



Political Discourses, Women's Voices: Mismatches in Representation

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Abstract

This paper is part of a larger project whose overall aim is to investigate the representation of women's issues in Makueni District, a rural district in Kenya, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The study explores the mismatches between the way politicians select and represent these issues and the way women construct these issues in women's groups. This paper focuses on representations of women's agency. How women construct their agency is contrasted with that of politicians and community leaders. This social science research is multidisciplinary and crosses the fields of language, gender studies and politics. Data was collected by use of focus group discussions, political speeches and interviews. The data for the entire study consisted of eleven focus group discussions with women's groups, four political speeches and ten interviews with politicians and other community leaders. This article is based on four focus group discussions, and four interviews. The analysis focuses on the use of pronouns and modality. Each of these linguistic features provides a different lens on the data which enables us to understand the construction of agency. While women, politicians and other community leaders construct women's agency within deficit discourses, these discourses do not match women's enacted practices or what political and community leaders say they expect of women. The contradiction inherent in the study is that everyone constructs women as lacking in agency, yet these women act as agentive subjects.

Key words: Agency, representation, political discourse, women's issues, women's group.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the construction of women's agency by both women in women's groups as well as by politicians and other community leaders in Makueni District-Kenya. Here, the focus is on women's agency based on their construction of their issues with particular emphasis on the use of modality and pronouns. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as a means to uncover the subtle ways in which language reveals issues of power and

ideology. Although women's issues appear to be at the core of sustainable development discourse, the crucial role of language as a possible source of understanding their agency has been ignored. Yet text and talk are the most important ways in which people construct reality and have come to be core units of analysis in the area of CDA. Texts are the products of linguistic actions (Wodak 2001: 66) and talk produces spoken texts. Much work on discourse as social interaction focuses on conversation and dialogue as found in face-to-face encounters (van Djik 1997; Brown and Yule 1983). The term 'agency' is used in this study with reference to Fairclough (2003: 22) who defines it as the capacity of people to act freely, while recognising the limitations of agency thus, 'social agents are not 'free' agents, they are socially constrained, but nor are their actions totally socially determined'. The term representation is used in this paper in two senses: the first is 'political representation', how women are represented in the political system in terms of numbers. The second sense is 'discursive representation' which is concerned with how women are portrayed or constructed and how they construct themselves.

In this paper we argue that both women and community leaders construct women's agency within deficit discourses that do not match either women's enacted practices or the expectations that political and community leaders have of them. The contradiction inherent in the findings of the study is that everyone constructs women as lacking in agency, yet these women act as agentive subjects. In view of this, we argue that the way women construct themselves and are constructed by others enables us to understand their levels of involvement in both the political process and in social action.

2. Agency as a Women's Issue in Rural Kenya

Global perspectives addressing women's issues can be traced from the World Conference on women: the first in Mexico 1975, the second in Copenhagen 1980, the third in Nairobi 1985 and the fourth in Beijing in 1995. In Kenya, this period saw the development of welfare associations at the local and national levels. For example self-help women's groups popularly known as merry-go-rounds were working at the local level; *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* Organization (Women in Development) focused on specific women's objectives at the national level. At the same time, a number of professional organizations began to interrogate the unchallenged value and belief systems that reinforce the subordination of women in society. These included the Association of African Women for Research and Development, the National Council of Women in Kenya (NCWK), the Forum of African Women Educationists (FAWE), the International Federation of Women Lawyers (IFWL) and Kenya League of Women Voters (KLWV). The growth of women's groups in Kenya is positively connected to support notably from the government and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Though several scholars provide insightful analyses of women's groups in Kenya (Chitere 1988; Lewa 2002) viewing the women's groups in the context of the women's movement as most of them do is erroneous. This is a test case of the treatment of women in a monolithic way and it often led to the obscuring the actual needs of women's groups at the expense of the national organization.

The feminist movement as conceived by the elite women's organizations while aimed at transformation differs significantly from women's groups whose key pre-occupation is sustainability.

Women constitute 52% of the adult population and 60% of the voting population in Kenya, making them the majority especially in rural areas (Khasiani 2000). Due to their numeric advantage one would expect them to play a significant role in elections since their voter turn-out would be higher than that of men. However, the Electoral Commission of Kenya registration figures for the 2002 elections in Makueni Constituency show fewer women than men (ECK 2002): 38,446 women were registered compared to 40,100 men. Consequently, women's numerical strength does not seem to translate to a higher vote and therefore to increased attention to women's concerns and interests. In other words, despite having good numbers in terms of political representation, there is not a matching increase in voting patterns. Khasiani's study also showed that a third of the women in Makueni District cannot read or write. Research by Zubair (2003) in Pakistan suggests that high literacy increases women's agency while low literacy diminishes women's agency. Since most women in the district are illiterate this has serious implications for their participation in the political process and their increased agency.

