

## Media Representations of Women Politicians in Kenya: Lesson from 2017 General Elections

Margaret N. Barasa<sup>1</sup> and Mary Gitau<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kisii University, Department of Languages and Linguistics, P.O. Box 408 – 40200, Kisii, Kenya

<sup>2</sup> Clarke University, Department of Social Work, Dubuque, IA 52001, USA

Corresponding Author: [barasamargaret@kisiuniversity.ac.ke](mailto:barasamargaret@kisiuniversity.ac.ke)

### Abstract

In the past fifteen years, there has been a pattern of slow progress in the rise of women leaders across the globe. Partly, this situation is due to the media's ability to enhance or hinder women's political leadership, making symbolic media annihilation an area of concern for contemporary studies on women and politics. The goal of this study was to assess the visibility and invisibility of female politicians in the media and their implications in the run up to Kenya's 2017 General Elections and what can be learned as the country prepares for the 2022 General Elections. The specific objective was to establish the type of frames used by the media to represent female politicians running for office in Kenya's 2017 General Elections and to ascertain whether such frames contribute to their symbolic annihilation. This study used content from two major television networks in Kenya. Two transcripts of the 9 o'clock news interviews on Women in Politics were obtained and subjected to content and qualitative data analysis. The findings indicate that the media used gendered frames when interviewing female politicians, which reduced their visibility and viability. These findings could be an eye opener on the role of media in influencing the success or the failure of female politicians and how women can exploit any opportunities therein to secure positions of political leadership. In addition, the findings might contribute to knowledge that can help to re-theorize modern social and gender media policies and legal frameworks.

**Keywords:** gender, elections, media coverage, framing, women, Kenya

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### INTRODUCTION

There is notable improvement in women presence in national leadership positions worldwide; however, the number of female leaders is still low in Kenya's political arena. This is attributed to many factors, including poor financial support, and cultural and societal variables, which make women politically insubordinate and less likely to attract media coverage. The latter is the focus of this study in which media coverage is operationalized in terms of Tuchman's omission concept, condemnation, and trivialization. The media is recognized as a holder of power, but with a social responsibility to respect and promote gender equality. As such, the media is expected to provide equal space to both men and women candidates and thereby promoting equal gender access to political power.

Nevertheless, several studies have found discrepancies in how female and male candidate speeches are, inter alia, reported and quoted in the media (Gidengil & Everitt, 1999, 2003; Norris,

1997; Voronova, 2014). Other studies (e.g., Tuchman, 1978) have indicated that female politicians suffer more from symbolic annihilation in media representation than their male counterparts do. Sometimes, this marginalization takes place with the connivance of women themselves, even though this feeds into the sexist media's representation of women in politics. Consequently, this non-neutral media stance shifts attention from the female aspirants' message to their experiences (e.g., drawing on feminine attributes in their struggle to pursue or maintain power), and thereby eliciting negative attention from voters.

Feminist textual analysis has for years been concerned with how women are represented in the media. To this end, feminist scholars have examined women's marginalization and trivialization in the media in terms of both quantity and quality of their interviews. The Global Media Monitoring Project, for instance, has indicated that the major issue affecting female politicians is their lack of adequate coverage or public appearances, unlike their male counterparts who dominate the news cycle as subjects and source of election stories. Whereas photographs of women political candidates are common, their professional experience is seldom the subject of focus and, as such, their expertise or opinions are rarely publicized. Ironically, the media often highlights their femininity and routinely questions their viability as candidates. Since media fails to perceive women politicians as newsworthy, this reduces their visibility as candidates.

There is concern that the media bias facing women in politics comes from the use of traditional frames built around the dominance of men in politics, making women outsiders. Some feminist scholars have also pointed to a new trend where women contribute to the media's trivialization and symbolic annihilation of fellow female candidates (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003).

### **Women, media and politics**

A study by Benwell (2003) noted that the work of philosopher Judith Butler (1993) "revolutionized" language and gender studies. Butler's key contention is that gender is not a stable pre-discursive entity that is inherent in individuals, but rather constituted, mobilized and negotiated through the enactment of discourse. Is it possible then that the media is perpetuating stereotypes about female political candidates by trivializing them? (Tuchman, 1978). The absence of women in top national leadership positions remain to be tested. Limited evidence from Norris' (1997) study of women worldwide suggests that they receive less media coverage than their immediate male predecessors do. For instance, a number of studies (Devitt, 2002; Spears et al., 2000) have indicated that the major issue affecting women political candidates is their lack of public appearance or media coverage. These studies confirmed that male politicians dominate as subjects and sources of election stories. The 1995 GMMP research suggested that, in a day, 17% and 83% of women and men, respectively, were the news subjects on radio, television and newspapers. In 2000, five years later, the GMMP results had hardly changed. Women's news coverage in world media in a day was 18% compared to men's 82% (Spears et al., 2000).

To promote gender equality to power, the news media, given its social responsibility, should provide equal access and space to both male and female political candidates (Voronova, 2014). Yet, previous research shows that political news coverage is characterized by gendered mediation, gender imbalance, stereotypes, and lack of discussion on gender inequality (Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). The constructed gendered roles of women as mothers, daughters and wives have consequences for female political participation. Furthermore, according to the International Federation of Women Lawyers of Kenya (FIDA, 2018, p. 38), women candidates in Kenya have long received less coverage than men because they lack resources to gain access into the media.

However, when they attract the attention of the media, women are negatively framed compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, the media often stereotypes, stigmatizes and intimidates them and, therefore, reduces their visibility.

