

## Women's Experiences of Male-Dominant Behaviors in Kenya's National Assembly 2013-2017

Simon Okumba Miruka<sup>1</sup>, Grace Wamue-Ngare<sup>2</sup> & Pacificah Okemwa<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Community Development, South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya (omiruka@seku.ac.ke)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology, Gender and Development Studies, Kenyatta University, Kenya (wamue.grace@ku.ac.ke)

<sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology, Gender and Development, Kenyatta University, Kenya (okemwa.pacificah@ku.ac.ke)

<https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v4i2.139>

### Abstract

*This article examines male dominant behaviours in Kenya's National Assembly 2013 – 2017. This was the first Kenyan legislature to house women elected on quotas. Although there was a substantial surge in the proportion of women from 7.62% in 2007 to 19.5% in 2013, they remained a distinct minority which, according to Rosabeth Moss Kanter's Critical Mass Theory (1971), is subject to male dominant behaviours. The article analyses the experiences of 11 women legislators of the male dominant behaviours using data from semi-structured interviews and contents of the National Assembly Hansard. Study respondents were selected through stratified sampling. Adopting the workplace perspective, the article argues that it is imperative for the National Assembly to be conducive for both women and men. Unfortunately, this is not so due to prevailing masculine cultures manifested in: backlash, conservatism, objectification, trivialisation, victim blaming, stereotyping and sexism. These behaviours essentially restricted the space for women parliamentarians and characterised the National Assembly as a patriarchal bastion. In order to address this, the article recommends: familiarisation of new women parliamentarians with gender dynamics in the legislature; establishment of an observatory on behaviours in parliament; and sensitisation of the leadership of the National Assembly towards development of rules that deter such behaviour.*

**Keywords:** Backlash, Conservatism, Critical Mass, Minority, Objectification, Trivialisation, Victim Blaming, Quotas, Stereotype Phenomenology, Examination, Malpractice, Analysis, Evaluation, Meaning

## Introduction

This article examines the male dominant behaviors experienced by women in Kenya's National Assembly 2013 – 2017 using the Critical Mass Theory by Rosa Beth Moss Kanter (1971). This was the first Kenyan legislature to house women elected on gender quotas arising from the Constitution of Kenya (COK) 2010.

Kenya had a bi-cameral parliament at independence in 1963. It adopted a unicameral formation in 1966. This lasted until 2013 when the country reverted to a bicameral formation as a result of the COK 2010. Throughout its history, Kenya's parliament has been male dominated. Table 1 summarizes the trend from 1963 to 2022.

*Table 1: Number and Percentage of Women Elected to Kenya's Parliament 1963-2022*

Parliament	Seats	Women	% Women
1 <sup>st</sup> (1963-1969)	158	0	0%
2 <sup>nd</sup> (1969-1974)	158	1	0.63%
3 <sup>rd</sup> (1974-1979)	158	4	2.53
4 <sup>th</sup> (1979-1983)	158	5	3.16
5 <sup>th</sup> (1983-1988)	158	2	1.27
6 <sup>th</sup> (1988-1992)	188	2	1.06
7 <sup>th</sup> (1992-1997)	188	6	3.19
8 <sup>th</sup> (1997-2002)	210	4	1.90
9 <sup>th</sup> (2002-2007)	210	10	4.76
10 <sup>th</sup> (2007-2012)	210	16	7.62
11 <sup>th</sup> (2013 – 2017)	349	68	19.5
12 <sup>th</sup> (2017 – 2022)	349	76	21.5
13 <sup>th</sup> (2022 – 2027)	349	81	23.5

(Source: FIDA, 2013; KNBS, 2023)

The table shows that women constituted less than 10% of Kenyan legislators until 2013. This changed when gender quotas were applied, resulting in an increase of their presence to 19.5% in the National Assembly, a surge from 7.6% in the immediate previous parliament. Nevertheless, they remained a minority which, according to the Critical Mass Theory, is subject to male-dominant behaviors. Applying this theory to analyse the women's experiences, the article problematises the masculine culture of the National Assembly as a candidate for institutional reforms.

