aggressiveness that people inhabited (Presley, 1992). Some of the traders and adventurers who traversed Kikuyuland province included Sir Frederick Jackson (1889-1890), Frederick; later Lord Lugard (1891-1892) and Boyes (1901-1903). John Boyes traveled as far as Murang'a district (Ng'ang'a, 1978). In June 1898 Boyes later named Karianjahi (eater of lablab beans), found an ally in the name of Karuri wa Gakure, a trader in red ochre in Tuthu in Murang'a District. However, due to accusations that he had killed many residents

who he believed had participated in the killing of a Swahili porter in his employ, he was convicted and deported in 1900. During this time, he had acquired three Kikuyu wives, cattle and goats (Gakuyo and Truphena, O. I, 2003).

On his deportation, Hall, a European merchant was appointed the paramount chief of the Northern Kikuyu land in 1912, a position he held until his death in 1916. He built a fort later named after him-Fort Hall. 1902 was seen by the colonial administration as the year of “pacification” and entrenchment of colonial rule in Murang’a district. The government posted Lt. Swire with government troops and Maasai warriors permanently at Thika, and Fort Hall was put under an assistant District Commissioner with the members of the King’s African Rifles (KAR) and policemen around him. Together with Lt. Swire, Hall started the pacification of Forthall but met great resistance in many areas especially from Gikoe, Kiru, Gakira, Gaturi, Ruchu, Kariara, and Weithaga. Apart from the punitive expeditions used to penetrate the people of Forthall, the colonial officials also penetrated into the minds of the people themselves (Ng’ang’a, 1978).

The building of roads to reach as many natives as possible and to get raw materials for their factories in Europe was done starting 1903. A hundred miles had been completed from Thika River to Fort Hall and another from Tuthu to Mathira. By 1910 the motor transport company started operating between Nairobi and Fort Hall. In the interior the government began to erect camps all through Kangema, Kiharu and Kandara. These camps were to be used as tax collecting centres and as gathering areas for colonial officers on safari. Near the roads and also along or near the government camps, missionaries started establishing mission stations for preaching and educating the “natives”. It was also along these roads and these camps that both the government and the settlers were to obtain forced or lowly paid labour.

The major objective of the colonial state was to dominate and exploit the indigenous people and their resources, thus by 1914 settler economy had made some progress in Fort Hall. The settlers thus needed labour in order for them to survive. The colonial administration therefore enacted a number of measures aimed at forcing people to go and work. Taxation, both poll and hut tax was introduced and livestock and foodstuffs were not accepted as payment of the same and therefore the immediate source of money to pay was selling labour. Hut tax was levied on each homestead. The aim was to get money from a husband and his dependants living in different huts (*thingira*) within the homestead (Ng'an'ga, 1978).

Chiefs and headmen guaranteed the orderly transfer of the tax in terms of labour or money. Trading activities also came to be controlled by chiefs' headmen and elites. Trade markets were established in all locations. European loyalists like Karuri wa Gakure were the only people allowed to hold trading licenses and so were the elite from the missions. The same also got some clerical jobs in the European premises. People without strong traditional ties in the society such as the destitute joined the missions as the mission boys for after all they had nothing to lose in adhering to the missionaries. These mission boys after receiving some elementary education and skills were employed as teachers, preachers, supervisors, clerks and court-interpreters.

The missionaries also established churches and schools along the roads (Ng'ang'a, 1978). By 1905 Karuri wa Gakure had invited Italian missionaries who had started a station at a camp near Mugoiri while the Church Missionary Society also set up a school and a church at Kahuhia near Kangema town (Truphena, O.I 2003). Later most of these schools and churches were rejected in Kikuyuland as the missionaries condemned indigenous Kikuyu cultures and practices such as polygamy and female

circumcision. They also forbade their adherents against bride wealth. The Kikuyu practiced circumcision of both sexes at puberty. Teachings by missions against such practises had begun in 1906 at the Church of Scotland Mission in Kikuyu and at the African Inland Church at Kijabe. In the 1920's missionaries were growing concerned at the practice of female circumcision and were determined to prohibit it. The Church of Scotland and the African Inland Mission forbade its adherents and this led to an outburst by the Kikuyu. According to the Kikuyu such cultures as female circumcision polygamy and bride wealth were central to the fabric of their society. Infact as Kenyatta (1938) posits no proper Kikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who had not been circumcised and vice versa. He adds that a man who did so would be disinherited. Thus to the kikuyu, female circumcision at initiation was not only an important part of Kikuyu culture but also a symbol of subordination of junior women to senior women and to men.

After the First World War however, many Kikuyus began to put forward demands for its prohibition. The government recognized the harmful effects of the operation and this was discussed at the East Africa Governors Conference in 1926. Education was regarded as the best means of ensuring its gradual disappearance. According to most authorities the practice was infact beginning to die out. But attacks by missions were taken as attacks not on the operation itself but on the whole initiation ceremony and so on the whole body of indigenous Kikuyu custom. Since this initiation marked the transition from childhood into adulthood, it was rightly held by Kikuyu to be at the very heart of their traditions and customs. Such controversies thus led to the formation of breakaway Kikuyu churches and schools. European missions lost adherents to the African Orthodox Church, which organized its own Kikuyu schools, and to the African Independent Pentecostal church, which launched the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA) (Gordon, 1996).

The growth of independent churches and schools reflected the need of the Kikuyu community for the retention of its own institutions and freedom. European society confronted the natives as a hostile force ready to destroy their institutions. Considerable efforts were made to resist the influence of Kikuyu schools and churches but despite the hostility of European officials, independent schools thrived. A rejection of the European and a desire for dignity and freedom predisposed Kikuyu towards a millenarian solution. The *Murathi* or prophet of indigenous Kikuyu religion emerged preaching salvation in a semi-Christian and anti-European form. The earliest millenarian church was the *watu wa mungu* (God's people), which emerged in Kikuyuland in 1930. The message of salvation for the African and punishment for the Europeans usurpers found resonance within sections of the squatters communities. For colonial officials such sections represented dangerous and explosive forces. Adherents were perceived as a threat to law and order and faced police harassments and expulsion from European farms (Kanogo, 1987).

From 1944 onwards however, police reports indicated a growing millenarian pressure on the settler farms. Dreamers or *Aroti* religions sprung up on the farms and other sects like the *akorino* provided a clear testimony of the dissatisfaction that people had against the European system. However, the colonial officials attempt to disband these sects succeeded in various places and by 1949 District Commissioners confirmed this assessment, only in FortHall was there a noticeable increase in millenarian activity (Furedi, 1989).

While the European administration was busy pursuing its end by force and through its agents, the missionaries were busy "domesticating" 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 the "native" thought and habit. They thus, 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. Needless to say social relations between and among people also underwent rapid transformations at both cultural and material levels. Imperial culture affected peoples’ lives in insidious ways altering their self-perception and their own attitude towards one another and it impacted on diverse cultural systems both directly through missionaries and other emissaries and less directly through the rapid changes in the economic and political structures and systems that the colonial economy superseded (Presley, 1992). It is for this reason that approaching cultural and political studies through gender relations is a good way of revealing aspects of the people of Kangema’s social political and economic life.

When the British government declared a protectorate over what came to be known as Kenya, Kikuyu settlement stretched northwards of Nairobi to the slopes of Mount Kenya. European settlement of the white highlands began in the southern districts of Kikuyu country. It soon transpired that settlers intended to appropriate the more highly cultivated areas such as Kiambu and Forthall, land that had already been broken in preference to waste and unoccupied land. Administrative officers entrusted with the task of processing European applications for land usually gave settler immediate authority to occupy land, with the only condition being that they pay the kikuyu owners a meager 3 rupees per acre compensation for their loss of rights (Kanogo, 1987). In Forthall –Kangema areas about 25,000 acres of Kikuyu land were alienated for European settlement. No compensation was given for the alienation of land. This was perhaps the most serious setback for women.

Although men lost their land too, their fate was better as they were later employed in the European premises as clerks and chiefs among other lowly paid jobs. Women were left as housewives and even in areas where small pieces of land were left for the Africans, while the men worked in the European

farms, the responsibilities for these land were left for them without due recognition. With land alienation, women as the main food producers suffered the most.

As earlier noted, the European colonial system together with missionaries had no place for women. Thus when land was consolidated, the few Africans who remained with small pieces of land all included men. They were issued with title deeds as heads of the households even when they were absent from the farms. This was often in direct contradiction to the use-rights that were customary and that encouraged women's productivity. Women's rights to land were undermined as men were given the best pieces of land to grow cash crops. There were also growing pressures to deprive women of their inheritance rights to land in favour of males in the family. One of the most damaging colonial land policies for women involved efforts to introduce private land ownership. In Kiambu, and FortHall, the Swynnerton plan of the 1950s granted legislation of private land ownership to privileged male loyalists. The privatization and consolidation of landholdings rarely 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 women.

Colonial officials and male elders worked together to get better control of women. The colonial need to control the economy also marginalized women who had often exercised control over the production, pricing and distribution of agricultural commodities. In Murang'a for instance, the British were constantly in dispute with Gakira women leaders over the location markets, their internal control and the settling of prices for staple commodities (Robertson, 1997). These were all areas which women had formally controlled and which the colonial state sought to regulate.

Establishing colonial rule in Kenya and attempting to turn the country into a white settlement area had a profound effect on the local African population. Not only did the alienation of land disinherit

and dislocate many Kenyans, but also the subsequent development of settler plantations and mixed farms created a demand for a large number of wage labourers. But since no African labour force was readily forthcoming, the colonial government adopted a combination of financial and political measures to create the required labour supply. This labour force predominantly involved men whom colonialism drew away from work on the land. Attempts to coerce men into seeking wage employment included imposition of taxes, creating reserves, disrupting local economies and denying them to grow major commercial crops (Kanogo, 1987).

The British introduced a taxation system and established institutional infrastructure in the form of chiefs and headmen. They also created material infrastructure such as roads, piers and bridges through which colonial market could penetrate the indigenous economies. 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 as a source of his wealth since in every homestead the man paid the woman's tax. On the other hand in Britain itself, it was the man who was taxed for whatever property owned even if the property belonged to his wife. Thus as Ayot (1990) observes, it was in actual fact, the British who viewed their women as the man's property by taxing the man even if the wife was the source of livelihood.

Within this system, the English and their Victorian fashion forced the Englishwoman to believe that "she was inferior to the man" and indeed aided the man himself to think and believe that he was superior to his woman. The Englishmen therefore succeeded in making the woman an inferior being. This idea was introduced in Kikuyuland where the man as the head of the household paid the tax for



each and every wife that he married. The missionaries who discouraged such indigenous practices as polygamy backed the colonizers on other women oriented practices as clitoridectomy, girl's education and seclusion. Both the missionaries and the colonial administration for their own self-ends therefore exploited the system of tax (Kanogo, 1987).

Colonialism had an impact on many aspects of women's economic lives, leading as elsewhere in Kenya, to a considerable loss of political status. Kikuyu women continued to be involved in the household economy in ways that they had been during the precolonial 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 cultivation. With the introduction of new productive relations under 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). At home, women continued to perform the bulk of work particularly those aspects of work that were the most time consuming and labour intensive.

The introduction of wage labour also had widespread effects- thousands of kikuyu women became involved in new forms of agricultural labour and the double burden of indigenous agricultural production and labour for European farmers became part of the economic part of women during the colonial period. Kikuyu women had little control over their meagre wages and working conditions and few means to seek to redress their grievances. Men on the other hand were recruited in better jobs. Women who often had many dependents to look after children, elders, and the ill took their farm work. Men were also favoured with opportunities for education, employment and access to resources (Robertson, 1986). The missionaries also encouraged families to send their sons rather than their

daughters to school, where they were educated to assume the new places and positions created by the colonial state. This polarized division of labour created wide gaps in productivity and in the income between men and women within the same sector, again lowering the relative status of women vis-à-vis men.

The overall inferior position of women in the modern sector reflects the fact that men are given preference in administrative and clerical jobs as they had in the colonial state. In that situation, the attitudes 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 dependent on men as their incomes in the trading sector decline. This divergence in income and the hierachization of work roles are not found in the indigenous society, they are characteristic of the ‘modern society’ (Iglitzin et.al, 1976).

Everywhere, the function of indigenous institutions was abruptly altered by the colonial system. It is true that earlier forms of social organizations underlie and influence new systems imposed upon them, but it is also true in this case that those forms profoundly affected could no longer respond to the needs they were designed to fulfil or to the demands made upon them. Women suffered from these circumstances more than men did, 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).

Closely connected with the economic and political transformation during the early decades of colonial rule in Kikuyu land were changes in the conceptualization of marriage and sexuality. Central to these shifts was the possibility for all people but particularly for women to begin to think of sexuality as an individual matter outside the context of lineage authority. In the past, women were

thought of as partners but colonialism destroyed these aspects through the combination of government legislation, the commercialization of bride wealth and the emergence of new urban communities, which transformed the context for relationship. Men for instance, could move out in search of jobs in colonial farms with their wives. As individual rights came to have the legal social standing, the authority of male elders over women and younger men was reinforced (Jeater, 1993).

The European definition of femaleness reflected a European gender division of labour and sexist bias. Women's education was thus perceived as a vehicle to be domestic and dependent. The schools in colonial Africa, the Middle East and Latin America emphasized education for domestic roles. The provision of suitable wives for the male Christian elite and the importance of mothers as socializers of their children dominated the colonial agenda; as articulated by both the colonizers and the indigenous males elite. Colonialism thus sought to impose not only political dominance and economic control but also western culture (Iris and White, 1999).

The democratic government models developed by Europeans for their colonies were essentially alien structures hastily superimposed over the deeply ingrained political legacies of imperial rule. The real political inheritances of African states at independence were the authoritarian structures of the colonial state, an accompanying political culture, an environment of politically relevant circumstances tied heavily to the nature of colonial rule. Imperial rule from the beginning expropriated political power. Unconcerned with the needs and wishes of the Africans, the colonial powers created governing apparatuses primarily intended to control the territorial population, to implement exploitation of natural resources and to maintain themselves and the European population (Gordon, 1996).

For all European colonizers power was vested in a colonial state that was in essence a patriarchal heritage. Specifically colonial rule was highly authoritarian and backed by male police forces and colonial troops. Under these circumstances power did not rest in the legitimacy of public confidence and acceptance. Power lay in the hands of a few male elites. This was based on a principle that there was a private/public dichotomy and that the men's place was the public while the women's place was the private (Cutrufeli, 1983). Women were therefore relegated to domestic chores, while decision-making was left to men. The new patriarchal values imposed by western colonizers and missionaries ignored the indigenous political and economic positions that women held, their freedom in marriage and their complementary shared responsibilities (Wright, 1993). This was to the detriment of Kikuyu women whose relative status was higher than that of the women in western society.

Long-term experience with the colonial state also shaped the nature of ideas bequeathed at independence. Future African male leaders continuously exposed to the milieu of male authoritarian control, were accustomed to government justified on the basis of force. The idea that government was above the self-interested political activity (which only served to subvert the public's welfare) was communicated by colonial administrators. As a result notions that authoritarianism was an appropriate method of ruling were part of the colonial political legacy (Gordon, 1996). Among the Kikuyu women suffered out of authoritarian control as this authority was in the hands of men. Women lost their indigenous authority and they became subjects to male members of the society.

Though recent scholarship on women in European dominated colonial societies present evidence that there was no one colonial experience for all women, even within the same national boundary, the position of most women declined under the aegis of colonialism both because of its sexist bias and because women were members of a politically weakened group. In general, women were dislocated,

economically exploited and politically dominated within a weakened indigenous order, and in these spheres at least; women were rarely compensated in the new order. Women remain economically subordinated and politically marginalized (Iris, B and White, F, 1999). Nevertheless, though women were victims of colonialism, they also took initiative both in resisting policies they viewed as harmful to them and in using new situations to their advantage.

