Ideology and Representation of Women Political Aspirants in the 2017 General Election Primaries Campaign Posters in Nairobi County: A Cultural Studies Approach

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**Abstract**

Although the Kenyan Constitution stipulates that women be represented by at least a third in all public institutions, including political positions, this expectation seems too ambitious. Feminists feel that Kenya is a patriarchal society where politics, like other leadership positions, is male-controlled. The common narrative is that politics in Kenya is approached from a patriarchal perspective, including creating campaign posters of women aspirants. The present study set out to investigate this assumption by critically analyzing campaign posters. Using the semiotic approach, the researcher analyzed campaign posters for women aspirants in the primaries’ nominations for the 2017 general election to decode meanings embedded in these posters. Findings indicate that, much as these posters contain messages that are expected to persuade Nairobi voters to elect these women, they are replete with hidden meanings that promote patriarchal ideologies. They represent the women aspirants in their stereotypical roles as mothers, nurturers and passive beauties for the male gaze. The researcher concludes by suggesting that unless people look at media texts, like campaign posters, critically these posters are not going to help in promoting leaders who can bring about social change, including gender equality in politics. The researcher recommends promotion of media literacy at all levels of society, which is the main project of media cultural studies.

**Key words:** Ideology, Campaign posters, representation, gender, aspirants.

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**Introduction**

Although the Constitution of Kenya (2010) stipulates that there should be at least a third representation of each gender in all public positions, including political seats, this has not been achieved in the last five years that the new law has been in force. For instance, in the 11th Parliament, both the National Assembly and Senate, there were 87 women out of the 349 Members, which is 19 percent out of the constitutional requirement of 33.3 per cent.
However, this is the highest number of women political representatives since Kenya regained Independence from Britain in 1963. Owuor (2016) traces the trajectory of women’s political participation from 1962, when the country held its first general election, and no woman was elected, to the last general election of 2013. She blames colonialism, which she says, entrenched patriarchy in the country’s political systems. She cites “studies [of] colonial Kenya [that] have painted a picture of deeply patriarchal societies run by councils of elders with no input from women whatsoever” (p.8).

As the country prepared for the second general election under the 2010 Constitution, in 2017, there was a push from many interest groups to compel Parliament to enforce the two-thirds gender rule. Women were encouraged to seek elective positions in order to fill the gender gap in the National Assembly, the Senate and the County Assembly representation. Although many women in Kenya had previously taken the challenge to fight it out with men in the various political seats Owuor (2016) is pessimistic:

The rule of fathers is alive and well in Kenya and the narrative has been that women want free seats which they should not get as equality dictates that they fight it out with men in the ballot box. However, this narrative ignores the set rules of the game in nominations and elections that favour men…. Politics remains the last bastion of male power and dominance…(p.56).

This study set out to interrogate the feminist claim that the political playing field in the 2017 general election was not level right from the primaries. Adopting a cultural studies perspective the researcher analyzed campaign posters for women candidates during the primaries’ nomination in Nairobi County in April 2017. The posters contain photographs, symbols and written messages of two main political parties Jubilee party, led by Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto and ODM, party under the umbrella movement, National Super Alliance (NASA), led by Raila Odinga and running mate Kalonzo Musyoka (see Appendix). Twelve posters were analyzed. Eight of the posters are from Jubilee aspirants: Agnes Wathira Ibara, Beatrice Elachi, Eunice (Nyasuguta), Margaret Wanjiru, Millicent Omanga, Virginia Wanja, Wambui Nganga and Winfred Abuti. There are four posters for ODM aspirants, namely: Esther Passaris, Marie Odhiambo, Mumo (Rhoda) and Sabina Anyango. Each of the aspirants will be referred to by the first name in this study.
The researcher made an attempt to find out whether these campaign posters, besides projecting messages that were likely to please their prospective voters, were embedded with patriarchal ideologies. Three research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What messages do women-aspirant posters in the 2017 primaries in Nairobi County convey?
RQ2: What hidden ideological messages can be decoded from these posters?
RQ3: How do these messages relate to the dominant ideology in the Kenyan patriarchal capitalist society?