A historical perspective is important in trying to understand women's agency. Citing evidence from history, Adhiambo-Oduol (2001) argues that African communities are either matrilineal or patrilineal. Amadiume (1987) in her book *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, based on research on the Igbo community in Nigeria, argues that economic changes in colonial times undermined women's status and reduced their political role such that patrilineal tendencies persist today to the detriment of women. Kanogo (2005) expresses similar sentiments based on research in the Kikuyu community in Kenya observing that on the eve of the colonial era, women were embedded in gendered constructions of power, authority and ownership of and access to property in a manner that publicly diminished their individual agency. While there is more change in the urban areas, for the present study, women are constructed in a more rural, traditional set up with fixed roles for men and women. Due to rural-urban migration, most of the men have left to the towns in search of formal employment.

A review of the literature has revealed agency as a major theme in the discussion of key issues that affect women such as education, leadership, poverty, water and rape (Khasiani 2000; Kanogo 2005; Ndambuki 2006). A needs assessment conducted by Khasiani (2001) among women in Makueni showed that socioeconomic and cultural governance (defined as access to and control of resources, improved social status, and participation in economic decision-making to ensure equity) remains elusive. The trend in Kenyan political discourse has over the last two decades been characterized by efforts towards gender equality and working towards fairness for both genders especially in making opportunities available for leadership roles, yet women continue to be excluded in the political process. Thus women's participation in political decision-making is mostly peripheral. Attempts to explain this trend in Kenya, for instance by Khasiani (2001), have focused mainly on the

social-economic and political factors that contribute to the marginalization of women.

In known contemporary societies, power relations are often asymmetrical such that women's interests are systematically subordinated to men's. In Wodak's view, many empirical studies have neglected the context of language behavior and have often analyzed gender by merely looking at the speaker's biological sex (1997: 1). As a result, she proposes that a context-sensitive approach which looks at gender as a social construct would lead to more fruitful results i.e. a look at gender in connection with the socio-cultural and ethnic background of the interlocutors, and in connection with their age, their level of education, their socio-economic status, and the power-dynamics of the discourse investigated; some of the factors which this study has taken into consideration.

At the beginning of 2008, the situation of women in Kenya was exacerbated by the post-election violence that followed the December 2007 elections. Women's ability to sustain their communities has been further eroded by their displacement. The 'National Accord and Reconciliation Bill' subsequently passed in parliament was designed to restore human rights and to secure a safe environment for vulnerable groups mainly women and children. This study comes amid calls for 'issue-based politics' in Kenya that will address the needs of the electorate. Agency is linked to the question of power which is realized in two spheres: in macro-level civic politics and in everyday micro-level interaction through social practices. In Kenya, both of these are shaped by patriarchal discourses. The politics of gender intersect with civic politics such that representation in the political sense and representation in the semiotic sense intertwine. Representation in language and discourse is fundamental to the articulation of policies and actions for the public good. Gendered social relations contribute to the prevailing conditions for the production and reception of texts. Our argument is that the possibilities that exist for women's semiotic representation of themselves affect their political representation.

2.1 Popkewitz' Critique of Agency

In contemporary discourse studies, it is assumed that anything working towards increasing self-actualising agency is a good thing. It is believed that human agency is necessary for people to act in order to transform their conditions of life. This is part of the motivation for this study. However, Popkewitz (2007) in his book *Cosmopolitanism and the Age of School Reform* provides a useful critique of agency. In Popkewitz' view, cosmopolitanism brings to the surface the importance and limits of the qualities and characteristics of modern life that order what 'we' are, what 'we' should be and who is enabled to be that 'we'. He argues that these very practices meant to include simultaneously exclude. Today, that 'other' is placed in a space inside but recognized to be included and different (Morrison 1992, cited in Popkewitz 2007: 35). In his words, 'today, the abject are given the categories of disadvantaged, urban, at risk, and the left behind, recognized for inclusion and paradoxically radically cast out as different' (Popkewitz 2007: 172). This view of cosmopolitanism succinctly brings out the paradox of agency in that despite being seen as the way to empower those seen as being in need, it

actually excludes them further. Popkewitz' critique is typical of how most development discourses have represented women's marginalization; this study opens up different possibilities by investigating women's issues from the point of view of the women themselves.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study was carried out in Mbitini Division, a rural division in Makueni District in the eastern part of Kenya. The data for the entire research consists of eleven tape-recorded focus group discussions (qualitative group interviews) of between 40-60 minutes each, ten interviews with politicians and other community leaders and four political speeches. This paper is based on only four focus group discussions and four interviews. After explaining the research to a meeting of each of the women's groups they then agreed among themselves who would remain behind for the focus group discussion. The meetings were held at places where the participants felt comfortable such as the women's project sites, at their homes and at the market place. The Kikamba texts were first transcribed into English and after systematic thematic content analysis, purposive selection was used to identify key texts for CDA analysis.