In addition, the colonial officials together with the missionaries had no place for the girls. The colonial system was almost exclusively male and as it developed it replaced the indigenous political systems, some of which had afforded women substantial participation in the political and religious life of their communities. In many places this exclusively male colonial bureaucratic and administrative apparatus did away altogether with pre-colonial systems, which although gender differentiated included political offices and titles of varying importance and influence for women as well as men (Hay, 1995)

## **2.5 Women's response to colonialism in Kangema.**

Colonialism in Africa was received with mixed reactions. In both the French and the British colonies of Africa, western educated African elites were active participants in some form of local government from the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1920s, reform movements developed in British West Africa, which apart from South Africa were probably the earliest nationalistic movements in Africa. These movements were primarily directed at abuses of the colonial system. Nowhere before World War two did the idea of actual political independence from colonial rule gather much momentum. The war though helped to raise African political consciousness. African soldiers fought in most of the same areas of the European settlers. In Eastern Africa, the presence of Europeans in the interior of the colonies made the struggle for independence even more difficult.

In Kenya, colonized between 1895 and 1963, a peaceful evolution of independence was ruled out by the white settler opposition. Independence for most settler colonies was won only through armed struggle. Like the Algerians who fought a bitter eight-year freedom struggle against the French, Kenyans too found it necessary to resort to arms to achieve independence. The national liberation struggle in Kenya, called Mau Mau by the British began in the late 1940s and was most strongly supported by the Kikuyu of Kiambu, Limuru, Fort Hall and Nyeri. In 1952, a state of emergency was declared. Jomo Kenyatta was imprisoned by the British between 1953 and 1963 as the alleged brains behind the movement, though other forest fighters did the actual fighting including Dedan Kimathi who was captured and executed in 1957 (Furedi, 1989). During the struggle, as many as 10,000 Africans, mostly Kikuyu were killed. A growing sense of national unity against the British resulted from this conflict, and the British finally granted independence to Kenya in 1963.

In an era of wide ranging popular protest, women played a fuller part in local resistance movements than in earlier nationalist organizations such as the circumcision and the education struggles (Iris and White, 1999). Women were not absent from political action particularly in Central Province. Occasionally, early nationalistic organizations took up issues of concern to women such as when the Kenya based East African association (EAA) made the beating and sexual harassment of women on coffee estates, one of its concerns in the 1920s. The EAA also championed other African grievances including increased taxation, compulsory labour on public works, the Kipande registration system for African lands. Its leader Harry Thuku was arrested in 1922. A crowd including at least 130 women protested against his arrest (Rosberg and Nottingham, 1966). Women enraged by the male compromise jeered at them and taunted them. To emphasise the extent of female displeasure with male leadership, one of the women, Mary Nyanjiru resorted to a traditional insult, *Guturama*. This

act, which entailed a women's exposure of her genitals to the offending party, was the ultimate recourse of anger, frustration, insult or revenge. Here, it symbolized the strongest challenge the women could put to the men. They reviled the men for being hesitant. After turning to traditional forms of insult to display their scorn and irritation, they led the assembled crowd to the police station. When the European masters drinking on the verandah of the nearby Norfolk Hotel, joined police in firing on the crowd, the women's leader, Mary Nyanjiru was killed. However, women's courage won them no immediate place in political affairs.

Excluded from meetings of the successor group, the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), women in 1930 formed the Mumbi Central Association (MCA). The organization dissolved three years later, when women gained the right to take part in KCA (Presley, 1992; Robertson, 1997). Although short-lived and not successful in releasing Thuku, this incident was a strong testimony to the hidden political dynamism of women. They had used a ritual practice to score a political point. An exclusively female institution challenged both the traditional male monopoly of political power and the colonial authority (Kanogo, 1987).

The active political resistance of the 1920s continued into the 1940s. Between July and November 1940, there were organized riots in most parts of Fort hall. The riots began with the women of Kahuro, Gikoe and Kahuhia trying to stop inoculation of cattle in their area. The government had forced people to take their cattle for inoculation as a result of rinderpest outbreak in areas adjacent to Fort hall. It is likely that the government wanted to prevent the disease from spreading to the European farms. The people were suspicious of this colonial government's move and thought that its aim was to reduce their cattle. The suspicion increased when many cows died after the inoculation. Finally, in late 1940s, there was an eruption of violence.

In a series of demonstrations, thousands of women stormed into the inoculation areas and burned the cattle crushes, the pens into which the cattle were driven for inoculation. The government arrested 140 women during the riots. A committee of inquiry was set up to look into ways and means of dealing with the riots and with the women involved. The committee resolved that a fine of one rupee be charged to those involved in the burning of the crushes, pens and chasing away of inoculation inspectors (Ng'ang'a, 1978; Damaris, O.I, 2003). These riots challenged the traditional male authorities that were seen as representatives of the colonial government. The men felt intimidated and also joined them in advocating for better farming methods.

In 1928, thousands of young girls from Kangema also defied both African male authorities and colonial officials in a highly provocative fashion. After a locally enforced ban on clitoridectomy was passed by missionaries, adolescent girls sought to initiate their own transformation into womanhood by attempting to excise each other. The condemnation was viewed as a disregard for the Kikuyu traditions and cultures. As earlier discussed, female circumcision was a fundamental source of identity for women and it marked the graduation into the Nyakinyua age grade. The use of razor blades in place of special-purpose knives and abandoning the public celebrations normally associated with the occasion by the girls thus exacerbated peer pressure throughout the district to encourage others to join them, sometimes with the collusion of their mothers and grandmothers (Kanogo, 1987; Gituku, O.I 2003).

At the end of the guises, missions lost much of their local influence and a large proportion of their adherents, many of whom turned towards independent Kikuyu churches and schools that sought to define a mode of Christian belief consistent with valued traditions and free from European support among the peasantry in the reserves.



By mid 1930s, land in central province was badly eroded (Sorrenson, 1967). The colonial government enforced soil conservation measures including terracing, intercropping and the planting of trees on steep slopes, all of which increased the workload. It also enforced measures to improve stock by vaccination and culling. All these extra works fell on women since men were migrant labourers employed in European farms. Women boycotted these extra works and resented the chief's authority and agricultural officers who constantly visited them at their home uprooting indigenous crops (DC/MUR/31/18). They refused to participate in the terracing responsibilities they had been ordered to do and staged protests and demonstrations at the chief's camps in Fort hall.

As Kanogo (1987) observes, attempts to incorporate women into the colonial structures had not paid due regard to their reproductive and productive labour and this elicited strong objections from the women. Their defiance however was seen as a direct and personal attack on the colonial chiefs. The colonial administrators feared that this could cause a landslide in government authority. The women had also defied traditional authority as was embodied in clan heads that the government had empowered to fine those who did not complete their tasks. While the DC of Fort Hall sympathized with the burdens the women had to shoulder, he retorted, "the soil could not wait for a few men to fence it" (KNA: MAA/2/3/16/IV 1948 quoted in Kanogo, 1987). However, the women did not take up their tools and in 1948, the D.C ordered the arrest of these recalcitrant women. However, they were quickly released when as (Kanyari, O.I., 2003) puts it, several circumcised elder women threatened to break into the cells.

Although these protests and riots did not soften the colonial officials as pertains to the agricultural legislations, it proved the extent to which women and other masses were dissatisfied with the whole colonial system. The demonstrations by elder women was a clear symbol to the traditional male

leaders and the colonial government that the Africans were tired of the system and were ready to sacrifice their elders for their freedom. Elderly women were a symbol of peace and stability of the Kikuyu tradition (Gituku, O.I., 2003). The riots of 1948 by women was regarded a probably the biggest social event of importance during the year (DC/FH1/27). It was resolved after the protest that terracing of cut-offs was to be done communally and that women's work was to carry the soil using sacks.

Perhaps the most successful resistance to colonial rule was the Mau Mau movement that began in the late 1940s. This was especially precipitated by the acute shortage of land that hit Kikuyu land at the time caused by various factors among them the alienation of the white highlands that had been done in the 1920s, the eviction of squatters from the same and shrinking land holdings occasioned by natural population growth. The immediate spark of the Mau Mau revolt was the tension between the moderate older generation devoted to the strategy of constitutional reform and a younger generation of activists with strong constituencies in Nairobi, the Rift Valley and parts of Nyeri and Fort Hall. What divided these two wings of the nationalist movement were not so much political objectives as the means to be used to realize them.

By late 1947, the tension between the two wings could barely be contained within the existing movement. The determination by the activists in Nairobi, Fort Hall, and Nakuru to extend oath-taking on a mass scale to escalate resistance finally brought matters to a head. The divergence between the two wings led to a *de facto* split. It is at this stage that the movement emerged as a distinct force, no longer constrained by moderate elements. The radical wing was free to experiment and develop raw tactics for its struggle (Furedi, 1989). Among the Kikuyu, the use of an oath as a sign of allegiance was a secret institution administered only to a select minority of core members of a group who were almost

always men but after World War II, men, women and children all took the oath in a bid to create unity in their struggle against the colonial system. The first of such an oath was taken in Olenguruoni in 1948. Later, these oaths were administered in Fort Hall and Nyeri during the Mau Mau revolt (Presley, 1992).

Whatever the causes of the Mau Mau and however many the grievances, which produced it, once under way, the movement spread with astonishing speed. Its leaders employed fear as a major instrument to force others to their will and did so most effectively. Mau Mau was confined to the Kikuyu who at the time were key to African politics in Kenya. The revolt drew Kikuyu women into the conflict (Arnold, 1974). Governed by a clearly defined seniority of rural female leaders, many young and old women took part in the oath-taking ceremonies that created bonds to the movement, and others joined the armed forces in the forest.

Chiefly, these women played their crucial role in helping to maintain the supply lines that funnelled food, information, medicine and weapons from the towns and reserves into the forests (Presley, 1992). Again, their menstrual flow was required for the preparation of oath-taking concoctions. Higher oaths included such sexual acts as placing a dog or ram's male organ into the woman's vulva and/or the initiate inserting his genital into the woman's vulva for a specified number of times. It is difficult to determine the symbolic significance of these sexual rites (Kanogo, 1987). As Wangari Mbaa (O.I., 2003) an informant observes, the mention and use of sexual organs was a thing that Kikuyu regarded with fear and secrecy and thus the partakers of it were bound by it and could not reveal the secret to anyone who had not taken oath. In the forest, young energetic women acted as spies searching for British troops and colonial loyalists. They were also assigned duties of fetching firewood, cooking, washing, and guarding the hiding places for Mau Mau warriors during the day.

In addition, they were required to meet the sexual needs of the male warriors. Some women combined domestic tasks with minor military duties like cleaning guns and helping in the making of weapons and ammunition. In 1953, when women became fully fledged warriors fighting alongside men, a meeting of all the Aberdare forest leaders decided that women would be commissioned up to the rank of colonel depending on their competence as warriors (Barnet and Njama, 1966).

Though no woman rose to the level of colonel, in Fort Hall, their military roles, increased and their responsibilities of administering oaths were recognized. Women who had administered more than three oaths were accepted in the council of elders (Esther Mbaa O.I, 2003). Their competence in the forest also saw some of them co-opted in to the political arena. Their voices were heard and such women as Muthoni Ngatha rose to the senior post of field Marshall (Kanago 1987). Many of them died during the Mau Mau revolt, for instance during the Kirwara massacre of 1954 when around 20 of them died together with 24 men. Others lost their husbands and children. However as a movement geared more to the recovery of political independence and return of alienated land women were not rewarded.

The attainment of independence in the early 1960s did not solve their problems than it did the other pressing dilemmas of poverty and economic dependency within a patriarchal world order (Sydie, 1987).

Throughout Kenya, formal independence did lead to more widespread female education at all levels as government responded to insistent demands for improved educational opportunities. But the tendency for development projects (when they address women issues) to accept these existing division of labour as unalterable or to exacerbate this division means that little transformation has

occurred in the lives of most rural women. And the majority of independent African states, rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, continue to express ambivalence about women's equality.

The patriarchal vision constructed in many areas during the colonial period has been perceived as the right model where women are seen as (homemakers) subordinated whose position is at home (Wright, 1993). The forms gender inequalities are taking in Africa generally and Kenya in particular reflect indigenous pre-colonial and European influence expansion into Africa 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 western gender ideology and practices that promote male dominance and female dependency 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).

As the following discussions show the culmination of pre-colonial, colonial and post independence history is the prospect that women in general will continue to lose ground economically, politically, and socially unless concerted efforts are made by women themselves, African governments and initial community to ensure that the fruits of independence and development are extended equally to women and men.

## **2.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, we have discussed the nature of pre-colonial gender relations, the colonial period and its impact on women's involvement and the general resistance methods used by women during this period of colonial imposition. It has been observed that prior to the advent of Europeans, women and men engaged in parallel but equally important roles in the society though formal political power was

vested in men. However, colonialism and its attendant forces completely ignored women and only dealt with men and therefore relegated women to the periphery. Colonial officials tended to visualize women in terms of a Victorian image of what a woman should be, instead of observing women's actual functions. From that perspective, they envisioned women's responsibilities as largely limited to nurturing and conserving society, while men engaged in political and economic activities. Missionaries, on the other hand, preached and taught the importance of submissiveness of women to the heads of households who were mostly men. It has also been noted that although women participated in the resistance movements against colonial brutality, their efforts were not recognized and that after independence their position have remained peripheral to that of men.

In the next chapter, we examine the numerous trends and trajectories that the politics of Kangema assumed since independence centering on women's political involvement.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 TRENDS AND TRANSITIONS IN WOMENS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN KANGEMA FROM 1963-1978

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

As examined in the previous chapter, the granting of independence to Kenya did not change the status of women. Women remained marginalized and subordinated despite the government's Sessional Paper on African Socialism clearly indicating that participation by men and women was to be on equal terms, including vying for elective offices (Kabira, 1998). At independence, the patriarchal relations that had characterized the colonial era, were solidified with the new male leaders consolidating political power and relegating women to the periphery. Worse still, the male political elites, that comprised the ruling government, Kenya African National Union (KANU), did not recognize the role women had played in the independence struggle. Conspicuously forgotten were the Kikuyu women who either participated as warriors, spies and/or housewives during the Mau Mau insurrections, the inoculation exercises in Muran'ga, the Karugia and Kirwara massacres. Independence to them thus only meant a shift from one form of marginalisation to another. This chapter therefore examines the trends in women's political participation in Kangema in the period 1963-1978. This period is herein referred to as the Kenyatta era.

#### 3.2 Kenya at independence

Although the end of administrative colonialism constituted an important political break with the past, the transition from European to African patriarchal relations in Kenya was so easy the critics were soon suggesting that a clique of black male comprador were now acting on behalf of a departed white elites and that Kenya had settled into a fixed orbit of dependency around the west. More optimistic

observers argued that Kenya was soon to become a model for the rest of Africa; a black ruled, multi-racial gender sensitive state simultaneously dedicated to social justice, individual rights and economic growth. However, this was not to be. The constitution at the time was based on a Westminster model of parliamentary sovereignty, with a formal division between political blocks, each intending to seize complete power over the state with a major addition, a regional system of provincial assemblies with their own designated areas of authority. (Nnoli, 2000)

The new African leaders soon curtailed and eventually abolished the regional administrations, concentrating control around their ethnic boundaries. In Kenya the ruling government led by President Kenyatta, on abolishing regional administrations, concentrated control in Nairobi. By this time Kenya was divided into eight provinces, which were further subdivided into 41 districts. In 1964, the position of the head of state was converted from prime minister to president. Rather than ruling through the fledging political party, the then President, Kenyatta chose to retain the provincial administration, which had so zealously repressed Kikuyu protests in the 1950s, making it directly accountable to the office of the president. Provincial and district administrators, in this case men, continued to exert almost as much political power after independence as they had during the 75 years of British rule. They continued to provide the administrative framework for the colonial authority, supervising appointed chiefs and headmen in every location and directing communal labour, agricultural betterment campaigns and tax collection (Yeager, 1994). The poor representation of women persisted into independence Kenya. Women remained appendages of men even after independence, and were, therefore, to be “represented” by the men in the government (Kabaji, 1997).

