



Vol. 18 | Post COVID-19 Recovery and Sustainable Development

Vol. 18 Article 9 | November, 2023

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Youth Political Mobilization in Tharaka-North during the Colonial Period between 1895 and 1963

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Cite as: Mwangangi, J. M., Oduor, I., & Vengi, A. (2023). Youth Political Mobilization in Tharaka-North during the Colonial Period between 1895 and 1963 [Data set]. In *International Journal of Social and Development Concerns* (APA, Vol. 18, Number Post COVID-19 Recovery and Sustainable Development, pp. 131–137). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10142810>

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Editing Oversight

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Abstract: Kenyan youth have been a key constituency for political mobilization since the country's independence. Politicians across the country have in most cases co-opted the youth in electoral competitions to either retain or wrestle power from opponents. Despite their numerical strength, importance and historical relevance little attempt has been made to analyze youth political mobilization during colonial period in Tharaka-North sub-County, between 1895 and 1963 hence forming the purpose of the study. The objective that guided the study was to analyze youth political mobilization during colonial period in Tharaka-North sub-County, between 1895 and 1963. This study took the form of an exploratory research design. The study employed both primary and secondary data to accomplish its goal. The respondents for the field interviews were selected using stratified random and purposive sampling approaches. Stratified random sampling was used to select 90 respondents who comprised of ordinary youth residing in Tharaka North-Sub-County. This was backed up by purposive sampling technique which was used to select 10 lead respondents mostly youth leaders and elders. Research instruments used included interview schedules with open ended questions. Qualitative methods of data analysis and interpretation were used. Anchored on the theory of patron-client relationship this study argued that the political class take advantage of the desperate situation of the youth to promise goodies if propelled to positions of power. The findings of this study shows the youth in Tharaka were socialized to believe that leadership positions were reserved for the old and senior males because The patriarchal structure of Tharaka society acted as a barrier to the ascendancy of young men to positions of leadership. As a consequence of this, youth political mobilization was low. It recommended that Civic education should be geared towards making political awareness to young people and that the government should put in place strategies that will improve youth participation in the political process.

Key words: Youth, Politic, Political mobilization, Political participation/engagement, Political systems

1.1 Study Background

The political engagement of the youth has been studied by academicians globally. Sloan (2018) criticizes the growing lack of interest among young people in politics in the United Kingdom. Young people between the ages of 18 and 24 have an alarmingly low general election turnout, according to the author. Young people continue to be engaged in politics and are involved in other form of political participation. Here the question of youth political engagement is raised. According to Jacqueline (2008), increased political engagement and civic education are to be attributed for the rise in young people's voting participation in the 2008 presidential election. The author adds that previously, young people all around the United States appeared lost in political matters, as evidenced by the poor voter turnout in the past presidential elections.

Wilkinson (2019), documents that the All-India Student Federation (AISF) was a dramatic demonstration of student power at the national level as well as a successful attempt to combine the already-existing student organizations in colonial India. During the final ten years of the British Raj, this student movement evolved into a forum for the negotiation of young people's political and religious identities. In response to broader political change, particularly the power structure of political parties, Indian students and their student leaders looked for distinct political spaces for youth. Garalyte (2016) adds that this student movement became an arena for the competing efforts of adults and youths to mobilize students, especially by the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Congress Socialist Party (CSP). Despite the numerical importance and historical relevance of youth political mobilization of generational identities within the area, Resnick and Casale (2011) argue that very little is actually known about the political participation of Africa's youth. They document that young people in Africa tend to vote less and display less partisanship than older residents, which is consistent with research on young people in other parts of the world.

Youth political mobilization in Africa can be directly linked to colonial liberation movements, claims Clapham (2006). He observes that nationalist leaders frequently included disgruntled youth in their fight for independence. Youth also served as a source of legitimacy for post-colonial administrations. During the colonial liberation movement and into the post-independence era, youth were first to be co-opted. Resnick and Casale (2011) concentrate on extreme kinds of political engagement by the youth living in African democracies in a paper on the political participation of Africa's youth. They speak directly to the political preferences and preferred methods of engagement of young people. They focus on three key facets of political engagement in this study: voting in national elections, partisan affiliations, and protest activities.