The article adopts the workplace perspective articulated in Erikson and Verge (2020) as treatment of parliament as a formal workspace in which conditions should be conducive for both women and men. Unfortunately, this is not so due to routine treatment of women as outsiders. While Erikson and Verge (2020) argue that this may make women retreat from politics, this article posits that the immediate effect is to alienate them from parliamentary debate.

The main contribution of the article is to be understanding of parliament as a gendered institution in which inequality is perpetuated through informal practices. This is important in demonstrating how gains from quotas are negated by male dominant behaviours.

In terms of scope, the article focuses on women already in the National Assembly, not as electoral candidates or members of political parties. Specifically, it looks at male dominant behaviours, not any other challenges. It neither focuses on the Senate, the second national legislature, nor country assemblies

## Literature Review

Globally, studies show that various male dominant behaviours are common in legislatures (Inter-Parliamentary Union – IPU & United Nations Development Programme - UNDP, 2017). A survey of the Swedish parliament by Erikson and Josefsson (2019) observes that female legislators faced higher performance pressure, more anxiety and negative treatment from male colleagues, which reduced their opportunities to participate in parliamentary business. The authors show that these behaviours resided in both formal and informal contexts.

Citing Europe and the Americas, Verge (2020) notes a lack of safeguards against sexism in most parliaments. As a consequence, the behaviours remain unreported and women's spaces to perform are highly constricted. Even where legislatures have protective measures, they are countermanded by pre-existing informal rules (Deshpande, 2023).

Typical male dominant behaviours in parliaments are sexual harassment, personal attacks, intimidation, interruptions, sexist remarks and scrutiny of private lives by male colleagues, as captured by Brechnemacher (2018) with reference to the legislatures of the United States of America (USA), France and the United Kingdom (UK). These "sexist practices generate feelings of uneasiness and discomfort amongst female MPs...hampering efficiency in legislative action" (Erikson & Verge, 2020: 8).

An increased number of women in parliament usually provokes backlash from male parliamentarians (O'Brien & Piscopo, 2018). This arises from an entrenched masculine parliamentary culture, referred to by Galea and Gaweda (2018), basing themselves on the Australian and Polish parliaments, as a "masculine blueprint". Analysing the German Bundestag of 1998 – 2013, Hohmann (2020) notes that a surge in the number of women in parliament also makes male members to abandon their support for women's interests, expecting the female colleagues to handle the issues. This is tantamount to feminising the women's work, a concept referred to as symbolic consequences in the Critical Mass Theory but as "the specialisation effect" by Hohmann (2020).

A study of the House of Commons by Ilie (2018) unveils that there was obsession with women's physical appearance, use of patronising personal endearments such as "honey" and "dear" and abusive labelling. These sexist behaviours appeared to be a form of backlash coming in the wake of the surge in the number of women in the UK legislature after the 1997 elections.

A manifestation of backlash is the treatment of women as inferior colleagues. This is evidenced in Latt et al. (2017) which shows that women legislators in Myanmar experienced patronising language from male

colleagues who referred to them as “little sisters”, instead of the established honorifics, in order to demean them. Furthermore, women elected on quotas are often treated as illegitimate politicians due to an attitude that they would probably not have made it to parliament in open elections (Rosenbluth et al., 2015). According to Ehrhart (2023) on the Turkish parliament, male dominance is maintained through established practices or unwritten rules that disadvantage women, which include stereotypes about their capabilities or roles as politicians.

The dominant behaviours are also evident in African countries. In Uganda, male legislators opposed women's legislative proposals arguing that they undermined culture while women in Tanzania endured androcentric language and sexist remarks by the men (Okello-Orlale & Ugungu, 2010). According to Clayton, Josefsson and Wang (2014), Ugandan women parliamentarians on quotas had a lower status than colleagues who won seats contested with men. Women also suffer intimidation from male colleagues. In Egypt, for example, male legislators intimated that their female colleagues who criticised female genital mutilation should be taken through the procedure, in order to intimidate them into silence (Hassan, 2018).

