

## Being female in African Politics: Alisen Chelaite through Biographical Lense of Gender and Image Identity

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### Abstract

### Review Article

Few modern women in Kenya have had as great a political impact as Alisen Chelaite, a peasant's daughter from Kapropita who, rose to become celebrated political character and charted her ways otherwise male dominated Nakuru politics with great influence. With such elegance, wit, and historical insight, this study charts her upbringing and influences, her political career and life after politics, the impact of her policies, and her personal reputation and political legacy. The article equally features *dramatis personae* of significant male figures that influenced her life. On the other hand, this study examines construction of gender identity in the discourse of Chelaite and aims to make a critical examination of the direction of a contemporary female political leader. Overarching theme and question of political image and substance will run throughout holistic discussion levels of this argument. A major theme introduced in this discussion is that despite being the first female leader in Rift Valley she was antagonistic the widespread feminism that had sprouted from the Kenyan capitals. Questions will be asked in the context of determining the extent to which image and substance existed in her political character. In order to make this exposition the discussion will need to draw out and closely examine any comparisons and question Alisen changed both her political image and substance from the time when she initially entered politics to the period when she became a Cabinet Minister in the Kibaki regime.

**Keywords:** gender, women, chelaite, Kenya, female, power, identity.

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## INTRODUCTION

Politics as a real-world phenomenon and political science as an academic discipline are gendered. People all over the world find that the basic conditions of their lives—their safety, health, education, work, as well as access to markets, public space, and free expression—are fundamentally shaped by their identification as belonging to particular sex or gender groups. Individual bodies may be typed as male or female, masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual, transgendered or nongendered in a dizzying variety of ways across cultures and over time. However, these social practices of gender often appear natural and unproblematic, even biological and therefore impossible to change, in the social contexts in which they occur. But a cursory review of the literature on the biological basis of sex, taking into account the wide variety of the number and content of gender categories across social contexts, reveals a world far more complex than this simplistic male–female

dichotomy would suggest [<sup>1</sup>]. Gender is never just about sex but varies by race, ethnicity, nation, class, and a variety of other dimensions of social life.

Indeed, the persistent, dichotomous sex-typing characteristic of many institutions of the modern world would be a matter of intellectual curiosity if the consequences of being identified with a particular sex were not so dire. Across the globe, gender determines who goes hungry and who gets adequate nutrition and water, who can vote, run for office, marry, or have rights to children, who commands authority and respect

<sup>1</sup>See for example, Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge. Dreger, Alice. 1998. *Hermaphrodites and the medical invention of sex*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and Fausto-Sterling, Ann. 2000. *Sexing the body: Gender politics and the construction of sexuality*. Basic Books

and who is denigrated and dismissed, and who is most vulnerable to violence and abuse in their own homes and intimate relationships [2]. These norms shape more than personal and family relationships or career paths, though they certainly shape those: they shape religious practice and processes of governance [3].

Gender and politics scholars argue that the roots of this enduring male domination in both politics and the political science academy are complex and profound. Challenging this deep-seated domination is more than simply a problem of adding women or increasing the “sheer numbers” in public office [4]. While important, it is not enough in itself. More significant change is needed both to politics as a practice and to political science as a discipline to make them gender equitable. To facilitate this, we need to understand what it is about politics as an academic discipline and politics as a practice and the ways the two interact that results in this overrepresentation of men and profound gender blindness.

Although forgotten in the mainstream literature, Chelaite is a woman endowed with great personal charm, a will of iron, and a soaring intellect. Unquestionably, she is the most gifted woman politician the Kenya nation has ever produced though the women very few people, really know. Those who do, or think they do, either admire her or dislike her. This works in no way a eulogy, for she is robust of health and agile in intellect- she represents a career's worth re-thinking and writing. She broke the glass ceiling in the 90s when she became the first woman mayor of Nakuru town at a time when political leadership in Kenya was a preserve of males.