In a study of youth political involvement in Nigeria, Afolayan (2018) finds that young people have historically participated in, contributed to, and spurred substantial changes in political systems, dynamics of power sharing, and economic prospects. Despite this, Nigeria's young people still have to deal with prejudice, unemployment, poverty, and other issues. These obstacles have hindered youth political engagement, turning them into passive political observers at the mercy of the political class. The youth in Africa have frequently utilized violence and war to disturb peace (Ojok and Acol, 2017). Both the genocidal Interahamwe in Rwanda (Roessler 2005) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone (Richards 1996) were founded by disillusioned and unemployed youth respectively.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Different social groups participated in politics in one way or the other. There was tendency by scholars to concentrate efforts in studying the role of social cleavages such as gender, ethnicity and religion in Africa; consequently the impact of generational identities on the political process received relatively little attention compared to other social cleavages. Young Africans made up more than 60% of the population demographically. Youth political mobilization had not been adequately addressed in spite of their numerical advantage and historical relevance. In the political calculations of African politicians, the youth constituency was crucial. The African youth continued to be marginalized in local and national politics despite their numerical advantage and historical significance. Is this situation by default or by design? This study attempted to solve the problem of youth exclusion in politics by examining the youth political mobilization during colonial period in Tharaka North-Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya between 1895 and 1963.

1.3 The purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to analyze youth political mobilization during colonial period in Tharaka-North sub-County, between 1895 and 1963

1.3.1 Objective of the Study

The Objective that guided this study was to Examine youth political mobilization in Tharaka North Sub- County in the colonial period from 1895 to 1963.

1.4 Review of Related Literature

Youth Political Mobilization in Colonial Kenya, 1895- 1963

Whitney (2009), notes that in France, youth were at frontline of French politics for two decades following the First World War as Communist and Catholic forged the most important movements. The youngsters engaged themselves more fully, joining the youth movements in unprecedented numbers. Youth emerged as central component of political mobilization. The interwar era made youth prominent in European world.

Literature on the involvement of the youth in colonial liberation movements in the Third World abound. Hourani, Khoury, and Wilson (2004) document that in the Middle East the youth were at the vanguard of violent protests against British and French colonial dominance. Young people-led groups started organizing nationalist protests in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These protests directly opposed the imperial power of the British, French, and even Ottoman Turks. These overt imperial presence challenges were guided by the organizations' ideological leadership. Consequently, Arab nationalism rose to popularity among young intellectuals in Syria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. The three scholars above shed light on the role played by young people in strengthening Arab nationalism in colonial Arab World. This pattern was to be witnessed in the Arab spring beginning 2011 in Arab dominated North African countries of Algeria, Egypt and Libya where the youth were at the forefront in the revolt. Van Gyampo and Anyidoho (2019) document on youth political mobilization in colonial liberation movements in Africa. They both agree that since the independence fight, African youth have been a political force that has pushed for reforms and adjustments. They echo examples of young political engagement in movements of political contestation, resistance, or uprising in, among other nations, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Niger, Togo, and South Africa. According to Asante (2006), young people involvement in politics is not a new phenomenon. In fact, young people were active in politics in pre-colonial African civilizations and, most famously, they led the pro-independence movement and the anti-apartheid movement in the 20th century. Additionally, history shows that the political involvement of young people has frequently been restricted and appropriated by the political elite.

Ahwoi (2008) and Cooper (2008) concur, adding that young people are frequently enlisted to fight risky political battles, frequently as "foot soldiers" for political parties. In the worst circumstances, they are recruited or seduced into acts of terrorism and armed combat. Reviewing the nature of youth political participation and noting the difficulties many young people face in trying to engage meaningfully in politics at different levels remain crucial to this study. Gyampo and Obeng-Odoom (2012) divide youth political activities in Africa into four stages: pre-colonial period, around 1620s, when young people had distinct roles within age-based societies; the colonial period, which focused on the encounter and resistance of Africans against colonialism and saw the establishment of mostly voluntary trans-ethnic youth groups; and the period of political independence, during the 1950s and 1960s, saw the growth of government-sponsored youth organizations.

