

**A HUNDRED YEARS OF AGIKUYU WOMEN'S SELF-IMAGES:**

**CASE STUDIES OF NAIROBI AND NYERI COUNTIES**

**(1900 – 2000)**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
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## DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other  
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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to the unsung heroes of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), the female warriors and their General, Field Marshall Muthoni. They made unimaginable sacrifices and endured atrocious physical and sexual abuse so that we could be free! May their tremendous sacrifice, perseverance and even death be remembered and celebrated by all the children of Kenya who enjoy the freedom they died for.

And to the memory of my grandmother and namesake Serah Mumbi Kigwe, Rest Blessed!

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Respondents Demographics - Oral testimonies Questionnaires .....	83
Table 2: Respondent Age Groups - Face – to – Face Questionnaires .....	83
Table 3: Level of Education of Respondent, Her Spouse, Mother and Father .....	88
Table 4: Respondent’s Occupation Compared to Mother.....	90
Table 5: Number of Children by Age Group (Face – to – Face Questionnaire).....	91
Table 6: Women’s Reproductive Roles Across Their Lifetime.....	93
Table 7: Women’s Productive Roles Across Their Lifetime .....	107
Table 8: Women’s Productive Roles Across Their Lifetime.....	117
Table 9 (Overleaf): Women’s Free Time Roles Across Their Lifetime .....	124
Table 10: Summary of Women’s Perspectives of Beauty .....	182
Table 11: Summary of Women’s Advice for Today’s Generation.....	257

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Kenya indicating the two selected counties i.e. Nairobi and Nyeri.....	66
Figure 2: Map of Nairobi County .....	67
Figure 3: Map of Nyeri County .....	68
Figure 4: women who were eighty years old and older (80+) focus group discussion in Kibra, Nairobi .....	78
Figure 5: Respondent Age Groups - Face – to – Face Questionnaires .....	85
Figure 6: Respondent’s Level of Education (Face-to-Face Questionnaire).....	86
Figure 7: Comparing Respondent’s Education to Her Mother’s .....	87
Figure 8: Level of Education Women, and their Spouse, Mother & Father .....	89
Figure 9: Taken From Kikuyu / Ethnic Group / British East Africa / 1919 .....	158
Figure 10: An old Kikuyu woman near Fort Hall Murang'a – 1936 (Matson, 1936).....	159
Figure 11: Young Kikuyu woman on the road to Nairobi. Kenya. (Matson, 1936).....	160

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aiiritu	Girls
Askaris	Police
Chama	An informal cooperative society that is normally used to pool and invest savings
Ciondo	Basket
Cucu	Grandmother
Gukia Ucuru	To make porridge
Gwatio	Special overnight dances for young circumcised, single men and women during the full moon
Kihuguiya	An irresponsible person
Mau Mau	The Kenya Land and Freedom Army
Mbariki	Goat fat
Mugiro	Curse
Muthenya wa Ngo ni wa Ngo	The day for collecting wood is just for collecting wood
Mutumia Ngatha	A virtuous woman
Mzungu	A Caucasian person
Ngukindiria	To be patient, virtuous, persevering, etc
Ngurario	Traditional Gikuyu wedding
Rika	One's age group or age set. Traditionally everyone belonged particular age group that was identified by its own unique name
Shamba	A cultivated plot of ground; a farm or plantation
Shosh	Modern slang word meaning grandmother
Shuka	A cloth or sash used for clothing
Thenya	A natural gap in their teeth
Tama ya mbesha	Lust for money
Thenya	Gap in teeth

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION .....	i
DEDICATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
GLOSSARY OF TERMS .....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	9
CHAPTER ONE .....	10
INTRODUCTION .....	10
1.1 Background and Context.....	10
1.1.1 Statement of the Problem.....	14
1.1.2 Research Question .....	15
1.1.3 Objectives of Study.....	15
1.1.4 Justification .....	15
1.1.5 Scope and Limitations.....	16
1.1.6 Definition of Concepts .....	17
1.2 Literature Review.....	19
1.2.1 A Woman’s Self – Image: Western Perspectives .....	19
1.2.2 The Self- Images of African American Women .....	28
1.2.3 African Women’s Self-Images and Women’s Images in African Oral Literature .	30
1.2.4. Gikuyu Women’s Self-Images.....	33
1.2.5. Impact of Colonialism, Religion & Education on Women’s Self-Images.....	47
1.2.6. Gikuyu Women’s Images in Oral Narratives.....	50
1.9 Theoretical Framework.....	55
1.9.1 Western Feminist Theories .....	56
1.3.2 African Feminism .....	58
1.10 Research Hypothesis.....	64
CHAPTER TWO: .....	65
METHODOLOGY .....	65
2.1 Introduction.....	65



2.2 Research Design.....	65
2.3 Study Setting.....	66
2.2.1 Nairobi County.....	67
2.2.2 Nyeri County.....	68
2.4 Sampling Framework.....	69
2.4.1 Study Population.....	69
2.4.2 Sampling.....	71
2.5 Data Collection Tools.....	72
2.5.1 Oral testimonies Questionnaire.....	72
2.5.2. Interviewees for Oral Testimonies.....	73
2.5.3 Face-to-Face Questionnaires.....	77
2.5.4 Focus Group Discussions.....	78
2.6 Data Analysis.....	78
2.6.1 Thematic Analysis.....	79
2.6.2 Frequency Distribution.....	79
2.7 Observations.....	79
2.7.1. Insider – Outsider Perspectives.....	79
2.7.2 Location of Interviews.....	80
2.8 Ethical Considerations.....	81
2.9 Conclusion.....	81
CHAPTER THREE:.....	82
WOMEN’S PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL GENDER ROLES.....	82
3.1 Introduction.....	82
3.2 Demographic Data.....	82
3.2.1. Age Distribution.....	82
3.2.2. Marital Status of Respondents.....	85
3.2.3. Level of Education.....	86
3.2.4 Occupation.....	89
3.2.5 Children.....	91
3.2.6 Summary.....	91
3.3 Women’s Social Gender Roles.....	92
3.3.1. Reproductive Roles.....	92
3.3.2. Productive Roles.....	104
3.3.3. Community Roles.....	114
3.3.4. Free Time Roles.....	123

3.3.5 Women’s Leadership Roles .....	133
3.4 Conclusion .....	138
CHAPTER FOUR:.....	142
PHYSICAL IMAGES.....	142
4.1. Characteristics of <i>Mutumia Ngatha</i> .....	142
4.1.1 Character and Good Behaviour.....	143
4.1.2 Hardworking .....	147
4.1.3 Respect.....	149
4.1.4 Relationship with Other Women .....	151
4.2 Physical Beauty.....	152
4.2.1 Skin Colour .....	152
4.2.2. How Did Women Know they were Beautiful? .....	156
4.3 Women’s Enhancements of Beauty .....	157
4.3.1 Traditional Methods of Enhancing Beauty .....	158
4.3.2 Cleanliness .....	164
4.3.3 Dressing .....	166
4.3.4 Perspectives of their Mother’s and Grandmother’s Dressing.....	167
4.4 Factors Influencing Women’s Beauty and Style .....	172
4.4.1 Tradition.....	172
4.4.2 Religion.....	174
4.4.3 Western Style and Fashion.....	174
4.4.4 Media .....	179
4.6 Conclusion .....	180
CHAPTER FIVE: .....	187
WOMEN’S HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS .....	187
5.1 Introduction.....	187
5.2A Call for a Cultural Revival.....	187
5.2.1 Gikuyu Language and Self – Identity .....	190
5.2.2. Cultural Seminars.....	195
5.2.3 Coaching and Mentorship .....	196
5.2.4 Balancing Education with Tradition .....	198
5.2.5 Gikuyu Spirituality.....	199
5.2.6 Give Teachers Cultural Training .....	201
5.2.7 Traditional Diet.....	201