In addition, after the attainment of independence, multiparty democracy only lasted for one year. The president moved rapidly to consolidate personal authority and to create a government of national



unity. Facing a state determined to consolidate what authority it had, and even without any intention of implementing the regional constitution imposed upon it, Kenya African Democratic Party (KADU), a party that had been formed by those who were dissatisfied by the style of rule that the president was using in consolidating power to one ethnic group, quickly collapsed. Both winners and losers now agreed that there was little to be gained for their communities from a Westminster kind of confrontation leading to an electoral contest every five years. In 1964 therefore, KADU dissolved and joined KANU creating a *de facto* single party state (Throup, 1987).

In 1966 however, after a series of rigged KANU elections, KANU fell apart and Odinga immediately announced the creation of a new political force, an avowedly socialist party to be known as the Kenya People's Union (KPU). This was backed by roughly a fifth of the parliament, among them Kikuyu and Luo members who defected from KANU. The KPU's goal was to create a more left wing party to oppose the growing conservatism of the Westminster orientation of the KANU leadership and to try and replace the persistently ethnic basis of politics with a cleavage based on ideological, class or socio-economic grounds. This was however not to be as Kenyatta disbanded KPU in 1969. During this brief phase of multi party politics, KANU exercised strict control over the political process, refusing to accept the legitimacy of the opposition. From then onwards, KANU remained the sole political party up to the early 1990s, when political pluralism re-emerged (Gordon, 1996; Yeager, 1994).

Kenyatta then began an earnest scheme of power concentration around himself and a clique of loyalists as the distinction between KANU and the government faded into oblivion. As Kibwana (2000) puts it, for one to vote or contest for any political office, one was required to be a member of KANU. Any dissenting voices were sacked or deployed from public offices, as was happening during

the colonial era when loyalty to the European meant access to “better” jobs. In addition, apart from the removal of racial connotations in the colonial constitution, there were only a few if any significant changes that were adopted by the ruling government. Therefore the officially sanctioned oppression of the citizens continued. Worst affected were women who were hardly recognized by the male political elite around the president. This is what the leaders had inherited from colonialism that considered the native as subhuman.

Indeed as Throup (1987) observes the religious and ideological rationalization of colonialism was that of a civilizing mission and from this viewpoint, the gender of the native was inconsequential. Moreover, since the imposed legal order was rooted in Victorianism, in which women were perceived as inferior beings, disenfranchised and lacked many rights; the “native” woman was seen and treated as a lower species. Therefore in the inherited post-independence system of governance, the place of the woman was in the kitchen. They were not supposed to hold public office and even the few like Margaret Kenyatta and Jane Kiano among others from central province who were appointed to head the women’s bureaus and the *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* Organization (MYWO) owed their allegiance to the president or his close allies most of whom were Kikuyu. This is what we call here the feminization of neo-patrimonial politics.

One of the few aspects of the constitution to be reviewed was on issues pertaining to marriage. This was because at independence, the laws and regulations relating to marriage were not clear especially regarding inheritance and custody of children. At independence, Kenya had four systems of marriage and family law namely: statutory family and marriage law based on the western Christian model, Hindu, Islamic, and the African customary family and marriage law (Muigai, 1989). There was need therefore to revisit the laws regarding marriage in order to cater for the concerns of men and women

at marriage. For a long time, spouses had to make do with the common law doctrine that “husband and wife are one and that one is the husband”. That doctrine had the effect of disqualifying the married woman from owning and controlling property during the subsistence of the marriage

Hence, in 1967, Kenyatta appointed two commissions, one concerned with the law of divorce and marriage and the other concerned with succession. The one on marriage and divorce was to consider the existing laws relating to marriage, divorce and matters relating thereof. The work of the commission was to make recommendations for a new law providing for a comprehensive and, so far as may be practicable, uniform law of marriage and divorce applicable to all persons in Kenya. This would replace the existing law on the subject comprising customary law, Islamic law, Hindu law, and the relevant acts of parliament (Wanjala, 2000). The commission was also to prepare a draft of the new law, to pay particular attention to the status of women in relation to marriage and divorce in a free and democratic society. It sought to advance women’s rights to maintain, after divorce their own property acquired in the matrimonial home. However, the bill was abandoned because of the commission’s reluctance to depart from customary law. Male parliamentarians opposing the bill argued that wife beating was a normal customary practice and that such legal practices would have the state interfere in the domestic affairs of the husband and wife (Wamalwa, 1989).

At this time, there was no woman parliamentarian and none headed any government parastatal. The rejection of the bill by male parliamentarians and the public clearly indicated that women were relegated from the public sphere. Their views were therefore not needed during the rejection of the bill. Further, this rejection meant that the women belonged to the men as property. The fact that the government rejected the bill further stamped their patriarchal nature. Women were to remain appendages of men and hence could not inherit or own such property as land and animals. Children

were also to identify with the father and not the mother. As discussed elsewhere in this work, one prerequisite for those intending to participate in politics as candidates, be they men or women, is resources. Thus, women's restriction with regard to ownership of such property as land meant dismal, if any active involvement in politics as candidates (Chazan 1989).

With the rejection of the bill by parliament not much changed pertaining to the status of women in the society. They remained relegated to the periphery especially in the realm of politics. Though women formed more than half of the Kenyan population very few actively participated in politics as candidates for elective offices. The majority only participated as voters', dancers and mobilizers during elections (Kabira, 1998). In fact, between 1964 and 1969, there was not a single woman Member of Parliament (MP) in Kenya. Worse still, in 1964, Ms Ruth Habwe was denied a chance to vie as an MP on the ground that women were not yet qualified for political office. In November 1969, the first woman was elected into the national assembly and one more nominated to sit in the legislative body, along with eleven male nominated members.

Thus of the total number of elected legislators between 1969 and 1974, women formed 0.56% and 5% of nominated members. Except for the period 1974-1979 when women's representation improved slightly, the general trend during the Kenyatta era was one of women's marginalisation in political decision-making at the local and national levels and by implication lack of inclusion of women's concern in the legislative agenda (Nzomo, 1991). Table one below details this scenario between 1969-1979.

**Table1: Membership of Kenya National Assembly by year and gender**

ELECTION YEAR	ELECTED MEMBERS%		NOMINATED MEMBERS%	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
1969	99.4	0.6	91	8
1974	97	3	84	16
1979	98	2	92	8

Source: Supervisor of elections: Attorney Generals Chambers, 1985 also cited in the Republic of Kenya, Women of Kenya, Nairobi, government printers, 1985

One of the measures of women's participation in politics is their share of parliamentary seats, ministerial level positions, local government representation and management positions in professional and technical jobs among many others (UNDP, 1995a). Parliaments are bodies where decisions on allocation of resources, the recruitment of human resources, and strategies and decisions for development are made. Women's entry into this body not only demonstrates the existence of equity and justice in the country, but also enriches the legislative process as they bring with them their perspectives and creativity. It is obvious that any move aimed at improving the social, economic, political and cultural conditions of a country is likely to originate at and be sanctioned by parliament. Hence, participation in parliament or lack of it would have significant effects in the struggle to acquire legitimate claims. The years between 1969 and 1979 witnessed very low women's representation in parliament and this meant that their perspectives regarding development were not given due recognition. Male members of parliament made decisions on behalf of the women since they were perceived as weak and dependent on men as the heads of the households.

### 3.3 Kangema women and political participation: 1963-1978

Apart from electoral politics and party membership, it is becoming increasingly clear that the collective action of those concerned (victims of all forms of oppression) against political powers with a long-term goal of social transformation to ensure liberation from exploitation, degradation, subjugation and injustice is also part of political participation (Patel, 1994). Women's mobilization for collective action to address one or more of the issues of concern is essentially political and therefore an empowering process. A positive trend observed in this regard is the proliferation of women's organizations, which improved in quality and quantity during the Kenyatta era (Ahmed, 2000). Just as oppressed and discriminated workers organized various collective initiatives to right their oppression by the capitalist owners, women the world over developed strategies to counter the gender based oppression and discrimination which they had been the eternal victims of since the colonial era. Women groups evolved and grew as one of the instruments to fight against social, economic and political inequalities and marginalisation.

In Kikuyu land, the *ngwatio* and *itati* groups, which had been dismantled by colonialists with the introduction of the taxes and wage economy, were revitalized. These groups were however transformed and reorganized into goal-oriented clan-based groups. They contributed money, food and clothing to needy members of the group. In case of death, birth or any community-based activity, these women grouped and helped members through prayers, food or money. Such goal oriented groups led to the formation of the department of community development and the re-launching of the nation-wide organization, the MYWO, in 1970s. Colonial administrators wives had formed MYWO in the early 1950s as a women's club after the realization that there was need to address the plight of African women, colonial administrator wives began to hold classes for African women in the

villages. As Ndeda (1994) observes, one activating factor for the formation of these women groups and clubs in Kenya seems to have been African veterans of the second world war who went to the Jeane School with their wives to attend leadership classes. While men were taught community development, home management nutrition club library, home craft, first aid and general citizenry, their wives were trained in housewifery and children welfare by the social welfare organisation. When these women returned to the rural community they wanted to keep in touch with each other so they organized clubs assisted by colonial administrators.

In their efforts to keep in touch the MYWO was started. Its main goal at the time was to: improve the African life through bush-clearing, terracing, dam building and adult education in literacy, the encouragement of crafts suitable for the needs of the people. They also engaged in teaching of the best use of leisure through games African dancing and singing, teaching proper standards of behaviour and spiritual guidance. The women's clubs were also part of a colony-wide organization started under the auspices of colonial governments department of community development and rehabilitation to promote the advancement of the African woman and to raise their standards. In 1951, after a series of meetings between the white ladies interested in the African welfare and Africans training at the Jeanne's School it was agreed that the existence of the women's institutes be formalised and integrated into MYWO (E.A. Standard September, 10 cited in Ndeda, 1994) Many of these women's clubs joined it at pre-independence but the organization's link with the colonial government caused bitterness and damaged its credibility among indigenous women for years to come (Wipper, 1976). Moreover, older women felt that the training that was being offered in sewing, basketry and weaving was so technical and so most of them abandoned it.

In spite of this setback at the time, the formation of MYWO accelerated the growth of the women's

movement in Kenya. Women leaders like Ciokaraine of Tharaka and Nyanjiru of Kangema began to emerge at the forefront of colonial rule. During the Kenyatta era, MYWO promoted the performance and productivity of women's groups and helped many to acquire leadership, organizational and micro-enterprise skills. During this period, women's groups grew stronger through the spirit of *harambee* initiated by Kenyatta. The spirit of *harambee* emphasized the spirit of working together and pooling resources for development. It stimulated a high degree of community participation especially in community based social, political and economic projects. A good example is the *Nyakinyua* group that was so advanced that it acquired large tracts of land for its members in Central and Rift valley provinces. In Kangema, the Muguru, Marimira and Gakurwe *Nyakinyua* women's groups organized *harambees* for the education of their children. Because men were so much engaged in local beer drinking, women through *harambees* also helped in putting up local secondary schools like Kiairathe and Gaturi (Njeri, O.I 2003). In Mathioya division, women engaged in such activities as knitting, basketry and informal education. The Chui *Nyakinyua* women group and the Kambara *Nyakinyua* group for instance organized classes for basic literacy. In Chui, the catholic catechist assisted these women by offering rooms where contributions were made to help in the education of their children (Wanjiku, O.I, 2003).

In recognition of the contribution of women's groups to development, the Kenyatta government established a special Rural Development Program to provide financial support to women's groups. This program was however headed by men. Funds were embezzled and the few women in the program were co-opted by male leaders. The initiative hence collapsed and in 1971, the government established a women's division in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services that resulted in the formation of the Women's Bureau in 1976 (Ahmed, 2000). The Bureau's mandate included policy formulation, implementation and coordination of all government initiatives and programs for women,



collection, analysis and dissemination of data and information for the design, monitoring and evaluation of policies and projects for women and support for and liaison with women centred NGO projects and women's groups. The Bureau encouraged and initiated the formation of many women groups. In central province, the number of women groups increased from 285 in 1976 to 298 in 1978. Countrywide, over 15000 groups had been registered in the early 1980s (Kibwana, 2000). Among the prominent women groups in Murang'a District included: *Chui, Nyakinyua, Wanjiru Kiruu, Ichichi, Gakurwe, and Yakarengo*, among others (DC MUR 31/18).

In addition, 1977 saw the formation of AAWORD, a pan-African non-governmental organization in Dakar-Senegal. The organisation was formed by a group of African women researchers who felt that there was need to set up a continent wide network of scholars dedicated to undertaking research from an African and gender perspective. The idea of this organization grew out of the realization that much of the African research on women and on issues of great concern to women was framed from a male perspective and mainly conducted by men while women scholars played a marginal role if any. These women scholars therefore strove to build the capacity of African women to undertake research and disseminate their research results to both men and women in rural and urban Africa (AAWORD, 1999). During its formation there was however no Kenyan woman representative. Kenyan women particularly the urban women who knew how to read and write English only attended international meetings mostly held in Dakar and the information they got was only disseminated to a few urban women.

Between 1995 and 1999, a Kenyan woman was appointed the East African representative. Jacqueline Odhiambo Oduol on her appointment lobbied and mobilized both urban and rural women to participate in the goal-oriented projects that would help them alleviate their constant poverty.

Together with other women, she encouraged both young and older women to enrol in literacy classes. They also disseminated information concerning the women's decade and the involvement of women (AAWORD, 1999). The effect of their tireless efforts was an increase in adult literacy since many older women enrolled in community based literacy classes where government paid tutors were initiating many in reading and writing. In Kangema, such classes were conducted in Gakira, Gikoe ACK church Wahundura and Chui. Although women continued to be marginalised despite such efforts, it should be pointed out that the activities of the women's clubs, and institutes, such as MYWO and AAWORD were a forward looking step towards their emancipation in general from the bondage of patriarchy which at this time deeply entrenched in the customs of most Kenyan communities in general and the Kikuyu in particular.

Apart from engaging in political and economic activities through women's groups and women's organisations, the Kenyatta era also witnessed increased number of girls attend school. The abolition of gender and racial segregation in education at independence created opportunities for access to education for both African men and women (Caulfield, 1993).

Education broadens and sharpens one's intellect about the world including an awareness of all the social, cultural, economic and political forces of one's existence. It is almost impossible for women to participate fully in national development if educational opportunities for them are restricted by economic situations and social and cultural attitudes of individuals, (Kabaji 1997). Basic education and general education must necessarily be articulated around political and vocational training programmes. The educational system is thus very dependent and when it is not motivated by a desire for change it is handicapped by extreme inertia and adapts extremely slowly to the modifications imposed upon it. Fortunately, however, when it is mobilized to reach new objectives, it is capable of

being highly innovative. The question that we are asking in this work is whether the education system in Kenya during the Kenyatta era was open. Could it be mobilized to reach new objectives? Unfortunately, educators and policy-makers continued to disseminate the same colonial information that the place of women was in the kitchen. Girls were therefore not encouraged to undertake subjects that could orient them to the public world; even the few that were encouraged, as is today, their duties after school were far too many that they ended up not succeeding as boys did in schools.

In the early years of independence as it is today, the central concerns in education were to achieve equitable distribution of educational opportunities and to relate education to national needs and aspirations (Mbeo, 1989). To achieve this there was need to revise the laws that governed education at independence. The first post-independence educational commission was appointed in 1964 under the chairmanship of Professor S. Ominde to survey the existing educational resources and to advise government in the formulation of national policies for education.

Although it endorsed the ultimate goal of universal primary education, this was not financially feasible in the immediate future. Thus it urged concentration on more equitable distribution of educational opportunities and improving the quality of primary education (S. Ominde, 1964; Mbeo, 1989). In an effort to meet these objectives, the government passed the Education Act of 1978, revised in 1980 to streamline the management and administration of the educational system. The National Committee followed this on Educational Objectives and Policies established in 1976 to evaluate the educational system and formulate a program to make education a more potent instrument of social and economic advancement. School fees were also removed from the entire primary cycle between 1974 and 1979 to achieve more equitable distribution of educational opportunities (Karani, 1989).

