

ABSTRACT

Across the African continent, traditional institutions of governance have demonstrated resilience in every aspect of African life. These institutions are re-emerging in modern democratic governance structures to solve community issues such as drug abuse, land feuds, and marital disputes. Since the advent of colonialism, these institutions have gone through considerable changes. Although a great deal of ink has flowed on the subject, the visibility in terms of the role and place of women has received minimal attention from a historical perspective. The inclusion of women in African studies plays a pivotal role in ensuring that their obscured contributions to societies are recognized. This study drew on archival method of enquiry and qualitative narrative interviewing to inquire historically into the roles, place, and emerging trends of Agikuyu women in traditional governance institutions in Kenya. Using the case of *Ndundu Cia Aaka*- a historical women's governing council among the Agikuyu, the study interrogated women's place in traditional governance, and explored the resilience of this traditional institution across the precolonial, colonial and the present day Agikuyu communities. Particular attention is centred on exploring who women were in the set-up of traditional leadership, their roles, and how these have evolved since pre-colonial times. The study's findings reveals the diverse perspectives on women's agency and power within the Agikuyu's social, economic, and political structures. Findings suggest that the Agikuyu community has diverse and complex views on gender power dynamics. Examining this knowledge & experiences, privileges a critical analysis of women's experiences in their diversity in traditional governance of their communities is essential to reconsider the significance of oral history in influencing historical narratives and empowering women in their roles within community governance. Historicizing women in traditional governance in Kenya is by no means an attempt to map out and present linear progress or the lack of it that women have registered over time. Doing so would simplify what is rather a complex historical engagement with unequal governance structures. The mapping enables a reflection on the contexts within which women's leadership operated, albeit within patriarchal structures of traditional governance. In addition, it helps us understand women's negotiations in the patriarchal systems of governance and the implications these processes have for contemporary leadership.