Gallagher (2001, p. 83) states that one of the battles in the struggle to tear down current gender-based divisions in the public and private arenas is to change media perceptions on the newsworthiness of female politicians around the world. Studies by Kahn (1992, 1994) and Kahn and Goldenberg (1991) examined U.S. newspaper coverage of female candidates for political office in 1980's. They established that in the U.S. Senate and Gubernatorial races, between 1982 and 1988, news media gave female candidates less coverage time than their male counterparts. Kahn noted that the press not only stereotyped female candidates by highlighting their femininity, but also questioned their viability. Similarly, Norris (1997), in her study of international women leaders, concluded that women were less visible in the news than male leaders, underrepresented (quantitatively) and marginalized (qualitatively) compared to men. In a *HuffPost* report on women in politics, Bahadur (2013) noted that media coverage of female candidates for elected office included more discussion on their character traits. These issues are of global concern and have serious implications for women participation in leadership and government.

Political media coverage, using gender specific lenses, frame female candidates negatively (Jamieson, 1995) and, conversely, men are more likely to be described in gender-neutral terms. Norris (1997) noted that news frames always use women politicians' gender as their primary descriptor and, as outsiders, serve as agents for change. The female politicians' leadership capabilities and experiences are always undervalued and their qualifications evaluated relative to past male political leaders.

Stereotypically masculine imagery, which typically convey power, strength, virility, athleticism, and competitiveness, predominates metaphors for men. Whereas, the depiction of female politicians relies on sex-based stereotypes, such as spinsters, superwoman, one of the boys, witches, or Cinderella (Norris, 1997). Gendered mediation alerts us to the reality that far from being gender-neutral, conventional news frames treat the male as normative (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). Moreover, "news reports favor a "masculine narrative" that constructs politics in stereotypically masculine terms" (Rakow & Kranich, 1991, p. 8).

In investigating the representation of men and women politicians in Kenya during elections, this research focused on audiovisual media (i.e., television). Interviews on Citizen Television and Nation Television (NTV), out of a total of four, were selected, evaluated, and analyzed based on how they framed female politicians during the 2017 General Elections. Two interview transcripts were purposively selected for content analysis specifically focusing on female politicians' coverage and representation in election programs. Focus was placed on special ways in which stereotypes or conventional frames were used in the interview process to disadvantage female candidates. For example (a) how specific questions were structured, (b) differential reporting for male and female speeches (e.g., paraphrasing, transitivity, quotations backed by reasoning), (c) use of gender distinctions and stereotyping through masculine imagery, and (d) archetypal or clichéd images of women and gendered descriptive terms (e.g., age, physical appearance, marital status and explicit gender marking).

Paraphrasing involves putting a passage from source material into one's own words, which maybe shorter or condensed than the original text. Transitivity refers to how grammatical resources (e.g., agency deletion, negative/positive representation of actors, foregrounding/backgrounding, or

nominalization) are used by the media. Quotations involve using the speaker's actual words; however, there is a tendency for the media to paraphrase direct quotations, and hence reducing the impact of the speaker's message.

## **METHODS**

A combination of content and qualitative analysis was done. Content analysis involved identifying lexicon or words used by anchors, and candidates in NTV and Citizen news interviews on coverage of the election campaign. This task was performed by the researchers, using transcripts of the interviews. The lexicon was identified on the basis of gender distinctions and gender stereotyping through masculine imagery (e.g., competitiveness, power, virility and strength), archetypal or clichéd images of women (e.g., beauty, submissiveness, nurturance, and cooperation) and gendered descriptive terms (e.g., age, physical appearance, marital status and explicit gender marking). In order to obtain the effect of the lexicon, qualitative analysis, which involved a focus on stereotypes and conventional frames, was employed. Interpretation and explanation of the findings was done in the context of gender social role theory (Mallon, 2003) and framing theory and gender (Cappella & Jameison, 1997; Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). The gender social role theory posits that each social role is a set of rights, duties, and expectations. Mallon (2003) suggested that people accept their everyday activity based on their socially prescribed gender roles. The model is based on the observation that people behave in a predictable way, and that an individual's behavior is context specific, based on social position and other factors. The theory posits the following propositions about social behavior that: the division of labor in society takes the form of interaction among heterogeneous specialized positions that we call roles; social roles include appropriate and permitted forms of behavior, guided by commonly known social norms, which determine expectations; and these roles are occupied by individuals called actors and when they approve a social role (i.e., consider it legitimate and constructive), they can incur costs to conform or punish those who violate the norm. Contrarily, framing and gender theory looks into how media constructs can be likened to the frames of a house that provide the structure around which everything else fits, and influencing the overall style of the construction (Tankard, 2001). The approach offers a new and more nuanced way of understanding gendered media representations, which partially supplants the traditional preoccupation with negative news coverage of women (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996).

### **Media framing of female politicians**

Framing involves stereotypes or conventional frames that reveal gender distinctions. For instance, media can choose what aspects to highlight, draw attention to, or leave out. Unfortunately, in most cases, the media is often preoccupied with the maternal and familial statuses of women politicians, consistent with the concepts of trivialization and condemnation; yet, equivalent criteria are not often applied or used to judge male politicians. Whereas gendered mediation is a concept that recognizes that far from being gender-neutral, conventional news frames treat the male as the norm. Thus, the media transcripts below will be followed by an analysis on framing and gendered mediation.

### **Sample 1**

*This program aired on May 26, 2016 on Citizen Television during the 9:00pm News segment on "Women in Leadership" by Lilian Muli. The female politician interviewed was Nazlin Omar, a*

presidential aspirant in the 2017 General Elections in Kenya. The runtime for this interview is 19:22 minutes and can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/G4drXvVDkUc?t=104>.

*Muli:* (opening remarks). So, the 2017 General Elections is expected to be one of the most hotly contested and a woman who does not shy away from the big race has thrown her weight in the race. Rather, [she] has thrown her weight in the ring. Nazlin Omar is seeking to unseat the incumbent Head of State. She is the only female presidential aspirant this year in the August polls and she is with us in the studio on “Women in Leadership.” Thank you very much for joining us Nazlin.

*Nazlin:* Thank you for inviting me. I am honored to be here.

*Muli:* Always very gorgeous, stylish, Chanel bag ... (both laugh).

*Nazlin:* And look who is talking (laughs). This is an icon of beauty and style (both laugh).