3.2 Data Analysis

The data is analyzed within a Critical Discourse Analytic framework, an approach that advocates increased awareness in the use of language to promote the welfare of marginalized groups (Fairclough 1989). Key scholars who have contributed immensely to debates in CDA include (Fairclough, 1995; van Djik 1997, 2001; Wodak 1997, 2001; Blommaert 2005) etc. In Fairclough's approach to CDA, individuals are seen as agents capable of constructing their own agency in their daily interaction. The framework presents power as embedded in social relations. CDA is able to show that the semiotic representation of social actors and agency is based on linguistic choices. Fairclough's model of CDA involves a description of both the social processes and structures that give rise to the production of a text. He conceptualizes these relations using a three dimensional view of discourse that includes analysis of text (spoken or written), discourse practices (process of text production and interpretation) and an analysis of the socio-cultural conditions that affect the production and interpretation of texts. In this paper the focus is on pronouns, voice and modality as analytic lenses.

In addition to Fairclough's framework, we use the concept of habitus developed by Bourdieu (1990, 1991). One's habitus is a set of predispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain predisposed ways. These dispositions generate practices, perceptions, and attitudes which are regular and which help us to understand how and why the women in this study see themselves as capable of transformative social action or not.

4. Women's Construction of their Agency

This section analyses transcripts of the women's focus group discussions in order to provide examples of how women construct their agency.¹

4.1 Pronouns as an Analytical Lens

A critical examination of the data indicates that participants characterize themselves in a 'discourse of suffering'. For example, one of the women in a focus group discussion describes it thus;

Text (1)

Nituthinaa ovaa tutena mundu wautwonia mbee. Na nengi andu makaleaa kwonua mbee komesa kumbuka.

We suffer here with no one to show us ahead. And if people are not shown ahead, can they really emerge?

By using of the plural object -infix '-tu-' (we), the women construct themselves as a 'suffering community' that needs a leader to show them the way. Despite a culture of community, in which women's group are deliberately constructed to give members the support of the collective, women construct themselves in a discourse which focuses on the centrality of an individual leader. In other words, they do not see the power that exists when they work together collectively. The women do not understand that community action underpins their sustainability not individual power. Their agency is based on the mutual support that women give one another, not on the power of an individual leader.

Morrison and Love (1996: 59) underscore the role of the pronoun 'we' used to define 'who we are'. They contend this is especially pronounced in periods of upheaval (as in the problematic times of the women's national organization in the last decade in Kenya) or national resurgence during which there is usually an attempt to redefine or reassert a particular identity construction. This involves identity differentiation between 'us' as the powerless women versus 'them' (the powerful national women's organization) in the context of polarity that exists between the rural women and the urban presumably elite women in Kenya. More specifically for this paper, women also construct themselves as the 'other' as in the development discourses that Popkewitz critiques.

The women represent themselves in an impersonal way. They refer to themselves as 'people' and use the third person plural pronoun suffix '-ma-' 'they' which gives women a generic reference. According to Fairclough (2003: 150) generic reference is often associated with the universal and hence by use of the generic pronoun 'they', the women construct a particular 'we-community' which exhibits the suffering of rural women in general in the local and global community. What is foregrounded is their suffering, not their actions that sustain their families. For example in the area of study, the majority of men have left for the urban centers to look for employment; the result of this is that men are absent leaving the women to fend for themselves. The women pool their resources together and look out for each other. They do what needs to be done with limited resources in order to survive. This action sustains them but just, for them it is survival.

4.2 Active and Passive Voice as a Lens

In the following text, the women use a combination of passive and active voice.

Text (2)

Indi nengi neeko kakyama, nambaokutunga muvea, nathi naa...nakuu Wote, nambo kutungomuvea. Ninanengwe okindu, tinathi tinaaka ngolova ndaaona ngolova kuu kiima ninamyonia. Vu nasya nuseo.

Then I performed a miracle. I want to give thanks, I went ...I went to Wote and I was given something (support). Then we went and built a storied building. I had never seen a storied building here at the hills, now I saw it. For that I was grateful'

The speaker emphasizes her individual agency by the constant use of active verbs ‘neeko’ ‘I did’, *ninathi ninanengwa* (I went and I was given). The speaker’s emphasis on her individual contribution to change in the group might be interpreted to indicate a struggle to express her leadership role as one of the committee members in the women’s group. Whitely and Muli (1962) note that in the Kamba language, it is necessary to insert an object – infix whenever the object of a verb is not mentioned; e.g. *-n-eeko* (I did *it*), *ni-n-athi ni-n-anengwa* (I went and I was given *something*). The shift in the use of the singular pronoun ‘*n-*’ ‘I’ to the plural pronoun ‘*ti-*’ ‘we’ within the same utterance represents a shift in her construction of agency as within the collective. Further, the shift from the use of the active to the passive presents a contradiction in the way the women represent themselves. The use of the passive ‘was given’ constructs the women as dependent on the support or handouts of others. They beg for handouts constructing themselves as being unaware of their rights to services such as water and healthcare. What is interesting is that this quotation from the data shows the women as taking the initiative, as capable of action. There is other evidence to show that women make things happen. For example:

Text (3)

Nundu wakwithia miaka yi ovau inavitie tinai thinani tuteavuanisye. Tinavuaniw'a tioona ngwatonio noyo itonya utuokoa'. Na tinoona tikwatane twake nyumba tenu ... (points to a house) nakiwe no kikundi...

because some years back we were in problems because we were not enlightened, and then we saw, we got enlightened and saw that unity is the one that can save us...and we saw let us unite or let us build a house like this one and that other one I was built for by the group).