The researcher was guided by a cultural studies theoretical framework in order to decode various meanings encoded in the symbolic domains of the posters that were displayed in public spaces for mass consumption by members of the public. The cultural studies tradition of media studies is concerned with meanings as opposed to effects of media texts. In other words, as Andy (2001, p. 116) puts it, the cultural studies project does not study “… what texts do to the audience [but] what texts mean to them.” These posters were treated as media artifacts in the league of outdoor advertising.

**Theoretical Framework**

Media texts, according to cultural studies scholarship, are replete with ideological overtones in favor of the dominant group in society. The project of media cultural studies is to show how the media use texts to entrench the dominant ideology or maintain status quo. Media texts therefore work against those subordinated in society. These include women, the youth, the disabled, and various groups of minorities. Women, for instance, play second fiddle to men in a patriarchal capitalist societies.

One way of looking at how women are disenfranchised in the media is to look at the theory of representation. Representation, according to Hall (1997, p.15), is “…an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent.” In other words, a media text, like a campaign poster, uses language (which includes written text and photographs) to create meaning. It should be noted that these posters were professionally created by artists and printers hired by
the women aspirants themselves in order to create meanings that were intended to represent the women favorably to their prospective voters.

According to Hall (1997) there are three theories that explain how language is used to connect meaning to language in media texts. These are “the reflective, the intentional and the constructivist approaches to representation” (p.15).

According to this perspective, when language simply reflects a meaning that already exists then it can be understood through reflective approach. If language express only what creators of the artifact “want to say, his or her personally intended meaning then that is intentional. However, if meaning is constructed in and through language this is constructionist approach” P.(15).

Hall posits that media texts do not carry meanings in themselves. Meanings are created by the consumers of those texts. This does not mean that creators of media texts have no agenda. The people who create campaign posters for their clients, for instance, are out to influence voters’ perceptions about the candidate so that they can vote for him or her. Creators of media texts strive to fix meanings that are intended to lure audiences to their points of view and change their behavior accordingly. Media consumers, however, create their own meanings, which may or may not resonate with those intended by the creators of a particular artifact.

This is explained by Hall’s (1996) model of Encoding/Decoding. In this model, creators of media messages, like campaign posters, have their main objective of creating those messages – to attract voters to the candidate. But according to Hall’s (1996) model readers of media texts have three possible reading positions. First is the position of the creator of the text, which is the preferred (by the creator) meaning. Then there is the oppositional reading, where the reader rejects the message altogether. The reader can also take a negotiated reading, a middle ground, where they can accept part of the message and reject the other part.

Whether the messages in the campaign posters in this study were appealing or not to the intended audiences is outside the scope of this study. The aim of the present study was to read the posters closely in an attempt to decode the various meanings encoded by creators of the posters in order to understand how the women aspirants were represented by the posters’ creators. This is within the context of media ideology in the patriarchal capitalist milieu.

In media representation texts are created using commonly-shared signs and symbols within the culture they circulate. This can be better understood by using semiotic
analysis. Semiotics, according to Bignell (2003, p. 5) is “the study of how signs communicate meaning.” According this perspective, associated with French Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, every sign has two components, the signifier (what stands for something) and the signified (what it is that is represented). There are two levels of looking at signs: their literal/obvious meaning, which is called denotation and their hidden meanings known as connotation.

According to Barthes (1972) connotation can be used as a second level of signification to create a myth, which he describes as commonly held beliefs that have been made to look natural because they have been stripped of their historical context. According to Bignell (2003, p. 17) “…myth takes hold of an existing sign and makes it function as a signifier on another level.” This mythic level of signification is where ideology comes in because as Bignell (2003, p. 17) puts it “… myth is not an innocent language, but one that picks up existing signs and their connotations, and orders them purposefully to play a particular social role.” The researcher in this study utilized the semiotic analysis in order to decode ideological meanings in the campaign posters.