*Muli:* Let’s get to business Nazlin. We will be talking about fashion later. So, you vied for presidency in 2007 against then President Mwai Kibaki. What has motivated your attempt this time round?

*Nazlin:* Uhm ... I think as we keep on [pause] from one election to the next, Kenya keeps on breaking as a nation. As a people, we keep on breaking apart ... whether it is tribalism or this gross corruption, mass theft of public funds, extreme impunity, [and] bad leadership. It has been the case for the last 54 years from independence ... And one day, we will all have to stand before the majestic tribunal of God Almighty. And hereafter, explain to Him what did we do as leaders. Did we try to make a difference in people’s lives? And that is what I am all about ... I think the same reasons last time when I vied would have been the same reasons if I were to vie in 2013, but I underwent a lot of gross persecutions unheard of. Maybe we can talk about it a bit later in the program. I think God has just lifted me from the ashes of persecution, gross targeted and systematic political persecution. And I am back on the ground and ... (overlap from Muli).

*Muli:* So ... so! When I listen to what you went through, was it because you were a woman? Or was it because, perhaps, uhm. You were not as prominent as we know the narrative in this country is: that this is usually a two-horse race ... uhm. Why the persecution? Why, why the injustice towards you and what exactly was that? (overlap in talking together with Muli).

*Nazlin:* I think (overlap from Muli) it was very important [to note] there would be no prosecution. I mean, I think being very vocal of ... uhm. I am in headlines every other day [on the] front-page cover and I think part of the media were compromised. Perhaps, to black me out for a certain time, I went through gross persecution, I was arrested for allegedly stealing my own ... vehicles ... So, after even terminating the case against me, when I was giving my evidence in the magistrate’s criminal court, the AG [Attorney General] misused the Constitution provision of terminating cases *nolle prosequi*. I think you remember that was used in the old Constitution, just for political purposes. So, I was not able to present my evidence and then they withheld my cars and I was arrested for four days, kept in detention for four days without food, without access to relatives, hospital, doctor, nobody! I remember when I was presented to court, I was vomiting in court. I was actually throwing up on tissue papers. That sick! And I was lying on the floor; it was really terrible ... (interjection from Muli).

*Muli:* And at that time, people labelled you and thought you were a bit cuckoo. People said Nazlin is a crazy wild cat (overlap from Muli as Nazlin responds).

*Nazlin:* Yes! Because you have been arrested and all that stuff. So, these were the sensations they were paying some poison pens or journalists to write some wrong things about me, but at least God is great. Because there is law in this country, and eventually I sued them. I took the police, the director of public prosecution, [and] the state to court, and I continued the matter there. It is doing very well. The files disappeared, my files disappeared, including my matrimonial files, but they came back eventually. After a lot of fighting, writing petitions to the chief justice, complaining here and there until it actually grew wings and flew back into the judiciary ... now my files are back. Thank God! And then, in 2012 March, it was broad daylight [when] police raided my premises in Garden Estate and took away my five truckloads, including my dogs, four dogs. Everything taken ... why would they take your dogs? Everything was taken away. This all evidence [is] before court (*overlap from Muli—Right*) ... I proved to the court that there was persecution. There is targeted systematic cartels working on this, and guess what? The DPP representative, the Director of Criminal Investigations representative, I mean, these are State Counsel coming to court and conceding to my application, shocking the court and the court enters consent orders to protect me. Absolute immunity to me, my children, my servants and agents ...

*Muli:* So, you went through a lot Nazlin and this time round fast forward to 2017, you are running as an independent.

*Nazlin:* Yes. Just one more thing, in 2013. I did not run because my name had been maliciously entered in the criminal records [*Muli sighs*]. They branded me as a criminal [and] I had no charges, they terminated charges against me, but they called me a criminal, and they entered my name in the register of criminals. Actually, I was surprised this time [round] they gave it to me and clean record and I wondered why they did that ... For the last [*sighs*], since 2009, they have done that. So, back to 2013 and 2017, we are here now. And since 2015 May, I have sent circulars all over Kenya and, so far, as I speak, I have written endorsement from Imams throughout Kenya because I wanted to seek their support back, but 1,800 Imams in Kenya have endorsed my bid to run for the Presidency of the Republic of Kenya [*Muli sighs*] ... Through that system, they have backed me and I have worked with about 700 pastors, a few of them are bishops and reverends, as well, who have endorsed me again to run for [the] presidency. I have hosted them several times at my residence ... And as we speak, I think God is working in His own miraculous ways. Because, over the last month and half, I have founded the caucus for independent candidates of Kenya and who have appointed me as the president in writing on mandate. And we are above 2,000 members, written registered members. So, this is the only organized body of independent candidates in Kenya (*overlap from Muli*).

*Muli:* So, you chose to go as an independent instead of getting the support of perhaps the bigger party.

*Nazlin:* I don't want to be sucked up into these parties. Let me tell you Lilian, and Kenyans will agree with me. Parties have demarcated Kenyans on ethnic lines. If you look at all the parties, they have some ethnic basis around them. Every party has some ethnic base around them. The two or three kingpins that dominate their party allegedly claim that they are bringing their tribal vote in there. So, I think and when you look at parliament, good laws do not pass, [but] bad laws pass because tribal votes gather together or partisan votes gather together to support. They fall blindly onto their party leaders, onto their party interests. So, I would like to tell Kenyans, and they know me, I am not a politician. I am into this for good governance, which is separate from politics. Politics is dirty. Politics is where you go to Parliament and if that bill is good for the nation, you will break it down because you do not want it to pass because it will give the regime some power.

I think those kinds of things, I really want Kenyans to rise above that and say even, I would really advise Kenyans: You vote for me great, if you do not and want to vote for Raila, or you are going to vote for Uhuru or ... I would rather you still go to the MCA's [Members of County Assembly] and MPs who really make a difference and the Women Reps, for example, look at them as individuals [and] ignore the parties.