5.3 Addressing the Failure of Modern Parenting Styles .....	203
5.3.1 Making Your Children Your First Priority .....	205
5.3.2 Safeguarding Your Children’s Innocence.....	209
5.3.3 Re-Introducing Collective Responsibility.....	210
5.3.4 Teach Your Children Good Values.....	212
5.3.5. The Importance of Disciplining Children .....	213
5.3.6. Invest in Your Children’s Relationship with God .....	219
5.4 Let’s Respect Ourselves and Others .....	220
5.4.1 The Importance of Self-Respect .....	220
5.4.2 Respect for Parents .....	221
5.4.3 Respect for Elders .....	222
5.4.4 Respect for Other People .....	223
5.4.5 Respect and Unite with Other Women .....	224
5.5 Women’s Perspectives of Modern Relationships .....	226
5.5.1 Perspectives of Married Women.....	226
5.5.2 Perspectives of Single Career Women.....	230
5.6 Changes in Mother-Daughter Relationships.....	232
5.7 The Taboo of Modern Dressing.....	234
5.8. The Immoral Sexual Conduct of Today’s Generation.....	238
5.8.1 Public Display of Affection .....	238
5.8.2 “Today’s Generation is the Most Promiscuous Generation Ever” .....	240
5.8.3 Pre-Marital Sex is Taboo .....	242
5.8.4 Having Children Out of Wedlock is Taboo .....	244
5.8.5 The Challenge of Inappropriate Father–Daughter Relationships .....	247
5.8.6 The Increasing Prevalence of Prostitution .....	249
5.9 The Dangers Technology .....	251
5.10 Today’s Generation’s Abuse of Drugs and Alcohol.....	254
5.11 Conclusion .....	256
CHAPTER SIX:.....	259
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS .....	259
6.1 Introduction.....	259
6.2 Summary of Key Findings .....	259
6.1.1 Women’s Perspectives of Social Gender Role .....	260
6.1.2. Women’s Perspectives of Physical Images.....	267
6.1.3 Women’s Hopes & Aspiration.....	275

6.3 Conclusion .....	280
6.4 Recommendations.....	281
APPENDICES: .....	285
Appendix I: RESEARCH TOOLS - Oral Testimonies Questionnaire .....	285
<b>PART 1: BIODATA.....</b>	<b>285</b>
1.1 Name .....	285
1.2 Age.....	285
1.3 Place of Birth .....	285
1.4 Number of Siblings .....	285
1.5 Marital Status .....	285
1.6 Number of Children .....	285
1.7 Education Levels.....	285
1.8 Occupation .....	285
<b>PART 2: SOCIAL GENDER ROLES .....</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>Examples of Community Managing Roles:</b> (voluntary work for the community such as participating in the church, weddings, initiation ceremonies, etc.) .....	286
<b>Examples of Leadership Roles:</b> (community leadership, cultural roles, political roles, roles with in advocacy and lobby groups) .....	286
<b>PART 2: PHYSICAL IMAGE, BEAUTY and STYLE .....</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>PART 3: WOMEN’S HOPES &amp; ASPIRATIONS .....</b>	<b>290</b>
This section records women’s hopes and aspirations for future generations of women. ....	290
Appendix II: RESEARCH TOOLS – Face-to-Face Questionnaire.....	291
<b>PART 1: BIODATA.....</b>	<b>291</b>
1. Name:.....	291
2. Age:.....	291
3. Place of Birth:.....	291
4. Number of Siblings:.....	291
5. Marital Status:.....	291

6. Number of Children:.....	291
7. Education Levels:.....	291
8. Husband’s Education:.....	291
9. Mother’s Education:.....	291
10. Father’s Education:.....	291
11. Occupation:.....	291
12. Spouse’s Occupation:.....	291
13. Mother’s Occupation:.....	291
<b>PART 2: SOCIAL GENDER ROLES .....</b>	<b>291</b>
<b>PART 3: WOMEN’S PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL GENDER ROLES .....</b>	<b>296</b>
<b>PART 4: How Have Social Gender Roles Changed Over the Years?.....</b>	<b>298</b>
<b>PART 5: PHYSICAL BEAUTY .....</b>	<b>300</b>
Appendix III: RESEARCH TOOLS – Focus Group Discussion Guide.....	303
<b>PART 1: List of Participants .....</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>1. NAME AND AGE OF PARTICIPANTS .....</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>2. SHORT INTRODUCTION BY EACH PARTICIPANT.....</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>PART 2: Women’s Collective Image (probe each question).....</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>PART 3: Women’s Aspirations for The Next Generation (probe each question) .....</b>	<b>303</b>
Appendix IV: Advice for Today’s Generation .....	304
<b>General Advice .....</b>	<b>304</b>
1. A call for a Cultural Revival, where young people would: .....	304
a) Learn Gikuyu .....	304
b) Return to traditional diet .....	304
c) Listen to Vernacular radio stations to learn about Gikuyu culture .....	304
d) Hold cultural seminars .....	304
e) Teach about Gikuyu Spirituality .....	304
f) Coach young women.....	304

g)	Give teachers cultural training .....	304
2.	Stop drinking alcohol, .....	304
3.	Get closer to God, .....	304
4.	Improve your diet by introducing components of the traditional diet, .....	304
5.	Exercise respect for yourself, your bodies, your husband, your parents, elders and your culture, .....	304
6.	Change your attitude by learning to be polite & kind,.....	304
7.	Cultivate a good character by being morally upright and trustworthy, .....	304
8.	Be better parents by: .....	304
a)	Making time for your children,.....	304
b)	Being strict with your children, .....	304
c)	Teaching your children good values, .....	304
d)	Advocating for bad children to be removed from classrooms and counseled, .....	304
9.	Have more children.....	304
10.	Make time to connect with extended family.....	304
11.	Re-introduce collective responsibility, .....	304
12.	Create social structures that ground today's society in a set of values .....	305
13.	Avoid peer pressure .....	305
14.	Dress decently.....	305
15.	Seek advice from grandmothers and look for a mentor .....	305
16.	Be content with family's financial situation and .....	305
17.	Stop drinking alcohol.....	305
18.	Be more faithful in marriage,.....	305
19.	Dress decently,.....	305
20.	Re-introduce collective parenting, .....	305
21.	Stop being a victim of technology, .....	305

22. Stop embracing religion blindly,.....	305
23. Stop copying western style and behaviour,.....	305
24. Balance your education with knowledge of your people people and culture .....	305
<b>Advise on Relationships &amp; Sex .....</b>	<b>305</b>
1. Carry yourself with dignity .....	305
2. Respect your husband and inculcate mutual respect in your marriages, .....	305
3. Be more faithful in relationships,.....	305
4. Stop engaging in public displays of affection,.....	305
5. Stop being promiscuous, participating in premarital sex, and sleeping with older men, 305	
6. Stop having children out of wedlock, .....	305
7. Stop dressing indecently around your fathers and having inappropriate relationships with them,.....	305
8. Stop being overly familiar with opposite sex, .....	305
9. Career women should stop putting their work first and make time to find a husband ..	305
Appendix VI: List of Research Assistants .....	306
<b>NAIROBI</b> .....	<b>306</b>
<b>NYERI</b> .....	<b>306</b>
Appendix VII: Letter of Introduction, University of Nairobi .....	307
<b>SOURCES</b> .....	<b>308</b>

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the changing self-image of Gikuyu women from 1900 - 2000. This was done through the investigation of three generations of women's social gender roles across their lifetime, their perspectives of physical image, beauty and style and their hopes and aspirations for today's generation of women. Case studies were conducted in Nairobi and Nyeri counties where three different tools were used to collect the data. thirty (30) oral testimonies from key informants were recorded; one hundred and twenty (120) face-to-face questionnaires were also conducted in order to provide empirical data that confirmed or disproved what emerged from the oral testimonies. Finally, six (6) focus group discussions were carried out to primarily address collective images of women and to provide further insight on questions that emerged from both the oral testimonies and the face-to-face questionnaires. The Oral testimonies and focus group discussions were examined using a thematic analysis and the face-to-face questionnaires was analysed using frequency distributions. African Feminism was the theoretical framework used for this study. African Feminism confronts the gender, race, class, and cultural oppression that African women face. It is also primarily fighting the negative effects of patriarchy and westernization on African women and African culture as a whole. This research confirmed that patriarchy had socialized women to view certain roles as naturally belonging to them. The study revealed that women's reproductive roles (ie: domestic chores) had remained constant from 1900 to 2000 as had society's expectation of women to perform these roles but the women themselves were not critical of the roles. All women were over-burdened by their reproductive roles and this was further exacerbated because of the new demands of their productive and community roles. From 1900 to 2000, women have also gone from seeing themselves as restricted to the homestead to having the freedom of movement and interaction and taking leadership roles. When it came to beauty, women still saw *Mutumia Ngatha* (a virtuous woman) as an example of a good woman and inner beauty was still valued more than outer, cosmetic beauty. The women's perspectives of physical beauty were found to be in conflict with western ideals in the literature reviewed. The women appealed to today's generation of women to stop dressing indecently, drinking alcohol and having any form of pre-marital sex which was all taboo. Further research needs to be conducted on young Gikuyu women (below forty years) who were not covered by this study. It is also important that this research be duplicated in other communities so that women's changing perspectives of themselves are documented.