**Ideology and the Media**

Although the term “ideology” means the study of ideas scholars have not agreed on a common definition of the term. For instance, McLellan (1995), who posits that there is no single definition of the term, has come up with 17 definitions. One of the definitions that is closer to the present study is: “… a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class” (p.1). The concern for the present study was not to analyze ideology but to demonstrate how ideology is employed in media texts because, as Stokes (2003, p. 76) posits, “all media artifacts are the products of an ideology.” According to Devereux (2003, p. 99) “Ideas perform an ideological function when they either mask the exploitative nature of capitalism or present these kinds of exploitative economic relationships as being natural and inevitable.”

In order to understand how ideology relates to media texts it is important to understand the evolution of the cultural studies tradition of media studies. Although the creation cultural studies as an academic discipline evolved in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the University of Birmingham in Britain in 1964 its ideological foundations can be traced to the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School is
the work of Marxist scholars, who came together to set up the Institute of Social Research in the University of Frankfurt, Germany, in 1922. Their main concern was why Marxism had failed to bring about a revolution as envisaged by its founder Karl Marx in the 19th century. Instead, to the chagrin of these scholars, exploitative capitalist regimes were being supported by exploited, impoverished masses. When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933 these scholars immigrated to America where they continued as a school of thought to pursue research on critical theory. The Frankfurt School scholars are credited for initiating the study of the mass media (which at their time in the early1920s to late 1940s was radio, cinema and music records) as a tool for promoting the capitalist ideology. In their seminal paper “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” published in 1947, key figures of the School, Adorno and Horkheimer (1999) argue: “Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth is that they are just business made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries…” (p. 32).

When the Birmingham School was founded in 1964 its scholars continued to draw from the Marxist ideology that the mass media’s role was to reproduce the capitalist status quo. Cultural studies researchers, however, opposed the Marxist Base and Super Structure ideology, arguing that class society and oppression of the underprivileged play out, not in the economic, but cultural terrain (Hall, 2006). Scholars in cultural studies were inspired by French Marxist Louis Althusser and Italian critic Antonio Gramsci. Althusser coined the notion of “interpellation,” where, he believed, media texts interpellate (or hail) viewers/readers and in the process manipulate them to see the world in terms of the dominant ideology. According to Althusser the capitalist system uses various institutions to prepare the people for exploitation. He called these institutions Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 2006). To him, institutions like “the media, school, family and religion are all ideological state apparatuses” (Stevenson, 2002; p. 160) because they prepare individuals to appreciate, and even support status quo. According to Althusser the people have no way of escaping media manipulation. Gramsci, on his part, coined the concept of hegemony, where he believed that rulers exploit the masses without coercion. Media texts according to this theory are used to make exploitation of the masses look natural, common sense or even necessary. According to Watson (2006), in explaining Gramsci’s theory, “… a state of hegemony is achieved when a
provisional alliance of certain groups exerts a consensus which makes the power of the dominant group appear natural and legitimate” (p.22). However, unlike interpellation that is supposed to have power over an individual, hegemony suggests that the subordinates are always challenging the status quo and the ruling class has to always fight to keep their dominant position. This explains why cultural studies scholars believe that the media are a site where ideological wars are fought. This is the central thesis of Hall’s (1996) Encoding/Decoding model. This model that explains the production, circulation and consumption of media texts projects consumers of these texts as active individuals with the capacity to accept, reject or negotiate ideological meanings encoded by their creators. Hall (1996) points out that media texts are created within a cultural context and that they often take “active ideological dimensions” (p. 56). Hall argues that in producing a media text creators use professional codes to independently create quality work. “The professional code, however, operates within the ‘hegemony’ of the dominant code” (p.59).

The aim of the present study was to analyze media texts (women campaign posters) as an attempt to decode how women aspirants were represented within the dominant ideology of the Kenyan capitalist patriarchal society.