*Muli:* Right! And, you know, let us talk about the IEBC [Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission] and this week you came out very prominently during the pre-nomination meeting where you accused the IEBC of planning to lock out independent candidates out of the August polls. Uhm, you, of course, today got a reprieve because the High Court has ruled in your favor as independent in certain sections of the elections act. But let us talk about some of the issues that you were not happy about, such as the disqualification criteria, such as university degrees being, you know, a qualification criterion for anybody that is a presidential aspirant. Do you have a university degree?

*Nazlin:* No, I do not and I have been very honest about it. I have committed my life for the sake of others. And I have been so busy on the ground. I have got several global acclamations and nominations, global awards. I would welcome Kenyans to visit my website at nazlinomar.com and this is what the world has said about me. My website is all about what the world has said about Nazlin Omar from Kenya, all over the world. So, my work takes me globally as well on peace, HIV/Aids, women, gender, good governance, democracy, human rights, social justice.... If you look at my school leaving certificate, which I have attached for delivery to the IEBC on Monday, you can see clearly even in school I have a commendable school leaving certificate ... (*she goes ahead to list her school accolades*). So, I have done so much work ... The Constitution Article 137 clause B is clear. You are qualified to run for presidency, if you are qualified to be a Member of Parliament. MPs have passed the qualification criteria for presidency. The MPs of today do not need degrees, until after this election. So, today an MP without a degree can run for presidency.<sup>1</sup>

*Muli:* ... Had you been able to secure these signatures prior to this?

*Nazlin:* I have covered over twenty counties already. And one of the reasons I went to court against IEBC is that I wrote letters to IEBC from last year and I have sent agents to IEBC. Eventually, I sat with Mr. Chebukati in his office on the 19th April, with other letters.<sup>2</sup>

*Muli:* You are going back to court. The narrative in this country has been and particularly this time round is that this is a two-horse race. We know that the NASA flag bearer is Raila Odinga, a seasoned politician, and of course the incumbent, President Uhuru Kenyatta, and therefore there is a general feeling that the independents stand very little chance against these two giants, for lack of a better word, because number one, you have a low popularity and secondly because of your late entry into this race.

*Nazlin:* It is not a late entry, I think may be Citizen did not capture me earlier. And I have been here I think for the last two weeks. I appreciate and thank Citizen so much for quite extensive coverage you have given me. I declared my bid in May last year ... My bid on Facebook trended, Lilian. It trended! And it trended and trended until Facebook send me a warning and then it blacked me out and it gave me a suspension for two weeks ... what I have done is I am engaged

<sup>1</sup> Some content of Nazlin's interview in this section was purposefully omitted in which she discussed the relevancy of degree requirements.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the content of Nazlin's interview where she elaborates on her meeting with Mr. Chebukati on the issue of signatures has been purposefully omitted; however, she thanked the courts for ruling in her favor.

with Kenyans directly on Facebook. When I realized there is a media blackout more or less, I just focus so much on social media, I went viral on social media.

*Muli:* Is it a powerful. Is social media powerful enough to front your agenda?

*Nazlin:* Extremely powerful. That is just one of my multi-pronged approach. When I trended, the trending actually got the attention of K24 TV and they invited me on Capital Talk for half an hour ... So, I have declared my bid from last year May. One year now. It is not that I have come into the race last minute. And it is not easy to be able to mobilize 700 pastors [and] 2,000 Imams to back you. Clearly, I have been on the ground, I have been talking to them. I have been receiving these delegations all over Kenya, they have been collecting the signatures for me without much resources, my matrimonial case has not ended so I do not have access to my matrimonial....

*Muli:* Talking about your matrimonial case, now that you are likely to be the mother of this nation, should you be the first female President of the Republic of Kenya, your home situation, your matrimonial case, what was the situation with that, and where do things currently stand?

*Nazlin:* Well, we are separated clearly for five, six years almost now, five and half to six years....

*Muli:* Tell the people of Kenya why you should be their president.

*Nazlin:* First of all, thank you. I think what you have just heard about a two horse-race, that these two are the most popular, I do not believe that ... [they] have been rejected by the people... I have been endorsed from Nyanza and Western ... (*she continues to explain in detail her bid for presidency and justifies her qualification through several endorsements, including Imams, pastors and other Kenyans. She also castigates other contesters who have been engaged in corruption*).

*Muli:* This is Nazlin Omar, the very stylish ... Thank you very much for joining us.

## Analysis

In her interview with Lilian Muli, Nazlin Omar discusses the challenges she faced in her bid for presidency in Kenya. She openly brings out the pertinent issues of tribalism, corruption, bad leadership and extreme impunity, which face the country. To some extent, she attributes her political woes to her domestic challenges used by the media to frustrate her political ambition. She also points out that these challenges stem from her domestic court cases that later dimmed her desire to vie for the presidency. From her interview with Lilian Muli, she discusses challenges female politicians face in their bid to vie for top positions in politics, which leaves them with no option, but to run as independent candidates. However, independent candidates equally face challenges of registration, particularly from voters and, to some extent, the unfavorable election laws.

Framing in Sample 1 is evidenced in gender distinctions and stereotyping, gendered descriptive terms, and explicit gender markings. First, gender distinction, evidenced in the reference to one's sex, is described as a hindrance. For instance, Muli questions the leadership capabilities and experiences of the female aspirant. The reference to male personalities (e.g., Raila Odinga), expressions (like seasoned politician), or images (like giants, two-horse race) imply the unlikelihood of the female aspirant to win a race. The two main aspirants in both 2013 and 2017 general elections were male: Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta. Furthermore, the description of male aspirants as being seasoned politicians and giants, automatically, depicts female candidates as weak. In addition, Muli seems to suggest that Nazlin, as a presidential aspirant, is less popular



and not strategic as reflected in her late entrance into the race. These descriptions clearly indicate that the leadership capabilities of female politicians are undervalued. Their qualifications are often measured against those of seasoned male politicians who have a history in leadership.