From as early as 1920s, African youth were both the intellectual and ground forces in the nationalist and Pan-African movements (Boahen, 1979). This author points at the Gold Coast as an illustration, where local elite who had studied law in Britain and joined the West African Student Union as active members (WASU). In order to analyze the issues, the colony was facing, this group of young people strongly supported the establishment of the National Assembly of the Youth. Chazan (1974) and Awoonor (1990) add those younger nationalists, frequently favoring alternative techniques than older nationalists. The youth employed unique techniques in contrast those used by older nationalist such as Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe, Guinea's Sekou Touré, Mali's Modibo Keita, and Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, to rally the youth to resist colonial control.

Burgess and Burton (1990) discuss the young migration to urban areas in colonial Africa in Tanzania. They contend that as young people in Africa moved to towns and cities in greater numbers, their exposure to a new world of urban tastes, sounds, and stimuli as well as their new encounters with various people and circumstances resulted in relative anonymity and frequently in a process of self-reinvention and the adoption of new identities. Young people actively participated in movements for urban protest.

Clapham (2012) documents of young people in colonial Uganda flocking to the streets to demand change in response to the erosion of human rights and increased unemployment, Ugandan youth across the nation and especially in the urban areas founded a number of political movements. Young activists were detained, and many of them were tortured and murdered. There were numerous inspiring instances of liberation movements throughout Africa that engaged in protracted, frequently traumatic conflicts with colonial, oligarchy- or authoritarian regimes.

Urban youth's contribution to Kenya's Mau Mau uprising has been well documented. According to Amanda (2007), the radical group attracted Kenyan adolescents mostly from the numerous Kikuyu ethnic minority. This organization occasionally organized violent attacks against the colonial government. Many of these young people were arrested, some of whom were killed. According to Robert Dix (1983), the majority of the elder leaders continued to use the Kenya African Union (KAU) and non-violent tactics in contrast to the confrontational means adopted by the youthful leadership of the Mau Mau.

According to Wachanga (1975), young radical youth in Central Kenya held meetings for the forest fighters and gave educational lectures on how to use a weapon properly and why it was a significant sign for the future that they were willing to suffer in squalor and miserable conditions in order to establish a free Kenya. It is impossible to undervalue the part that young people played in the struggle for colonial independence.

In discussing the Mau Mau and the land struggle in Kenya, Kanogo (1987) asserts that an elite group of primarily young people who served as the revolution's decision-makers and public face led the movement. The revolution's direction was determined by the actions of a number of young, prominent Mau Mau leaders as well as by other individuals who were not directly involved in the organized guerilla battle. The majority of the Mau Mau participants were young, Kikuyu-speaking peasants from the countryside. Young men who fought in the Second World War made up a large portion of the Mau Mau generals. Generals Kago, Mathege, China, Kariba, Tanganyika, and Kimathi were among them (Ibid, 1987). The Mau Mau insurrection was the subject of antagonism on the part of the colonial

authorities and European settlers because to their violent and confrontational posture towards the colonial state, as well as their growing popularity and influence among urban and rural youth. As a response, the colonial authority enacted a variety of sanctions to restrain the youth's political activity. The current study sought to specifically establish the role of the youth in colonial liberation struggle in Tharaka North Sub-County.

1.5 Research Methodology and Design

This being a case study, the researcher favored an exploratory research design. Exploratory research is a methodology strategy that looks at research questions that haven't been thoroughly examined before. Exploratory research frequently has a qualitative focus. However, a study with a sizable sample size that is exploratory in nature might also be quantitative. Due of its adaptable and open-ended nature, it is also frequently referred to as interpretive research or a grounded theory approach. Exploratory research design allowed for the examination of youth political mobilization in Tharaka North sub-County. This was achieved by examining dynamics in youth political mobilization during colonial in Tharaka North-Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

Population and sample size

The population in this study included youth in Tharaka North Sub-County. As per the 2019 census Tharaka North Sub-County has a population of 58,345 according to Kenya Bureau of Statistics (K.B.S 2019). From the census result 60% of the total population of Kenya comprises young people between the ages of 18 and 35. From this information Tharaka North sub-County has a youthful population of roughly 35,000 people. The sample size was determined using Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) formula for populations greater than 10,000. Although there is no consensus among authors over the sample size for qualitative research the sample size should not be too small to prevent realization of data saturation. Equally, it should not be too large to make deep case analysis difficult. The researcher in this case interviewed 100 respondents. Although 100 was the sample size, the researcher was contented with data collected when saturation point was reached. This was the point where information began to repeat itself hence no need for further data collection