Statements like the one above show that women are aware that they have been able to ‘do’ something for themselves and the community and that this impacts positively on their lives. The choice of the pronoun ‘*ti-*’ ‘we’ also reflects the women’s sense of collective action. This collectivity is seen in the use of action words such as ‘unite’ and ‘build’ in the expression ‘*tikwatane twake*’ (let us unite and build a house). Coppock et al. (2006) in their study on the creation and governance of women’s groups in arid Northern Kenya underscore the importance of collective action as a basis for transformation of women’s lives and the lives of other community members. The action women

take to sustain themselves and their communities demonstrates their agency and constitutes them as the ‘rock’ that hold things together, not just individually but collectively. Another participant put it this way:

Text (4)

Yu ukethia ni kana kaaiwa ni viisi tukombanisya inyia tukamutwaia viisi. Nitutwaite twana tuna ivinda yiu vala tunaamukile natuyuka tuyikala nthi tuyasya kana kaa keeititwa sukulu va na tuka tuyikata? nituukainua tunenge inyia mbesa nethaake mbesa atwae kana sukulu’.

Now if there is a child without fees we collect it for the mother and take it to her. We have taken four children since the time we awoke and we sit down and say this child has been taken to this school, and let’s do what? Let us uplift him/her and give her mother and her father fees to take her/his child to school.

From the text above, use of the pronoun ‘we’ combined with the active verb ‘-twaite’ meaning ‘taken’ indicates the women’s active contribution to the process of social transformation. They construct themselves as agents capable of change.

On the whole, however, women construct themselves as lacking agency. Their sense of their dependency on NGOs appears to erase their sense of agency. Let us look at the text that follows;

Text (5)

Inter: Nuu uminite kuete utethyo?

Resp: Utethyo usu twanengiwe ni serikali kutukwatania na donor yakuma Denmark, va nivo serikali yatuiteie donor isu vaa na niyo yatunenge maujusi asu.

Inter: Who has supported this group in any way?

Resp: We were given that support by the government through a donor from Denmark. And that is when the Government brought the donor here and that is how it (donor) has given us those skills.

In this text, the close collaboration between the government and NGOs is shown. However unlike text 3 where agency was with the women, agency in text 5 may be said to be with the NGO and the government and not with the women themselves. They construct themselves as done-to’s in the use of the pronoun ‘-tu-’ (us) in the expressions ‘yatuiteie’ (it brought us) and ‘yatunenge’ (it gave us).

Prompted on the form of support, the women indicated that they have acquired skills in various areas but ironically another problem has been created, the problem of where to market their finished products.

4.2.1 Passive Voice

Fairclough (2003) observes that where the passive voice is used to construct social actors, their subjugation to processes is accentuated and they are seen as being affected by the actions of others.

Text (6)

Syiasani kana ila tusyitaa politics aka aingi nimakothete kuimwa nafasi kati ka kusakuwa mautongoi ukethia yu twiw'a ta ivinda yimwe twalilikana siasa inai vau iina nthini wa nthi yaitu, mama ula wetasya kivila kya usumbi akilasya aungama aneena munduume ula ekwiw'a ena vinya wauneenania nake atasya ndesa unyuva mama ta musumbi, tiw'o ningi?

In politics, many women are denied an opportunity in leadership positions, like for instance if we remember the last elections in our country, the woman who was vying for a presidential post, whenever she stood to speak any man who thought they had the energy to speak also stood up and said that he would never choose a woman as a president, isn't that true?

In text 6, the expression '*Syiasani... aka aingi nimakothete kuimwa nafasi*' [In...politics, many women are denied an opportunity] uses the passive voice to construct women as helpless in the face of their political marginalization by men. All men need is the energy to open their mouths. Rather than seeing this patriarchal discourse as a challenge, the women allow it to shape their horizons of possibility and to prevent their participation in politics. In the context of patriarchal discourses, women are constructed in deficit discourses that show negative subject positions for women whereby they are not allowed out of their traditional roles despite the fact that men have abrogated responsibility.

4.2.2 Modality

Modality is another of the grammatical resources for interpersonal meanings identified by Halliday (1985). In the Kamba language, modality is realized by the term '*ukethia*' with variants such as '*uketha*' and '*ketha*' all of which generally mean 'if it were possible'. Despite women taking an active role in their lives, as seen in previous texts, it is interesting the way they repeatedly represent themselves in deficit terms as seen in text 7.

Text (7)

Resp: Taketha notwona mundu eutusyaisya atakatumanthia order na muthenya muna niw'o muukita kwitawa na kuetewe mbesa. Kau to kaindu?