Secondly, media presenters describe female politicians through gendered descriptive terms. In Sample 1, this stereotyping is evidenced through the use of archetypal or clichéd images of women. For instance, Nazlin is described as being stylish, looking very young, and her marital status as the focus of the discussion. In the course of her interview, Muli even asks Nazlin, “When I listen to what you went through, was it because you were a woman? Or was it because, perhaps, uhm. You are not as prominent ...?” The persecution of Nazlin, based on her identity as a woman, is in itself stereotypical. In politics, male politicians, like women, are not immune to political assaults. However, the use of gendered terms is stereotypical and unmarked or normalized for women. For instance, Muli’s reference to Nazlin as “always very gorgeous, stylish” draws attention to her beauty as opposed to her intellect or leadership qualities. Moreover, the use of less flattering, clichéd and image centric language as illustrated in Muli’s expressed sentiments, “we will be talking about fashion later,” shifts the discussion from a political interview to fashion. It is unlikely Muli would have used a similar language while interviewing a male politician. The media also portrays women politicians as negatively aggressive. This view is illustrated in Muli’s remark that “people said Nazlin is a crazy wild cat,” hence questioning her ability to lead. The reference of the term “people” referenced here further indicates that a majority of voters perceive her as being combative and unfeminine, therefore, unacceptable.

The focus on the aspirant’s marital status by Muli is gendered. Through her interviewing style, Muli not only questions and undermines Nazlin’s leadership ability, but also her tone seems grossly inappropriate. “Talking about your matrimonial case, now that you are likely to be the mother of this nation, should you be the first female President of the Republic of Kenya, your home situation, your matrimonial case, what was the situation with that, and where do things currently stand?” This excerpt reflects a line of questioning that is negative and offensive, which she would not use while interviewing male politicians. As a woman, Nazlin is forced to elaborate on her status. Sex-based terms (e.g., “mother” or “first female”) stereotype the aspirant in feminized frames and consistent with the concepts of trivialization and condemnation (Tuchman 1978; Fountaine & McGregor, 2001).

Thirdly, Muli’s opening remarks for her segment fronts a gendered trope. Her comment below highlights and emphasizes Nazlin’s femininity as being more important than her leadership skills.

[T]he 2017 General Elections is expected to be one of the most hotly contested and a woman who does not shy away from the big race has thrown her weight in the race. Rather, [she] has thrown her weight in the ring. Nazlin Omar is seeking to unseat the incumbent Head of State. She is the only female presidential aspirant.

In this context, if Nazlin were male, the opening gender marking would not have occurred. Muli’s use of the phrase “only female presidential aspirant” emphasizes Nazlin’s feminine image. Additionally, the use of the expression like she has “thrown her weight in the race” and “thrown her weight in the ring” conjure a stereotypical male domain in politics rather than a fair competitive space. This highlights a pre-determined male race that points to her pre-destined defeat.

The framing of the female aspirant in Sample 1 further points to gendered mediation. There is evidence of the use of conventional news frames, which treat male candidates as normative.

Muli, in this interview, seems to favor a masculine narrative even though she is a woman. For instance, she alludes to the fact that presidential elections in Kenya are usually a “two-horse race.” The term “horse” is a masculine metaphor for power or strength, which promotes a masculine political image and narrative. The number “two” metaphorically constructs a space for only “two seasoned politicians,” who are also male. Muli later clarifies this as a race between Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta. “[T]he NASA flag bearer is Raila Odinga, a seasoned politician, and of course the incumbent, President Uhuru Kenyatta.” This qualification of Raila as “a seasoned politician” and the incumbent Uhuru, indicates that both men are politicians. In contrast, Nazlin understands the game of politics as “a two-horse race” and the men are better positioned to win. The implication behind the incumbent aspirant is that he has power, money and a competitive edge over other aspirants, including the female competitor who lacks resources. Therefore, “the two-horse race” supports the status quo and constructs politics in stereotypically masculine terms (Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). The use of the word “giant” is gendered in its reference to the likes of Raila and Uhuru and depicts the female candidate in a non-starter position. While the term “low popularity” implies the female aspirant is unseasoned in politics and, therefore, her vehicle in the race (Independent Party) lacks popularity compared to the two famous parties: NASA (Raila Odinga) and Jubilee (Uhuru Kenyatta).

The media coverage of female aspirants is also wanting. Mainstream media did not cover Nazlin’s presidential bid despite declaring her candidacy a year earlier. She, thus, had to resort to social media channels like Facebook to engage with voters one-on-one. Nazlin notes, “It is not a late entry, I think may be Citizen did not capture me earlier ... I declared my bid in May last year ... My bid on Facebook trended, Lilian. It trended! ... I am engaged with Kenyans directly on Facebook.” While the visibility of women on social media has increased, structural systematic gendering of women in politics takes place daily on television, radio broadcasts, and in the print media (Fountainne & McGregor, 2001). Instances of omission, trivialization and condemnation continue despite greater political gains by women. Their marginalization and trivialization, in terms of quantity and quality coverage in mainstream media stations, has occasioned women candidates’ overreliance on social media channels. This symbolic female annihilation (Tuchman, 1978) involves media practices whereby women’s experiences are constantly effaced, illustrative of gendered mediation. In terms of quantity of time, Nazlin was given less coverage, if not blacked out altogether.

As demonstrated in Sample 1, there is also the tendency for women themselves to contribute to their trivialization and symbolic annihilation (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003). What this means is that they do not wait for the media or presenter to trivialize or condemn them, but they do it themselves. For instance, Nazlin draws on her feminine attributes in her quest for power by providing detailed, but counterproductive account of her marital status and ongoing divorce case, which evokes mixed feelings. Despite years of a stable marital status, Nazlin’s narration of her troubled marriage only serves to trivialize her experiences and presidential bid. As Fountaine & McGregor (2001) have observed, women political candidates are often condemned by the media for their marital status. For these reasons, the media frequently trivializes their parenthood for political gain as outlined in Tuchman’s symbolic annihilation.