Removing fees and reviewing the Educational Act was a good incentive to greater gender equality in enrolment. At independence, 891563 children were enrolled in the country's 6058 primary schools, less than 60% of the primary school going age population (Sifuna, 1964). By 1969, the percentage of children attending schools increased by 57%. In the same year Kangema division, reported a 40% increase of the children both boys and girls attending both *harambee* and government schools. The percentage increase of girls attending primary school was about 57% in the same period. In Mathioya division this increase of girls was about 49% while the number of primary schools increased by about 33%(MUR/DC/07/89).

The school attendance rate for girls in Kangema lagged behind that of men and there are several reasons for this. First, it has been argued that in traditional society the major role for a woman was to ensure the continuity of a lineage. She was expected to marry soon after puberty. She did not need formal education to perform this function. Moreover, a woman was to be provided for by her husband and since education became a means of entering highly paid jobs in the formal sector, it was considered more important for boys to have it because they were to become the breadwinners. Further it was argued that it was fairly easy for a girl with no formal education to earn a living out of retail trade or the sale of snacks to workers. On account of this most girls who started school did not continue beyond primary school level. In a society where there are no social security benefits for old people, parents look on their children as their insurance against poverty in their old age. It did not seem profitable therefore to invest money in the education of a girl who was expected to get married and help her husband and his kin (Abena, 1991).

For all these reasons, it was considered important not to invest money in a girl's education. By 1981

the percentage of girls who had attended primary education in Kangema was at 31% while that of boys was 68%. In the secondary school level girls comprised 22% while boys comprised 59%. Worse still, the university level enrolment during this year was at 13% for girls. The curriculum at this time was highly, gender biased. The examples given in textbooks included boys giving public speeches and women/girls breastfeeding and nursing. Girls therefore tended to enrol in such service careers as nursing, catering and secretarial jobs (Karani, 1989).

Generally, the Kenyatta era witnessed an increment in the number of children attending school. The increase in girls' attendance meant a future increase in their economic earnings capacity. It also motivated and encouraged women to reach for higher goals in their lives and to utilize opportunities created through various initiatives like that of creating equal employment, equal pay for equal work and equal political rights, marriage rights and property rights (Karani, 1989). This also resulted in increased awareness of the women's need to participate in various arenas in the society in the late 1970s when several women rose to prominence in the public fields like government offices, parastatals and in the private sector. Such women as Jane Kiano, Eddah Gachukia and Margaret Githinji among others from Central province rose to prominent positions in the late 1970s. Such women who joined MYWO in the early 1970s worked to improve the lot of women by encouraging them to join social and economic groups which would earn them little money for the education of their children, particularly girls. Eddah Gachukia, for instance, travelled far and wide across central province educating women on the importance of girls' education. She also encouraged them to enrol in adult literacy classes, as this would increase their awareness regarding the day-to-day happenings in the government, politics and among others their rights as women. The same women, a thorn in the government's side called attention to the discrepancy between the government's verbal support for *maendeleo* and its meagre financial support. The MYWO national leadership changed in the late

1970s and a number of new faces assumed office. The appointments were not done on merit but were based on the relationship that one had with the political elite of the time (Nzomo; 1998). In these much rigged elections, the needs of the women folk in Kenya were neglected. The new national executive was out of touch with the realities of the women in Kenya as they increasingly developed a lifestyle close to that of the European elite.

Tired of unfulfilled promises and fed up with what they saw as hypocrisy, the rural members were alienated in many ways from both the government and its own national executive. The women's morale to agitate for higher positions in education and in government decreased.

### **3.4 Obstacles to Kangema women political participation**

There are various reasons that may explain why despite the active involvement of Kangema women in the independence struggle, the granting of independence in 1963 in Kenya and the improvement of educational policies during this era, did not result to their increased participation in the political arena. They remained marginalized and relegated to household duties as well as providing family labour as men were engaged in clerical jobs in the rural and urban factories such as coffee and tea.

One of these enormous reasons may be as a result of the social cultural beliefs, myths traditions and customs, which form the training that most of them were exposed to from childhood. As Hay and Stitcher (1995) posits, the sex stereotypes and gender segregation in education, employment and allocation of roles in the private and public life are primarily a product of the early socialisation process. Socialisation is the process by which society's values and norms, including those pertaining to gender, are taught and learned. Through socialization the child is able to learn and adhere to the set cultural norms, values not forgetting the stereotypes. The culture of a people, which entails all

aspects of human behaviour is learned through socialisation and not *via* genetics. This culture includes social norms, values and beliefs of a particular society as well as the way these are expressed through actions, words and symbols. It thus becomes a heritage transmitted from generation to generation. Once a child was born, the patriarchal aspects of the society were inculcated in his or her mind through socialization. The girl is initiated into domestic roles as this was perceived as the female world. On the other hand, the boy was socialized into leadership roles and was therefore introduced into such roles as grazing, hunting and guarding the homestead. These were considered male duties, which hardened them for future leadership roles.

As has been observed, the Kikuyu were, and still remain patriarchal in nature. Patriarchy, as earlier stated, is a social, political and economic system that ensures, preserves and perpetuates male supremacy in all sectors of life. In Kangema, this system characterized the operations of practically all structures in the society. Within this framework of patriarchal understanding, male leadership at all levels was seen as the only legitimate leadership for the protection of women (Kabira and Masinjila, 1997). Patriarchy takes various forms and is experienced at different levels starting from the family. Walby (1990) argues that since patriarchy is a term that emits various contentions among many scholars, it needs to be conceptualized at different levels. He, together with Rosaldo (1974) and Mies (1986) has therefore identified two levels of patriarchy. The first form is what they have called private patriarchy. Walby (1990) posits that this form is based upon household production. In this case, the man as the head of the family controls almost all members of the family including the wife. The man as husband or father thus becomes the direct oppressor and beneficiary, individually and directly, of the subordination of women. He determines who is to go to school and who is to graze, hunt, cook or nurse the babies. Rosaldo (1974) also argues that the subordination of women by men results from their confinement in the domestic sphere. They work for long hours in the home

catering and caring for children, husband, and the ill and generally for other members of the extended family. This denies them many opportunities such as adequate access to education, job opportunities, general information about the country's economic and political developments and so on.

The second form is what they call Public Patriarchy. This is based on structures other than the household. In this case, women may have access, though inadequate, to both public and private arenas but they are nonetheless subordinated within both. Thus at home women are subordinated by their husbands or fathers while at school and in other public fora; men look down upon them. Sticher and Parpart (1988) concur with this assertion when she posits that the subordination of women is not only in the household but also in other public functions. This thesis focuses on both forms of patriarchy since Kangema women in their day-to-day activities experienced both.

In the wider Kikuyu community, the status of a woman was largely determined by her relationship to men (Maina Gakuyo, O.I 2003; Smock, 1977). A woman's social position was defined through the men in her life, one as her father's daughter, as her husband's wife and finally as her son's mother. Perhaps the reason why there has been so much female oppression within the Kikuyu society is because from the time they are born women's right to individuality is taken away. All through her stages of development a woman was 'tied' to someone, their father, husband or children. They were never appreciated as individuals in the society. Although this is slowly beginning to change and single and barren women can fit in the society, Kangema residents are far from being anywhere close to achieving gender equality. This is mainly because of the strong influence culture has had on the way they think, respond and act on a day-to-day basis. This is primarily a good thing as they are able to hold onto important morals; many of which have been lost elsewhere due to the disintegration and eventual extinction of local cultures. However some aspects of traditions had a negative impact on



the way they viewed gender differences. Many a time, women and girls were unfairly viewed as less capable of undertaking societal responsibilities than their male counterparts. Indeed their security and social approval often came through satisfying the men and particularly by producing male heirs for the husband's family. Their sons ensured the continuity of the husband's lineage and hence producing girls especially in the olden days was a disgrace in Kikuyu land since it was believed that the lineage died with the death of the man who was the head of the household.

Another issue that facilitated subordination and oppression of women within the patriarchal setting was bride wealth (Ndeda, 1999). As Goody et al (1973) posits, the term bridewealth has been referred to in different names including: dowry, brideprice, sister exchange and bridservice among others. This therefore makes the problematization of this concept complicated and hence an analysis is needed to clear common doubts about it. A general examination of this practice will be given to enable us understand it among the Kangema people.

Land is a much-valued asset by both men and women in Kangema as in most other Kikuyu communities. It constitutes the greatest percentage of wealth that a man has. Animals including cows, goats and sheep are also considered as part of a man's wealth. It should be made clear here that women in indigenous kikuyu cultures were not allowed to own land unless through marriage. Even on marriage they only had user rights and could therefore not call their husbands' land their own (Kenyatta 1938). In order for a wife to have the user and managerial rights of her husband's land, a certain number of cows and goats had to be paid by the man. The negotiations during this ceremony were often so heated and fierce and women were not allowed in the huts where such negotiation took place. Again the number of animals that the man offered determined what services the woman was to give to her husband.

After the payment of dowry, the woman became the possession of her husband. She therefore gained managerial and user rights to her husband's land, the right to maintain it for herself and her children as well as the right for her sons to become legal heirs of the land allocated to her husband (Jeater, 1993; Potash, 1984; Gachunji, O.I 2003). Upon payment of bride wealth the husband on the other hand gained right to his wife as a domestic worker, bearer and nurturer of his children. Further, he became the owner of the children he fathers. In this case only intelligent children were identified with him. He equated delinquent children with the mother as he considered her as having weaker genes and therefore not capable of producing intelligent kids (Wambui Wanyeki, O.I 2003). The man thus encouraged the intelligent ones particularly boys to be brave, strong and to undertake "tough" subjects such as law, engineering and science related disciplines in school. The mother on the other hand dealt with those that have been "rejected" by the society including their father. Such children included; cretins, cripples, the deaf, blind and others with disabilities. The payment of dowry by the man under customary law made the marriage permanent and hence not easy to dissolve. Divorce or separation became difficult especially for women.

As most informants articulated, in Kangema, it was only in rare cases that this could happen and even in this case it was the man who takes the woman to her parent if for example, he discovered that she had committed adultery or had abused her parents in-laws. In case a woman decided to live separately like many urban Kangema dwellers are doing, they were still regarded as wives to their former husbands and could therefore not enter into any other permanent relationship till her parents returned the dowry paid. A man could however marry another woman, get children and hence be recognized as his wife by the society. If a divorced woman died she was in most cases buried in her husband's land (Gichohi, Chege wa Ndung'u, O.I 2003).

The whole idea of bride wealth thus tied the woman to the man and further contributed to her subjugation. The negotiations for bride price in almost all parts of Kangema were normally characterized by hot arguments and bargaining as if the woman was a property. Indeed, at such times women were not allowed to participate. Moreover, the bride was not supposed to know how many cows, goats or cash had been paid in exchange for her. As it is today the higher the dowry a man paid, the more the services he expected from his wife (Gichohi, O.I 2003).

In the homestead on her marriage, the woman's chores and the responsibilities began early in the morning. As (Kenyatta, (1938) and Kanyari, (O.I 2003) argued, the worth of a woman in many Kikuyu communities was gauged by what time she woke up. She milked, prepared breakfast and then left for the *shamba* where she worked up to late hours in the evening. On her return she carried firewood, water and if she had a baby she carried him/her on her bosom. All this time the man was discussing community "issues" with fellow men inside his *thingira* (hut). He could also be invited for minor duties such as herding cattle or repairing broken pens. For those who worked for instance in Kangema or Kiriaini towns, they would drink till late at night when they returned home to insult their wives (Nyambura Mbaa, O.I 2003). All these triple burdens as Nzomo (1998) posits, indicate a level of exploitation by men. Women had little or no time to discuss the social or economic issues of the community. Even if they had, they carried along with them the little babies. At times they could carry raw food in preparation for a later meal. The responsibilities of those working and living in urban centers was not any different because their services were needed later after work by the children and the husband. This is because as research has shown many Kangema men demanded unlimited services from their wives arguing that they married the wife and not the house help if there was one (Presley, 1992).

The exploitation of women was further exemplified by considering the products of the woman's labour (Gordon, 1996). While women supplied most of the labour needed for both food and agricultural production, most of them did not own equipments or the proceeds for which they supplied the labour. After working so hard in the coffee or tea plantations, most Kangema women complained of men retaining the money got when such harvests were sold. One woman Wanjiru Gichigo for instance, complained of her husband "drinking" all the money got from the sale of coffee. On asking the husband, he reminded her that her together with the money belonged to him and so he expected no questions from her. Such longstanding social norms relegated women to the periphery as they were considered as producers and reproducers without any pay or recognition. Their triple roles left them with no option but to rely on rumours particularly during electoral politics. This is why as Mugure Gakuyo, O.I 2003 posited, when it came to lobbying and campaigning such women did so for their husbands' candidates for fear of reprisals.

Religion is yet another source of patriachalism (Huss, 2001). The tenets of all major religions in Kangema reflect the attitudes and moral values of the male priests and church leaders who enunciated them. There can be no argument that the church is one of the most oppressive structures in society today especially in regard to the oppression of women. About three quarters of the people in the church are women but men make most of the decisions. The Bible also perpetuates and legitimizes patriarchal structures in the society. Biblical texts are articulated in grammatically masculine language- a language that is embedded in a patriarchal culture and religion. Besides the bible is canonized, interpreted and proclaimed by a long line of men (Iglitzin, 1976). It is therefore not uncommon for Christian leaders and theologians to cite the teachings of Saint Paul when delineating the role of Christian women and men. In one frequently quoted passage for example, Paul instructs

the Christians of Ephesus,

*“Let the wives be subject to their husbands as to the Lord; because a husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.... But just as the church is subject to Christ as also, let wives be to their husbands in all things (Ephesians 5:22- 24)*

Elsewhere Paul explains why women must cover their heads at religious gatherings while men need not to. He says:

*“A man indeed ought not to cover his head because he is the image and glory of God. But a woman is the glory of the man. For a man is not from the woman, but woman from man. For man was not created for woman, but woman for man (1 Cor 11:7-9)*

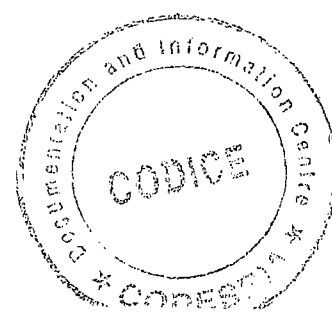
This sexism in Paul’s teachings though hotly debated, is perhaps important than the fact that the words have been repeatedly used by church priests to legitimize and even promote the subordination of women. There is considerable evidence that before the advent of Christian missionaries, both men and women shared in the leadership of the indigenous religious functions. Both participated and served in the offering of sacrifices under sacred trees. In Mathioya Division for instance, *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga* Location was the place where most men and women met to offer sacrifices. Women particularly from Mathioya Division were known for rainmaking. Muthoni Wanjogo pointed out that the *Nyakinyua* from the *Ethaga* clan were known for “blowing the rain” during prayers. After the introduction of Christianity some women served as missionaries and participated in the spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ (Renzetti and Curran, 1992). They also engaged in the interpretation of the scriptures (Carmody 1979).

As many scholars argue, there is nothing in Jesus’ reported words that could be labeled anti-female or sexist. Rather, he treated both men and women simply as individuals who needed his help or as co-

workers or friends. Within a hundred years of Christianity as Renzetti and Curran (1992) argues, an all-male hierarchical structure was firmly put in place. Women were relegated to the periphery as second-class citizens within Christianity, a state that persists to this day. Thus within Christianity particularly in the Catholic church which is so dominant in Mathioya Division, women participate passively in church matters. Their views and suggestions are taken only if several men support them; and this is rare. Men are supposed to be rational, authoritative and in control; women on the other hand are portrayed as weak, irrational and “temptresses”. Infact as a church leader Kanoti from Gitugi Catholic Church posited, it is women who caused men to sin as Eve made Adam to in the Garden of Eden. Such images hint at the Christian churches’ attitudes towards sexuality. Other such churches include *Akorino, Kariuawa ka Wega and Nyariri*.