This was just the beginning. Some of the benefits enjoyed by women today can be traced back to efforts of leaders such as Alicen [5]. She grew up as an

<sup>2</sup>Elman, R. Amy. 1996. *Sexual subordination and state intervention: Comparing Sweden and the United States*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

<sup>3</sup>See Enloe, Cynthia. 1996. “Margins, silences and bottom rungs: How to overcome the underestimation of power in the study of international relations.” In Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Maryisa Zalewski, eds., *International theory: Positivism and beyond*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 11–46; Ferree, Myra Marx. 2009. “Inequality, intersectionality, and the politics of discourse: Framing feminist alliances.” In Emanuela Lombardo, Petra Meier, and Mieke Verloo, eds., *The discursive politics of gender equality: Stretching, bending and policy-making*. London: Routledge, 86–86.

<sup>4</sup>Beckwith, Karen, and Kimberley Cowell-Meyers. 2003. “Sheer numbers.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, August 31–September 3.

<sup>5</sup>See Parpart, J. L. & Staudt, K. A. (Eds.). 1989. *Women and the State in Africa*. Boulder, CO: L. Rienner

African girl who had to necessarily go through such mandatory childhood stages like schooling and rituals, and rose above board to become a senior citizen and a great leader in the Kenyan socio-economic and political arena. She successfully found her way to become a leader in the Kalenjin community of Rift Valley Kenya, which is heavily patriarchal society [6]. She has therefore become a great subject of study today [7].

Sizeable number of studies have been carried about female politicians whose endeavors touch millions of people on the global mapping while ignoring common women who had not reached the first rank in any area but whose lives and painful struggles were interesting to warrant their being recorded. In the light of the gap that exists in the writing of biographies on women in Kenya, this study is a historical investigation of a political life of Alicen Chelaite. Chelaite rose to become a Member of Parliament and a Cabinet Minister and even the first female mayor in Nakuru Municipal council, yet her contributions are not captured by historians. It is interesting how she traversed through patriarchal terrain to raise political fame at a time when her society had pushed women into the margins of obscurity. The study anticipated to assess how such a woman made it without networks of power or related to elites in power.

### **The Nightmare and the formative years, 1945-1961**

Chelaite was born in 1945 at Kapropita location of Baringo District to Cheptoo Arap Cheron and Kobilo Cheron who were small scale farmers and ardent followers of the AIM [8]. She was the third in the family of nine children. According to Alicen, this was a large family by any standards [9]. Cheptoo Arap Cheron being a staunch Christian lived by the church's teaching that a good Christian should only marry one wife. This was when the he assault which the missions were seen to be mounting against African traditional family structure was therefore felt primarily by women. Their first reaction was to defend the discredited institutions then as the contents of scripture became diffused throughout society, women gradually became aware of the discrepancy between their relatively under privileged status under the mission Churches and the liberty in Christ proclaimed for women in those scriptures.

Publishers. In W. R. Ochieng & B. A. Ogot (Eds.), *Decolonization & Independence in Kenya 1940-93*. (pp. 187-213). Athens, OH: Ohio University Press and London: James Currey.

<sup>6</sup>David Anderson, *Eroding the Commons: The Politics of Ecology in Baringo Kenya. 1890- 1963*. East African Education Publishers Nairobi, (2002), pp. 278-9.

<sup>7</sup>W. R Ochieng.. 1985. *A History of Kenya*. Nairobi: Macmillan Kenya.

<sup>8</sup>Chelaite, OI, 10 August 2019.

<sup>9</sup>Kamurian, O.I 21 August, 2019.