Moreover, Muli, an anchorwoman, engages in framing, which undermines Nazlin’s candidacy. Her line of questioning borders on the use of conventional news frames that treat male politicians favorably and as norm. In addition, the language she uses creates an impression that female candidates cannot outdo men in politics. This conclusion is based on her stereotypical

presentation of the female candidate as a mother burdened by domestic woes that might impact her performance if elected into office. Most importantly, we need to recognize that media personnel have been socialized into prevailing cultural norms and values to the extent that they also engage in gendered framing and mediation regardless of their gender.

## Sample 2

*This program aired on April 30, 2017 on NTV during the 9:00pm News segment on “Women in Politics” by Larry Madowo. The female politicians interviewed were Susan Kihika (vying to be the senator of Nakuru County) and Dr. Joyce Laboso (seeking to be the governor of Bomet County). The runtime for this interview is 14:51 minutes and can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/K9c9Y-qsCBc>.*

*Madowo:* I am now joined in the studio by two ladies who are on the verge of making history: Susan Kihika is the speaker in the Nakuru County Assembly and she has just won the Jubilee nominations for Senate. So, you could be the first woman senator in Nakuru County. Congratulations on winning that.

*Kihika:* Thank you.

*Madowo:* And Dr. Joyce Laboso is the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and just won the Jubilee nominations there for governor. So, you could be one of the first female governors in the County, in the country, actually.

*Laboso:* Okay, thank you.

*Madowo:* Congratulations to you both.

*Kihika and Laboso:* Thank you.

*Madowo:* It must have been a very difficult campaign, but you both had such convincing wins. You had something like over 200,000 votes

*Kihika:* 270,000.

*Madowo:* Two hundred and seventeen thousand votes is unheard of in a nomination. How did that happen?

*Kihika:* I guess the people of Nakuru County were ready for change and they thought and believed that I am the best person to take up the mantle and bring the change that they need.

*Madowo (addressing Laboso):* You also had a convincing defeat and your opponent conceded, which is something that is rare. A lot of politicians have been going about saying, no, no, no, it was not free and fair, [but] in your case, they agreed she beat me.

*Laboso:* Yes. Because I think we had a very free and fair nominations and we are happy that the party decided to cancel what had happened on Friday ... So, with the Monday elections that were held, it was clear that I had really won that election in a free and fair way. I do really want to also say thank you for my opponent or my competitor because by conceding also it really showed a gentleman way of doing mature politics.

*Madowo:* I wish more people ... haven't done that, and this is not just in Jubilee [but] in ODM as well, in smaller parties [and] we were just talking about the Wiper situation where there is a tussle, the one Wiper chairman even resigned. Why is it that politicians do not agree when they are

defeated? I start with you Dr. Laboso because you have been here longer. You have been in politics longer.

*Laboso (laughs):* That is true. I think a lot of the time it is the amount of effort that you put into the campaigns. It is really grueling, and many many times, you really do put your best. You are down even financially, morally, physically, and by the time a result comes that is not favorable to you, sometimes it is not easy to take it. So, it is understandable. Then again, many times, you find that maybe when there are malpractices, when clearly there has been maybe vote stuffing, or things have not gone quiet right and with all that you have gone through, it is sometimes difficult not to concede easily. But like I said, when the process is very clear, all of us had our various [and] different tallying centers. I am talking about the case of Bomet. So, you know, by the time we were coming to that hall, all of us already had our own results from our own tallying centers. So, it was difficult for anybody to say anything else.

*Madowo:* Alright. That is out of the situation Susan that there is. I think the Jubilee appeals tribunal today was dealing with something like 55 different appeal cases.

*Kihika:* 400 actually.

*Madowo:* Nearly 400 different appeal cases. So, are you surprised by how many people are just contesting the losses?

*Kihika:* Actually, considering that we had about 8,000 candidates, if the people contesting are about 400, I don't think in the scheme of things that [that is] really a very big percentage. But, at the same time, like Dr. Laboso said, I mean as politicians, you put so much into it, so much resources. You invest so much emotions and everything and you have supporters every day telling you, you know, we are ahead. So, at the end of the day, sometimes when the results come out, maybe people feel that they did not lose, even though the process was fair. At the same time, too, you have people who have very, very thin margins; they have lost by a very thin margin, and maybe they also feel that the process may not have been as fair. Granted, I do feel that this time, really the Jubilee party really tried to have very, very, very fair and open nominations, but I am not surprised by the number.

*Madowo:* Okay. Dr. Laboso, the two-thirds gender bill did not sail through this house that you were part of. Why was that?

*Laboso:* We really tried. We tried as a house. We tried as members of KEWOPA, which is the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association. We tried through even the civil society. You know, holding several different forums with our male counterparts. You know, trying to really get them through the fact that this was not about us. You know, asking for more seats, but it was in the Constitution. It was a requirement and it was only parliament that was supposed to pass that legislation. It could not come from anywhere else, otherwise it would have happened, but anyway we did not succeed with this one.

*Madowo:* Why? Is it male chauvinism?

*Laboso:* Uhm (*pause*). Yes. I can put it down to that because one they thought already there are enough women in parliament. Some of them even complained the perfumes are too much, you know! ... some things which you really feel should not really count, and ooh there we are already giving them enough problems; those of us who are there. So, it boils down to male chauvinism and maybe still that perception that politics really is a male world. It is for the men. It is not a game for women.

*Madowo:* This is the world Susan you are going into, from making laws in the county. Now, you are going to be making laws at the national level, but she [Laboso] says there is obvious sexism among the male MPs and senators.

*Kihika:* No. I agree. I mean, just the nature of politics seems to be very, very male dominated. And even as we go to the next level, meaning, for example, for me from the county assembly into the senate, I am expecting that. But, at the same time, I don't think we should shy away from doing it. Eventually, we must do it. So, many of us that we no longer require, have that requirement because it seems it is hard to get it to pass. And I think, maybe the positive side of it is having failed to go through. A lot of us women are now really understanding that it is *gonna* be hard to get this given to us, not that we just want it given to us, but that we must fight it out with our male counterparts. And that is what we are doing.