There are more Pentecostal churches in Kangema Division totalling to 97 while Mathioya Division has 63 of them (Ngahu O.I 2003). A few ‘liberal’ churches have also sprung up in Kangema. Such churches that afford women some place in the church include *Jesus is Alive Ministries* in Kibutha, *Wings of life, Calvary Temple* and the *Assemblies of God*. However, when it comes to politics, church leaders discourage women from participating, as politics is considered unholy, involving abuses and insults. To avoid sin women are also discouraged from forming or joining movements and organizations that discuss politics as they are viewed as avenues of gossip, which the ‘lord’ does not entertain.

It should be noted that unlike the Catholic Church, which is known for its rigidity as regards sexuality, the Anglican Church is a bit flexible. Infact the Catholic Church speaks, as one of the most conservative denominations in this aspect. It has remained steadfastly resistant to change. Women are therefore discouraged from public missions. This may explain why very few women from Mathioya



Division engage in political activity unlike those from Kangema Division who have formed several economic and political movements. One such movement is the Women Economic Empowerment Consort (WEEC) that was formed 3 years ago by women from the division. These women engage in both economic and political activities. The Anglican Church since its inception encourages girls' education. During the Kenyatta era, several schools were set up particularly in Kangema division where the Anglican Church is deeply rooted.

Together with increased participation in the women's groups and improved educational policies as regards girls' education, the Kenyatta era witnessed the declaration of 1975 as the women's year. A world conference was held in Mexico the same year. Among the most significant issues articulated during this conference was the concept of women's development that emphasized equality, peace and development of women (Staudt, 1990). The women in development stand advocated for women's development in terms of education, employment and empowerment. Education in this case was understood as a prerequisite for improvement in women's status. Access of girls and women to formal education was therefore encouraged. In terms of equality, the UN Women's Commission discovered that legal rights for women had been down played and that though most governments had constitutions that granted women equality, too often these rights were not enforced in the face of custom and patriarchy. This they argued resulted into the marginalisation of women in both political and economic participation. The conference also encouraged the participation of women in income generating activities to help poor women since they considered economic activities as key to improving the status of women in society (Tinker, 1990; Hay, 1995).

Though this year marked some considerable improvement in the status of women in Kenya, not much was realized until 1985 when the women's decade was celebrated in a conference in Nairobi. The

projects that the conference advocated for failed since: the leaders of these programs lacked not only the experience in creating viable income generating activities for the poor but also experience in running these organizations on a business basis. Because the organizations had non-social programs, they tended to retain stereotypes about women's domestic roles, and they set up income generating projects based on incorrect assumptions about women's needs, daily activities or skills. These projects assumed that women were predominantly housewives with ample free time who only needed pin money for supplementary food or clothing. Further, these new income-generating activities assumed that women had skills in traditional women's crafts like pottery, basketry, and sewing, activities quite foreign to most poor women in rural areas. As a result, such projects seldom resulted in economic returns without constant subsidies. In Muranga, a number of such groups flourished, albeit for a short time. They included Wahundura in Kiriaini. Another group, Chui, hired a shop where cow feeds and maize were sold to the local people (Wahu, O.I 2003). These activities helped local women to cater for their families' needs as well as support the education of their children.

### **3.5 Summary and conclusion**

In this chapter, we have discussed the trends that women's political participation took in Kangema during the Kenyatta era. It has been noted that the granting of independence to Kenya did not automatically translate to women's equality in the political field as it was in other fields. They therefore remained marginalized and oppressed by their male counterparts headed by president Kenyatta. Nevertheless in efforts to enhance their status women in Kangema mobilized and organized themselves into goal-oriented groups and later rejuvenated MYWO, which they had rejected in the 1950's due to its association with the colonial government.

It has also been noted that the reviewing of the Education Act by the ruling government resulted in



increased number of girls attending school. However, this again did not result to more women engaging in political activities as candidates for political posts as would have been expected. This was because of their multiple roles as caretakers, producers, reproducers and homemakers among many others. In addition, the customs and traditions dictated that the place of the woman was in the kitchen and thus was not expected to hold public office. This patriarchal system among the Kikuyu ensured that the women remained appendages of men who could not be entrusted with any leadership position be it as an MP, judge or even the head of state.

This era as has been discussed also witnessed the declaration of 1975-1985 as the women's decade. Although much was not achieved in 1975, shortly before the death of Kenyatta in 1978, the year 1977 saw the establishment of the community tree planting campaign by women. This was later renamed the Green Belt Movement. The movement increased the awareness by women of their need to group in order to fight for their rights as women.

Despite the various achievements during this period Kenyatta era did not mean much to women as they remained exploited and marginalized by the male political elites who had no place for them in politics. Their involvement only entailed praying, dancing and serving during official government meetings.

In the next chapter we examine the effect of Moi's presidency to women's political participation in Kangema

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 TRENDS AND TRAJECTORIES IN KANGEMA WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FROM 1978-2002.

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

By the time of the death of Kenyatta in 1978, Kenya had acquired the reputation of being one of the most open polities in Africa (Throup, 1998). However, the leadership of the country chiefly lay in the hands of a few male elites. Most of these elites belonged to KANU, a party that monopolized party politics. Not much opposition had been experienced and hence most people belonged to the party. The representation of women in politics at the time was still minimal especially because the organizations dealing with women's issues were mostly headed by men (Nzomo, 1998). Again, few women engaged in the activities of these organizations especially because they were busy in the farms, as men had left for the urban areas. In Central province, a lot of women were busy in their businesses and therefore had no time for these organizations (Robertson, 1998).

During his first decade in office, the new president was to face more challenging circumstances than his predecessor (Throup, 1998). First, Moi came to power just as the cash crop boom of the mid 1970s was ending and as the international women's decade was commencing. Women had therefore become more impoverished by the fallen earnings from coffee and tea and were consequently not willing to join any group. The activities advocated for during the women's decade such as income generating activities were collapsing and there was urgent need to revive them. The MYWO was the only vibrant organization at the time.

## 4.2 Remnants of the Women's Decade, 1975-1985.

As earlier noted, the women's year conference of 1975 recognized that women had been systematically disempowered through the process of economic decay. International agencies and individual donor nations determined to assess the ways in which their aid programs affected women (Fraser, 1987). The delegates adopted a three-fold strategy for change. First, they agitated for the creation of national women and development instruments to monitor the status of women and make governments more accountable to women's needs. Secondly, they campaigned for changes in family law that would guarantee women equal status. It was during this time in Kenya that in 1976, the bill on marriage and divorce was introduced into parliament but was withdrawn one month later only to be reintroduced after 3 years (Wamalwa, 1989). Thirdly, they lobbied for the creation of and implementation of new economic policies targeting women.

Each of these goals was partially attained during the Moi era. The UN Decade for women inspired institutional and legal reforms throughout Africa and elsewhere. By 1985, most governments of African countries had created full ministries for women affairs. Cameroon, Burundi, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Zaire, Mauritius, and Zimbabwe were among these countries (Fraser, 1987). Kenya had not yet created a full ministry. The ministries that dealt with the issues of women included such soft ministries as health, education, social services and culture. These ministries are considered female ministries with the assumption that their work is related to traditional female work and concerns. These ministries also command fewer resources and have a lower status than the other powerful ministries such as finance, planning, foreign affairs and trade (Bekele, 2000). Again, by 1990, mechanisms existed in 40 nations to monitor the impact of development policies on women (African Rights Monitor, 1990). African women supplemented these government agencies with their own organizations devoted to research on women conducted by African women. AWWORD, which they

founded, had branches all over Africa. In Kenya, AWWORD offices are found in Nairobi. Information on participation of women in the economic, social and political sphere is disseminated from such offices. These organizations also monitor elections in Kenya and supports women willing to vie for elective posts in politics. They also create awareness of legal rights, educate women on how to claim these rights and advocate for reform on law and policies that discriminate against women. Unfortunately, institutional and legal changes have not always improved the status of women in Kenya. The existence of such institutions does not necessarily indicate that a government is committed to ameliorating the position of women. Women's bureau and organizations may exist but they are often poorly funded and staffed. Government officials may ignore the bureaus because they see them as peripheral to essential policy concerns or because they deny the reality of women's subordination (Nzomo, 1998). The Kenyan government for example maintains that women have already made significant progress and now occupy positions of importance in both the public and the private sphere yet women remain marginalized in both the economic and political spheres. The women's organizations and groups where women are primarily supposed to be engaged have been co-opted by the government and can therefore not challenge the government's complacency and demand changes in the status quo (Keller, 1984).

Legal changes promoted during the UN decade have not strengthened women's status. Where legal reforms have been enacted, their impact have been diluted by the absence of enforcement mechanisms and by the reluctance of women to demand their legal rights in court (Parpart, 1988). These phenomena suggest an essential weakness in the strategy of pursuing change through legal reforms. Such reforms do not necessarily alter prevailing social attitudes about women. In Kenya, men have resisted legal changes because they threaten the patriarchal cultural system under which men have profited.

The third legislation of the UN strategy, the use of development policy to give women greater economic security has received the greatest support from the donor community. These programs on economic development have attempted to integrate African women in development by giving them greater access to existing resources and institutions (Hay, 1995). Most of the resulting policy initiatives have targeted the rural poor women and organized them into special development projects. These associations have empowered self-help and self-reliance, ostensibly in an effort to give control of their own economic lives.

Women are organized most often into small groups that then engage in income generating activities such as raising poultry, tapping water, and buying farm inputs among others. The participation rate in these programs has been high. In 1986 alone, Kenya's self-help programs encompassed 15,000 groups and more than 550,000 people (Nzomo, 1997). In Kangema, most of the women groups, which had become dormant in the late 1970s due to lack of finance were revived in the mid 1980s. Women self help groups like Chui, Kanjahi, Iyego, Marimira, Gakira and Wanjerere were assisted through such programs. These self-help groups started contributing small amounts of money and most of them bought small plots for rearing animals. Kiamuingi women's group in Mathioya contributed KSh 70 each and later organized a harambee in 1985 to buy a plot in Gitugi. On this plot, the women kept pigs, which they sold, to local butcheries and to schools around Kiriaini and Murang'a town. Attesting to this, Iyego High School principal suggested that there was need to revive such organisations rearing domestic animals to ensure that these animals do not become extinct from the area. (Matahe O.I 2003). In Kangema division, many such self-help groups sprouted in the 1980s and local women joined willingly and contributed the required registration fee of between five and seven shillings.

Although majority of these organizations women formed in Kangema and indeed else where in Kenya can be viewed as welfarist in nature, they can also be conceived as political if conceived as “ collective strategies in which individual women combine resources to cope with changing structures- structures that increase women’s need for cash while disproportionately excluding them from acquiring it as compared to men (Staudt, 1990). These gender solidarity groups did not however engage in political matters as they mostly consisted of rural women who believed that politics was the reserve of men. They nevertheless acted as good arenas where they could air their grievances on domestic violence. These groups later in the 1990s during the multiparty politics acted as very good avenues where women mobilized themselves and campaigned for their candidates.

The major problem underlying the failure of the UN policies was that of women’s political invisibility. Though most projects were meant for rural women, men and the elite women hijacked them. Decisions regarding participation of these groups at every stage, local, and national therefore excluded rural women. At the local level, male elders controlled and disbursed development funds received from the government. At the national level, male bureaucrats gained political capital from managing successful programs. Consequently, Kenyan women were rarely in a position to voice their needs and concerns. They were not present to pressure local and national male politicians to place women’s issues at the centre of development planning; they were not present to demand changes in land law, to give input to the design of effective leadership in the government before, during and after the UN decade for women. As Nzomo (1998) observes, government co-option of top women group leaders and the social welfare orientation of these organizations conspired to make them toothless bulldogs.

### 4.3 The era of political pluralism

After years under an oppressive regime characterised by torture, detention and political murder, the introduction of a multi-party political system in 1991 seemed to mark the dawn of a new era: The Kenyan people would at last enjoy a wide range of fundamental human rights enshrined in chapter V of their Constitution. Yet the country's human rights record continues to this day to be tarnished by hundreds of accounts of repression, brutality and torture inflicted on political activists as well as peaceful civilians. From the Kenyan women's point of view, this is a situation not only permitted by a number of provisions or restrictions in the Law, but also reflecting a culture of brutality against women widespread in the Kenyan society. Given this context, the position of women in Kenya generally and in Kangema in particular is vulnerable. Traditionally as well as legally, their rights are restricted whilst they can be subjected to various forms of harassment and brutality at all levels of society, with no guarantee of protection, either by traditional institutions or the law. Moreover, women cannot rely on the Law or law enforcement agents to protect their rights to freedom of expression, association, or their right to be free from persecution either by state agents or family members (Mbeo, 1989).

In the 1992 preparatory period for the first multiparty elections in Kenya, a high premium was placed on political empowerment as a means of achieving the goals associated with the advancement of the status of women (Nzomo, 1994). This was in the hope that if women actively participated and attained key political decision making positions in large enough numbers, they would for example exert a decisive influence to measure the removal or repeal of laws that discriminate against women at all levels and they would participate in designing development policies that would mainstream rather than marginalize and disempower women (Gordon, 1996).

Consequently, from January 1992, women's lobby groups and organizations embarked on a mobilizing and strategizing campaign to ensure that in the 1992 general elections, women candidates won the maximum number of parliamentary and civic seats. One basic strategy employed to achieve this goal as AAWORD (1998) posits was to sensitize and conscientize women who are the majority of voters on the power and merit of casting their vote for committed leaders rather than for gender insensitive men. Women in Kangema met at Kiriaini and Kangema towns to campaign for Matiba who they saw as their saviour against exploitation and oppression from the then ruling government of KANU, which had embezzled funds from the MYWO in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These women had also wanted to vote for a leader who would meet their constant underrepresentation in parliament and other decision-making for a. They therefore mobilised, campaigning and encouraging fellow women to vote for Matiba. Although he did not win the sit, the women solid as they had been during the campaigns, invited him for a *harrabee* in support of the education of their children, which he attended. Such efforts by these women cannot be overlooked because it is in such avenues that women were able to discuss and enlighten each other on issues affecting their political life.

The other related strategy employed was to encourage and build confidence in those women with the necessary political will and commitment to contest for political office in the December 1992 elections. Towards this end, a National Women's Convention bringing together women from the grassroots to the national level was held in February 1992 to chart out the women's agenda and in July 1992, the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) organized a national training workshop for capacity building of women candidates bringing together about 60 women candidates who had already declared their intention to contest for political office (Nzomo, 1994). This was however only successful in towns as local women were left out from the trainings and workshops.



In the meantime, however, some women's lobby groups and organizations notably the Young Women Christian Voters (YWCV), Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) conducted grassroots civic education programs, gender and legal rights awareness campaigns, using the medium of training workshops, seminars, the media posters, and other printed materials. NCSW further monitored the elections as an accredited observer body and gave moral and material support to women candidates throughout the campaign process until the completion of the election process (AAWORD, 1998). The achievements of an entire year of advocacy, mobilizing and enhancing gender awareness as well as the civic and legal rights campaign produced the following outcome: one, over 250 women stood for civic and parliamentary seats in the December 1992 elections. This was over 100% increase from previous elections. In Kangema division, two women stood for civic seats while in Mathioya division, there was no woman candidate for either the civic or parliamentary position (Kanyata, Nyaga, O.I 2003)

Despite the numerous obstacles that women faced during the electoral process ranging from harassment, intimidation, and discrimination within parties, financial shortfalls, mass rigging and other electoral irregularities, six women won the parliamentary seats and about 45 were elected as councillors Nationally, women have however proved their political tenacity and their determination to penetrate the male dominated political hierarchy with or without affirmative action. Indeed, if the electoral process had provided a level playing field and if elections were truly free and fair, there is no reason why more women would not have won the civic and parliamentary seats. The modest number of women elected during the 1992 general elections was an important political achievement, but it fell short of the original objective of attaining 30-35% female representation (Nzomo, 1994). Furthermore, outside the political arena, many of the gender concerns women identified and lobbied for still remained on the drawing board. Discrimination against women in existing laws and practice

is still in place as are the negative images and the various forms of violence against women, which are on the increase despite protests from some women activists. Nevertheless, the point that needs to be underscored is that the women's movement in Kenya put up a remarkable pressure for women's empowerment and the respect of women's human rights in 1992 (AAWORD, 1998). The women's groupings in 1992 encouraged each other on the importance of voting responsible and gender sensitive leaders. They also lobbied for the 6 women who were elected at the time. There was no elected woman in Kangema in the civic or parliamentary elections at the time, but the lobbying and campaigns done by women groups created awareness among women on their rights as voters and elected members. The 6 women however were too few to influence gender sensitive policy changes in a 200 hundred-member parliament (Nzomo, 1994).