**Representation of Women in Media Texts**

Representation according to Hall (1997, p.15) “is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture.” Feminist critics have always argued that the media present the world, including the image of women, from a patriarchal perspective. This is how Carter and Steiner (2004) summarize it: “The messages of media texts never simply mirror or reflect ‘reality’, but instead construct hegemonic definition of what should be accepted as ‘reality’” (p.21). Mulvey (2006) in her analysis of Hollywood movies posits that women characters in the movies are created for the “male gaze” to satisfy the male audience’s ‘phantasy’. These women are aware of this and tend to seem prepared to be looked at: “In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (p.346). Mulvey’s views are supported by Berger (2013), who studied the history of oil paintings. According to Berger (2013, p. 198), in the world of those paintings, “…men act and women appear. Men look at
women and women watch themselves being looked at…she turns herself into an object – and particularly an object of vision, a sight.”

Goffman (1979), who studied photographs in magazine advertisements, argued that images in these photographs reflected the relationship between men and women in the society where they circulated, with the only difference being exaggeration or, as he calls it, “hyperritualization” (p.84). Comparing men and women characters in the advertisements Goffman (1979, p.48) discovered that the women were relatively shorter than men, they were touching the goods with their fingers as opposed to men, who could grip them; they performed subordinate jobs, they were part of a family, they demonstrated “ritualized subordination and they exhibited lack of confidence or what he called “licensed withdrawal.” Goffman noted that women in these pictures were smiling sheepishly “… all these smiles, then seem more the offering of an inferior than superior… (p.48) and that there was a tendency of women characters to behave like children in relation to the men in the advertisements. In media texts created by the patriarchal system, according Zonen and Meijer (1998; pp.298), who studied billboards, are meant for the male pleasure: “The Anderson billboards and similar images of women invite us to look at them with a prospective male viewer in mind.”

Media texts are created to make meaning within the social and cultural contexts in the society they circulate (Fourie, 2008). Gender identities, for instance, are constructed in relation to power relations between men and women in that society. In order for media texts to achieve the preferred readings, the creators of these texts employ “intertextual devices” (Real, 1996; p.137). Intertextuality refers to the case when texts look like other familiar texts. Creators of posters, for instance, borrow creative ideas from commercial billboards in order to make the consumers read them in equal measure. Representation of women in popular culture, advertising and fashion has always employed intertextuality across the genres. Media critics argue that intertextuality is often used by creators of media texts to blur the boundaries between genres in order to create media spectacles. This is how Kellner (2003) puts it: “Long a major component of advertising, eroticized sexuality has been used to sell every conceivable product. The spectacle of sex is also one of the staples of media culture, permeating all cultural forms and creating its own genres in pornography, one of the highest-grossing domains of media spectacle” (p.9). According to this argument it is not uncommon to see a billboard or poster where the model strikes a pose commonly
seen in pornography. In the present study the researcher used semiotic analysis to identify sigfiers and signifieds of the various signs in the posters and their ideological connotations.

**Methodology**

The aimed of the present study was to analyze campaign posters in order to decode meanings created by their producers. Specifically, the researcher was interested in how women candidates were ideologically represented through a semiotic analysis.

The researcher hired an assistant to take photographs of all the women aspirants just before the primaries of the 2017 general election were held in the Nairobi County in April. A total of 67 photographs were collected from women vying for the seats of Governor, Senator, Women Representative, Members of the National Assembly and Member of the County Assembly. There was no woman vying for the Presidential seat from the county. These posters were displayed either as billboards or pasted on walls, trees, electric poles or road sides and tunnel walls. For the purpose of this study all the photographs are referred to as posters. From the 67 photographs some were repeats of the same aspirants while others were from defaced posters, making them too unclear for analysis. Others were too dark to show all the messages on them.

Twelve photographs were finally selected (See Appendix).