Chelaite's family depended largely on small-scale farming and trade since there was no formal employment in existence then. At that time, the colonial government jobs were not desirable at all and most people disliked being employed by the colonial masters who were distrusted following the Nandi resistance and persistent attacks. In fact, barter trade was still being practiced as the currency trade had not been embraced fully. Cheron Arap Cheptoo, Alicen's father sold cows, goats and sheep in exchange for food crops and other household basic needs this was his major source livelihood [10]. At times, cattle rustling as a cultural practice were done and he took part in it. Normally, this practice was not criminalized as it had cultural tags around it. Communities practiced cattle rustling as a social way of interacting with their neighbours. It was considered a sport and a cultural practice in which young men had to prove their worth [11].

Following Beecher's Report of 1949 [12], the government realized the importance of supervision and inspection. The colony was divided into five regions for purposes of educational administration. Provincial Education Officers, District Education Officers and area Education Officers were appointed and mobilized. The idea of quality was further strengthened when the Kenya Inspectorate was formed in 1955. The medium of instruction was vernacular up to Standard four and then English took over. However, in the mid-1950s, poor performance was noted in Asian and African schools in the Primary Examination. The Ministry of Education created a special centre-an off school of the Inspectorate to investigate and experiment with issues relating to education. The Centre introduced English as a medium from standard one in Asian Schools in 1957. The approach was experimented in African Schools in 1961.

In 1955, Chelaite's father fell sick, that means that he could no longer take care of his family as before. This came at a time when Chelaite was to commence her intermediate School. Elizabeth Kobilu Chesire, Chelaite's aunt looked for ways of helping the young Chelaite to continue with her studies. Kandie, Chelaite's brother observes that his two elder sisters were married in unclear circumstances they eloped from home so Elizabeth Kobilu Chesire decided to hold Chelaite's hand since she had seen the potential in her. She used the friendship she had with the Moi's family to connect the young Chelaite with the Moi's family not just to work as a house help but also to be part of the family. Consequently, Chelaite moved to take care of Moi's children; Jonathan and Jeniffer. By that time, Moi was working as a teacher at Kabarnet High School

in Baringo [13]. While working as a house help, Moi's family welcomed her and she observed that she was loved. She asserted that while working for Moi as a house help, she was highly respected and treated as part of the family [14]. Moi took care of her intermediate level education, Chelaite further observed.

### **Chelaite, Trade Unionism and Political changes in Kenya, 1978-1996**

The genesis of Chelaite's long political career dates back to her time as a secretary at the Wheat and Maize Board in Nakuru. In 1978, while working at the Maize and Wheat Board (which later changed its name to National Cereals and Produce Board-NCPD), was nominated as a counselor by the then ruling party-KANU within the Nakuru Municipality to represent women at the county council for having been actively involved in women and children issues. She recalls that she dedicated all her life to serving women and children at the grass-root. Alicen did love working to improve the welfare and needs of the women and children at the grass-root. She considered children and women especially at the grass-root levels as being vulnerable. Alicen felt that they needed help and that's how she found herself working towards changing their lives. As a result, she was nominated councilor under KANU [15].

In 1984 after serving as a nominated councilor for six years, she vied and won as Nakuru Municipality Councillor. Though she won the election, she posits that Moi was not confident about her being in a leadership position as he feared her being victimized and intimidated by male leaders who dominated the municipalities in Nakuru. As a counselor, Alicen Chelaite will always be remembered for the contribution she made when she was the chairperson of Nakuru Housing Development Company, which was later changed to NABANAKA (shika nishike twende pamoja). The NAKA estate in Nakuru. As the chairperson, she mobilized individuals from Baringo who had moved to Nakuru they were 645 members she was able to supervise the acquisition of 218 acres of land at 4.1 million in 1985. NAKA later became one of the prestigious estates in Nakuru [16].

In 1985, Chelaite was elected the vice chairperson of Public Health and Education Committee within the municipality. She spearheaded for renovation and upgrading of Nakuru Girls Harambe School to a Provincial School. Chelaite worked closely with the then area Member of Parliament Kimemia to ensure that the school was upgraded. The school was later upgraded to the Provincial level after meeting the

<sup>10</sup>Kandie, O.I, November 12, 2019.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>W. Nabea, "Language policy in Kenya: Negotiation with hegemony" *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2009, 3 (1), 121-138.