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Context

Who is the Gikuyu woman? What image does she have of herself? What values are important to her? What is her role in her family, in her work life and in her community? How does she spend her free time? How would she compare her life to that of her mother's, grandmother's, daughter's and granddaughter's? Unfortunately, little is known about her because she has had neither the platform nor the opportunity to share her views on her self-image with the world.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a woman's self-image (also referred to as self-concept in literature) is defined as the way she regards herself, or the ideas she has of her abilities, appearance and personality (Merriam Webster). In *The Self-Concept Revisited: Or a Theory of a Theory*, Seymour Epstein (1973) describes one's self-image as being made up of several self-impressions that have been grown over time and which are informed by one's environment or the people and experiences that someone is exposed to.

Epstein views self-image as the nucleus of one's personality and describes it as the personal theory behind how someone designs their life and operates in it, where they place their values, what they perceive to be good social conduct, etc. (Epstein, 1973). One's self-image affects a person's entire life because it determines how they behave, how they will treat others and even what they will pursue in life. For example, once a person gets an education, the ideas and concepts that they have learned and observed will inform, change and expand their self-image to incorporate these new self-concepts.

In today's society, the traditional female voice is missing and so is the continuous conversation by women about who they are, what values they hold dear and who they aspire to be (Goredema, 2010). This significant information gap is having serious ramifications on young Gikuyu women today because they have no reference point from which to chart their own lives. A lack of sufficient information from their foremothers means that young women are forced to look to other cultures to inform their self-image. Filomina Chioma Steady, in her book *African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective*, says:

The contemporary African woman is a creation of historical and current forces that are simultaneously internally generated and

externally induced – from indigenous socio-cultural structures and foreign influences (westernization, Christianity, islamization) (Steady, 1981:33).

Similarly, the rapid westernization witnessed since Kenya' independence in 1963 has diminished the transference of Gikuyu knowledge, traditions, cultural values, and social norms and this is resulting in a rapid decline of Gikuyu Culture.

The onslaught of religion, colonialism, education and westernization has systematically disconnected the modern woman from her Mother's and grandmother's self-image, culture and values. "One is terribly disturbed by what has become of the African woman of today, particularly those whose psyche has been severely damaged in the process of acquiring western education with its philosophy of gender bias" (Cornwall, 2004: 32).

The role of religion in westernizing the Gikuyu community cannot be underestimated. The missionaries settled in Nyeri in the early 1900s and, according to Wangari Maathai, within thirty years of the introduction of Christianity into the community, the majority of the Gikuyu had converted – all but abandoning their own forms of worship, which they were told by the missionaries was 'evil' and 'witchcraft' (Maathai, 2006). Maathai explains that,

Dancing and other non-Christian activities and initiation rites were discouraged and even demonized by missionaries and converts. A nearly complete transformation of the local culture into one akin to that of Europe had taken place in the generation before I was born. The *athomi* culture brought with it European ways and led to profound changes in the way Kikuyus dressed and adorned themselves, the kinds of food they ate, the songs they sang, and the dances they performed. Everything that represented the local culture was enthusiastically replaced (Maathai, 2006:11).

This was not unique to Gikuyu culture but was witnessed across all indigenous communities. The International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, a United Nations agency, explains that:

Many indigenous peoples have come to see formal school education as a way of assimilating them into mainstream society and eradicating their cultures, languages and ways of life. This often causes cultural and generational conflicts between youths and elders, and threatens the

social cohesion in indigenous communities. Many indigenous youths also experience the loss of an important part of their identity in their dealings with mainstream values and norms, while not fully becoming a part of the dominant national society (International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, United Nations, 2001).

Aside from the impact of colonization and western influence, Gikuyu women also have had to contend with a patriarchal social order that seeks to define women's images and perspectives on their behalf. This is similar to the global patriarchal system where "It was men who formulated the theories about women, who made the pronouncements and proffered the advice on how women should live their lives. It was mainly men who wrote about women in the academic press and who talked about women in the media" (Spender, 1985). In fact, in the Gikuyu context, the two most comprehensive early works on traditional Gikuyu society were written by two foreign men, namely, Father Cagnolo who wrote *The Agikuyu Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (1933) and Louis Leakey who penned *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903* (1939).

When it comes to their own narratives, the Agikuyu have historically had a very strong oral tradition where they communicated the society's values to the next generation through storytelling, songs, poems, riddles, etc. "Through the process of storytelling, which is a social activity, the children and young girls and boys learn who they are and, what society expects them to be or not to be. They learn the values and hopes and aspirations of their community" (Kabira, 2010: 148).

Most of the story tellers in Gikuyu society were women. One of the storytellers, Wanjira wa Rukenya felt that storytelling helped her to "reclaim her dreams" (as the book is aptly named).

A woman yearns for the self-assurance – to be a woman of dreams, of song and poetry. The feel of life, buried by socialization and domestication processes, oppressed by the surrounding culture (and dealing with a problem without a name), is lifted in the process. That is the woman Wanjira becomes when she narrates the stories. You see the sparkle in her eyes when she talks about dances, courtship, beauty, children, love, courage, determination and joy of womanhood (Kabira, 2010: ix)

For Wanjira, storytelling helped her to remember her past and to bring to life the rich cultural life that had previously existed.

Oral narratives have many negative images of women while praising mothers and sometimes daughters (Kabira, 1983). These negative narratives have a negative impact on women. “The kind of ideology that is perpetuated through narratives makes it seem natural to be passive, to be dependent on men, even on very young boys, to accept ornaments as reward for good deeds done” (Weisstein, 1968: 53). The question one must ask is why would women stick to a negative narrative about themselves and their daughters? Could it be because of years of cultural and traditional socialization? Or are they reflecting societal norms? The answers to these questions is what makes this study important because if we want to know about women, we must begin with asking them what they know.

The culture of telling stories to younger generations in order to guide them played a significant role in the molding of children into responsible adults but the stories have not been updated to deal with emerging challenges to culture. Secondly, traditional storytelling has been replaced with educational concepts and western-style story telling through the movies and TV and this is what is informing the modern woman’s self-image. The Working Group of Indigenous Affairs which is a UN agency that was established in 1982 to help indigenous populations to share their experiences and concerns with the United Nations, says:

Long before State-sponsored education systems were introduced, indigenous peoples had their own systems for managing their knowledge and educating their children. These systems, which are rooted in specific cultural contexts, have allowed them to survive as unique peoples (working group on indigenous affairs). A lack of information and a negative perception to traditional women are moving women to adopt a western oriented self-image (UN Working Group on Indigenous People, 2001:2)

History tells us that Gikuyu women had great informal power and they also had their own women councils that had influence.

Traditional societies in pre-colonial times had spheres of power and influence for women in closely-knit organizations that helped them maintain a voice. Colonialism has its merits but its new culture of ascendancy through education, white-collar jobs and money-driven economy relegated women down the ladder (Chukwuma, 2000:271).

Information exists on Agikuyu women as shown by the discussion, but their voices have not been recorded and therefore, their perspectives are missing from the ongoing dialogue of the changing Gikuyu culture. This is a gap that this study intends to fill in by introducing the female voice into the community's dialogue. This study endeavors to start the journey of recording women's perspectives of self-image.

The importance of recording women's stories is illustrated in the Feminist works of researchers such as Betty Friedan, Hannah Gavron and Ann Oakley who all did studies on women by recording their stories and perspectives. Each study revealed women's perspectives that had not been known or understood before by both men and women themselves (Spender, 1985).