Various studies have been conducted on Kenyan women parliamentarians. But their focuses differ from that of this article. Association of Media Women in Kenya (2014) captures the profiles of women elected in 2013 but does not address the dynamics in the National Assembly. Likewise, Mbugua (2017) illustrates the influence of women in spearheading gender-responsive legislation but makes no reference to minority status as a challenge. Like this study, Marie, Bouka and Kamuru (2020) look at backlash. However, they focus on women vying for membership in county assemblies, not those already in the national parliament as this article does. Another recent study, Obwogi (2022), examines the obstacles women faced in the journey to political leadership, not on the dynamics during parliamentary tenure.

This study's uniqueness therefore lies in three factors: focus on the first post-quotas National Assembly; inter-gender dynamics related to minority status; and use of the Critical Mass Theory to analyse male dominant behaviours.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The Critical Mass Theory states that when women are a distinct minority (tokens) in an institution, they face male dominant behaviours which limit their space and performance. These behaviours fall into three broad tendencies namely visibility, contrast and assimilation.

Under “visibility”, the minority is alienated and subjected to generalisations about its type. This leads to “performance pressure”, which manifests in four ways. In the “limelight”, women are under constant scrutiny and are judged by “a different set of rules” from that applied to men. Their technical abilities are subordinated to their physical appearance. Next is “tokenism eclipse” where “the token does not have to work hard to have her presence noticed, but (must do so) to have her achievements noticed”. In addition are “symbolic consequences” under which women have “the burden of representing their category, not just themselves”. “Fear of retaliation” inhibits women from outperforming men so as to escape hostility (Kanter, 1977: 385-386).

“Contrast” refers to creation of boundaries by men to isolate women, who can choose to remain excluded or become “insiders”. For survival, they tend to choose the latter. This tendency is characterised by four behaviours classified as “loyalty tests”. First is exhibition of “aggression and potency” marked by “sexual innuendos”. Second is interruption by, for example, taking over conversations and using crude language. Because women do not want to make a fuss, they play along, get co-opted and are intimidated into silence. Third is exclusion of women by clandestine manoeuvres such as holding secret meetings. Last is acceptance by male colleagues only if the women demonstrate loyalty by occasionally turning against ‘the girls’. They are further expected to be “comic inferiors” by tolerating demeaning jokes (Kanter, 1977: 388-390).

Under “assimilation”, women are pushed to “fit pre-existing generalisations” by performing traditional gender roles and becoming submissive, frivolous and self-limiting. Women are also assigned predetermined roles regardless of interest and are then marginalised. Additionally, they are driven into four “traps”, referred to as “stereotyped informal roles”. These are: the “mother” – expectation to provide personal care to men; the “seductress” – treatment as sex objects; the “pet” – regard as sources of amusement and objects of sympathy; and the “iron maiden” – labelling of outstanding women as “tough” and “militant” followed by ostracisation (Kanter, 1977: 390-393).

The study matched the dominant behaviours reported by the women parliamentarians and evidence from the Hansard, the verbatim record of parliamentary proceedings, with specific elements of the theory thus demonstrating how minority compromised the legislative atmosphere for female legislators.

## Methodology

This was a descriptive study of Kenya’s National Assembly based in Nairobi. The study population consisted of all the 68 women in the National Assembly 2013 -2017. Stratified sampling was applied to ensure that all categories of women in the National Assembly were included. The sampling criteria were: pathways to the National Assembly; membership of different political coalitions; presence in parliamentary committees; participation in parliamentary debates; membership of the Parliamentary Service Commission (PSC); and sponsorship of successful bills. A total of eleven women (16%) fulfilled at least three of the sampling criteria and were interviewed. Four key informants (KIs) - three male and one female – were also interviewed, all purposively sampled.

Sample representativeness was ensured through stratification to capture the diversity of women in the legislature. The need for a larger sample was also obviated by the fact that the women were interviewed in multiple capacities, enabling the study to capture details of their experiences from diverse perspectives. The respondents were contacted through phone and email to introduce the research, book appointments and convey gratitude after interviews.

The study relied on the Hansard for content on women parliamentarians’ experiences during debate. Electronic copies from 16 April 2013 when parliament was opened to 7 August 2017 when its term ended were accessed from the National Assembly website ([www.parliament.go.ke](http://www.parliament.go.ke)), scanned for relevant content, labelled by date of contribution, analysed using a content analysis guide which focused on the experiences during parliamentary sessions, the direct and indirect challenges they created for women and the responses they elicited.