<sup>13</sup>Kandie, O.I, Septemeber 15, 2019.

<sup>14</sup>Chelaite, O.I, August 14, 2019

<sup>15</sup>Chelaite, OI, August 12, 2019.

<sup>16</sup>Katya, OI, January 21, 2020

standards that were set by the ministry of education [17].

In 1989, Chelaite who was then serving as an elected municipal councilor, was elected the Chairperson for Maendeleo ya Wanawake because of her good leadership skills to represent Rift Valley Province. Rift Valley province was the largest province of all the eight provinces in Kenya. Maendeleo ya Wanawake under the leadership of Chelaite managed to accommodate a lot of women within Rift Valley province. Chelaite initiated a lot sensitization programs where women were empowered and taught their rights within their societies. Alicen observes that since she hailed from a patriarchal society, it was her principle aim to ensure that she changed that narrative of chauvinistic thinking [18]. Kangogo who hails from Kapropita also observes that Chelaite worked tirelessly as the leader of Maendeleo ya Wanawake in Rift Valley to advocate for the rights of women whom she thought were being oppressed by their husbands, she further asserts that Chelaite was also an anti-Female Genital Mutilation campaigner within the region and most importantly, she improved the maternal services within the region. According to Kangogo, it was because of Chelaite that a lot of women from Rift Valley began to rise into the political arena [19].

Chelaite fitted well while working at this women organization having been elected chair for the entire province. Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization is a national organization for women development whose aim is to support women in expanding their space for development from grass-root level to the national sphere. It was a national membership Non-Governmental Organization. It did seek to unify, nurture and empower women socially, economically and politically to be able to deal with the unique challenges that face them in society [20]. Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYWO) was first organized by the Department of Community Development and Rehabilitation within the colonial government. At the time of independence, the leadership of the organization was turned over to African women. The new independent government rewarded MYWO's efforts by funding their projects and distinguishing the role of the organization as a welfare agency. Overtime, MYWO's grassroots network expanded to eight provinces of the country and the leadership was made up of a chain of elected representatives from the

smallest administrative unit up to the national level [21].

The organization's efforts in women's mobilization were instrumental in building schools, clinics, and community centres across the Rift Valley region. The leaders were strongly influenced by the United Nations Declaration of the Decade for Women, following the World Conference for Women that were held in Mexico City in 1975. Correspondingly, MYWO oriented its programming towards social welfare all the while providing a prominent voice for grassroots women's organizations [22]. In the 1989, MYWO became affiliated with the then ruling party KANU. MYWO mobilized women for KANU and managed government programs for women [23].

At the same time, pressure had mounted on the Moi's government to repeal section 2A of the constitution, development partners declined to sponsor MYWO's development because of its alignment to KANU. This was a way of punishing them to support the move to repealing section 2A. Ironically this was the period MYWO acquired many assets in form of vehicles and land/plots in urban areas as a reward for the good service done for KANU. However, in 1991, MYWO still under the leadership of Alicen Chelaite in Rift Valley, joined the democratization movement in Kenya and disengaged from KANU. Nevertheless, MYWO continued as a key political player. During the political transition from one party to a multiparty system in Kenya, MYWO, like many civil society organizations in the country, went through an identity crisis as it attempted to find its place in the reform movement to better take care of the interests of women in the new political dispensation [24].

Over the years, this organization had accumulated a wealth of experience in the management of development projects and, diversified and expanded its vision and mission to encompass community concerns. MYWO's past main programmes were: Reproductive Health, Women and Development, Economic Empowerment, Education, HIV & AIDS, Gender & Governance and Research and Development [25]. This was the biggest achievement ever made by

<sup>17</sup>KNA/GY 1/329. Minutes of the Municipal Council of Nakuru, 1985, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>Chelaite, O.I, 10 September 2019; Kenya Census 2009

<sup>19</sup>Kangogo, O.I September 21, 2019.