In fact, Ann Oakley took it a step further and developed a research methodology that allowed women to tell their own stories. "She went out and talked with women about their lives and not only provided some of the missing data – which could be used by women – but with her insistence on the inclusion of women, she challenged the fundamental structure of sociology" (Spender, 1985:132). Dr Oakley's research confirms that there is certain knowledge and perspectives that remain invisible until a woman is given a chance to share her story.

Recording women's voices helps to raise women's consciousness on their social gender roles and status in their community. "Talking with women about their lives was a methodology quite consistent with the women's liberation movement strategy of consciousness-raising... many of the women Ann Oakley has talked with over the years would be the first to declare that those talks 'changed their lives'," (Spender, 1985: 133). This research will endeavour to provide women's perspectives that all Gikuyu women can use as a starting point on she is, what her priorities are and how she desires to be perceived.

### **1.1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Substantial changes have taken place in Kenyan society particularly with the infusion of western culture through colonialism, Christianity and western education and yet little is known about what kind of impact this has had on the way Gikuyu women view themselves. There is a significant gap in information, when it comes to women's self-images. As one's self-image forms the basis of a woman's personal philosophy from which they make decisions and live their lives. Gikuyu women's voices and the continuous conversation about their lives, their self-image and their hopes and aspirations, are poorly documented and this makes it hard to measure how their self-image has changed over time and why.

This information gap is also making it increasingly difficult for young Gikuyu women to find reference points from which to build their own self-image. The challenge here is twofold. Firstly, traditional Gikuyu women's voices, particularly when it comes to their self-image are not adequately documented to inform today's woman's self-image. Where the images of Gikuyu women appear in the oral and written literature, it is rarely from the perspectives of the women themselves but more about observations by others. This study will, therefore, record women's self-images across three generations in order to explore what the women's images of themselves are and how they have changed over time.

### **1.1.2 Research Question**

- i. How have women's perspectives of their social gender roles changed from 1900 - 2000?
- ii. How have women's perspectives of their physical image and style changed from 1900 - 2000?
- iii. What are women's hopes and aspirations for today's generation and future generations?

### **1.1.3 Objectives of Study**

The objectives for this study are as follows:

- i. To investigate Gikuyu women's perspectives of their social gender roles since 1900 - 2000
- ii. To explore Gikuyu Women's perspectives of their physical image and style from 1900 - 2000
- iii. To examine the women's hopes and aspirations for today's and future generations?

### **1.1.4 Justification**

From 1900 – 2000, the Agikuyu have gone through transformational change: from Christianity and colonialism to education, to the Kenya Land and Freedom war (the Mau Mau war), to rapid westernization and urbanization. All these external forces had an impact on the Gikuyu woman. However, women's voices have not been documented so as to give their perspectives on how they have been affected by the external events that have taken place from 1900 - 2000. This thesis attempts to create a foundation upon which Gikuyu women and women from different cultures and communities can start to define their image for themselves, in their own words.

The study interviews three generations of women: women above eighty years' (80+) generation, sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) generation and forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation with the intention that they would be able to provide generation perspectives of their grandmothers, mothers, daughters and granddaughters. It did not consider the eighteen to thirty-nine years' (18 – 39) women because they did not have the younger generation perspectives of daughters and granddaughters.

### **1.1.5 Scope and Limitations**

This study targeted three generations of Gikuyu women: forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59), sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) and women who were eighty years old and older (80+) on the basis that these three generations could give generational perspectives of women's self-image – from their grandmothers' generation to their granddaughters' generation. The study was conducted in Nairobi and Nyeri Counties only. To be considered to be from Nairobi County, the women must have spent at least fifty percent of their lives in Nairobi. Women from Nyeri County had to have been born and raised there.

The Study population was limited to Gikuyu women which meant both their mothers and fathers were Gikuyu. The age was limited to forty years (40) and above because the researcher wanted women who could provide perspectives of the two older and two younger generations. Women below 40 were missing perspectives of the younger generations because their children were still young. None of the women in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age category had grandchildren.

The research locations were limited to Nairobi and Nyeri Counties. Nairobi County provided the urban and semi-urban perspectives because some women had spent half their lives in the rural areas. Nairobi County was also selected because of its close proximity to Central Province and special connection to the Agikuyu who have been migrating to Nairobi in search of work from the time the railway was completed in 1899 (Macharia, 2003).

Nyeri County provided rural women's perspectives. Nyeri people were also amongst the first to come into contact with missionaries and colonialists. They were also among the first people in Kenya to be forcibly evicted from their ancestral land, and to also receive education, medical health care and monotheistic religion (Macharia, 2003). This may not have adequately reflected every Gikuyu woman's experiences, especially those from counties such as Murang'a and Kirinyaga in Central Kenya and Gikuyu women who grew up in different regions of Kenya such as the Rift Valley.

Although the research has reached its aims, there were some unavoidable limitations. Firstly, the research was only conducted in two counties. The influencing factors on the women's self-image, however, were the same for all women and therefore they can still find themselves within the narratives.

### **1.1.6 Definition of Concepts**

The following are the operational definitions that were used for this study:

**Oral testimonies:** Recording experiences and historical information through interviews with people with firsthand knowledge. An audiotape, videotape, or written account of such an interview or interviews.

**Feminism:** the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities; the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes.

**Culture:** the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

**Cultural Identity:** the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-image and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture.

**Morals:** a person's or community's standards of behaviour or beliefs concerning what is and what is not acceptable for them to do.

**Values:** a person's principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgment of what is important in life. Values have major influence on a person's behaviour and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations.

**Gender:** the state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones).

**Gender Relations:** the social relationships between men and women, such as relationships of class, ethnicity, nationality and religion. They are socially constructed.

**Gender Roles:** culturally determined behaviours, attitudes, and activities expected or common for males and females; those activities that are considered by a given culture to be appropriate to a woman or a man.



**Triple Roles of Women:** In most societies, including the Gikuyu society, women have a triple role, including reproductive, productive and community management activities, while men undertake productive and community political activities.

**Reproductive Roles:** the care and maintenance of the household and its members, such as cooking, washing, cleaning, nursing, bearing children and looking after them, building and maintaining shelter. This work is unpaid. Examples of reproductive roles for Gikuyu women include: cooking, cleaning the house, fetching water, fetching firewood, working on the family *shamba*, and taking care of goats and cows.

**Productive Roles:** roles that are involved in the production of goods and services for income. Examples of productive roles for Gikuyu women include: picking coffee and tea, working on the family *shamba*, formal employment, casual labor, and school.

**Community Roles:** voluntary communal roles that are cultural, religious or voluntary work in one's village or community. Examples of community roles for Gikuyu women include: church activities, cultural activities, entertaining, taking care of the elderly, collective work, and community policing.

**Free Time Activities:** the activities women engage in when they are not involved in their reproductive, productive, or community roles; usually for pleasure or amusement. Examples of free time roles for Gikuyu women include: knitting, crocheting, visiting with friends, cultural and church activities.

**Cultural Activities:** To engage in activities that are rooted in one's culture such as traditional ceremonies (wedding ceremonies, circumcision ceremonies, etc.)

**Beauty:** a combination of physical qualities, such as shape, colour, or form that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight.

**Enhancements of Beauty:** to make one's physical image and appearance more attractive by the addition of decorative details or features.

**Noble (A Noble Woman):** having or showing fine personal qualities or high moral principles and ideals.

**Style:** a mode of fashion, as in dress; a distinctive appearance, typically determined by the principles according to which something is designed.

**Personality:** the combination of characteristics or qualities that form an individual's distinctive character. In this context it emphasizes a person who is soft-spoken, polite, cooperative, and submissive to her husband.

**Influencing Factors:** ideas and things that have had an important effect on a person's choices.

**Tradition:** beliefs, customs, and principles, or ways of acting that people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

This literature review looks at what has been written about women's self-images. It also examines what has been written on the images of women in the literature and how they influence on their self-images. The review explores: western perspectives of women's self-image, the self-images of African American women, African women's self-images, women's images in oral literature, Gikuyu women's self-images and the impact of colonialism, religion and education on women's self-images.