*Madowo:* In the last election, there were a lot of women, who were running for seats other than women representatives, who complained that their opponents, the male opponents said “*Tumewapatia ile ya wanawake. Mbona wanataka hizi zingine?*” (We have given them a women's position. Why do they want other positions?). Did you experience that?

*Kihika:* A lot of it actually. I actually really did experience it. And a lot of my ... the people that I was competing with for the senate seat were males, and the theory of what they were using was saying that for me, I have a reserved seat, which is the women rep seat. So, then, I should give way and cede the senate seat to a male. But obviously, when we have a population that sometimes does not understand that the other seats are open to all of us, and only the women rep one is open to the women, for affirmative action purposes, then it becomes a bit of a problem. But what we have done is [that] we have done a lot of civic education as we move around campaigning. But it is a big problem.

*Madowo:* You laughed [to Laboso] when I asked that. Did you also hear that?

*Laboso (Laughs):* Oh yes! But like you said, I have been here longer in politics and we have spent a lot of time really telling [the] electorate [that] this is an affirmative action seat. It is because over the years, despite education, we are represented in all the other spheres. Whether it is in private sector, in business, in education, in whichever sector except the political arena. And that this was affirmative action that we have struggled over the years. We have never gone beyond 20%. In fact, this is probably the highest that we have gone to 20% of elected. You know, actually elected plus even the affirmative action. We still haven't managed to reach the 30%. So, we are still below 30 percent.

*Madowo:* Alright

*Laboso:* So, really, Yes. You get those kinds of comments, but I do not get as much as I have said because I have been there longer. And, I have been explaining myself that, that is not a seat that I want to go for ... or that I am interested in. Because I think there are more deserving people who have not been in politics that can be able to benefit from that seat.

*Madowo:* The battle for you is coming Dr. Laboso in August when you face Isaac Ruto.

*Laboso:* Yes. I am not looking at it as a bigger battle than what I have come from because this one was a real battle because I know that Bomet is a Jubilee zone. It is 100% Jubilee. And, I knew that this was almost the final. It doesn't matter whether it is Isaac Ruto or any other Ruto. Well, not any other Ruto, the one I am fully behind is the Deputy President, who is in the presidency and who is in Jubilee....

*Madowo:* But Isaac Ruto is an incumbent. He is a party leader. He is a NASA Principal.

*Laboso:* Aah, you give him all the accolades you want to accord to him and, you know, yesterday we learnt about his new position in the NASA coalition. Some people are calling it an Assistant Minister. Others are calling it, you know, all sorts of names because it does not exist in the Constitution. And having all that fought so hard [*pause*] to come and be given a position that does not exist in the Constitution, that is up to him. But I keep saying, I am not fighting Isaac Ruto. I am going out to the people of Bomet to sell my policies, to sell myself to them. It is up to Isaac Ruto to go and do the same thing. Sell his NASA to the people of Bomet. And I can assure you, they are not about to buy it because [when you] look at all voting patterns, of the Kipsigis from when they started voting. And I can assure you, this is not going to be a very different one, particularly when they have one of their own as the number two person in the country, who is just about to also ascend to the presidency. They are not going to leave or cede that position and go to a number five or a number nothing because we don't know what that position is.

*Madowo:* Alright, Susan Kihika, a question for you from Kennedy Mwaniki: "Susan Kihika's campaign was high profile, where did she get the funds and she is an MCA and a speaker of the County Assembly. Somebody else mentioned here that it is rumored you have spent as much as 500 million shillings."

*Kihika:* Oh my God! I wish, I mean, I don't know, Larry. Why I keep getting this question of finances? And again, I have said, I believe the reason it keeps coming up is because I am a woman. I don't believe that I have spent any more than my male counterparts, but, at the same time, I think when the males are able to spend that, then it seems normal. It seems okay! But when a woman is able to come out there and give as good as the men are giving, then there has to be questions to it. So, anyway, five hundred [million] is ludicrous. There is no such kind of money spent. But, at the same time, I have a lot of friends, who believe in me. And I was able to get them to come together and fundraise for me to be able to put [up] a formidable campaign. So that I am able to not only do a mediocre average campaign, but to be able to do better than those that I was fighting against and then come out on top.

*Madowo:* So, you think there is double standard here?

*Kihika:* Absolutely. I believe.

*Madowo:* Because there is one tabloid that even claimed you have a sponsor that is paying for all of this.

*Laboso:* (*Expresses surprise*)

*Kihika:* Larry, I mean, I really dislike that! Uhm. Again, I think it is a double standard. Again, the reason that it is happening is because I am a woman. Why is it that ... why can't it be my partner or my boyfriend? Why would it have to be a sponsor? Just simply because I am a woman. Why aren't we hearing who their wives or girlfriends are? Because they are men and that is okay. You know, so I think there is a lot double standard in politics, but it is not going to deter me. I am doing everything I can to win the seat. I have come this far. I had 270,000 and my closest competitor had 49,000. So, clearly, I am doing something right. But I am also pushing forward so that I am also successful come August. And so that eventually and I hope and pray that this double standard ends at some point.

*Madowo:* Alright, I am out of time, but really quick somebody, B. M. Muriithi, wanted me to ask both of you: "What do you think of the fact that neither NASA nor Jubilee has a woman in their

top leadership?” Dr. Laboso first.

*Laboso:* I cannot talk for Jubilee. They may not have now, but I can assure you that Jubilee has been very practical in the way they support the women. I can tell you that my party supported us even in the last election. In 2013, we had the highest number of women in parliament. Twelve or is it thirteen out of the sixteen came from Jubilee. So, I can tell you that Jubilee not only says that they support women, they actually go out of their way to do it.

*Madowo:* Susan really quick.