<sup>20</sup>UN Women, "Stories of courage and transformation from women political leaders in Kenya", UN-Women Web-book, 2004.

<sup>21</sup>L. M. Thomas, *Politics of the womb: Women, reproduction, and State in Kenya*, (California: University of California, 2003), 51.

<sup>22</sup>A. Wipper, "The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization: The Co-optation of leadership", *African Studies Review in Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975), 99-120.

<sup>23</sup>Kangogo, O.I, 21 November 2019.

<sup>24</sup>A. Wehliye, "Change and continuity in the role of Kenya's National Assembly in Formulating Kenya's Foreign policy: 1900-1978". *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 7(1), 595-608.

<sup>25</sup><https://mywokenya.org/index.php/about-us/history> accessed on 24 November 2019.



Alicen Chelaite as the leader of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake in Rift Valley. The fruits of her hard work and her leadership skills are still being enjoyed to date. S.K. Towett, a former mayor, argues that Chelaite was an iron lady. Towett could still vividly remember how Chelaite went physical with her opponent Korir when she was denied entry into the meeting venue. Towett further observes that Chelaite was selfless and was ready to sacrifice her time and money for her fellow women. During her tenure as the town mayor, the entire sewage system in Nakuru municipality was under control. The town was clean and in order Towett observes and according to him, the town residents will forever miss the clean town under the leadership of Chelaite [26].

Against all odds, Chelaite managed to shine in the political arena. Several studies conducted locally and internationally concluded that indeed, women were more vulnerable as compared to their male counterparts. Violence against women and children is perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated human rights violation, cutting across borders, race, class, ethnicity, and religion. Gender-based violence in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, is a complex issue that has at its root structural inequalities between men and women, young and old. This results in the persistence of power differentials between the sexes [27].

#### **Chelaite and the Municipality Politics, 1996-1997**

What are the consequences of electing a female leader in mayoral or municipal politics? and what were its political outcomes? We answer this question in the context of Nakuru Municipal politics, where women's participation in mayoral elections slightly increased after 1980s. In 1996, Chelaite was elected as the first woman mayor in Nakuru, a position that was male-dominated countrywide. It surprised many people when she was elected with an overwhelming majority as a mayor for the then Nakuru Town Municipality. The men, according to her applied every type of violence, ranging from physical to psychological warfare, and abuse to rumour mongering to scare women from politics women have had a long struggle in clinging to political seats and access to equal leadership opportunities like their male counterparts in Kenya and across Africa. This came as a beacon light of hope to thousands of women who thought that they could not compete for such positions [28].

Kenya remained greatly challenged with regard to women's ascendancy into public political leadership positions. The dismal performance of Kenya in regard to women's representation in political

leadership, despite having pioneered and provided leadership to the post-1990 multi-party women empowerment programmes in the East African region, continued to raise concern both at the level of theory and praxis. Globally, the basic constraints women face as they attempt to participate in politics, though occurring in varying magnitudes in different countries, tend to be broadly similar. It had been argued that Kenya had some unique aspects that continued to keep the numbers of women in politics low, such as lack of an affirmative action law, and the gender insensitive male political culture, which continues to dominate key social and political institutions [29].

Such an argument had been profiled for this state of affairs was because women were traditionally socialized to accept male dominance, they would be acting contrary to societal expectations if they played an active role in politics. It was also argued that most women in Kenya were not yet qualified for political office. They were not aggressive enough and therefore, could not withstand the rigors of political life. Contrary to these assumptions, historical records reveal that women had not spared themselves in their fight to make Kenya what it is today. In fact, their invisibility in political affairs would not be attributed to their supposed "passive nature" but to the obstacles which they had to face as they participate in politics. Deliberate efforts had also been made either to ignore their contribution obliterate their role altogether from historical records [30].