### **1.2.1 A Woman's Self – Image: Western Perspectives**

In western culture Psychology is the one of the primary fields of study that has attempted to define a woman's image but these definitions end up being cultural and patriarchal perspectives of women that confirm sexist norms (Weisstein, 1968). In *Psychology Constructs the Female* (1968) Nancy Weisstein challenges the limited definitions of women which define her in relation to men and place all her value on her attractiveness to the opposite sex. She also criticizes the way in which personality in the field of psychology is defined solely by the observation and clinical research of clinicians and psychiatrists such as Sigmund Freud. She notes:

Psychology has nothing to say about what women are really like, what they need and what they want, especially because psychology does not know. I want to stress that this failure is not limited to women; rather, the kind of psychology which has addressed itself to how people act and who they are has failed to understand, in the first place, why people act the way they do, and certainly failed to understand what might make them act differently(Weisstein, 1968:53)

She argues that a woman's environment, social conditions and the expectations of her community all help to define who she is. She implies that women's voices need to be included in defining who they were.

Weisstein asks the important question "*How are women characterized in our culture and in psychology?*" before answering,

They are inconsistent, emotionally unstable, lacking in a strong conscience or super ego, weaker, nurturant rather than productive, 'intuitive' rather than intelligent and if they are at all normal, suited to the family life (Weisstein, 1968:52).

She believes that such patriarchal perspectives of influence their images of themselves and consequently disempower them because women are always comparing themselves to and trying to fit into the global ideals of beauty.

In his book *Ways of Seeing* (1973), John Berger explores the way women's bodies are portrayed in art from the Renaissance period in the 1500s to modern times. He explains that the patriarchal society perceives men and women's social presence differently. For men, their social presence is based on their power, whereas a woman's social presence is defined by how she looks, what she's wearing, her voice, her demeanour, etc. (Berger, 1973). In fact, women are socialized to constantly observe and improve their physical appearance. Therefore, while a man is socialized to be in constant pursuit of power, a woman is constantly trying to improve her appearance, her clothes, her demeanour etc.

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself.... From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life (Berger, 1973:8).

Berger argues that the nature of society orients women to constantly be aware of their physical image and as a result to live a dualistic life of the observer and the observed. As a result, a man's focus is outside of himself whereas a woman is socialized to be self-conscious

because she is always being observed and assessed by the people around her (Berger, 1973:9).

Both Nancy Weisstein and John Berger agree that a woman's self-image has been largely determined and defined by male perspectives and patriarchal ideologies. Their work confirms some of the ramifications of not recording women's voices, particularly when it comes to their own self-image because how women see themselves is inadvertently influenced by the way the patriarchal male society define them which is based solely on their physical image.

In 2004, a study was conducted by Dove, a women's hygiene product manufactured by Unilever, entitled *The Real Truth about Beauty* where 3200 women from 10 countries were interviewed on their perspectives of what female beauty was and the role it played in women's lives. The majority of women felt that physical beauty was a crucial component of a woman's success today and yet only 2% of the women claimed to be beautiful which demonstrated how they had been negatively influenced by the global standards of beauty. The study revealed that on average, women were exposed to over 2000 advertisements that promoted this western idea of beauty as the standard for all women's beauty

Nancy Etcoff, the primary researcher from the Dove Study, *The Real Truth about Beauty* confirmed Berger's observation of women being socialized to constantly survey themselves and she believed that this was directly related to women's concern and obsessions with their physical appearance.

The global perspectives of women place a lot of emphasis on her physical looks and less on her intelligence, temperament, behaviour and other characteristics. In a world where most societies have a patriarchal system in place, the images of women are often biased and discriminating. Western cultures still practice many forms of gender discrimination and they place far more importance on beauty, thinness, and youth in females and on intellectual accomplishment, skill, and strength in males (Etcoff & Scott, 2004:6).

The Dove study confirmed that the self-image of women from all ten countries was influenced by the global standards of beauty. The participants in the study argued that the global definitions of beauty were too narrow and caused great anguish and self-esteem issues for women who did not fit the stereotype of tall, thin, and light skinned or white. They unanimously agreed that the global images of a woman's beauty needed to be expanded to

include women of different shapes, sizes and complexions and also broadened to include nonphysical attributes such as personality, intelligence and wit (Etcoff & Scott, 2004).

While this study is useful, it does not capture the perspectives of African women. The 10 study countries were from North and South America, Europe and Asia but not from Africa. Therefore, there is a gap in this study that needs to be filled. It is of utmost importance that African Women's perspectives of their beauty be addressed.

In the article, *Discriminatory Experiences and Depressive Symptoms among African American Women*, written by Keith et al. in 2010, the European Standards of beauty are described as

...The notion that the more closely associated a person is with European features, the more attractive he or she is considered; these standards deem attributes that are most closely related to whiteness, such as lighter skin, straight hair, a thin nose and lips, and light coloured eyes, as beautiful (Keith, 2010:48).

The article goes on to argue that African Americans grow up despising their own physical features and feeling inferior about their own self-image because the world does not describe them as beautiful. It is extremely important to record the self-images of African women so that existing research may be informed by the perspectives of the African women themselves.

The greatest challenge to women's self-image around the world is the over-emphasis on her physical attributes while downplaying other important aspects that make up her self-image. In her book *The Beauty Myth* that was published in 1981, Naomi Wolf argues that the gains of the early feminist movement and the second wave of the feminist movement were diluted by the burden of new measures of physical beauty on a woman's self-image and value. "The beauty myth countered women's new freedoms by transposing the social limits to women's lives directly onto our faces and bodies" (Wolf, 1981:271). As a result, a woman's success was not just measured by her actions and achievements but was also tied into her physical appearance.

Wolf argues that the global images of women are based on men's opinions of what a perfect or good woman is (Wolf, 1981). In her book, *For The Record, the Making and Meaning of Feminist Knowledge*, Dale Spender (1985) notes that men have always been the ones who wrote about women.

It was men who formulated the theories about women, who made the pronouncements and proffered the advice on how women should live their lives. It was mainly men who wrote about women in the academic press and who talked about women in the media (Spender, 1985:11).

Women waste resources and countless hours trying to fit into this male ideal instead of defining their images for themselves.

In her book *Feminine Mystique*, Friedman says, “Over and over, women heard in voices of tradition and Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity” (Friedman, 2001:15). Visual media in the form of magazines, TV shows, movies, music videos, advertisements, etc. have all influenced the western middle class woman’s perceptions of herself. Friedman reveals that for a long time, women’s magazines were actually written by male authors. These male authors defined what was important to a woman and even went as far as to teach her about how to dress, how to cook, how to get a man, how to raise her children, etc. (Friedman, 2001). They also assumed that women were only concerned about trivial, superficial things like hair, beauty and romance.

The male voice has been so dominant in women’s lives that it has drowned their own voice and opinion. Naomi Wolf describes this scenario perfectly when she says,

More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before, but in terms of how we feel about ourselves, physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers (Wolf, 1981:270).

She believes that women are more unsure and insecure in these modern times than they were before because of this over-reliance on external approval.

The problem with the dominant male voice on women’s images is that it reduces women to their physical beauty and places so much emphasis on how women look that it diminishes the importance of other crucial attributes to her image and personality. When women internalize these male ideals they also develop a shallow self-concept that only focuses on their physical appearance.

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male:

the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object -- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight, says Berger (Berger, 1973:55).

This research plans to give Gikuyu women the opportunity to re-define themselves, that is, the thesis intends to document women's self-images so that women can develop a more robust self-image.

In *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (1992), Clarissa Estes speaks about the deep instinctual nature of women which she calls wild woman. She proves that the wild woman is a global archetype that is found in communities across the world by compiling stories of the wild woman archetype from different tribes and nations. She believes that this part of a woman's nature is critical to her health and happiness and yet it is being suppressed and endangered by the global patriarchal social order.

A healthy woman is much like a wolf: robust, chock-full, strong life force, life-giving, territorially aware, inventive, loyal, roving. Yet, separation from the wildish nature causes a woman's personality to become meagre, thin, ghostly, spectral (Estes, 1992:8).