Audio tapes of interviews were transcribed, edited for logical flow and synthesised with information from the Hansard. Illustrative quotes from the interviews and parliamentary debates were identified, matched with the dominant behaviours, narrated and discussed in the findings. The data was then organised thematically under each dominant behaviour, narrated, interpreted, cross-referenced and subjected to the theoretical framework.

## Ethical Considerations

Approval for fieldwork was granted by the Graduate School at Kenyatta University and used to seek a licence from the National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation which issued Permit No. NACOSTI/P/16/46137/9391.

All respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, their consent to be interviewed and audio-taped established and an assurance given that the information would be used purely for academic purposes. All were interviewed face to face at locations they preferred for privacy and convenience. Data sources have been anonymised using the codes WL (Woman Legislator), ML (Male Legislator) and KI (Key Informant).

## Findings and Discussion

The number of women legislators who reported being exposed to specific dominant behaviours of male colleagues is tallied in Table 2.

*Table 2: Type of Dominant Behaviors by Number of Women Reporting*

	<b>Behaviours</b>	<b>N=11</b>
1.	Contempt towards beneficiaries of affirmative action.	8
2.	Backlash from male colleagues due to increased numbers.	10
3.	Frustration of women's pursuits by conservatism from male colleagues.	9
4.	Blame by male colleagues even when women legislators were the aggrieved parties.	9
5.	Stereotypes about women legislators.	11
6.	Treatment of women legislators as sex objects and sources of amusement and sympathy.	6
7.	More attention to personal attributes than technical competence.	7

Table 2 shows that each dominant behaviour was experienced by more than 50% of respondents. This implies that the behaviours were widespread. The behaviours have been collapsed into six themes each of which is presented and discussed based on the interviews and Hansard content, starting with contempt for affirmative action.

### Contempt for Affirmative Action

Ten of the 11 women legislators reported backlash against affirmative action and its beneficiaries. This was confirmed from the Hansard in the reaction of four out of seven male legislators to a message sent to parliamentarians by the Federation of Women Lawyers-Kenya (FIDA-K) before voting on a bill that would

ensure that at least one third of members of the National Assembly would be either men or women (Hansard, 27 April 2016PM: 13; 5 May 2016PM: 10). The message read as follows.

The Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) (No. 4) Bill is coming up for voting on Wednesday 27th April 2016. Please note that voting for constitutional bills is public. We will be watching and counting on you to vote the Bill (Hansard, 27 April 2016AM: 2).

Below is one reaction of a male legislator.

This is coercion and trying to threaten members of parliament to vote in a particular way...When we finally vote ..., will we have (done so) because our conscience says so or because .... people like FIDA-Kenya are wielding a big stick over our heads? (KI-1, Hansard, 27 April 2016AM: 2).

The reaction depicts an attitude that FIDA-K was blackmailing legislators. In the view of KI-2, this “fortified men’s resolve to ensure that the Bill was defeated” (KI-2, OI, 7.3.2017). The Bill actually failed to muster the 233 votes required for a constitutional amendment, despite being voted for twice (Hansard, 27 April 2016PM: 13; 5 May 2016PM: 10).

This article argues that the defeat of the Bill was not only due to the FIDA-K message but male parliamentarians’ general distaste for affirmative action. This is consonant with the view of WL-9 that the resistance arose from men’s feeling that the Bill would make women “muscle into their territory” (WL-9, OI, 16. 1. 2017). In other words, the resistance was purely protectionist.

Eight out of 11 women indicated that there was contempt from male colleagues towards quotas. In the interviews, KI-1 (OI, 15.2.2017) asserted that “you cannot put a finger on the gap the 47 county women representatives (CWRs) filled hence the ‘flower girl’ tag idea around them”.

The flower girl metaphor was used to portray CWRs as merely decorative. Men of this persuasion argued that quotas filled the National Assembly with “sycophants, cronies and relatives of political godfathers” (KI-2, OI, 7.3.2017). In our view, this suggests that the CWRs were regarded as undeserving of being in parliament, which belittles the fact that they also campaigned for their seats, albeit against fellow women. Inlaid in this is the mindset that unless women defeated men, their triumph was not authentic.