Since these photographs were commissioned by the women politicians themselves the researcher was out to look for embedded ideological meanings besides the meanings preferred by the women aspirants. Bignell (2003, pp.94-5) argues that a press photograph has been “…worked on, chosen, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms.” It is therefore not a “pure, natural image, but one which has been selected and processed in order to generate a particular connotation.”

The semiotic analysis was used as a research approach because, according to Bignell (2002), media artifacts are always embedded with ideological meanings and these ideologies can only be decoded through a semiotic analysis (Hall, 1997).

Each photograph was therefore analyzed in terms of its signification properties, pointing out what each sign denoted, what it connoted and its embedded ideological message. The photographs were identified in terms of the aspirant’s name. The analyses were used to draw conclusions.
Analysis and findings

A semiotic analysis of the 12 posters’ various signs helped create the general meaning intended by the creators, which was to make the aspirants’ campaigns attractive to potential voters. Various signifiers signified various campaign signs according to the strategies of the aspirants. For instance, all the eight Jubilee aspirants’ posters had a graphic of two hands of two people clasped together as a form of greeting in Kenya. This is a signifier of Jubilee party as the signified. Some of the posters had texts next to the symbol “Jubilee Tuko Pamoja” (Jubilee we are together)” or just “Tuko Pamoja.” This is a signifier that plays the double role of anchoring the symbol as representing Jubilee party and telling the voters that the party is a caring friend (in Kenyan lingo when someone wants to assure another that the friend can count on him or her for help, they say “tuko pamoja – we are together). Another signifier that was in three of Jubilee candidates’ posters was an inset photograph of the party’s presidential candidate Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto. This signified that the candidate was supporting the two principals, who were going to be crucial for the party’s overall victory in the general election. The inset photographs were therefore a message to all party supporters that should they nominate the particular candidate she was going to campaign for the presidency to win.

Each of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) candidates’ posters had a photograph of an orange. This is a signifier of the ODM party. In some posters the orange symbol was accompanied by the line “Mbele Pamoja” (moving forward together), signifying an assurance to ODM supporters that the party supported them in their quest for a better future. Two of the ODM posters had inset photographs of ODM presidential candidate Raila Odinga. This is a signifier to ODM supporters that the candidate not only enjoyed the blessing of the party’s leadership but was also ready to support the party’s campaign at presidential level.

Besides political symbolism signification there were also other signs that were meant to give prospective voters preferred readings of these aspirants’ posters. The women had projected themselves in the posters as the best persons Nairobi voters should pick as their leaders. One of such signifier was the use of social media. Some of of the posters had either a twitter handle, hash tag or Facebook page account. This is a signifier that that these women were modern and/or youthful. This signified was also suggested by the use of slang or short form for their names. In these posters some of the women had also identified themselves as young beauties to signify that they were
people to admire (want to associate with) and thus vote for. Millicent Omanga, who was vying for Women Rep. through Jubilee party, for instance, gave her identity as “#Msupa Na Works” with a Facebook account of the same title. This loosely translates as “#a beauty who is also hardworking.” She was appealing to her supporters to associate with her beauty by voting for her. The slogan on Agnes of Jubilee’s poster was “Round this ni mrembo” (this is the turn of a beautiful girl). This slogan had two signifiers that projected youth and beauty. The whole slogan talked about her beauty while youthfulness was signified by mixing English and Kiswahili, the way the youth of Nairobi commonly speak. Anyango of ODM identified herself, after the name, as “Miss Maendeleo (Miss Development).” This was allusion of a beauty pageant, where she was suggesting that she should be supported because she was a beauty who was ready to promote development (it gave an impression of Miss Kenya, Miss Tourism, Miss Earth, etc). People always like to associate with young women with the title “Miss…” and this was what she was counting on and inviting prospective voters to look at her beauty and know that she was a beauty with a mission. Winfred of Jubilee identified herself as “Mrembo na Kazi (Beauty and work),” which has the same meaning as Millicent’s Msupa Na Works” using a different language.