Consequently, while women's voices in the civic society continued to be audible in the post election era, they were not as loud and forceful as they were during the 1992 election year. Due to the disappointment of the election outcome, many women activists turned to the less politically overt but strategically empowering activities of civic education and gender awareness. This fatigue went on until 1995 when the international women's conference was held in Beijing. Here the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted which called for equality, development and peace.

#### **4.4 The 1995 Beijing conference.**

The conference noted that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status was essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. The members also observed that the poor relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society from the most personal to the highly public. Thus, achieving the

goal of equal participation of men and women in decision-making would provide a balance that would more accurately reflect the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning (Nzomo, 1998).

Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function. The conference thus agreed that there was need to involve both men and women to ensure that democracy is attained in all countries. In this respect, women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. This equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but it can be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Thus without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (Beijing Conference Handbook, 1996).

Members also noted that though women had demonstrated considerable leadership in the community and informal organizations as well as in public office, socialization and negative stereotyping of women and men including stereotyping through the media reinforces the tendency for political decision making to remain the domain of men. Likewise, the under representation of women in politics, education and the law have prevented women from having a significant impact on many institutions. In addressing this inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making, at all levels, it was suggested that the government and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policies and program so that before decisions are made and taken, an analysis is made of their effects on men and women respectively (Beijing +5, 2000).

In Kenya, a year after the Beijing conference in 1996, Hon. Ngilu moved a motion on the Platform for Action. In this motion, the government committed itself to among other things, translate, interpret, simplify, clarify and disseminate the resolutions of the Platform for Action (PFA), convene seminars, workshops and other fora in all sub locations to explain the PFA and allocate adequate budgetary provisions for the enhancement of the welfare of women, implement and continually monitor and assess the PFA (Mugo, 2000). This was the first time in Kenya for a woman MP to move a woman friendly motion. Women therefore had cause to remain optimistic that the system was indeed beginning to become responsive to their needs. The euphoria created by the passage of that motion was however short-lived. The government did not create necessary mechanism for the implementation. Women were quick to realize how quickly private member motions can be shelved to gather dust since the government did not generally feel obliged to implement them. The mover of the motion, Hon. Charity Ngilu however, remained relentless in her struggle. The same year she became the first woman to declare that she would run for presidency in the general election. She became 4<sup>th</sup> overall in a field of seven men and two women (Kabira, 1998).

The conference though attended by several Kenyan women was seen by rural women as an organization for the powerful educated urban women (Wahu, O.I 2003). The rural women thus did not gain from it. In Kangema, during the elections in 1997, several women failed to vote for Ngilu as they viewed her as one of the educated urban women out to fulfil their own self-interests (Wanjiku, Matahe, Wahu, O.I, 2003). Again, the fact that the presidential candidate Kenneth Matiba vied, had a negative effect on Ngilu's candidature since she hailed from Ukambani, while Matiba hailed from Kiharu in the, neighborhood of Kangema. Ethnicity thus took precedence. Nevertheless, this conference acted as a reminder to the government that there was need to create a women's ministry. Though the ministry was created, it was headed by a man and was dismantled two months later, a

sign that the government was still not ready to listen to the grievances of women.

#### **4.5 Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO).**

At the height of the 1980s, the largest women's association in Kenya was the MYWO. It involved around 5000 rural clubs and a membership of 500,000. At the 1985 decade for women, it assumed a leadership role both at the NGO forum and at the governmental conference (Nzomo, 1989). It was given a great boost by the increasing attention of overseas aid agencies to women's projects. MYWO was seen by foreign donors as a viable vehicle through which to channel resources to women at the grass root level. For example, a Kenya news magazine reported that MYWO received several millions of dollars over a three-year period in the mid 1980s (Weekly Review, 1989). The money was to be distributed to local women's groups by the MYWO leaders. Since most of them had been co-opted by the government, the money they disbursed to local women groups was embezzled, again.

The money was to be distributed to local women groups. Those who were to distribute the money had patrimonial relations with the male leaders and therefore in their corrupt endeavours embezzled the funds. The little amount that reached local women groups was to be distributed but male local leaders used nepotism as it was the order of the day to distribute the money. The leaders regionalized the whole issue and distributed more to their regions of origin. In Kangema, the Division officer (D.O) at the time disbursed more money to his Mihuti location to the detriment of the women groups from Mathioya. Moreover, the local women groups used the funds to fulfil their own interests (Kanyari, O.I, 2003). The effect of this was the break up of many women groups. By 1986, many of the affiliate MYWO associations had broken up and financial scandals were rife throughout the country. The government intervened ostensibly to straighten up the financial mess in 1987 MYWO was formally

affiliated to KANU (Hay, 1995). In 1989, the MYWO elections clearly illustrates that the formal affiliation of the MYWO to KANU meant that the women leaders only served the government's interests. The key male politicians got the opportunity to ensure that their wives, sisters and friends captured the leadership of this organization. Rural women and those with no relation to the male politicians were relegated to the periphery. Despite grassroots' women cries of rigging and male interference, the powerlessness of the majority of women in this organization was once again affirmed (Kenya Times, October 31 1989).

According to Nzomo (1998), the elections were unfair since most rural women were not considered for any posts. The merging of the MYWO with KANU was a wrong move since the male players took advantage of the organization. Moreover, the strategy that the government adopted of openly preferring and jointly working with the KANU-MYWO to the total exclusion of the groups weakened and further fragmented an already divided and vulnerable women's movement in Kenya. The conflicts and rivalries that had been so common among the leadership of the national women's organizations increased thus postponing the development of a relatively cohesive women's movement that could have formed the basis of effective women's participation in politics (Kabira, 1998). Local mobilization also went down as the local women associated educated urban women with KANU. The voting, vying and general involvement of women in politics decreased as they perceived themselves as appendages of men with their fate determined by men with little or no reference to women (Weekly Review, November, 1989).

#### **4.6 Hinderances and successes in Women's Political Participation In Kangema**

The period 1997-2002 saw numerous and far reaching changes on the political, social and legal

fronts. Politically, the country witnessed the consolidation of multiparty democracy in parliament. At the social level, citizens generally became more aware of their rights as evidenced by the type of demands that they made to their leaders. Evidently however, there was continued need for civic education to make citizens even more aware of their rights and obligations. A key obstacle to this process was the fact that avenues for delivering civic awareness through the use of public media remained largely restricted as the government maintained a tight grip on the sole state controlled broadcasting establishment-KBC (Mugo, 2002). To a significant extent though, the private sector added channels for information dissemination as privately owned radio stations that broadcasted on the FM band proliferated. Some private TV stations also went on air, radically changing the media landscape of the previous five years. However, a lot of this revolution was only experienced in Nairobi since the frequencies of these private Media houses were restricted to Nairobi. Therefore, rural places like Kangema relied heavily on rumours and other personal information dissemination channels emanating from Nairobi.

To add on to these channels, privately owned magazines also proliferated which were also accessed in the rural areas. In Murang'a, *Kihoto* and *Mwaki*, both of which the Catholic Diocese of Murang'a published, and which were sympathetic to the opposition circulated throughout the district. However, these magazines keeping in line with the patriarchal catholic tradition only encouraged women to vote and pray for the nation. This had the effect of alienating a lot of would be women candidates from vying for elective positions in the wider Murang'a District (Kihoto, Vol II 1997; Wanjiku; O.I, 2003). Despite the constitutional amendments of 1997 during which the Public Order Act was amended to remove the clause requiring that licenses be obtained to convene public rallies, the police continued to crack down on civic education rallies with impunity. At the time, 2 opposing political blocks; KANU and FORD Asili dominated Kangema. While KANU's presence was felt in Mathioya through Joseph

Kamotho, FORD Asili's John Michuki dominated Kangema division. There were constant disruptions of rallies and eruptions of violence from members of opposing blocks, which scared off a sizeable number of women voters and aspirants (Mugo, 2002; Kiragu, O.I, 2003).

For women, the five years between 1997 and 2002 passed with mixed success. With only two years having passed since the holding of the fourth UN Conference on women in Beijing, Kenyan women had looked upon to more inclusive political and governance dispensations. After all, the conference resolutions captured in the Beijing Platform for Action were quite explicit and represented a global consensus in terms of strategy for ensuring women's full participation in the process of economic, social and political developments (Thongori, 2002). The watershed event for women's full drive to demand political participation came in 1997. In that year, Phoebe Asiyo unsuccessfully tabled a private members motion seeking to legislate affirmative action in Kenya's political arena. The motion contained among other proposals a requirement that all registered political parties nominate at least a third women of the candidates. The defeat of the Asiyo motion served as a wake up call for women. They realized that the success of their course depended on their acting jointly rather than in isolation. After quick consultation, the Kenya Women's Political Caucus (KWPC) was inaugurated within the precincts of parliament; a symbolic move given that the motion of the KWPC was to increase women's representation in political offices (FIDA, 2002.)

The rise of the KWPC marked the strongest manifestation that women were determined more than ever before to consolidate their struggle for political participation as a political force. Its first joint initiative was in August 1997 when the KWPC presented women's demands for inclusion in the constitutional review process in the form of "The Women's Reform Initiatives", a document of the Kenya Women's Political Caucus (Mugo, 2002). Following the 1997 general elections, women's



hopes that this state of affairs was changing were raised when a Ministry of Women's Affairs was created in 1998. However, a male minister, Maalim Muhammed headed it. Women viewed this as a demonstration of the notion that women's capacity for leadership was wanting despite glaring evidence to the contrary. The Ministry was subsequently dissolved hardly two months after its establishment. Women perceived this move as a confirmation that the government was not committed to women's advancement.

The constitution of a nation is a contract between its citizens and the government that stipulates the values and principles by which they wish to live while instituting the organs through which they will be governed. It is the supreme law of the land (Koome, 2002). In 1962 when Kenya's current constitution was finally negotiated at Lanchester House, only one African woman, Priscilla Abwao attended and was not allowed to participate in the talks or present her memoranda. It is therefore not surprising that the current constitution in Kenya discriminates against women and provides only limited protection from discrimination on the basis of sex.

The period 1997 to 2003 has been one in which Kenyans have made significant strides towards their dream of achieving a new constitutional order. Unlike the case of the 1962 Lancaster house constitutional conferences, this time round, women have demanded and secured several places at the negotiating table (Chesoni, 2002) They have been active in pressing for constitutional reform as they have a major stake in the overhaul of the existing constitution. The draft bill of the constitution of Kenya review commission holds much promise for women. The bill has addressed many of the concerns of Kenya women regarding constitutional equality through women specific provisions and mainstreaming gender while directly addressing barriers to a culture of constitutionalism that has affected all seeking to rely on the constitution to enforce their rights (Chesoni, 2002). The number of

women parliamentarians and local representatives in the political field has also increased greatly. However a lot remains undone. There is need to mobilize and appoint local women as they articulate the needs of their fellow locals. It is therefore the work of women organizations and individuals to assist these women in order for them to attain the qualifications needed for one to be a local or national leader. Although president Kibaki's government promises to be gender sensitive, it is the work of the women organizations and individuals to keep the government on its toes to ensure that this is fulfilled.

Women experience a wide range of discriminatory practices, limiting their political and economic rights and relegating them to second-class citizenship. The Constitution extends equal protection of rights and freedoms to men and women, but only in 1997 was the Constitution amended to include a specific prohibition of discrimination on grounds of gender. However, constitutional provisions allow only males to automatically transmit citizenship to their children. Women continue to face both legal and actual discrimination in other areas. For example, a married woman is legally required to obtain the consent of her husband before obtaining a national identity card or a passport (US State Dept.).

As has been observed the Moi era although having witnessed several positive trends that would have translated into improved women's political participation, did not fulfill the equality that it had vowed to set. Women agonized as men consolidated power and continued to marginalize and exploit women's labour arguing that the Kikuyu society did not allow women to rule a country while men were watching. Other reasons that contributed to their marginalisation include: poverty, violence during elections, triple roles, and masculinity of political parties. These are elaborated below.

As earlier indicated, education is essential for improving women's living standards and enabling them

to exercise greater "voice" in decision-making in the family, the community, the place of paid work, and the public arena of politics. Basic literacy and other basic skills are absolutely vital to women's empowerment, and without the skills acquired in secondary school education, women cannot obtain better paid employment (UNIFEM Biennial Report)

In Kenya, as was noted, Universal primary education was introduced by the 1979-1983 national development plan, and fee payments were, in theory, eliminated. However, attendance at primary school still involved costs for parents, and little was allocated in the way of development resources. Communities were expected to build and equip their own schools, and funds were raised from parents for this purpose. Children were expected to attend school in uniform and to provide their own materials and supplies (USAID Kenya). These posed a heavy burden on most families. Although the law mandates that schooling be available for all children up through grade 12 and that it be compulsory, to date there is a very high dropout rate, in part because of educational expenses (US State Dept.).

Levels of education differ widely. Although the number of boys and girls in school was roughly equal at the primary level, boys substantially outnumbered girls in higher education. Rural families are more reluctant to invest in educating girls than in educating boys, especially at the higher levels. Seventy per cent of illiterate persons in the country are female (US State Dept.)

In 1997, the estimated adult illiteracy rate for the total population was 13.1% for men and 27.9% for women. In 2000, the rate declined to 11.1% for men and 24.0% for women (UN, Social Indicators). UNESCO defines an illiterate person as someone who, while understanding the situation, cannot read or write a short, simple statement in his or her everyday life.

**Table 2:** Percentage distribution of population, by sex and province in Kenya of reading ability in any language, 1995

Province	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
Coast	47	10	25
Eastern	68	32	48
Central	75	46	60
Rift valley	58	28	42
Nyanza	66	25	44
Western	66	34	46

Source: K. Ong'ayo and Lwenya (1996)

The table above indicates the gross enrolment ratios by level of education. Out of 46% females only 6% are from Kangema area. According to UNESCO, the gross enrollment rate is the total enrollment in primary and secondary education, regardless of age, divided by the population of the age group which officially corresponds to primary or secondary schooling (the ratios include the number of children who repeat a school year). The gross enrollment ratio for tertiary education, regardless of age, is expressed as percentage of the population in the five-year age group following on from secondary-school leaving age (UNESCO).

Fewer girls' school offered science and technical subjects, with the result that women constituted only about 18% of those enrolled in post-secondary science and technical courses. Also, women who completed secondary school did not qualify for university and technical institutions in the same proportion as men. Substandard facilities, fewer well-qualified teachers, and gender stereotyping in the classroom and in the curriculum, as well as the high costs that were associated with university education, accounted for the discrepancies (USAID Kenya). At university and other tertiary level educational institutions, women were best represented in education faculties and colleges. The proportion of girls enrolled in 1991 in the Departments of Building, Mechanical Engineering and

Electrical Engineering in Kenya Technical Teachers' College, was negligible. Girls continue to dominate secretarial and nursing courses in post-secondary institutions (National Report for Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995).

The under-representation of women in formal education during the Moi era is attributed to a number of factors, among them the socio-cultural attitudes of society and the limited number of educational institutions for females compared to those of males. In Kangema the poverty levels during the late 1980s and the 1990s resulted in parents preferring to cater for basic needs rather than invest in education. In places where preference was to be made regarding either educating the boy or the girl, boys were preferred. This meant that girls remained illiterate or semi-literate and hence could not access as good jobs as the boys. The kind of profession that one engages in is directly reflective of the remuneration that one gets. The low-paid jobs that women performed meant therefore that they could not get access to enough resources through credit or loans, to enable them participate in politics. As is discussed elsewhere in this study for one to actively engage in political endeavours, resources are a prerequisite.