Most societies in Africa had created stereotyped images of women, images that suggest negativism, weakness and even inborn stupidity. Statements such as, "don't cry like a woman! Only women are cowards! Speak like a man!" and so on, were so ingrained in the psychological make-up that we hardly noticed their derogatory connotations. Society was socialized to believe that men are the thinkers, scientists, politicians and bread winners while women are the home makers, workers and the artists. One hardly heard of women's role in "manly spheres" like politics, international affairs, and so on. In those societies where the role of women in politics had been cited, women had been negatively portrayed as being power-hungry, conceited, cowardly, soft hearted and immoral [31]. The story of Alicen Chelaite, who

<sup>29</sup>T. Kanogo, "Kikuyu women and politics of protest, Mau Mau", in Marcdonald, S. Arderner (eds) Images of women in peace and war: Cross-cultural and historical perspective, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 87-102.

<sup>30</sup>M. Mugo, The Role of Women in the Struggle for Freedom, in A. Pala, T. Aworand K. Abigail (eds.), "The Participation of Women in Kenya Society, Conference held in Nairobi 11-15, August", (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1975), p. 210.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, p. 211

<sup>26</sup>Towett, O.I September 11, 2020.

<sup>27</sup>UN Women, "Stories of courage and transformation from women political leaders in Kenya", UN-Women Web-book, 2004.

<sup>28</sup>Kiplangat, OI, 03 May, 2019.

became so intoxicated with conceit and craze for power that she managed to compete for male dominated seat and emerging a victor, indicated that times are changing and everyone can become a leader your gender notwithstanding.

### **Chelaite in politics in trade unions: Maendeleo Ya Wanawake and representation of women**

It was here that Chelaite encountered the persistence of exclusion of women from organizational power and leadership in trade unions in spite of women's increasing proportion of the labour force and of trade union membership especially in the 1990s. For a while, often as part of revitalization strategies, trade unions had put in place extensive structural reforms to encourage gender equality, but in practice these do not result in gender proportionality in formal positions in unions like Mandeleo ya Wanawake. In this section we explore how at a more profound level cultures of exclusionary masculinity are strongly embedded especially in traditional unions and among traditional male leaderships and increasing evidence of changing attitudes among younger and more diverse workers and trade unionists, those from different cultural and ethnic groups, migrant workers, men as well as women, as their experiences of increasingly precarious work align with patterns long established by women juggling family and part-time insecure work.

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<sup>33</sup>L. M. Thomas, *Politics of the womb: Women, reproduction, and State in Kenya*, (California: University of California, 2003), p. 51.

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<sup>34</sup>A. Wipper, "The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization: The Co-optation of leadership", *African Studies Review in Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975), pp. 99-120.

<sup>35</sup>Kangogo, OI, 21 November 2019.

<sup>36</sup>A. Wehliye, "Change and continuity in the role of Kenya's National Assembly in Formulating Kenya's Foreign policy: 1900-1978". *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 7, no. 1, pp. 595-608.

<sup>37</sup><https://mywokenya.org/index.php/about-us/history> accessed on 24 November 2019.

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#### **Chelaite's Role during Kibaki Regime, 2002-2007**

In 2002 Kenya held watershed elections that were seen as a mark of transition from arbitrary and personalised leadership to the institutionalisation of governance in constitutional structures. The general elections were also billed as a defining turn in Kenya's political history in the sense that it was expected that they would mark a break from autocracy, impunity, ethnic and rent-seeking politics to a new dispensation characterised by national cohesion, respect for the rule of law, accountability and a general reorientation of Kenya's politics. Hence the phrase 'second liberation', the first having been from colonialism. This period provided women with robust opportunities in political life and as we shall see, Kibaki presidency played a major role in the Chelaite's reentry into politics. As such this chapter discusses Chelaite's political life during the NARC regime. It goes ahead to explain how and why she abandoned KANU, the party that was the most popular in the whole of Rift Valley Province and her contributions as the

Member of Parliament representing Rongai constituency. Her contributions as an assistant minister for gender and sports is also discussed and all her undertakings in the political arena are discussed in this chapter.