Resp: Now if we had someone to get orders for us and on such and such a day you will be brought the money. Isn't that something?

Despite the fact that the women manage to take orders for their produce, here the respondent laments the absence someone else to do this. This reflects a constant refrain in their talk: 'Who will do this for us? The choice of the words '*tutietewe mbesa*' [we be brought money] implies that buyers should bring money rather than that the women should sell the produce. Syntactically, the women position themselves in object position rather than as subjects. Further, the use of the pronoun 'you' constructs women as the 'you-community' referencing the universal community of rural women as in deficit, supporting Popkewitz's views on agency. In addition, the use of the Kamba term '*taketha*' equivalent to the English expression 'if it were possible' suggests wishful thinking. In this text, the speaker positions women as lacking in agency by her use of syntax and modality.

The majority of the women indicate that support from government for education would help them to begin income generating activities and alleviate poverty.

Text (8)

Inter: Mavata menu kisioni kii ta aka nimo meku?

Resp: Mavata maitu kisioi kii tukwatanitye kikundi kii twakee na tuisomethya.

Inter: mm

Resp: Undu ula muneene viu wimaana kwitu ni kisomo yu ukethia nitukwata utethyo kisioni kii, ukethia andu ala manengae andu kindu nimatuliikakana, makatwikisya kindu (itheka).

Inter: What are your needs as women in this division?

Resp: Our needs in this division we have come together as a group to build and educate

Inter: Mm

Resp: The greatest concern for us is education. If we could get support in our area, if the people who give people something can remember us and give us something (laughter).

In text 8, women identify education and building [houses] as key needs. The use of the plural pronoun '*tu-*' 'we' in the word '*tukwatanitye*' (we have united) indicates the collective which enables them to take action to achieve their goals. In this text women recognize the value of education which a lot of studies have established as a precondition for development. Further use of the double modal '*ukethia*' constructs their desire for education as conditional on their getting support.

Together these extracts suggest that there is a mismatch between what the women say and what they do. There is a disjunction in the way the women produce a highly negative construction of themselves as unable to act without hand-outs and what they manage to achieve. In Text 8 women refer to themselves as 'unremembered', a forgotten constituency, particularly in relation to funding. Yet they do so with laughter. Laughter sustains them. What is interesting is that in reality the women *do* educate their children without support from an unnamed source. Yet their talk reproduces them as dependent subjects, rather than as agentive.

5. Representation of Women's Agency by Politicians and Other Community Leaders

The previous section has looked at the construction of women's agency by women in women's groups. This section now turns to look at the representation of women's agency by politicians and other community leaders in interviews. The first part focuses on pronouns while the second part focuses on modality.

5.1 Pronouns as a Lens

On the whole, the politicians appear to perpetuate the use of deficit discourses just like the women themselves to construct women's agency. Text 9 provides an example.

Text (9)

Resp: yeah, mostly women are not very good in politics. They are not very good. *Uangalie kama mama Ndetei*, (like when you look at mother Ndetei), I would like to give you that example. *Alikuja akawa mbunge* (she became an MP) and we had a lot of backing for that lady. *Na siasa yake ilikuwa nzuri sana* (and politics was very good). Lakini you can be played. But politics can be played on you.

Inter: you mean on women?

Resp: Politics are played on women, unaona (you see)... Lakini (but) women, you see the other time there was this funny story about Ngilu. *Unaona ooka* (you see she came) *na ni siasa anafanyiwa, siasa* (and it is politics being played on her).

The use of the plural form of the third person pronoun ‘they’ constructs women in generic terms as poor in politics. The claim that ‘*women are not very good in politics*’ represents the feeling of most male politicians and leaders that women are deficient in politics as a male dominated domain. The text constructs women as ‘done-tos’ as seen in the expression ‘politics are played on them’. The use of ‘them’ shows women as ‘non-agents’ in politics. In other words, they are objects on which action is taken (by men who are dominant). Similarly, the speaker constructs women as ‘done-tos’ in the use of the pronoun ‘her’ in object position. This implies that ‘politics is played on them’. The two examples ‘Mama Ndetei’ and ‘Ngilu’ cited in the text refer to two women parliamentarians who were involved in scandals. The respondent chooses to omit the scandals by referring to them as the ‘funny’ story. The two women had allegedly been involved in sex scandals. Sexualization of scandals involving women is common in politics and often seeks to discredit female politicians and generally portrays them as unfit for public office.

The politicians and other community leaders have constructions similar to the women; they see women as agentive in collective action but represent them as having no power in the collective. For example:

Text (10)

Women are pro-unity. Yes eh women are more pro-unity than men. A good example is majority of the self-help groups I have are of women. And you cannot have these merry-go-rounds; in fact majority of them 99% of them are women. It is just in few cases, it's just a rare case that you find a merry-go-round for men where you find a merry-go-round for men, but when we come to trust not with men. Not with men at all at all. In fact majority of the women’s groups, all the women’s groups in general, people feel more comfortable when the treasurer is a woman.