Dr Estes argues that within every woman is her natural, wild nature that is a powerful force, instinctive, passionately creative and possessing a deep inner knowing. But she believes that this deep dimension of a woman's nature is endangered because it is suppressed and ignored by the dominant patriarchal culture. "Though her soul requires seeing, the culture around her requires sightlessness. Though her soul wishes to speak its truth, she is pressured to be silent," notes Dr Estes, adding that women must save their wild nature from going extinct due to the pressure for women to ignore this part of their identity for the acceptable outward identity promoted by society (Estes, 1992).

In her book *Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedman explores the images that American housewives had of themselves and what influenced these perspectives. She starts off by describing the suburban housewife in the way the media did.

...She was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world. The American housewife -- freed by science and labour saving appliances from the drudgery and dangers of childbirth and illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children and her home (Friedman, 2001:4).

Friedman's research is the first to ask women to talk about themselves and to give their own perspectives.

Friedman looks at how western media duped American women into abandoning their careers so that they could pursue the false ideal of being the perfect housewife. Her research exposes issues of anxiety, a lack of fulfilment and tension experienced by middle class women in America who had sacrificed their careers to become housewives.

Millions of women lived lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husband's goodbye, depositing their station wagon full children at school, and smiling as they ran the electric waxer over a spotless kitchen. Their only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers; their highest ambition to have five children and a beautiful house, their only fight to get and keep their husbands (Friedman, 2001:7).

Friedman adds that in the 1950s and 60s women proudly referred to themselves as housewives because this was promoted as the modern suburban ideal.

Friedman points out that women were enslaved into the stereotypes of the American house wife by their own minds because they internalized and oriented their entire lives around these ideals. She notes:

It is easy to see concrete details that trap the suburban housewife, the continual demands on her time. But the chains that bind her in her trap are chains in her own mind and spirit. They are chains made up of mistaken ideas and misinterpreted facts of incomplete truths and unreal choices, (Friedman, 2001:45).

Friedman explains that women themselves often seek to be what society's definition of a perfect woman or a perfect housewife is but once they are in these roles they become miserable because they realize they have bought into an illusion that entraps and enslaves them into a life of boredom and limitations.

Friedman argues that the influence of western media on women's self-images continues till today because women are still internalizing and acting on what the media says about them. Friedman further notes,

This image – created by women's magazines, by advertisements, television, movies, novels, columns, and books by experts on marriage and the family,



child psychology, sexual adjustments, and by the popularizing of sociology and psychoanalysis shapes women's lives today and mirrors their dreams (Friedman, 2001:46).

While her research was only on American housewives, it provides great insight into the external factors that influence women's images of themselves. Friedman's book also demonstrates the importance of recording women's perspectives because their stories give insight into women's true self-images. This confirms the importance of conducting a study on Gikuyu women's images of themselves so as to disambiguate the historical perspectives of male authors.

A similar study was done in the United Kingdom by Hannah Gavron in the 1960s where she set out to document women's realities in terms of their reproductive roles and motherhood.

Hannah Gavron had noticed the absence of women in literature of the family and had elected to undertake for her PhD, the seemingly simple task of interviewing women to add their reports to the reservoir of knowledge about the family. She interviewed 96 women to find out how they felt about their lives and ended up asking whether the last 150 years of 'women's rights' had all been for nothing for the women she interviewed were less than happy with their lot (Spender, 1985:133).

In her book, *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (1966), Hannah Gavron shares her experience of interviewing women. Her findings are similar to Betty Friedman's in that she discovers that women were frustrated with their status and roles within the family, which were continuously being impacted upon them by social, demographic, legal, political, technological and economic changes.

According to Dr Gavron, these changes created an inner conflict within women between aspiring for the same things that men did while also trying to balance these ambitions with being a good mother (Gavron, 1966). One thing Dr Gavron mentions is that women are often unaware that their dissatisfaction is shared by other women because they never hear other women's narratives. Her research confirms the importance of documenting women's stories so as to give true insight into their experiences.

Ann Oakley is another feminist thinker who borrowed from the research experiences of Betty Friedman and Hannah Gavron to develop a methodology that was suitable for recording women's experiences by simply allowing them to tell their own stories. Oakley wrote several

books, including *The Sociology of Housework* (1974), *Housewife* (1976), *Becoming a Mother* (1979) among others that explored women's perspectives of marriage, motherhood and their social roles.

In her book *Sex, Gender and Society* (1978), Dr Oakley recorded cross-cultural perspectives of women which challenged the global stereotypes of women.

Ann Oakley produced hundreds of examples to demonstrate that, for every cherished characteristic of women believed to be natural in our own society, there was another where such a characteristic was unknown or even opposite.... She provided knowledge which was very much needed at the time. Many women knew they had been taught to be feminine, but were unable to state just what those particular lessons were (Spender, 1985:134 - 135).

Dr Oakley's research demonstrates how recording women's perspectives can help to raise the consciousness of women and society as a whole. "*Sex, Gender and Society* was a boost for many women and a practical handbook for assistance when it came to dealing with some of the daily put-downs used by men" (Spender, 1985:135). Her work confirms the importance of recording Gikuyu women's perspectives not only to challenge the historical stereotypes of Gikuyu women but also to help raise the consciousness of young Gikuyu women who have no reference point when it comes to what it means to be a Gikuyu woman.

Dr Oakley's book *The Sociology of Housework* (1974), for the first time in the history of sociology classified women's reproductive roles as work.

Her documentation of women's lives as workers in the home provided the foundation of new knowledge about women. For centuries men had been encoding knowledge about themselves in which they and their concerns were central, which they took for granted as reliable knowledge and which confirmed their existence and their supremacy in the world (Spender, 1985:138).

Dr Oakley's work challenges the patriarchal system where men were the only knowledge makers and subjects of study by also documenting women's work and encoding their knowledge. Her work illustrates how recording women's stories can lead to the discovery of new knowledge.

### 1.2.2 The Self- Images of African American Women

Dr Oakley's work confirms that historically, the popular western images of women are actually based on male ideas. In *“White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood”*, Hazel Carby says, “History has constructed our sexuality and our femininity as deviating from those qualities with which white women, as the prize objects of the Western world, have been endowed” (Carby, 1982). But what the works by Friedman, Gavron and Oakely demonstrate is that western women themselves had little to do with the development of these images of women and they were in fact unhappy with their lives and status.

In her article, *The Beauty Ideal: The Effects of European Standard of Beauty on Black Women*, published in 2013 Susan Bryant explains that,

Black women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of European standards of beauty, because these standards emphasize skin colours and hair types that exclude many black women, especially those of darker skin (Bryant, 2013:3).

She believes that the exclusion of African women, particularly darker women, from the global ideals of beauty inculcates feelings of self-hatred and low self-esteem, especially among younger women who are more influenced by external forces. This self-hatred she argues is apparent in the high prevalence of black women wearing weaves and make – up in order to fit into the European standards of beauty. It is important to note here that Bryant is talking about African – American women and not African women in general although both groups of women are affected negatively by the European standards of beauty, which are the western standards.

One of the first scientific studies on African American people's self-image and identity was conducted by Dr Lind in 1914 where he observed African Americans in the Government Hospital for the Insane in Washington D.C. Dr Lind concluded that African Americans suffered a colour complex because their environment relentlessly confirmed their inferiority even to the extent of portraying God, Jesus and all the angels as white. He argued that living in a culture that constantly affirmed their inferiority made black people exhibit signs of defensiveness and hidden desires to be white, because of this constant promotion and reverence for white culture (Lind, 1914).

This is important to note for this study on Gikuyu women because the women have been influenced in the same way by the racial profiling of God and Jesus and in fact, the missionaries went one step further and demonized their own religious and cultural practices

and yet no research has been done to explore how such images have affected the women's self-image (Likimani, 1974).

In the famous Doll Experiment, African American psychologists, Dr Mamie and Dr Kenneth Clarke (1939) demonstrated how the self-image of black children was negatively affected by European standards of beauty. Their research presented two dolls that were completely identical, except for their skin tone, to 160 African American children between the ages of 5 – 7, and asked them which doll they would like to play with, which one was nicer, which one had a nicer colour and which one looked bad.

