

The aim of the present study is two-fold. Firstly, it attempts to identify and describe the varied roles and educational experiences of Adigo women within the contexts of precolonial societies. Secondly, it purports to explore the interface between the gender roles identified and education (broadly defined to include indigenous, Islamic and western types). The study examines the hypothesis that the relatively higher status of women in indigenous societies, particularly matrilineal ones, has been depressed by mainly non-indigenous educative influences as reflected in their current social-economic dependent status.

Data for the study were collected over a period of one and a half years from the Kwale District of Coastal Kenya. It combined traditional anthropological field techniques such as participants-observations, survey questionnaires and ethnographic interviews with techniques developed by feminist anthropologist such as time allocations and daily expenditure study techniques. Additional data were collected from the archives and other documented sources, an exercise that particularly useful in the reconstruction of precolonial, colonial and post-colonial Adigo societies.

An overall feminist approach to research was adopted throughout the study with a view to correct misconceptions of past Andocentric research. The emerging data on gender roles on relations suggests need for reexamination of existing literature on women's position and consequent redefinition of their status within matrilineal societies.

Contrary to traditional anthropological perceptions of women's status in matrilineal societies, the present study indicates that Adigo women had the rights of inheritance to both property and public office in indigenous societies. They also had far more ritual, and therefore, political power that has been credited to them. This confirms the first part of the hypothesis enunciated earlier, that is, the status of Adigo women in indigenous societies was relatively high. Currently, this high status has greatly depreciated. Despite enjoying considerable marital and personal autonomy, the political, religious (ritual) and economic powers of Adigo women have been curtailed to a great extent. Islamic education, initially and subsequently colonial education, by denying easy access to females, ensured the non-participation of Adigo women in the newly introduced religious and economic activities. Though there is greater participation by Adigo women in both Islamic and postcolonial western type education systems today, the dominant patriarchal ideology being propagated through both these educational systems, is continuing to erode women's status in contemporary Adigo society.