In the repeated naming of ‘women’; ‘women are...women are pro-unity...’ the leader recognizes the collective in women as seen in the merry-go-round, however the speaker does not see women as having power in the collective. The reason for failure by this respondent to acknowledge women’s power in the collective might be because politicians know the danger in acknowledging this power.

In terms of representation, women are constructed as non-agents:

Text (11)

I think so far ladies have not woken up to realize that they can represent themselves. Two, ladies do suffer most of the ladies suffer most because they do not know their rights and three, they do suffer because they are not properly represented and four because of shyness and shyness is brought about because of brought about by lack of education, lack of exposure, and many other aspects.

Inter: Can you please explain those points especially on representation?

Resp: One representation, let's come down to the women's groups.

Inter: m

Resp: when they happen to come and they want to forward their needs, they feel more comfortable when sending a man than when sending their fellow ladies.

In the three texts above, women are constructed in a discourse of suffering similar to that used by the women. This creates a similarity between the way women and politicians represent women using the third person plural pronoun 'they'. This constructs women in generic terms, associating them with the universal conditions of poverty and inability generally in the world. This kind of representation denies women agency. The use of the term 'ladies' instead of women might also be interpreted to indicate the speaker's attitude that politics is a male domain which females ought to stay out of. Further use of the first person pronoun by the speaker 'I' reflects an individualistic representation of politicians as social actors. It gives them a sense of 'power and ownership' over the women. The politicians produce an 'us' versus 'them' discourse, a binary opposition in which politicians are constructed as educated, intelligent and all knowing while the women are constructed as unintelligent (they do not know their rights), uneducated (they suffer due to lack of education) and poor (in need). All these discourses maintain and reproduce deficit discourses that continue to present women as 'non-agentive' in the political process.

5.2 Active and Passive Voice

The findings of the study indicate that in their use of voice, the politicians on the one hand represent themselves as all-knowing; they are the ones who know and have the answers for the women. They are also dismissive of people's ability to think things out for themselves. As a result they represent women as powerless, illiterate and ignorant about their own issues. This denies women agency and yet recognition and voice are values that women need to have the confidence to articulate and represent their concerns. One leader said:

Text (12)

Resp: makitaa kwaiwa undu mekwika yu tayu mikopo tunengawe kuu no Kenya Women Finance Trust, na syindu mbingi, kuo tucompanies twingi tuunengane mikovo. Na mikovo inu ve iveti itonya kwosa ikeka nesa muno ikaola mathina maingi muno ma musyi. Ona thina uu wa ukua ndoo kilometer na kindu kuite Emali akaola na akekia kawila vu soko ila vu thome kwake, lakini utithiwa ndaaallowiwa ni muume kwosa mukopo. Ewa 'osa mukopo, mikopo itosawa ni ak'a, utithia nituuvinyikikia vau.

They only do not know what to do because the loans we are given here by the Kenya Women Finance Trust and many other things, like there are other companies giving loans. And with these loans, there are women who can get

them and do very well and reduce many problems in the home. Even reduce this problem of carrying a bucket for about a kilometer and a half to Emali when it is raining and instead start a business nearby at the market centre. But she cannot be allowed to get the loan by her husband. If she is told to get a loan, 'loans are not gotten by women' we are pressed there.

Politicians represent women as constrained by patriarchal discourses as seen in the expression 'she cannot be allowed to get a loan by her husband'. In other words, through passivization women are subjugated to patriarchy which limits their action as social actors. These patriarchal discourses portray women as enslaved by patriarchy as evidenced in the words 'loans are not gotten by women' implying that 'loans are got by men'. The current research also confirms similar hegemonic discourses of 'development' which stereotypically present women as poor, powerless, backwards, illiterate, suffering; a discourse that constructs the Third World generally in similar ways (Verma 2001). These discourses continue to portray women in deficit terms which in turn lead to women being seen as deficient and therefore unable to take transformative social action.

5.3 Modality

In general, both the women, politicians and community leaders construct women's condition as one of possibility in their use of modality. Both the leaders and the women agree to a large extent that women have been overburdened by household duties, a finding supported strongly in the literature. The following are some of the responses from the leaders;

Text (13)

Leader 1: Kila kimavinyie muno, mm generally andu aka mavinyiawa ni syindu sya musyi. Mundu muka niukaa ukethia ona nutonya uthukuma noyithia ndenawia museo wa kuthukuma.

What is pressing them much is generally things to do with the home house hold chores, it is as if a woman might do work (household chore but may not have a good job)

Leader 5: men look at it as if it is a very dirty thing, so most of the women are now taking up that responsibility.

The leaders appear to be very much in agreement with the women that women have truly been overburdened by household chores. In the use of the modal '*ukethia*' leader 1 constructs women's condition in the possible mode and yet in reality women are the ones who take the larger proportion of household chores. The leader in the first part of the utterance acknowledges women as being overburdened by household chores but does not do so in a firm way in the second part of the same utterance where he goes on to say that 'it is as if a woman might do household work' yet in reality it is the women in the Kamba community who do most of the household chores. Women are constructed as dependent and responsible for household chores such as gathering firewood, fetching water and farming which they rely more heavily on. In other words, women are constructed within a patriarchal traditional discourse of women's responsibility.