Methods of Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data collected in this study was analyzed qualitatively. For drawing conclusions and interpretations, qualitative methods of contents analysis were used. Documentary analysis of secondary data was undertaken as part of data analysis to provide the necessary authenticity to the research findings

1.6 Results and Discussion

Most of the primary data was collected from respondents and Archive. Secondary data was obtained from books, articles and journals. For instance, the youth in Tharaka were socialized right from birth to respect their elders. The patriarchal system that gave precedence to generational leadership meant that the youth should acquire leadership skills as they prepare to be future leaders when time for their generation came. This however did not prevent the youth from being actively involved in social and political issues in the community. In this respect the youth in Tharaka actively participated in political issues in society. Nevertheless leadership positions in society were a preserve of older men who were deemed to be wise and experienced. As noted by Kathomi (Gatue 2023). KNA/MSS/ 1/7/1971/ supports the idea of Enlistment of Kenyan youth in colonial administration noting that:

“As indicated in paragraph 6 of Manpower Circular Letter No.1 of 1st May 1945, Kenyan youth of British parentage on reaching the age of 18, will continue to be called for military service. this follows the United kingdom

practice and is based on the following considerations ;military requirement to overrule all other considerations,relief for men who served longer period in the war to return totheir home and that justice to be done to the 18 year olds who joined in 1939 and the succeeding years of war .A clear duty towards the young men whose carriers or training have been interrupted by war service ,and it is equitable that they should receive due consideration to enable them to resume their studies to find employment and that they should be followed in their proper turn by youth as they reach the age of call-up.”(KNA/MSS/1/7/1971)

The youth in Tharaka were in the forefront in resisting the discriminatory and exploitative colonial policies. Karani narrated how his father was in the forefront to oppose the imposition of restrictions on movement by the colonial establishment in Tharaka region. The father according to Karani would group with other young men from the locality to protest to the colonial authorities of the punitive aspects of the policies. They were arrested and locked for disturbing peace (Karani, April 25th 2023).

Scholars had noted of the domination of the young and educated elite in colonial liberation struggles in Kenya. Conchie (1985) noted that in Kenya young people were in the forefront in the colonial liberation struggle. According to Conchie they included; Eliud Mathu, B.A. Ohanga, Tom Mbotela, Francis Khamisi, and James Gichuru, Tom Mboya, Bildad Kaggia, Fred Kubai, Paul Ngei, and Oginga Odinga.

Just like other regions in Kenya the youth in Tharaka were also mobilized in to the colonial liberation movements. The youth were mobilized through the main liberation political parties namely the Kenya African National Union (KANU) and the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). In the post-World War II period African political consciousness increased and the struggle for independence was heightened. As a result of this the youth in Tharaka North actively mobilized in the struggle for independence (Maragwa 2023).

1.7 Conclusion

During the colonial period patriarchy determined and influenced the participation of young people in public affairs. During this period the youth in Tharaka were socialized to believe that leadership positions were reserved for the old and senior males. The patriarchal structure of Tharaka society acted as a barrier to the ascendancy of young men to positions of leadership. As a consequence of this, youth political mobilization was low. Under patriarchy generational leadership that put emphasis on age and experience meant that young people were to wait for their chance in leadership. It was observed that the establishment of colonial rule greatly impacted on the Tharaka people. Socio-economic policies introduced by the British colonial government had great implications on the local population. The young people in Tharaka were in the forefront in resisting colonial policies such as land alienation, creation of reserves and labor regulations such as the pass laws. It was further noted in the post-World War II period the youth in Tharaka were at the forefront in the agitation for independence. Young people mobilized in their numbers in the colonial liberation movement.

1.8 Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations;

- (i) The government should put in place strategies will improve youth participation in the political process

- (ii) Young people should be encouraged to vie for political positions as this increases the level of youth political representation.

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