A number of these aspirants identified themselves as mothers or motherly. This was a signifier that was meant to resonate with voters who were expected to see them as caring or nurturing the young and therefore the future generation, posterity. This was meant to signify motherly love, which every member of the society would have liked to be associated with. These motherly attributes were projected in the posters’ slogans. Wanjiru of Jubilee used the hash tag “#MamaNaKazi” (mother who works hard), Beatrice Elachi of Jubilee used “Mama Dago” (The mother of Dago, short for Dagoretti Ward), while Marie of ODM proclaimed, “A mother is a pillar of society.” Passaris of ODM identifies herself as “Mama Taa Mtaani” (the mother who promotes lighting in the neighborhood). Most people of Nairobi were familiar with her successful streetlighting campaign in the early 2000s). She was leveraging on this in her campaign posters for voters to see her as a politician who was going to care about their children through electrification of all neighborhoods.

Other women aspirants used signifiers of what they perceived to be their individual strength to signify their political strength. Wanjiru of Jubilee brought out her religious credentials to signify her strength over her competitors. She gave her full name as
Bishop Margaret Wanjiru (she owned a church with a large following in Nairobi) and went ahead to give the slogan of her church next to the hash tag “The Glory is Here.” Under this she quoted the Bible: “When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice – Proverbs 29:2.” Virginia of Jubilee’s slogan was “devoted to service,” signifying that she felt that she had leadership qualities. Winfred of Jubilee’s slogan was “Dawn of a new era,” signifying that she was capable of transformative leadership in Kilimani Ward as the new MCA. Two of the aspirants had only given one name in the posters with the second name being in brackets. Mumo of ODM identified herself as Hon. Mumo (Rhoda) while Eunice of Jubilee identifies herself as Eunice (Nyasunguta). This was a practice among artists, especially musicians in Kenya, who liked to be identified with only one name, signifying that they were famous or popular enough and therefore did not need more than one name as officialdom could dictate. While it was not clear from the posters why Mumo chose one name and the other in brackets, Eunice was a popular stand-up comedian on national television and her stage name was Nyasuguta. She expected to extend the feel-good laughter of her TV audience to her voters. All these signs, the signifiers and their signifieds, were meant to give Nairobi’s prospective voters the preferred meanings of the posters as envisaged by the authors (the creatives who designed the posters and the aspirants who commissioned them). However, when a text is put out there it takes a life of its own, independent of the author.

A critical analysis of these posters reveals other meanings which might or might not have been intended by their creators. Barthes (1957) talks of second-level of signification, where the sign becomes a signifier. There were hidden or ideological meanings that projected these women aspirants as victims of the dominant patriarchal ideology. The women in these posters were represented in their stereotypical roles as mothers and nurtures. These were the connotations of the various signs already described. Wanjiku described herself as “#MamaNaKazi,” while Marie proclaimed, “A mother is the pillar of society.” Beatrice identified herself as “Mama Dago, while Passaris called herself “Mama Taa Mtaani.” These are values that are cherished by the Kenyan society. But, as Barthes points out, these values were taken to be natural because they had been emptied of their historical contexts. There was nothing in these posters to link motherhood to good political leadership but the patriarchal ideology had compelled the women, even with their leadership credentials to define themselves
as mothers in order to be accepted by the patriarchal milieu of Kenyan politics. This was one of the hidden ideological meanings in these posters.