The majority of the children chose the white doll as the nicer one, the one they would want to play with and the one that had a nicer colour (Clarke & Clarke, 1939). This experiment showed the serious damage racial subjugation had on the self-concept and self-esteem of black children and ignited a series of studies on self-concept, particularly when it came to African Americans. Most of this research, however, was primarily conducted on children and adolescents and rarely captured the perspectives of adult African Americans (Clarke & Clarke, 1939). This study may be useful in our understanding of what influences the choices Gikuyu women make in their definition of beauty.

The majority of research on the self-concept of African people has been conducted on African Americans which confirms that there is a real need for African women and men to start recording their self-images because their context of growing up on the African continent and experiencing colonialism is different from the impact of slavery and racism on the self-images of African Americans. All Africans, however, are burdened with the inferior global images of African people which continue to be perpetuated by western media (Lewis, 2000).

Most of the research on African American's images of themselves is centred on issues of self-esteem or how they feel about themselves rather than what they think about themselves or their self-concept. Surprisingly, most of the research demonstrates that African Americans had higher self-esteem than their Caucasian counterparts but they had lower perceptions of their personal power (Hughes, 1989). Overall the research on African American's self-images and self-esteem points at the need to start building up a body of knowledge on the African women's self-image so that the self-concept of future generations of African women is not negatively affected by western image but rather informed by their own traditions.

### **1.2.3 African Women's Self-Images and Women's Images in African Oral Literature**

There is very little information on the African woman's self-image, save for the stories and autobiographies that African female authors have written about women and about their own experiences. The works on African women's self-images are rare.

There was however, a general study conducted on the self-image of African people compared to North Americans. *Individualism versus Collectivism, A Comparison of Kenyan and American Self – Concepts* (1997) by Vaunne Ma and Thomas Schoeneman explored concepts of self-image for people who had grown up in a community setting versus those who had grown up in an urban one. The results described Africans as having a collectivist self-concept because of how they were socialized within their communities. This meant that their self-image was defined exclusively by their relationship with others, their status in their family and the age-set they belonged to. People who had a collectivist self-image were said to sacrifice their own individual desires and ambitions for the group and this was found to be true among African communities that had not been exposed to urbanization (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997).

In contrast, those interviewed in the United States of America were found to be extremely individualistic and independent. Individualism was defined as a society where family and group ties were not very strong, where individuals made their own choices and acted on their own, and interacted with the group as individuals. While this study revealed the influence of culture on a people's self-image, it did not address how culture had affected the self-image of women and in particular Gikuyu women. This study intends to fill this gap.

According to Stagner in *Psychology of Personality, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (1948), a traditional African who had grown up in the same village, surrounded by the same people all their lives was less self-aware than a typical American who had been raised to cultivate their own uniqueness and independence. Stagner argued that this was because Africans valued relationships with their family and kinsmen and being a valued member of the whole, more than individual experiences and achievements (Stagner, 1948). As a result, there was a collective self-image for women and for men based on the ideals and values of the community that all women tried to emulate. The women's stories will indicate whether their self-image is community based and whether this has changed or remained the same since 1900 - 2000.

In her article *Human Ontogenesis: An Indigenous African View on Development and Intelligence that* (2006) Bame Nsamenang notes that for Africans, one's identity can only be defined in relation to others.

Within the African worldview, human beings not only need other humans but also social responsibility to individuate adequately and attain full personhood. Thus, a sense of self cannot be achieved without reference to the community of other humans in terms of being interconnected and enacting one's social roles (Nsamenang, 2006:3).

Furthermore, she added that African's view of self was very much interdependent and relational whereas the dominant western culture promoted a more autonomous and independent view of self. This study plans to explore whether Gikuyu women's self-image has been influenced by the collectivist or individualist worldviews and whether this has changed as a result of westernization.

In his unpublished PhD thesis, *The Relationship between Self-Concept and Academic Achievement in Kenya* (1973), Mwaniki found that in traditional Gikuyu society, people identified strongly with their *Rika*, (age set). "The system of socialization and organization in African tribal societies centred on initiation, ceremonies and age sets. These different stages in an individual's life determine one's status in the community as well as how one is treated by others" (Mwaniki, 1973). He believes that Africans were able to maintain a strong collectivist self-image because constantly being reminded of their obligations to the family and the *Rika* as well as their role within the family (Mwaniki, 1973). Mwaniki's research lacks information on the impact of the individualistic culture that has come with westernization. By exploring women's self-images over a period of a hundred years, this study will look at how the images of Gikuyu women have changed from 1900 to 2000.

In *Facing Mount Kenya* (1965), Jomo Kenyatta also emphasized the importance of a collectivist self-image in the Gikuyu community. He explains that people who displayed any kind of individualism were looked upon with suspicion because there was nothing like an individual event or experience (Kenyatta, 1965).

There are also very good accounts of Gikuyu women's images written by male authors; particularly *History of the Southern Kikuyu Before 1903* (Leakey, 1939) and *The Gikuyu Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (Cagnolo, 1933). Both men were granted special access to Gikuyu society; Leakey because he grew up among the Gikuyu and Father Cagnolo,

because he lived close to the Agikuyu and gained their trust over the years. Both men describe Gikuyu women as being hardworking, subordinate to their men and almost uniform in their way of life and appearance. Father Cagnolo is quick to point out, however, that women did have their own individual rights within the community and they were treated with dignity and respect.

The literature by Dr L. Leakey and Father Cagnolo on Gikuyu culture describes the image of the Gikuyu girls and women very well but the writing is based on observation rather than being informed by the experiences of the women themselves. For example, Father Cagnolo suggests that girls were content with their station in life. “The Gikuyu girl was not depressed, she spent her days without much thought, working, singing and laughing happily” (Cagnolo, 1993:113). But this is the point of view from an external observer looking from outside. It would be very insightful to ask women who were young girls in the traditional setting to provide us with their own reflections and opinions.

Father Cagnolo’s research also implies that Gikuyu girls were extremely hard working, spending most of their time helping their mother with various chores. Gikuyu girls would never “...spend their days in idleness, for this could have prejudiced their matrimonial prospects” (Cagnolo, 1993:81). But the value of hard work was not the only influencing factor on a potential suitor. He adds that Gikuyu girls were encouraged to also emulate chastity, fidelity, responsibility, a hardworking nature, politeness, purity through abstinence and so on, in order to marry well (Cagnolo, 1933). Not only was she held in high esteem by her family members and the community at large, but when she got married her father rewarded her for her good behaviour (Cagnolo, 1993). What Father Cagnolo reveals is some of the characteristics that informed and nurtured a girl’s self-image. It also suggests that from a very young age, a girl’s self-image was built up through instruction from her mother and further moulded and coached by the community and her age set.

Father Cagnolo’s work suggests that women had a very defined place in the community and they also had a very clear idea of their own self-image which was based on this positioning. “The woman understood her position perfectly well, and claimed no more than was due to her by common custom, being patient and resigned, even satisfied in conditions that would appear oppressive in most western society” observes Father Cagnolo (Cagnolo, 1933:30). It must be noted here that this opinion was arrived at through the observation of the research and not through conversations with the women themselves. It would be important to record the women’s self-images so as to verify what Father Cagnolo said.

Father Cagnolo, however, acknowledges that Gikuyu women were not entirely powerless and subjugated but actually enjoyed certain freedoms. “Customs allowed the woman certain personal rights, such as the option of accepting her match, the possession of certain things, the distribution of certain duties, wherefore she was not altogether a slave but possessed by mutual consent” (Cagnolo, 1933:113). It would be valuable to get a woman’s perspective on this and to understand how they themselves saw their ‘possession’ and how much of a choice they actually had in accepting their betrothed.

Motherhood was also seen as the most important purpose that women must fulfil if they were to have any kind of standing in society. “Women in Gikuyu society are socialized to aspire to be mothers. Of all the things that girls are supposed to be, motherhood comes first” (Cagnolo, 1993:113). There is always a special connection between mothers and their children and the oral tradition reflects this. Overall, the works by Dr L. Leakey and Father Cagnolo provide valuable information on the traditional Gikuyu society but it should also act as a catalyst for Gikuyu people and Africans in general, to start recording their own stories.