This article concurs with Bouka et al. (2018) that backlash arises from a perception that increased numbers of women “(is) a threat to (men’s) own power base and authority”. Such perceived threat is also reported in Faniko, et al. (2017), a study on affirmative action policies in Albania. In this case, men perceived that women’s entry was lowering their access to decision making positions.

The contempt sought to reinforce the notion of parliament as a workplace exclusive to men. In the context of the Critical Mass Theory, this conforms with the postulate that minority creates loneliness and compromises tokens’ ability to challenge and overcome domination. As stated in the theory, “sometimes (women) faced the loneliness of the outsider, of the stranger who intrudes upon an alien culture and may become self-estranged in the process of assimilation” (Kanter, 1977: 382).

The article notes, therefore, that affirmative action creates legitimacy deficits for beneficiaries hence the need to interrogate whether it should be the only means of reducing male dominance in legislatures. The next problem discussed is conservatism.

### **Conservatism**

Nine of the 11 study respondents indicated that their legislative pursuits were frustrated by conservative reactions from male colleagues. This was evident in remarks during debates on the Marriage Bill.

Under customary law, you do not inform your wife of the coming of the second or the third wife. You just appear with a lady, and she knows this is the wife... This particular clause offends the customs of the various tribes (ML-2, Hansard, 20 March 2014PM: 57).

African men are potentially polygamous. For that reason, there is no need for informing your first wife ... We are not living in Europe or America (ML-11, Hansard 20 March 2014PM: 59).

These views are puritanical, using the premise that polygamy is intrinsic to and a logical expectation in African marriages notwithstanding women's interest in the matter. Comparable remarks were made on the Protection Against Domestic Violence Bill.

In (our) culture, there is nothing like sexual harassment when you are dealing with a wife or husband... That is because the first reason you marry... is what we are calling sexual abuse (ML-5, Hansard, 20 August 2014PM: 32).

I was going through what "violence" means in this Bill. It says "interference from in-laws" ... Why do you create a law to punish your mother-in-law and your father-in-law? ... This particular provision is un-African (ML-1, Hansard, 20 August 2014PM: 23).

The view by ML-5 reflects an attitude that sexual violence cannot exist in marriage. Those by ML-1 argue that the Bill was culturally alien, citing that it contravened "African" reverence for parents-in-law. They reveal a conservative mindset that what is culturally "African" is inherently good, without weighing the potential benefits of the bill. In our interpretation, these views sought to dismiss clauses that would be beneficial to women hence perpetuate male supremacy in marriage. This is exactly what happened as the provisions were expunged from the final bills passed and enacted.

In the Critical Mass Theory, conservatism falls under "interruptions as reminders of 'difference'" to make women feel out of place hence become silent (Kanter, 1977: 388-390). Because of their rarity, women are subtly coerced to comply with the existing norms.

The article avers that if such a tendency persists, women's interests would not be comprehensively addressed even if their numbers are increased, unless this results in such numerical significance as to enable them to determine legislative outcomes without additional support from men. Further restriction of women's space was done through trivialization.



## Trivialisation

To trivialise is to make someone or something look petty. Five out of the 11 women legislators reported this treatment from male colleagues. This exchange from the Hansard illustrates.

As you can see, they are all county women representatives and they are talking about table banking (ML-2, Hansard, 11 December 2014AM: 5).

We are honourable members of this House. We speak about laws.... Do not reduce us to table banking! (WL-10, Hansard, 11 December 2014AM: 5).

Table banking refers to an informal system in Kenya where members of self-help groups pool funds to instantly loan one another. It is largely associated with women's welfare groups (Ngumbau, 2017). The remark by ML-2 stereotypes the model as a women-specific activity. Its discernible aim was to depict the CWRs as engaging in out-of-context discussions by insinuating that table banking is below the dignity of parliamentarians. In one breath, the remark trivialises the practice, women parliamentarians and womenfolk in general. Trivialisation was further captured in the comments below.

The 47 women representatives can be given the duty to go round schools and create markets for milk farmers ... They need to be busy. We can fund them (ML-9, Hansard, 2 October 2013AM: 11).