Another hidden ideological meaning was the myth of beauty. It is natural for women to be beautiful and dress attractively. But in these campaign posters the women had been made to project good looks as a political strength to convince voters, making each of the women “an object of vision, a sight” (Berger 2013, p.198). Feminist critics have always found a problem with patriarchal societies identifying women according to their looks, not their intellectual or leadership capacity. Most of the women in the posters were smiling to the camera, assign of inferiority, according to Goffman (1979). Like in the case of motherhood there was no evidence in these texts to suggest that political leadership in Nairobi needed beautiful women. Agnes declared in her slogan, “Round this ni mrembo” and her dressing and smile tended to invite viewers of the poster to appreciate her beauty. Anyango called herself “Miss maendeleo” and added “the change we need,” the name of her ward and another slogan, “Uwezo kwa wote” (capacity for all). In the rest of the poster she left the readers to look at her exotic hairstyle, large ear rings and her bright pink lipstick to complement the make-up in the rest of the face. Millicent didn’t have a lot of write-up in her poster but she had used the line “Msupa na works” twice, as a hashtag and Facebook identity. She was dressed as a college girl, which resonated with her self-identity. “Msupa” is a term young men in Kenya use to describe their “beautiful” girlfriends. It is hardly a title to use for a woman seeking to represent Nairobi City County in the National Assembly. She and creators of her poster could have known this but the patriarchal society she was contesting in had nurtured her to look at herself as a beautiful girl, not a woman selling her leadership qualities. She therefore saw her self-identity as normal. This was the same image projected by Winfred who only translated Millicent’s self-identity into formal Kiswahili, Mrembo Na Kazi (the working beauty).

The ideology of beauty was also connoted by the way some of the women were dressed, with heavy make-up and bling bling to enhance what Mulvey (2006, p.346) calls their “to-be-looked-at-ness.” Some of the posters were designed like magazine covers with the women looking like cover models. These intertextual device (real, 1986) only helped to project these women as models, just like cover girls, in a heterosexual society.

By using words like “mrembo” “msupa”, “mother” and “Mama” these posters were promoting the ideology of heteronormativity. It is only a romantic/ sexual relationship
between a man and a woman where these words are applicable. In heteronormative societies women are expected to be married and become mothers. Young women are expected to be beautiful (*Mrembo/msupa*) to attract young men.

Two posters in this study represented women aspirants as jokers or naïve, who were too incompetent to participate in national politics. Mumo (Rhoda) and Eunice (Nyasuguta), who only gave one name each and reminded prospective voters about another name in brackets, came out as people who didn’t see the seriousness of the general election. This connoted that these posters were promoting the ideology of patriarchy, where men preferred the status-quo; where politics was assumed to be a men’s preserve. Eunice is particular did not bother to tell her prospective voters her real name. Instead she shortened her stage name to look fancy: “*Maendeleo na Nyasu*” (Nyasu for development). A male opponent would use this omission to his advantage.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The posters analyzed in the present study looked ordinary and aimed at promoting the strengths of women seeking nomination for political leadership in Nairobi. The photographs and written texts were meant to pass persuasive political messages. However, a critical look at them revealed that they were potentially damaging to the women aspirants, who commissioned them in particular, and women in Kenya in general. With messages like these women aspiring to be governors, Women Representatives, Members of the national Assembly and Members of the Country Assembly are not going to bring about social change. The photographs and written messages in these posters represented women negatively. The women were projected as mere cogs in the male-dominated system, where women can only seek leadership if they conform with the male-accepted values of society. Women in many societies, including Kenya, have always been disadvantaged as far as political leadership is concerned. If this has to change then campaign posters have to move away from promoting the patriarchal ideology of representing women in their stereotypical roles as mothers, nurturers and passive beauties. Society must also learn to resist prejudices that are promoted by media systems aimed at reinforcing the patriarchal ideology. One way of doing this is to look at media texts critically. That is what the present study has attempted to do.
Since the media deliberately support status quo, it is the duty of consumers of media texts to resist the various prejudices and ideologies embed in these texts. This can only be achieved if he society is equipped with skills to enable them understand the hidden meanings in media artifacts; people need to be media literate. Efforts should be made to promote media literacy at all levels of society, starting with learning institutions. If schools and universities can teach media semiotics, for instance, many people will be able to discriminate between useful information and lies; between honest persuasion and deception. Cultural studies should be a key component in all Journalism and Communication schools in Kenya with focus on promoting media literacy.

References

**APPENDIX**: The campaign posters

![Campaign posters image]