In preparation for the 2002 elections, Kibaki's Democratic Party affiliated with several other opposition parties to form National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC). A group of disappointed KANU presidential aspirants then quit KANU in protest after being overlooked by outgoing President Moi when Moi had Uhuru Kenyatta, nominated to be the KANU presidential candidate, and hurriedly formed the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). NAK later combined with the LDP to form the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). On 14 October 2002, at a large opposition rally in Uhuru Park, Nairobi, Kibaki was nominated the NARC opposition alliance presidential candidate after Raila Odinga made the famous declaration, Kibaki Tosha! [40]. On 3 December 2002, Kibaki was injured in a road accident while on his way back to Nairobi from a campaign meeting at Machakos junction 40 kilometres (25 miles) from Nairobi. He was subsequently hospitalized in Nairobi, then London, after sustaining fracture injuries in the accident. He still walked rather awkwardly as a result of those injuries. The rest of his presidential campaign was thus conducted by his NARC colleagues in his absence, led by Raila Odinga and Kijana Wamalwa (who went on to become the Vice President) who campaigned tirelessly for Kibaki [41].

On 27 December 2002, Kibaki and NARC won a landslide victory over KANU, with Kibaki getting 62 percent of the votes in the presidential elections, against only 31 percent for the KANU candidate Uhuru Kenyatta. This saw Moi regime which lasted for 24 years under KANU come to an end. Kibaki was installed as a president under National Alliance Rainbow Coalition-NARC. Prospects for democracy in Kenya were enhanced by the resounding defeat of KANU. The NARC coalition [42] was an alliance of several political parties which had been formed to oust Moi from power. The 2002 elections therefore became very significant for women in Kenya in the sense that they were the first transition elections. President Moi retired and all political developments focused on his succession. KANU became an endangered party and all majorities of leaders abandoned it to support Mwai Kibaki presidency.

<sup>40</sup>T. Wanyoni, "The deal and deal makers in Kibaki's 2002 victory", *The Daily Nation*, Feb. 2003; 12.

<sup>41</sup>P. Kamau, "Moi is gone and nyayo era past tense, but impunity lives on", *The Daily Nation*, March, 2020; 24.

<sup>42</sup>The National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) is a political party in Kenya. As an alliance, it was in power from 2002 and 2005 when it collapsed due to disagreements between members over a constitutional referendum

<sup>38</sup>Kiplangat, OI, 03 May, 2019.

<sup>39</sup>T. Kanogo, "Kikuyu women and politics of protest, Mau Mau", in Marcdonald, S. Arderner (eds) *Images of women in peace and war: Cross-cultural and historical perspective*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 87-102.

Behind the scenes women organizations were negotiating with parties to gain entry into the campaign arena. Their main goal was to secure more parliamentary and civic seats for women. Alicen Chelaite shifted to NARC having been a member of KANU for 24 years and she emerged a victor in Rongai constituency with a NARC ticket in a KANU backyard [43]. This was a clear manifestation that change is always inevitable.

Before the Kenya's 2002 general elections women across the country mobilised themselves to form the Kenya women's political manifesto in which they described their political agenda for the country in which specifically focused in the key wanted the government address. In their manifesto, for examples, women pushed an affirmative action, where at least one-third representation in parliament and local government was to be prioritized. This, they hoped would give them the opportunity to ascend to key geopolitical positions in the country. They also wanted new government under Kibaki to discourage violence, encourage voter participation, discourage fraud, and prosecute corrupt leaders and intimidation during election. This is of course after a persistent attack on women aspirants who had been sidelined in the historical past). Consequently, women wanted the government to formulate regulations governing elections campaign financing for political leaders and candidates to discourage commercialization and commodification of politics. During this period women also developed a manifesto which also focused on poverty and economic empowerment, as well as education for girls and women, especially from the marginalized regions. The said manifesto also mentioned HIV/AIDS as a major impediment which affected women and children more as compared to the male counterparts. This was after a health survey report that revealed that the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate and new infections was high among the women in Kenya and since women were caregivers and therefore, they were more likely to be affected and infected as compared to their male counterparts [44].