I think ... we are busy enough. ... I do not think it is in order for him to attempt to create for us a job (WL-5, Hansard, 2 October 2013AM: 11).

The remark by ML-9 insinuates that CWRs were idle and required sympathy. Use of "we" connotes a condescending belief that the National Assembly belonged to men. The comments actually suggest that women did not understand their roles in the National Assembly, which is quite demeaning.

These findings resonate with those from Sweden where the competence of women legislators was doubted by male colleagues, undermining their credibility (Erikson & Josefsson, 2019: 11-15).

The Critical Mass Theory recognises trivialisation as a means through which men subordinate women by disguising their contempt as humour. As a result, the tokens are forced "into playing limited and caricatured roles" (Kanter, 1977: 391). As can be seen from the remarks, the behaviours are consonant with the "comic inferiors" tenet in the theory.

This article notes that when this happens, women are stigmatised. The experiences therefore call for attitude change among male parliamentarians in order to create a workplace in which men treat women as equals and with dignity. Related to trivialisation is objectification.

## Objectification

According to *Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary*, to objectify is "to make something into or present it as an object". Applied to human beings, objectification means reducing one to the level of a commodity. Seven out of the 11 women legislators confirmed that they experienced this from male colleagues with two illustrating as follows.

There are many comments about your dressing, physical appearance and not substance. They come in veiled compliments such as 'You are so beautiful in a short skirt'. Many male members of parliament think female colleagues are cheap sexual objects and flower girls (WL-2, OI, 24.7.2016).

They asked us to take them out for dinner. We did ...but their complaint was that it was only dinner and nothing else. They were asking why we did not give them sexual favours so that they could pass the Bill (WL-9, OI, 16. 1. 2017).

The remarks by WL-9 were made with reference to a dinner dance to mobilise the support of male colleagues on a bill to ensure that no more than two-thirds of legislators would be either men or women. The foregoing reports capture experiences which reveal a perception by male legislators that women colleagues' value primarily lay in their sexual appeal and that the dance was an excellent opportunity to extort them sexually. They depict a sub-conscious expectation which clouded the interaction between male and female legislators through expectation of sexual favours failure to deliver which rendered the dinner dance meaningless as a lobbying strategy.

As established in IPU (2016: 5), sexual blackmail "perpetuates the idea...that only by agreeing to (sexual) favours can a woman find her place and get ahead in politics". The article concurs. In addition, it should be noted that compliance with blackmail would set a precedent that would perpetually discredit women's achievements as manipulated.

Objectification was further exemplified in the following exchange between a male and female legislator.

I was looking at the member of parliament for (constituency name withheld). It is so beautiful when you see her around here (ML-8, Hansard, 25 October 2016PM: 34).

I may be beautiful ... However, we are not here to beautify these seats of parliament... Focus on real issues and not side-shows (WL-24, Hansard, 25 October 2016PM: 34).

The reference to a woman legislator as "beautiful" highlights obsession with physical appeal than formal presence. As the target noticed, it was an attempt to downplay her official status by equating her with an item merely there to enhance spatial aesthetics. Observably, it was a deliberate tactic by a male legislator to be a nuisance to his female colleague.

As shown in the responses, the women legislators detected the attempts at objectification and protested. We content that although such alertness is necessary, it is not sufficient in the absence of institutional mechanisms to oblige respectful treatment.

According to the Critical Mass Theory, attention to women's physical attributes rather than technical competence is classified as "tokenism eclipse", which creates "additional performance pressure" on women to prove themselves. The theory notes that when women entertain such treatment, they become complacent, self-limiting and ineffective. In the theory, if women pander to male sexual advances in order to gain acceptance, they lose moral credibility; those who resist are punished by being ostracised. Based on the work place perspective, this article posits that objectification is a stratagem to divert women's attention

from work to self-defence, hence it requires institutional intervention. Concomitant with objectification was stereotyping.

### **Stereotyping**

A stereotype is a generalisation about a category of people without acknowledging that not all in the group bear the same characteristic. It also inheres in beliefs and practices fix roles to specific groups and identities.