*Kihika:* And I think actually we have seen the commitment from Jubilee in trying to get the women to get real positions. And just us sitting here is an example of that. We have seen even from the Jubilee nominations the number of women who have been nominated for Governor, which we have not seen that yet in NASA, I believe. But, I was a bit disappointed to see five principles in NASA without one woman out of the five. And I am glad, and I am happy, that our party leaders really walk the talk and it is not just talk, but they have helped us women rise to the top.

*Madowo:* Alright. I have to leave it there. Thank you both for coming in. We appreciate your time. All the best in August.

*Kihika and Laboso:* Thank you

## Analysis

In Sample 2, feminization is the dominant strategy used by the presenter, Larry Madowo, as he engages two women aspirants: Susan Kihika and Dr. Joyce Laboso. From the beginning of his interview, Madowo employs feminized tropes to portray the women as unique candidates who are set to vie for top leadership positions, senatorial and gubernatorial. He alludes to how uncommon it is for a woman to garner over 270,000 votes in a nomination. He questions the aspirants to explain and justify how it happened, “Two hundred and seventeen thousand votes is unheard of in a nomination. How did that happen?” Madowo’s frames the question in a manner that seems to challenge the validity of their successful nomination. He derides the female’s win and the men who strangely conceded their defeat. “You also had a convincing defeat and your opponent conceded, which is something that is rare ... [but] in your case, they agreed....” Such perceptions devalue women because it appears that it is not norm for a man to concede defeat, especially if the opponent is a woman. This example illustrates the feminized framing in the media.

Madowo also introduces the two-thirds gender bill and questions how it could not pass in parliament, yet women, like Dr. Laboso, were members of parliament. In this case, he seems to suggest that women are their own enemies when it comes to issues that concern them in parliament. Further, he questions as to whether male chauvinism was the real reason behind the unsuccessful gender bill, a fact Laboso confirms in her response:

[Men] thought already there are enough women in parliament. Some of them even complained the perfumes are too much, you know! ... We are already giving them enough problems; those of us who are there. So, it boils down to male chauvinism and maybe still that perception that politics really is a male world. It is for the men. It is not a game for women.

Laboso elaborates on how male chauvinism is rife in parliament. Male parliamentarians discriminate against their female counterparts by highlighting their femininity, including the use

of perfumes, stereotyping of women as problematic, and promoting the perception that there are already enough women in parliament, and that politics is not for women. Such descriptions are negative and undermine women's success in the political arena.

Madowo further demonstrates his gendered views when he claims that women have a reserved position, Women Representative, and tasks Laboso and Kihika to justify why they are vying for other elective positions. "In the last election, there were a lot of women, who were running for seats other than women representatives, who complained that their opponents, the male opponents, said "*Tumewapatia ile ya wanawake. Mbona wanataka hizi zingine?*" (We have given them a women's position. Why do they want other positions?). The women confirmed that the Constitution does not preclude them from running for other political offices. The Women Representative position is an affirmative action aimed to boost their representation in parliament.

Further, Madowo, questions the women's viability as candidates by comparing them to their male competitors and past leaders. For example, he asks Laboso, "The battle for you is coming Dr. Laboso in August when you face Isaac Ruto." Madowo sees Ruto as a force to reckon with when it comes to politics and this could be a challenge for Laboso. He further suggests that Ruto cannot be defeated and heaps all manner of accolades on him thereby devaluing the woman aspirant. "But Isaac Ruto is an incumbent. He is a party leader. He is a NASA Principal." This characterization of Ruto diminishes Laboso's ability to win.

The use of clichéd images, which construct women as financially incapable of financing their own run for office, is sexist. For instance, Madowo reads a commentary from a viewer who questions the money source Susan Kihika was using in her campaigns. "Susan Kihika, a question for you from Kennedy Mwaniki [is] '... where did she get the funds? ... It is rumored you have spent as much as 500 million shillings.'" Mwaniki's comment seems to suggest that, as norm, women cannot have enough campaign money to run for a political office. If they do, then, the money must be from a male sponsor, a term in Kenyan context that demeans women by casting them as gold diggers. Kihika, in her defense, embraces her professionalism; she has her own money and willing friends who have been supporting her financially. Madowo then brings up the issue of "sponsor," which refers to a man who meets the financial needs of a woman, to whom he is not married, in exchange of sexual favors. He further harangues her when he reads, "Because there is one tabloid that even claimed you have a sponsor that is paying for all of this." This remark is a very archetypal marking, portraying women aspirants as sexual objects who depend on men for financial support. This negative framing hampers women's bid for political offices as illustrated by the fact that in 2017, Kenya's political parties did not have any female presidential candidate. This marginalization is highly gendered and consistent with the trivialization and condemnation of women political candidates (Tuchman, 1978).

## CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in this article, media framing of female candidates hinders women's chances of electoral success. The media's preoccupation with the maternal and familial statuses of women politicians trivializes and condemns them to defeat. In addition, their stereotypical female framing with clichéd images of women as mothers, beautiful, and stylish connects women more to their physical features and appearances rather than to their professional attributes and qualifications for office. This further reduces and questions their ability to run for office or lead, hence hindering their electoral chances of success. From this article's findings, we can conclude that the press



considers politics to be a male domain and relies on masculine language to describe it. The news interviews featured herein, therefore, have a masculine narrative that actively perpetuates the masculine conception of politics and politicians, which works against women candidates.

The findings of this study have many implications. First, they could help the media to re-evaluate its unfair treatment of female politicians. Secondly, they could help us to understand the role of the media in maintaining society's male dominated political power structures. Thirdly, they could also contribute to knowledge theory besides helping to guide contemporary journalism education. Moreover, the article can help female political candidates to engage more effectively with the media and to help correct negative images on women's roles in politics and public affairs. Finally, the article could promote a more balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women in the media.

Although there has been some visible progress of women representation in the media, their portrayal still remains negative, sexist, and often their concerns are overlooked. This shortcoming can be attributed to the inadequate training of journalists and managers, and a limited number of women decision makers in the media. This article, therefore, calls for Kenyans to address and eradicate "sexism" in society as a means to promote gender equality in its media.

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