The second utterance by leader 5 might be interpreted as resistance by the men in view of the fact that in terms of division of labour, the practice of child rearing was mainly a responsibility for the women in the Kamba community and continues to be so. Hence the use of the expression that ‘most of the women are now taking up that responsibility’ constructs women as just starting to recognize their work in household chores, yet they have done do since time immemorial. In view of changing conditions of production, this study recommends focus on this area to enlighten both genders about the importance of involvement in child upbringing for the good of the community. This is because this practice appears to be unique to the Kamba community as one of the participants who is from a different rural community expressed surprise that men in this community are largely uninvolved in household chores.

Modality also features in the construction of false promises made by politicians during elections which was identified as a key issue especially by the women community leaders such as this one:

Text (14)

Lakini nitwithaa yu ta ivinda yii tweteelle campaingn. Nimokaa makatwia nimeututetheesya, natuilea kwisa kwona undu meutwika. Maikita uneena tu. Yii mekaa uneena na munyuka.

But like at this time when we are waiting for the campaign. They come and tell us that they are going to support us but we never see what they do for us. They just talk. Yes they just talk with their mouths.

The choice of the term ‘mouth’ in the expression ‘they just talk with their mouths’ implies a lack of commitment on the part of the politicians. Politicians’ use of language for coercion has been widely researched. Findings by political discourse analysts have established that politicians use persuasion as a strategy to make the electorate to vote for them (Chilton and Schäffner 1997; Schäffner 1996)). In the Kenyan context, voters characterize this persuasion in terms of ‘false promises’. Majority of the politicians always promise that if they are voted for, they will provide water and roads to the people, but in reality, the roads in the study area remain some of the worst in Kenya.

5.4 A Frequency Analysis of Pronoun and Modality Choices

A frequency analysis of pronouns and modals was done to give an indication of women’s sense of agency. This was done in relation to the personal pronouns, ‘nyie’ (I), ‘ithyi’ (we) and the possessive pronouns ‘syitu, maitu’ both variants meaning (our). In addition, analysis of the modals ‘ukethia’ with the variants ‘kethia and ketha’ which express modality and may be glossed to indicate ‘possibility or if it were possible’ was also done. All these are captured in the table 1 below.

Table 1: A frequency count of pronoun and modality choices by women in the corpus:

Pronoun	Number of occurrences
Nyie (I)	65
Ithyi (we)	103
Maitu/sytu (our)	99
Modal: 'Ukethia' (modal for perhaps)	271
Total	538

5.4.1 Pronouns

From table 1, the pronoun ‘nyie’ (I) is the least commonly used pronoun which might be interpreted to mean that there are fewer representations of women as individual actors. ‘We’ (ithyi) is used more frequently than any of the other pronouns (more than double). This use of ‘we’ indicates that women construct themselves as a collective. All their achievements are based on mutual support within a collective yet they think the answer to agency lies in an individual. In other words, they fail to recognize the power the collective represents. In the table above, the use of the possessive pronoun variants ‘sytu’ and ‘maitu’ (our) indicates a remarkable sense of agency among the women particularly in terms of ‘labour ownership’.

From the table above, modality constitutes the highest usage of the terms selected for analysis in the corpus. This explains why the women appear to attribute agency away from the self. In other words, the women presented their issues as if they were helpless and not in control and yet in practice they did a lot of things like provision of child care, food and health especially as caretakers in relation to HIV. Most of the respondents describe their action in the possible mode even when something has actually happened and in this way appear to limit their sense of action.

6. ***Construction of Women’s Agency by Politicians and Other Community Leaders***

As already seen in the section on community leaders’ construction of women’s agency, the leaders’ construction of women’s agency is in certain ways similar to that to the women in women’s groups. In certain ways however, their construction differs remarkably from that of the women themselves. While the women use words that show them as lacking agency despite being very agentive in the actions they take in the community, the leaders construct women’s agency in very overt terms as ‘lacking’. The leaders express concern over the women’s lack of agency. In order to get an in depth understanding of this construction, this section provides a quantitative analysis of the leaders’ construction of women’s agency. As done at the beginning of this paper where pronouns and modality are analyzed to give a sense of agency, a similar

approach is used in this section. The table that follows contains the number of occurrences and their totals in the corpus for the personal pronouns ‘*nyie*’ (I), plural ‘*ithyi*’ (we) and the possessive pronoun realized by the Kamba variants ‘*maitu/syitu*’ ‘our’. These pronouns were chosen because use of pronouns is one of the most important ways through which agency is exercised. Lastly the modal ‘*ukethia*’ (if) is also analyzed in order to compare the leaders’ and the women’s construction of agency. As already noted in the previous section on women’s construction of agency, an analysis of modality is useful as it is an important part of how people identify themselves; the question of what people commit themselves to when they make statements, ask questions make demands or offers is crucial to the construction of identity.