All the women interviewed reported stereotyping by male colleagues, illustrated with these examples.

When you travel outside, male colleagues expect you to help them with shopping (WL-9, OI, 16. 1. 2017).

In party meetings ...women legislators are expected by males to serve the refreshments (WL-2, OI, 24.7.2016).

They (male legislators) refer to county women representatives as *Mama County* (Mother of the County) to depict them as nurturers (WL-4, OI, 6.8.2016).

The statements by WL-9 and WL-2 show that women legislators were expected by male colleagues to perform traditional gender roles of providing care. It is the view of this article that the reported treatment not only diminished the official status of the women, it also implied that they would be excluded from formal discussions and decisions. The reference to CWRs as mothers of counties falls within the same stereotype of women as nurturers. As noted by Bouka et al (2018), this resides in the belief that women are primarily caregivers. From the workplace perspective, women are certainly not in parliament to provide personal care to male colleagues. Both parties are in parliament to legislate not perform traditional gender roles.

In the Critical Mass Theory, this behaviour conforms to the “the mother” trap, a tendency to consign women to provision of care to men in ways that undermine their official roles (Kanter, 1977).

Another stereotype reported was an expectation of women to automatically focus on matters dealing with gender equality, yet some had no such interest (WL-11, OI, 11.2.2018). Relegating gender related subjects to women constitutes what Hohmann (2020) refers to as “the specialisation effect”.

The Critical Mass Theory classifies this as “symbolic consequences” where women are given “the burden of representing their category, not just themselves” (Kanter, 1977: 385). In this regard, the failure of one woman is the failure of all of them. This article contends that if such a pattern is sustained, the space for women to perform their legislative functions is limited to a small range of agenda. The final behaviour assessed is victim blaming.

### **Victim Blaming**

This refers to castigating the aggrieved party for own plight (Davies, 2011). Nine out of the 11 women legislators reported being subjected to this behaviour. The following examples were highlighted.

I was assaulted and undressed in parliament by male colleagues (then) blamed for allegedly exposing my body (WL-1, OI, 16.12.2016).

When I was sexually harassed by a male colleague on a trip to Japan, male legislators shifted blame on me for 'attracting' the treatment (WL-8, OI, 16.12.2016).

The first remark refers to an acrimonious debate on the Security Laws (Amendment) Bill which was opposed by CORD but supported by Jubilee legislators (Hansard 18 December 2014). The debate degenerated into anarchy involving WL-1 who alleged that she was consequently undressed by male colleagues of the counterpart coalition. The second remark alleges that an aggrieved woman legislator was accused of deliberately attracting sexual harassment, yet she was the victim. Both cases show a tendency to exonerate perpetrators of injurious activities by blaming the victim.

Looked at from the workplace perspective, victim blaming legitimises injustice and leaves the victim without redress (Hamby & Grych, 2014). In the Critical Mass Theory, victim blaming falls under "limelight", a tendency to amplify women's 'mistakes' relative to those of their male colleagues. This is tantamount to what might be called "triple jeopardy" – experiencing harm, being blamed for it and facing recrimination for raising the issue. The standpoint of this article is that victim blaming imposes on women a heightened self-consciousness in order to escape harsh judgement, in effect limiting their freedom and autonomy while intimidating them into silence and ineffectiveness.

In summary, all the behaviours cited in this article perpetuated women's subordination. The article shows that contempt for affirmative action creates legitimacy deficits for beneficiaries of quotas. Conservatism has the effect of negating attention to women's interests even if their numbers increase. Trivialisation and objectification diminish the status and dignity of women while stereotyping restricts their space. Finally, victim blaming heightens self-consciousness and limits women's freedom and autonomy in parliament. In essence, the multiple male dominant behaviours compromised the atmosphere for women's legislative influence in Kenya's National Assembly 2013 – 2017, despite a surge in numbers due to gender quotas. This calls for measures that would make the National Assembly more gender sensitive.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper illustrates the prevalence of male dominant behaviours in Kenya's National Assembly 2013-2017, consistent with tendencies outlined in the Critical Mass Theory. They indicate an androcentric institution in which women were subtly and overtly treated as intruders in ways that undermined them. This article proposes that these behaviours be dealt with through institutional measures, specifically the following.