#### **Against all odds: Chelaite and institutionalization of Rongai Politics**

Chelaite contested as a member of parliament for Rongai Constituency [45]. She was the only woman candidate among several other men who contested from other rival political parties. KANU had sponsored a powerful candidate by the name Eric Morogo who had

the backing of the then retired president Moi. Alicen Chelaite won the elections under NARC. This era marked the beginning of the end of KANU's popularity. Alicen alludes that, her victory helped to personify the struggle to place women in leadership in Rift Valley. That was at a time when Rift Valley was considered the backyard of the then President Daniel Arap Moi's KANU party. Despite running on an opposition party, National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC), she was elected to the ninth parliament [46].

Names of Contestants	Votes
Alicen Chelaite	17, 256
Erick Morogo	15,199
Patrick Miri Gichuhi	529
Kennedy Karungu	304
Jonathan Mbuthia Kameana	243
Peter Ngugi Njuguna	214

**Source:** 2002 General Elections Score Card. The Weekly Review, November 9, 2003

During Chelaite's tenure as a member of parliament for Rongai Constituency from 2002-2007, she initiated several projects which transformed the constituency in a tremendous way. This was majorly supported by the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) which was launched by Kibaki government to replace the then District Focus for Rural Development. The fund was to be utilized towards social-economic development within the constituency as a unit of administration [47]. At the constituency level she organized many fundraising rallies and contributing in paying school fees for needy students. During her tenure she initiated several development projects, among these projects were the construction of Rongai Health Centre and Lengenet Dispensary. The establishment of these facilities went a long way in changing the medical history of the constituency since it took care of so many outpatients within the constituency. Kipkorir, an electorate who hails from Rongai observes that the health centres came as great beacon of hope to the people of Rongai. According to him, Chelaite will forever be remembered for that great achievement [48]. Before the establishment of the health facilities, Chelimo observes that a lot of child births were done at home with the help of the mid-wives. According to her, just a few infants could survive at birth since there was no adequate. She further argues that with the establishment of Rongai Health Centre, child fatality rate at birth greatly reduced [49].

<sup>43</sup>Ng'ok, O.I, September 21, 2019.

<sup>44</sup>D. Nyakwaka, "The Gendered Political Transformation in Luoland", Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Egerton University, 2012

<sup>45</sup>Rongai Constituency is an electoral constituency in Kenya. It is one of eleven constituencies in Nakuru County. The constituency has eight wards, all electing councillors for the Nakuru County Assembly.

<sup>46</sup>The Parents Magazine, Issue 351, October 2015, page 27.

<sup>47</sup>S. Wamalwa, An almost sure seat for the opposition, Daily Nation, June 3, 2002, p. 23, Chelaite, OI, 03, Jan. 2019

<sup>48</sup> Kipkorir, O.I, November 12, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Chelimo, OI, September 11, 2019.



## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this paper has been to trace the role of Alicen Chelaite in Kenyan politics in Nakuru and at macro level of Rift Valley. We have emphasized the agency of personality and gendered image of the character in historical development-the fact that although women have contributed tremendously to the political history of Kenya, their contributions have not been adequately acknowledged. This lack of acknowledgement has resulted in the lack of role models that characterizes women's participation in all spheres of public life. Attention is paid to the fact that not enough effort has been made by proponents of women's issues to incorporate grassroots women in the mainstream of the struggle. We have finally highlighted the lessons that can be drawn from Chelaite's narrative and from this historical paradigm. We learn that women should seize this opportunity of challenge and strive to improve their overall position in society by vying for positions of prominence in society.

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