Violence against women is a feature associated with patriarchy. Most women complained of verbal violence, emotional abuse, and economic abuse, physical and sexual abuse. All these aspects of violence against women are an extension of a system of practices and laws that sanction men's rights to regard women as their property (Nzioki, 1993). Domestic violence is widespread in many parts of Kangema. Physical abuse in terms of wife beating is common in case a woman is found to have attended "women's meetings". Further if she lobbies or votes for a candidate against her husband's advice. Wife battering is sanctioned by such archaic beliefs such as, "A woman must be beaten as this disciplines her and her children" (Kanyari O.I 2003). This was considered normal in the past and such

wives were not expected to divorce their husbands as it was regarded by the society as a sign of love. Although this has slowly changed since the 1980's, some women still acknowledged that they fear participating in economic and political meetings among themselves since they fear being insulted by their husbands either through words or physically.

Others argued that their participation especially in politics is discouraged by the society as it is interpreted as an act of errant or stubborn women making public their domestic rebellion against men. Likewise, single or childless women complain of stigmatization as they are considered unfit for leadership; the argument against them being that they could be husband snatchers or divorcees and on that account could not be entrusted with leadership (Kabira, 1997). As Waithera Chege, a childless woman pointed out, many women discourage childless women by not enrolling them in women's organizations be they political or otherwise. Women who have access to information and who do not experience domestic violence are more likely to take advantage of opportunities for political action than those who do not. They are however few and mostly hail from Kangema Division and not Mathioya. Women from Kangema division are a bit enlightened as information reaches a number of them. The infrastructure here is more developed thanks to the Member of Parliament Hon. Michuki who has been in office for more than two terms unlike in Mathioya where no Member of Parliament has retained his seat for such a long period. In his tactics of seeking reappointment, he has ensured that the road from Murang'a town to Kangema is tarmacked and that more schools have been renovated (Wanjiku Kahure, O.I 2003).

As has been argued, of the factors limiting women's ability to participate in politics, poverty is perhaps the most pervasive. Women carry primary responsibilities for household and family maintenance. In both rural and urban areas, women from poorer families augment the income and

food supplies with agricultural labour or informal employment. This is due to the fact that their educational level does not afford them jobs in the formal sector. The dual obligations of household and paid labour leave them with very little time. They are, or become more concerned with earning their daily living than following any political development. Consequently the process referred to as feminization of poverty means that most of those affected are women (Nzomo, 1994). Women lack adequate financial resources that men tend to have access to. The social setting gives men more opportunities and access to finances than women. Their economic base is therefore weak, as they do not have control of vital resources such as land, capital and technology. Even those that have access to such resources may not be independently so and hence may not be able to afford the enormous amounts of money required to fund an electoral campaign or any other political activity.

The reasons for inadequacy of women's financial resources have been discussed earlier but it is important for us to point out here that the patriarchal nature of many Kenyan communities reinforces this situation. Contemporary state institutions for instance, such as producer cooperative and export crop marketing societies reinforce the patriarchal dominance over labour and earnings of women. Often only household heads, in these case men, are accepted as members of such cooperatives. In this case most women do not receive the seeds, credits, agricultural extension advice and crop payments, which are dispensed through cooperatives. A case in Kangema illustrates this point. In 1987 a women complained that the coffee and tea cooperative societies deprived them of their proceeds because their husbands had not accompanied them. Women argued that they also ought to be given the proceeds as they provided all the labour that was needed in the production of the crops. Indeed, they urged the district commissioner to intervene as they were being mistreated by the societies (Nyambura Mbaa, O.I 2003). Others also complained that once their husbands got the money they ended up misusing it not remembering their families including the wives and children who provide the labour.

Because of their restricted access to credit and capital, management problems and family obligations, few women have been able to manage large-scale trade or businesses on a long-term basis. They engage in small-scale businesses for their family survival. The amount of money accrued from these is therefore not adequate to manage any political endeavour. This means that most male candidates and voters are likely to have easy money to run an election while women experience financial hardships and therefore leave the field for men (Nzomo, 1997).

The lack of basic resources particularly in an election contest such as nomination fees, campaign vehicles and necessary requirements to publicize ones candidature is one of the major handicap to the majority of women aspirants. Although this problem does not affect women exclusively, a good number of them are locked out at the nomination stage, as they are unable to pay the fees to the political parties sponsoring them. Due to the lack of resources, women candidates get disillusioned on witnessing their able campaign agents being hired by other politicians. The situation is further aggravated by organizational groups “voters-for-hire”(Muchoki O.I, 2003). Such groupings demand for money which they call “retention fee”. Failure to get this money often leads to decamping and supporting the rival candidate. The lack of adequate resources among women in general has to do with patriarchy. Although a major recommendation of many gatherings is that both political parties as well as the government provides and sets up various funds especially destined for women, women in many parts of Kenya, still end up with less if any access to resources. The process is often hijacked by both men and women out to maintain the political status quo.

It is now widely appreciated that to the extent that, law institutionalizes and legitimates existing conditions and relationships, it can be a major constraint to development in situations of inequality.



But there is also growing recognition that creative use of the law often accelerates the process of development, precisely because law defines relationships and relationships define power. Law is both an instrument of domination and a mechanism of empowerment (Mbeo, 1989). With specific reference to women, the challenge lies in identifying and doing away with constraints in the law and enhancing the women's role in development by ensuring them access to legal resources.

To understand the current legal system in Kenya one has to appreciate the historical imposition of the British colonial legal system, which destroyed some organic legal institutions while preserving others. As a result, two different broad systems of law co-exist in Kenya; Western type law (a heritage of colonial History) and customary law. Ombaka (1989) argues that the co-existence of two different value systems and ideological grids presents a range of unique problems to the resolution of the woman question.

The legal system that buttressed colonialism was necessarily as oppressive and exploitative as colonialism itself (Kibwana, 2002). It was oppressive because Africans were governed without their consent and against their resistance, exploitative because its mission was to service capital accumulation by the imperial power; not to develop the local population. Coming at a specific historical juncture in Britain the jurisprudence was based on the highly positivistic doctrines of the Victorian period with its supporting religious and cultural ideologies. The legal orders was based on ideologies completely foreign to the population it was to govern. Thus the colonial legal system was repressive because it was imposed, exploitative because of the mission of colonialism, and it was historically alien because it was inorganic (Ombaka 1989).

The question we are asking here is how this legal orders relates to women. To the colonialists, the

African was subhuman. Indeed, the religious and ideological rationalization of colonialism was that of a civilizing mission. From this viewpoint, the gender of the African was of no great importance. However, since the imposed legal order was rooted in Victorianism in which women were viewed as inferior beings, were disenfranchised and lacked several rights, the African woman was seen and treated as a lower species to her English counterpart. The colonial legal systems did not replace the pre-colonial legal systems completely. The colonial policy was to destroy those aspects of pre-existing institutions, which militated against colonial rule, but to conserve those, which did not threaten colonialism. Thus pre-colonial land tenure systems were destroyed to make way for white settlement and agriculture while indigenous administrative institutions such as chieftaincy were conserved not only as a cost reducing measure, but also to effect more culturally relevant rules. Similarly many aspects of private law such as family law were left intact since they had no direct bearing on the dictates of the colonial economy. The colonial legal order was constituted by a co-existence of imposed legal systems and substantial aspects of indigenous legal systems (Kameri, 1993).

The year 1963 marked the granting of independence to Kenya. The rule by colonial males was transferred to local leaders all of whom were males. Thus the basic philosophical and jurisprudential basis of the current legal order, like the colonial one, is characterized by a continuity of the imposed laws which have now been internalized –their racial aspects removed and taken over by local leaders. These laws up to date are unjust to women (Mbeo 1989).

No legislation in Kenya has been formulated in answer to the woman question or motivated by feminist concerns. On the contrary, most political leaders both men and women argue that the laws of Kenya provide for equality. In reality there are discriminatory laws in our statute books. Even if

Kenyan laws ensured equality, the question still remains whether formal juridical equality translates to substantive socio-economic and political equality. Moreover, to assert that our laws are not discriminatory assumes incorrectly that we have enough laws. It therefore merely poses the question on whether existing laws accord equality to women. It does not recognize that there could be new laws, which promote women's interests. The ideology of equality is a legal fiction, which help legitimize the status quo. In theory, laws are supposed to define the norms of conduct by promulgating objective and value neutral rules applicable to all citizens irrespective of their status. It is precisely this "equality" of treatment, which results in or reinforces actual inequality. In treating unequal people equally, the law reinforces existing conditions and promotes inequality. In a historical context in which women have been discriminated against, formal equality means actual inequality. Actual equality demands affirmative legal initiatives to correct the historical imbalance. We need to go beyond juridical equality and fashion the operational norms to ensure equality in opportunity (Ombaka, 1989).

Women constitute 52% of the Kenyan population, yet no woman as earlier mentioned was permitted to participate fully in the formulation of the constitution. Can the document in its present form really claim to reflect or represent their values? Even the wording of the constitution would appear to be discriminatory. The constant use of "he" to denote all citizens of Kenya instead of he/she would seem contrary to the spirit of equality. As Kibwana (2003) notes, Section 70 of the constitution states that all Kenyans regardless of race, tribe, creed, and political affiliation shall enjoy the fundamental rights and freedom of:

- a) Liberty, life, security of the person and the protection of the law;
- b) Freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association;
- f) Protection of the privacy of his home and other property and from deprivation of property

without compensation.

At a glance the above section gives everybody their rights but until November 1997 after the IPPG reforms, discrimination on the basis of sex was not prohibited. Section 90 states that “ a person born outside Kenya after 11<sup>th</sup> December 1963 shall become a citizen of Kenya at the date of his birth if at that date his father is a citizen of Kenya.” But a child born outside of Kenya to a non-Kenyan father and a Kenyan mother is not a Kenyan. Similarly, a woman in Kenya cannot get an identity card, passport or any other identification document without her father or husbands consent. This implies that the Kenyan constitution is gender insensitive. Women are not given their rightful citizenship without identification to their husband’s or father’s. With the reviewing of the current constitution, however women have a chance to alter existing legal laws, which hinder their development. To do these, women need to work hand-in-hand with each other. Further they need to be aggressive and to ensure that laws that have been passed in their favour are implemented.

Following the minimum reform agitation in the 1990’s changes in the law permitted the nomination of candidates by their party except for the president. Half of all nominees according to the reforms were to be women. This did not occur. This demonstrates despite passing the laws, if the government does not have the political will to implement them nothing will change. The government needs to exempt itself from activities and movements such as the National MYWO. This is because, once the government is a stakeholder in such organizations, they most often than not co-opt the women from such organizations and hence these women may not advance fellow women’s interests for fear of victimization by the same government. Moreover, by excluding itself from such organizations they become popular. In the past regime for instance, the ruling party KANU had no ideology of addressing the women’s situation in the party and in the national women’s movement- MYWO. As

such, it was largely ineffective as a vehicle to champion women's political interests. Although MYWO was normally independent from the former ruling party, it suffered from its national and local leadership being co-opted into the government and thus drying up of grassroots' support (Wiper, 1975). Women in Kangema found this organization synonymous to KANU and hence withdrew their membership.

It should also be pointed out that although the former MYWO chairperson Jane Kiano hailed from Murang'a District- Kiharu Division, she did not at any one time address or even share with Murang'a women. This alone made women feel cheated and neglected. The organization was thus so unpopular in Murang'a as grass root women considered themselves cheated. They thought of Jane Kiano as unworthy and selfish; out to fulfill the government's interests together with her own self interest. Kangema women's limited contribution to political engagements may thus be attributed to the behaviour of such small cliques of women leaders elected by them, but who forget them on assuming office. This makes rural women to have stereotypes towards politics. This may explain why most women complained of women being their worst enemies since once they are involved in political campaigns and political organizations they easily fall victims to co-option by the men in power (Wairimu Mbuthia, O.I 2003). This respondent bemoaned the situation by giving an example of Kirimara Women Group, which collapsed due to their leader, a woman, employing her male kin in a shop they had purchased. She also pointed out that in 1989, when this woman was reappointed the leader of Iyego KANU Women Group, she danced to the tune of male district leaders who did not have the interest of these women at heart. Such women have thus sowed seeds of mistrust among majority of the rural and urban women.

Other residents, both men and women, complained of the feminized non-patrimonial nature of politics in Kangema. Most women argued that only wives, daughters and other female kin of male leaders are appointed to leadership positions be they local or national. They argued that no woman could be elected or appointed to any political office if she does not have a male “godfather”. This is what Amina Mama (1991) calls femocracy, where women leaders after election or appointment strive to uphold the interests of the males who facilitated their appointment. As elsewhere in Kenya, this state of affairs has resulted in women losing trust and confidence with fellow women. They thus opt to leave politics to men.

The structures and agenda of political parties are factors in consideration of women’s political participation. Many parties, reflecting the more general conditions in the rest of the society do not easily accept or promote many women into their echelons let alone women’s occupation of the important positions within the parties. This view is particularly important in the light of the current discussions about the overall role and functioning of political parties, and the concerns being raised about the political viability and popularity of such vehicles in the face of emerging alternative political entities such as non-governmental organizations. Political parties are the main avenues through which Kenyans can assert their presence and influence in the national and local politics. Unless people participate in the party politics, they cannot have an impact in the political arena. Unfortunately, the participation of women in party politics and leadership positions is very low both at the national and local levels. This can be explained in terms of the little attention given to the discrimination of women within political parties.

Although no political party has formulated rules and regulations that openly discriminate against women, such discrimination is implied. For instance, most of the political parties do not have any

aims and objectives addressing the participation of women, (Odicoh, 2001). This lack of reference is an indicator of the little space available to women within these political parties. Even for those parties that have these objectives, the ideas are only on paper. More often, these objectives are ignored when it comes to implementation. In addition to party based discrimination, women candidates and voters in Kangema cited hostility from their male counterparts as one of the reasons for their poor political performance. Actual violence or threats to violence intimidates women such that some women candidates and voters withdraw from vying or even voting before the exercise is over. Political campaigns are so insecure that women fear being assaulted during these campaigns and elections. To such women, this kind of intimidation strengthens the feeling that politics is indeed a dirty game. As Kihoro (O.I2003 an informant argued, one of the common campaign strategies used by Kenyan politicians is to embark on “meet- the- people” tour. This is usually done at night in drinking places. Political parties usually give cash handouts and free local brews for instance *muratina* in Kangema to win voters. This obviously put women at a disadvantage because drinking places and public gatherings at night are considered unfavourable for morally upright women among the Kikuyu. In such places, fighting is rampant and so is nasty language against women who are seen around such places. Indeed the abusive language used by drunkards is used not only to intimidate women opponents, but also to block women candidates from entering voting centres. Besides, night campaigns are unfavourable to women because of domestic duties and the fear that their fathers and/or husbands would suspect them of being involved in illicit affairs (Nzomo 1997).

#### **4.7 Summary and Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have discussed the numerous trends and transitions in Kenya during the Moi era and the effect that these had on the participation of women in politics in Kangema. It has been noted

that just like the former president, president Moi did not have any place for women. They remained relegated to the periphery in politics and in other fields. In consolidating power to his Kalenjin loyalists few women were appointed in leadership posts. Worse still Kenyatta loyalists were relieved of their leadership posts and this meant that women who solely relied on these men had to form social and economic groups otherwise called merry-go-round to sustain their families. Among the most affected were Kikuyu women whose husbands had been close to Kenyatta. Together with this, the collapse of agriculture left many Kikuyu women poor, as this was the main source of income. As has been discussed, one of the main prerequisite in politics is resources. The inadequacy of resources for women thus meant little if any involvement in politics.

It has also been noted that of the factors that hinder women from political participation, violence against women, the masculine party manifestos, and ignorance among women are the major factors. Due to their little education women seem not to be aware of their political rights as either candidates or/and voters and hence during elections women are easily manipulated and cheated to vote for men as women are considered their worst enemies.