First, the Kenya Women's Parliamentary Association should familiarise all women parliamentarians with gender dynamics in Kenya's National Assembly at the beginning of every parliamentary cycle. Second, it should sensitise the leadership of the National Assembly on the existence of such behaviours. Third, the National Assembly should establish an observatory that receives complaints about negative gender dynamics and reports them to the Speaker and Parliamentary Service Commission for use in developing a

prevention and response mechanism. Fourth, Kenya's electoral law should be revised to ensure that women have adequate numerical gravitas to counter male dominance.

## References

AMWIK (2014). *86 and counting: Women leaders in the 11<sup>th</sup> parliament*. Nairobi: Association of Media Women in Kenya.

Bouka, Y., Kamuru, M., Berry, M., & Moss, N. (2018). *Strengthening The Leadership and Influence Of Women In Politics In Kenya*. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute.

Brechnemacher, S. (2018). *Tackling women's underrepresentation in US politics: Comparative perspectives from Europe*. Washington DC: Carnegie Foundation for International Peace.

Clayton, A. (2018). Do Gender quotas really reduce bias? Evidence from a policy experiment in Southern Africa. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 5 (3): 182–194.

Davies, P. (2011). *Gender, Crime and Victimisation*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Deshpande, A (Ed.) (2023). *Handbook on Economics of Discrimination and Affirmative Action*. Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4016-9>

Erikson, J. & Josefsson, C. (2019). Equal playing field? On the intersection between gender and being young in the Swedish parliament. *Politics, Groups and Identities*. DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2018.1564055.

Erikson, J. & Verge, T. (2022). Gender, power and privilege in the parliamentary workplace. *Parliamentary Affairs* (2022) 75, 1–19. doi:10.1093/pa/gsaa048.

Faniko, K., et al. 2017. Quota women are threatening to men: Unveiling the (counter)stereotypization of beneficiaries of affirmative action policies. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 76 (3): 107–116.

FIDA (2013). *Key Gains and Challenges: A Gender Audit of Kenya's 2013 Election Process*, Nairobi: FIDA.

Hamby, S. & Grych, J. (2014). The complex dynamics of victimisation: Understanding differential vulnerability without blaming the victim. <http://thevigor.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Dynamics-of-victimization-Hamby-Grych-Wiley-chap.pdf>

Hassan, M. (2018). *Women in the Egyptian parliament: A different agenda*. James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University.

IPU (2016). Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians: Issue brief. <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/issuesbrief-e.pdf>.

IPU & UNDP (2017). *Global Parliamentary Report*. Geneva: IPU & UNDP.

Kanter, R.M. (1977). *Men and Women of The Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2023). *Economic Survey*. Nairobi: Government Printers.

Latt, S., Ninh, K., Myint, M. & Lee, S. (2017). *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Politicians 2011 – 2016*. The Asian Foundation & Phan Tee Eain.

Marie, B.E, Bouka Y. and Kamuru, M.M (2020). Implementing inclusion: Gender quotas, inequality, and backlash in Kenya'. *Politics & Gender*: 1–25.

Mbugua, R.W. (2017). *Affirmative action as a strategy for increased women's political leadership: A case study of the National Assembly of Kenya's 11<sup>th</sup> parliament 2013-2017*. A research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts at the African Women's Studies Centre of the University of Nairobi.

Miruka, S.O. (2021). *Legislative Influence of Women Parliamentarians in Kenya's National Assembly of the 11<sup>th</sup> parliament 2013-2017*. A thesis submitted to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Gender and Development Studies of Kenyatta University

Ngumbau, J.M. (2017). *Relationship between table banking and the growth of women-owned micro and small enterprises in Uhuru Market, Nairobi County*. MBA thesis, Kenya Methodist University.

Okello-Orlale, R. & Ugangu, W. (2010). *Beyond Numbers: Narrating the Impact of Women's Leadership in Eastern Africa*. Nairobi: African Women and Child Feature Service.

Rosenbluth, F, Kalla, J. & Teele, D. (Eds) (2015). *The Female Political Career*. Zurich: World in Parliaments (WIP) Global Forum & World Bank.