Table 2: A frequency analysis of pronoun and modality choices by politicians and other community leaders in the corpus

Pronoun	Number of occurrences
<i>Nyie</i> (I)	126
<i>Ithyi</i> (we)	14
<i>Maitu/syitu</i> (our)	29
Modal ‘ <i>Ukethia</i> ’ (if it were possible)	161
Total	330

From table 2, the politicians’ and other leaders’ construction of women’s agency indicates a very similar trend to that of the women in focus group discussions especially in relation to the high frequency of occurrence for the term ‘*ukethia*’. This might indicate that both categories perpetuate the use of deficit discourses in the representation of women’s issues. They both describe women’s issues in the possible mode with no likelihood of transforming women’s conditions of possibility into reality.

6.1 The Pronouns

Nyie (I)

Analysis of the personal pronoun *nyie* (I) indicates a much higher frequency for the leaders than that for the women in the focus group discussions. This is not surprising and may be interpreted to mean that the leaders have a greater sense of agency as individual actors in the political process as compared to the women. The possible explanation for this is also that politicians have greater access to resources as they are some of the best paid civil servants in Kenya. It might also be seen as an indication of their authority as leaders which gives them a greater platform for exercising power over the grassroots women.

Ithyi: We

The frequency of occurrence for the use of the plural pronoun ‘*ithyi*’ us indicates a minimal sense of ‘collectiveness’ with most of instances of the pronoun being used by the female leaders. This confirms studies on gender differences between men and women that indicate women have a greater sense of the collective than men. This pronoun is remarkably high among the women in the focus group discussions and the reason for this is the fact that women groups are essentially female.

Ukethia (Ethiwa) ‘if it were possible’:

In terms of modality, the frequency of the modal ‘*ethiwa*’ ‘if it were possible’ is low and the possible explanation for this is the certainty with which the leaders speak compared to the women. Unlike the women who are constructed in terms of deficit discourses, the politicians and other leaders construct themselves as contented actors who are in command in the political process.

6.2 Contradiction in Overall Construction of Agency

Table 3 provides a summary of the activities that each group engages in.

Table 3: Activities in women’s groups

Group	No. of members	Hours of tape	Total hrs and minutes	Activities
Group 1	13	45 mins	1 hr 10 mins	Merry-go-round; farming; cultural dance
Group 2	8	45 mins	1 hr 20 mins	Merry-go-round; farming
Group 3	12	45 mins	1hr 5 mins	Kerosene selling; poultry keeping
Group 4	12	50 mins	1 hr 30 mins	Merry-go-round; goat keeping; horticultural farming

Source: author’s fieldwork

Table 3 shows the various economic activities that the women’s groups engage in. Essentially all the women groups practiced small-scale farming, mainly growing maize and beans. Two groups were involved in house construction, while one group was involved in adult education and another was a dance group. All groups except one practiced the ‘merry-go-round’. The term has come to be used to refer to the rotational practice of contributing money or labor for one another in turns within the group. The term is seen in practices like the ‘*myethya*’ (working group meetings) where people come together to

assist one another in times of need as in everyday activities like crop harvesting, house construction and organization of various social functions such as marriage ceremonies, burials, fundraising and the establishment of social networks. If any member has a problem the group takes it up collectively.

It is clear that the women's groups are all engaged in local action to sustain their families collectively. All but one of the groups is involved in mutual support among its members. In other words there is clear evidence that at the level of action these women assume agency to survive and improve their local condition. Despite this, in their talk, the women represent themselves as having no agency, hence a contradiction in their construction of agency.

7. Conclusion

The study has shown CDA as one way of understanding how prevailing discourses impact on the participation of women in the political process in Kenya. The women appear to attribute agency away from the self. The women presented their issues as if they were helpless and not in control and yet in practice they did a lot of things like provision of child care, food and health especially as caretakers in relation to the HIV pandemic. Most of the respondents describe their action in the possible mode even when something has actually happened and in this way appear to limit their sense of action. The paper reveals that politicians and other leaders in the community continue to perpetuate the use of deficit discourses in their construction of women's issues. Women are represented against a backdrop of discourses of patriarchy, rurality and poverty that construct them as poor, ignorant and illiterate; constructions which seem to perpetuate unequal power relations between men and women in society. However, while both women and leaders construct women's agency within deficit discourses, these discourses do not match either women's enacted practices, what political and community leaders say they expect of women. The contradiction inherent in the study is that everyone constructs women as lacking in agency, yet these women act as agentive subjects. They also point to a need for the expansion of the scholarship on gender politics in the African Diaspora and Kenya in particular.

Notes

¹ Transcription Conventions:

- () To give additional information
- ... To indicate pauses
- , To indicate hesitations
- . To indicate end of statement
- ? To indicate questions
- _ To indicate a word cut in delivery

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