It has also been observed that the year 1985 marked the end of the women's decade while ten years later the Beijing conference was held. These had far reaching effects on women as many of them, including the rural women, got some idea on the importance of campaigning for gender sensitive leaders. In Kangema women mobilized to campaign for Matiba whom they regarded as their saviour against the patriarchal KANU regime. In 1994 therefore, there were six women parliamentarians while there were eight in 1997. With several political mergers, 2002 has also witnessed the highest number of women parliamentarians. The review commission has a number of women representatives and generally the Kibaki government promises to be more gender balanced. The question that



remains unanswered is; are these women a representative of all women both poor and rich, both rural and urban? This is a question that needs further probing.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 CONCLUSION

In this study we set out to examine the participation of women in politics in Kangema beginning 1963 to 2002. From the outset, it was argued that despite women constituting more than half of Kenya's population, the political landscape is largely unfavourable for their participation in politics and decision-making particularly in national and local fora. It has also been noted that in Kikuyu land, women, before the advent of Europeans participated fully in political arenas together with men. Their responsibilities may have been different but not inferior to those of men. The society recognized their participation and the aspect of age determined what roles a woman was to play in the society. *Nyakinyua* women, for instance, concentrated on advising the council of elders in case of settling disputes. They were also charged with the initiation of young girls and of punishing younger women who had misbehaved. This was mostly done by asking the wrongdoer to pay several baskets of lablab beans to the culprit.

In problematising the analysis, an integrative approach was preferred. Patriarchy a branch of radical feminism and gender as a tool of analysis were employed.

#### 5.1 Gender and patriarchy; pre-colonial and colonial Fort hall

It was argued in chapter two that the pre-colonial Kikuyu community was designed in such a way that although men and women performed separate tasks, the worth of these duties was given equal recognition. The concept of superiority between the two sexes was therefore non-existent. As men engaged in leadership responsibilities in the society, women concentrated on advising the councils of elders and in the education of their children. In cases where disputes were to be settled, among

Thus, 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 example the missionaries wanted Kikuyu women to do away with clitoridectomy and polygamy, which the Kikuyu considered a fabric of their culture that could not be discarded. This resulted into antagonism between the missionaries and Kikuyu who boycotted and rioted against what they considered an abuse of their customs. The missionaries on the other hand sent away children, particularly girls, whose parents were for the tradition and also refused to offer training to circumcised girls. In addition, the colonialists sacked the men and women who supported the traditions and this gender segregation had a two-fold effect. One, men could not afford to pay poll and hut tax that colonialists had introduced to every man in a household. Two men could no longer sustain their households as the heads and providers in the family.

The study has however established that the Kikuyu society continued practicing these customs and engaged Europeans in several insurgencies. In the 1920s, for instance, Kikuyu women from Murang'a boycotted the inoculation exercises, which were to be done on their animals. They also refused to buy goods from the white men's premises and finally failed to attend the terracing exercises, which were manned by Europeans. This resulted in the arrest of several of them. The worst of the insurrections was the Mau Mau insurrection that lasted up to 1952 when a state of emergency was declared in Kenya. During these insurrections women actively participated by providing their menstrual flow to be used during the administration of higher oaths. 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 Kikuyu women just like other women elsewhere in Africa did not

wrongdoers in the society, women were consulted and their decisions respected. Both men and women also participated in the day-to-day activities of the community, such as farming, building of houses, trading and hunting and gathering. During farming as men tilled land women followed them planting seeds. In times of harvesting, men cut down the harvest especially of maize while women transported the harvest and stored it in the granaries. Moreover trade was carried out by both sexes. Women engaged in the purchase and sale of cereals, eggs, vegetables and herbs while men bought and sold animals such as cows and goats. This division of labour ensured that there was no discrimination against any of the sexes. The society thus had designed each role as per the capabilities of its members.

Although no discrimination was reported, men quite often considered women as inferior because they paid dowry to marry them. This made them act as superior within their households and could hence give orders on who was to do what and when.

With the advent of colonialism in Kenya in 1894, the independence of women was altered and most household duties were left to them. As has been discussed, the colonial system with its attendant forces was exploitive and oppressive. With its Victorian the ideology colonialists considered the place of the 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 Kikuyu 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 sphere meant that women were not to join trade unions and other organisations that were deemed political. To stamp this, men were enrolled in colonial and missionary schools while women were left out to perform domestic duties.

welcome the European concept of patriachalism and Victorianism. Most of them continued trading with their neighbours in the locality as well as with other communities including the Maasai and the Akamba. The study has finally established that by the time Kenya was gaining independence, women had organised themselves into welfare groups. Colonial administrators' wives had also started the MYWO, which most Kikuyu women rejected due to its association with colonialism.

## **5.2 Gender and Patriarchy; Trends and Transitions in Women's Political Participation in Kangema from 1963-2002.**

As has been argued, the attainment of independence in Kenya did not translate into a better political place for Kikuyu women whose relative position in politics was better before the advent of the colonialists. Although women were granted voting rights and could vie for any political post, the patriarchal nature and the roles that they were expected by the society to perform could not allow them. They remained marginalized even after fighting for independence. In addition, they continued to undertake the duties that men had abandoned as they left home in search of jobs. These double responsibilities left them with little or no time to participate in politics as they had earlier done.

When President Moi took over power from President Jomo Kenyatta, majority of the women groups particularly in central province had flourished, as there was a coffee and tea boom. Their monthly contributions had also doubled from twenty shillings to fifty. Women had therefore established for themselves in several business premises. In Kangema, women were selling baskets, mats, cereals animal feeds, pigs as well as animals. Again, the formation of AAWORD during this era, the establishment of the Women's Bureau and the declaration of 1975 as the International Women's year had generally proved a forward-looking step towards the emancipation of women. The society as a

whole had begun to look at women as active members whose ideas in the development of the country could not be ignored. They were no longer to be viewed as appendages of men. Although not much was achieved particularly at the local level during the early years of the establishment of such bodies, and the declaration of 1975-1985 as the women's decade, president Moi took over power at a time when women were beginning to be enlightened through such forums as education and in their informal groups.

As has been noted, Moi did not mention women in his development agenda. Therefore, the decrease in the coffee boom in the 1980s and the attempted *coup detat* in 1982 resulted in a decreased involvement by women in the established groups and organisations. Moi took advantage of the women's vulnerable situation of poverty and suggested that women were supposed to perform domestic duties instead of forming groups and engaging in political activities. It should be stressed here that although women did not actively participate in the 1982 coup, leaders considered them part of it since their fathers; brothers and/or husbands participated in the attempted overthrow of the government. Women thus declined in their group participation more so because of the poverty caused by drought and the diminishing boom from coffee.

After the declaration by leaders that women were supposed to be assisted by men in their endeavours, men took advantage and exacerbated their exploitation of women. Patriarchy was to be further solidified when the institution of bridewealth was commercialised. As noted, during the Kenyatta era, few animals plus some money was paid as dowry. However, Moi era witnessed the institution further monetised. Heated debates accompanied bridewealth and the number of animals increased. To worsen the issue in Kangema instead of using animals as dowry, a conversion rate was reached whereby, for instance, if a bride was "worth" ten goats and four cows this were converted at the market rate and

money given to the bride's clan. Women were also exempted from the discussion as men considered themselves as the sole heads of their families. Society became insensitive to women during such debates and women were further marginalized.

However, the end of the women's decade in 1985 witnessed an improved awareness by women of their rights. The adoption by most governments of the convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which became operational in the early 1980s, meant that most governments including, Kenya, had recognised the importance of integrating women in their development agenda.

Moi era also saw an increment in girls' education. The declaration of universal free education in 1979 resulted in most girls enrolling in schools. This increased awareness of their rights through reading such pamphlets and reports as AAWORD, Nairobi Forward-Looking strategies that clearly indicated that if development has to be achieved in Africa generally, women were to be integrated in policy and decision-making organs.

The era as has been established also witnessed the advent of the second multiparty politics in the 1990s. At this time, women had actively mobilised themselves and had lobbied for the recognition of their rights. Women scholars such as Dr. Maria Nzomo had written extensively on the plight of women. The government was hence aware of the demands of women and during this time Nyiva Mwendwa was nominated to parliament. Although representing the interests of the government also advocated for an increment in the number of women MPs. The patriarchal nature of Kenyan politics could not allow for this and she was later dismissed. During the 1997 general elections due to the women's awareness of their rights most women turned up to vote. Although few voted for the then

woman presidential candidate, the fact that 45% of the women voted unlike about 40% in the earlier years meant that woman had recognised that they were also capable of leading and influencing the country's policies through their vote. Towards the decline of the Moi regime, most women through civic education lobbying from fellow educated women had become aware of their political rights and were hence willing to vote and generally participate in politics in large numbers. Hence, in Kangema almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the women populace turned out during the 2002 general elections to vote for president Kibaki who they hoped would meet their marginalized demands. The Kibaki government although consisting of more men than women has witnessed an increased number of women heading various ministries while others acting as assistant ministers. The nominated women also indicate that the government has probably finally recognised the significance of women in development and hence in governance. Their involvement in the constitutional review process is also a positive trend that cannot be overlooked as the making of the constitution in the 1960's only reported a single woman.

That notwithstanding, it has been observed that women in Kangema generally have showed decreased political involvement despite the efforts by the government and the wider women populace. The reasons for this have been cited as patriarchy, religion, inadequate education, deeply engrained traditions such as commoditisation of bride wealth and generally the commercialised nature of politics in Kenya. In addition, it has been noted that most party manifestos do not have provisions for gender equality and even for those that have, the provisions are only there in theory. It has been observed that the participation of women in politics in Mathioya is lower than that in Kangema division. This is because of the dominance of the Catholic Church in Mathioya with its conservative nature as regarding sexuality. Other factors that have been identified include the low level enrollment of girls in school and the high levels of poverty in the surrounding areas making their concentration less in politics.



In conclusion it has been established generally that women in Kangema are increasingly expressing the desire and a willingness to participate in the political sphere. In view of the above findings and conclusions the following recommendations are suggested. To improve the level of women's political participation in Kangema, several actors need to be incorporated. These include the society, the government political parties, women movements and non-governmental organizations. As for the society, parents' educators and other members of the society need to change their perceptions regarding the socialization of the girl-child. Educators and policy makers need to make education of the girl-child responsive to the societal needs including employment and information access. As for the government there is need for commitment in establishing the goal of gender balance within government bodies, committees as well as in public *inter alia*. As the Beijing Platform For Action advocates, there is need for setting specific targets and implementing measures to sustainability, increase the number of women with a view of achieving equal representation of women and men. This is if necessary through positive action in all governmental and public administration positions.

Further, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations, trade unions and professional organizations need to build and strengthen solidarity among women through education, information and sensitization activities. Political parties also need to incorporate gender issues in their political agenda taking measures to ensure that women participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men.

As Kabaji (1997) observes, the reality of the times has shown that it is no longer necessary for the society to be chained by the doctrines of past cultures and tradition sustained and nurtured by former colonial masters. Every man and woman in Kangema is obliged and should feel free to participate in

the political activities of the country in order to make it a better place. It is through mutual spirit that this can be achieved. There is therefore need for civic education to enlighten women and the general public on their responsibility to support women into political leadership. Sustainable development in Kenya should underline the need to improve the status and rights of women in the society.

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## APPENDIX i

### SAMPLE QUESTION

NAME

DATE

PLACE OF INTERVIEW

LOCATION

SUB-LOCATION

OCCUPATION

SEX

AGE

#### Colonial era

1. Were women participating in politics in colonial Mathioya? If yes describe their participation
2. What role did women play in the political associations such as KCA, KADU and KANU?
3. Which role did they play in Mau Mau and what was their anticipation?
4. How successful were women's political activities?
5. Were there difficulties faced by women in their political activities? If so explain.
6. Were men supportive of women in their political activities?
7. Were women supportive of each other?
8. What aspects of colonialism affected women in their political participation?
9. How did women respond to them?
10. What were some of the initiatives taken by men and women to enhance women's political participation?
11. Which basic changes have taken place in women's political involvement from 1963?
12. Are women's political experiences better after independence? If so explain
13. Are there some cultural, economical, political or otherwise beliefs that discriminate or promote women's role in politics?

#### MULTIPARTY ERA

1. Describe the nature of women in the politics of Multipartism?
2. Has women's political involvement improved in any way during the multiparty politics? If so explain.
3. Are women interested in party politics? If so explain.
4. How popular was women presidential aspirant (Hon. Ngilu) in this area?
5. Are men supportive of women? Are women supportive of other women?
6. Did women vie for political positions during the last two multiparty elections? If so explain

**MEASURES UNDERTAKEN TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS**

1. Are there some attempts by men or women in this area to increase women's participation in politics? How effective are they? Or can you evaluate their effectiveness
2. Are there any women groups in this area? If so, are these groups centres of political mobilisation? By which men or women are this women groups made of?
3. Are men supportive of women's political endeavours? If so how successful are they?
4. Are women interested in politics in this area?. If so why?
5. In your own opinion what can enhance women's political participation in this area?

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## APPENDIX ii

## LIST OF INFORMANTS

NAME	SEX	AGE	DATE OF INTERVIEW
ANTHONY KANDUIYI	M	74	13 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
BEATRICE NJERI	F	53	21 <sup>st</sup> April 2003
BENSON MUCHOKI	M	31	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
CATHERINE NJERI	F	57	8 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
CHEGE NDUNGU	M	47	11 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
CHEGE S. NGUNGU	M	31	14 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
CHEGE NYAGA	M	57	18 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
DAMARIS WAIYEGO	F	55	27 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
DAMARIS WANGARI	F	64	4 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
EGLA WAIRIMU MWANGI	F	59	5 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
ERICK KABUI	M	71	6 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
ESTHER MBAA	F	52	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2003
GACHUNJI KIBIRI	M	46	13 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
GAKUYO MAINA	M	53	19 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
GICHOHI NDUGIRE	M	55	25 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
GILBERT KAMAU JESSE	M	34	20 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
GITUKU KIMATHI	M	55	9 <sup>th</sup> April 2003
JAMES MUTHEE	M	45	17 <sup>th</sup> December 2002
JOHN MAINA	M	37	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2003
KANYARI MAHITA	F	53	12 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
KANYATA MUTHAA	F	34	30 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
KENNEDY KIHORO	M	54	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
KARANJA WAMBUI	M	43	29 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
KARUBA MUGURU	M	32	17 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
KIRAGU KARIUKI	M	34	20 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
MAINA WANJOGO	M	56	26 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
MATAHE IRUNGU	M	57	19 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
MARGARET WANGECHI	F	54	26 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
MUGURE GAKUYO	F	35	14 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
NELIUS WAIRIMU ARNOLD	F	45	31 <sup>st</sup> August 2003
NGAHU CHIEF	M	43	12 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
NYAMBURA MBAA	F	67	28 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
RAHAB MUNYUTU	F	63	16 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
ROSEMARY GATHITU	F	59	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2003
TRUPHENA NYERERE	F	62	16 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
WAHU GITUANJA	F	29	13 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
WAIGERA MUNYINYI	M	57	21 <sup>st</sup> May 2003



WAIRIMU MBUTHIA	F	42	25 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
WAITHERA CHEGE	F	29	8 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
WAITHERA MAINGI	F	45	18 <sup>th</sup> April 2003
WAITHERA NGUMO	F	36	23 <sup>rd</sup> July 2003
WAMBUI WANYEKI	F	46	19 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
WANGARI DUNCAN	F	56	25 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
WANGARI MBAA	F	43	4 <sup>th</sup> May 2003
WANGARI MUCHINA MBAA	F	53	13 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
WANGARI GICHIGO	F	67	12 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
WANJIKU CHEGE	F	34	17 <sup>th</sup> June 200
WANJIKU GICHIGO	F	45	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
WANJIKU KAHURE	F	54	14 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
WANJIKU MUTHERI	F	34	7 <sup>th</sup> may 2003
WANJIRU ZACHARIA	F	61	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2003
WILSON KIBIRI GATHII	M	57	17 <sup>th</sup> April 2003
ZACHARIA KAMAU	M	70(deceased)	21 <sup>st</sup> July 2003
ZABLON MWANGI	M	43	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2003

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**APPENDIX iii****LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Membership of Kenya National Assembly by year and Gender from 1969-1979

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Population by Sex and Province in Kenya of Reading Ability in any Language, 1995

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# LOCATION OF THE DISTRICT



LIBRARY

# MURANGA DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES

