

The purpose of this study is to inquire into religio-cultural analysis on gender roles and status of Agikuyu women. The inquiry centres on the role of religion, culture and economy on gender roles and status of Agikuyu women. It has focused on three historical periods; pre-colonial and postcolonial.

The study is an attempt to contribute to the on-going debate on gender imbalances in the human society. It aims at seeking the root cause and explaining some gender inequalities within the Gikuyu culture. An attempt is made to show that the roles that each person plays in the society determine his or her social status. The study reveals that the roles of women in Gikuyuland are not necessarily biologically based but culturally and socially determined.

The thesis of the study is that, Agikuyu women have for a long time been subjugated due to the social roles they play. To be more effective, we isolated Kiambu District as a representative of the rest of Gikuyuland and gathered most data through oral interviews. Library sources were also used to supplement and back oral information. The overall data were then fused, analysed and interpreted.

In view of the data presented and discussed, it was found out that the Gikuyu society has been structured in a way that, religion and culture justify gender hierarchy. This is done in the socialization process and through classification of roles by gender. It is argued in the thesis that, gender imbalance is perceived by both males and females as natural, and perhaps divine, and therefore, unchangeable. In so doing, hardly anyone sees anything wrong with gender discrimination. As a consequence, each gender has aspired to fulfill the social expectation.

The study argues that gender discrimination is unjust and a denial of liberty. Unfortunately, gender balance cannot be achieved unless the society has attained self-awareness. Agikuyu must become aware of their subordinate status, if they have to appreciate the evil of gender imbalance. Indeed, the process of gender balance necessitates both men and women to make a critical analysis of the situation. It is, in fact observed that the majority of men and women in Gikuyuland do not really understand the importance of gender balance. And, as long as roles complement each other, gender imbalance is deemed okay. Unfortunately, such a belief prevents the community from exploring the talents and potentials of women. Accordingly, women have not ventured much into areas culturally and religiously considered for men; consequently their status has remained lower than that of men.

In the light of the above conclusion, it has been suggested that, even though women's role in production and reproduction may neither be quantifiable nor classifiable as paid work, women's roles should still be given recognition. The study observes that there is a need to give Agikuyu women more decision-making powers to enable them participate more fully in development. There is also need to conscientize both men and women in the need for gender integration. This will not only liberate Gikuyu people but also the Kenyan society at large.