#### **1.2.4. Gikuyu Women’s Self-Images**

Very little research has been done in the area of Gikuyu women’s self-images. There are, however, a few scholars who have sought out the Gikuyu woman’s voice. These authors focus primarily on the experiences of traditional Gikuyu women and girls and those involved in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). Two notable unpublished PhD theses on Gikuyu women are *Aspects of Traditional Gikuyu Morality* (1983) by Hannah Kinoti and *The Role of Kikuyu Women in the Mau Mau* (1989), by Margaret Gachichi.

In *Aspects of Traditional Gikuyu Morality*, Dr Kinoti, provides an interesting perspective on the Gikuyu woman’s experiences in the pre-colonial traditional Gikuyu setting. She also explores the moral nature of the Agikuyu before the arrival of the colonialists. While this information is very revealing about women’s moral images in the traditional setting, it does not capture the broader self-image of the women.

In her thesis, Dr Kinoti (1983) notes that a good character was extremely important to the Agikuyu and there were numerous social codes of conducts that women had to adhere to, especially when interacting with men (Kinoti, 1983). For example, “When a woman or girl was talking to a man, she always either turned her back or looked elsewhere in order to show respect” (Kinoti, 1983:262). The Agikuyu took this social etiquette very seriously and the woman who observed it was held in high esteem by her family, her fellow women and the



community at large. “The traditional Gikuyu matron did not allow the person who entered her homestead to leave without eating” (Kinoti, 1983:264). It was expected for Gikuyu women not only to feed all the children and visitors who came knocking but to give them a little food to take away. While Dr Kinoti’s work provides images of traditional Gikuyu women, it does not explore what the women’s views are on the same issue.

One important revelation that comes out of Dr Kinoti’s thesis is that Gikuyu women were not necessarily docile or subservient but possessed informal power. “Traditional women were expected to play an inferior role but at the same time they informally exercised varying and sometimes extensive degrees of power such as?” (Kinoti, 1983:279). We see here that Gikuyu women were not powerless, but had power within the community that is not adequately documented.

According to Dr Kinoti, the women did not favour their own: “At the Assembly of Women, the voice of the reasonable husband was also heard. A woman, who knew she was beaten for her arrogance or disobedience, told others about it. If she did not another who knew her circumstances was sure to do so” (Kinoti, 1983:279). This suggests that women held each other to the highest codes of conduct and social behaviour which informed their self-image. It would be important to record the self-images of Gikuyu women in order to capture what was taught to them and nurtured in them in the traditional setting.

Dr Kinoti notes, however, that all Gikuyu women were under the control or authority of a male relative. She explains that the traditional Gikuyu woman was viewed as the property of either her father or her husband. Growing up she belonged to her father. When women got married they moved from being under the control of their fathers to their husbands. “In traditional society, a married woman was under the authority of her husband. She was also under the authority of the clanswomen by virtue of their being her companions and workmates” (Kinoti, 1983:268). Once married, women were expected to respect their marriage, demonstrate good character, cooperate with other co-wives and her in-laws, and start having children. This implies that a woman’s self-concept was based on her relationships, which is in line with the collectivist self-image.

Dr Kinoti explains that a traditional Gikuyu woman could not own land or livestock; in fact, everything she produced or earned in trade went directly to her husband. “A woman strictly did not possess. Having been taken from her parents upon the agreed dowry, she became the possession of her husband who exercised her rights on all the fruits origination from her”

(Kinoti, 1983:268). How did women feel about not owning anything? The oral literature and information from researchers such as Cagnolo (1993), suggest that after years of socialization, women saw this practice as normal.

Dr Kinoti adds that the Mau Mau saw girls taking on a more mature and serious self-image. They were not treated like young, naïve girls but as a critical part of the movement, and even at a young age they received the African Freedom Oath. Young Gikuyu girls, especially those in school were administered with the African Freedom Oath. This demonstrates the importance and seriousness of the girls' involvement in the African Freedom struggle (Kinoti, 1983).

Dr Gachichi, in her thesis entitled *The Role of Kikuyu Women in the Mau Mau*, explores the role of women in the traditional setting, before the arrival of religion, colonialism, and everything that came with it. Her thesis also records the instrumental role that Gikuyu women played in the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war), which is often downplayed by male authors. It sheds light on a different side of the Gikuyu women's image and place in the community.

Dr Gachichi confirms that "...kikuyu women in the traditional society had means and will to mobilize themselves and were well incorporated into the mainstream of social affairs and in fact wielded considerable informal power in society" (Gachichi, 1986:95). This informal power was exercised by women through their subtle influence on their husbands and by their ability to unite and act for a common cause that they felt men were failing to address.

Dr Gachichi also mentions the women's council that Dr Kinoti alluded to earlier. She explains that Gikuyu women had an advisory council which was their platform for airing their views and reporting abusive husbands, for example. It was also a forum where women were reprimanded for bad behaviour (Gachichi, 1986). "The basic role of the women's advisory council, however, was to safeguard and direct women's activities in domestic affairs and to take disciplinary action in matters pertaining to the social life of girls and women" (Gachichi, 1986:95). Dr Gachichi suggests that women had a strong communal self-image that was not completely subservient and at the mercy of men but was kept in check by other women. Dr Gachichi reveals that:

Whenever there was a situation that the women were unhappy with they would not sit quietly by, but would unite and take action. If the elders showed no signs of taking action, or were slow in doing so, the senior wives of the men of

the ruling generation would summon a women's meeting. Delegates would be appointed to take action.... (Gachichi, 1986:92).

The *Ndundu ya Atumia* or women's assembly gave advice to male elders on societal matters as well. This confirms that while Gikuyu women may not have had any formal power, they had and exercised their informal power when the need arose.

When it comes to the actual impact of colonialism, religion, education and the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) on the image of Gikuyu women and girls, there is little information available. This must change so that today's Gikuyu girls and women can have a deeper understanding of the journey their ancestors took so that they could be where they are today.

Another gap in the research appears when it comes to the social roles of women, especially when it comes to leadership. While many authors portray Gikuyu women as powerless when it came to the social decision making process, *The Role of Kikuyu Women in the Mau Mau* by Gachichi, paints a very different picture. Dr Gachichi explains that,

Kikuyu women in the traditional society had the means and will to mobilize themselves and were incorporated into the mainstream of social affairs and in fact, wielded considerable informal power in society (Gachichi, 1986:147).

This different image of Gikuyu women must be explored further. This study attempts to fill in this gap by capturing the images of Gikuyu women in their own words. Gikuyu women from three generations will share their narratives in an attempt to answer the questions: Who is the Gikuyu woman? How does she perceive herself?

The research by Dr Kinoti and Dr Gachichi on Gikuyu women and girls in their traditional setting and during the African Freedom provides valuable insight into the images of the Gikuyu women and girls during these two important periods in history. While there is no direct mention of the women's self-image, this research suggests that women did have a clear self-image which can only be captured by the women's perspectives. It also confirms the need to record women's self-images as well as generational perspectives of women so that the true impact of colonialism, religion, education, the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) and westernization can be traced and measured.

There are also several books that explore women's role in the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war), including *A letter to Mariama Ba*, (Kabira, 2005), *Our Mother's Footstep, Stories of Women in the Struggle for Freedom* (Kabira and Ngurukie, 1997) and

*Celebrating Women's Resistance*, (Kabira and Nzioki,1993). These books explore the personal narratives of Gikuyu women who lived and fought in the Mau Mau.

*A letter to Mariama Ba*, (Kabira, 2005), is a book that highlights the experience of Gikuyu women from the author's village, mainly widows, during the Kenya Land and Freedom war (the Mau Mau war) and at the dawn of independence. The letter is a response to Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* a novel from the Senegalese author, where Kabira shares her own observations growing up in Kenya. The book records the Gikuyu women's stories, shedding light on the terrible circumstances that they lived in and the horrible abuses they endured. It also reveals that one of the greatest consequences of the Kenya Land and Freedom war (the Mau Mau war) was the number of widows who were left behind, most of whom were under the age of thirty (30) and with several children to raise, feed, clothe and educate. From Kabira's story we witness that many women in the Mau Mau lost their husbands and chose to never re-marry but devoted their lives to raising their children.

Kabira provides countless examples of women who lost their husbands

...Monica, Phyllis wa Kamau, Tata wa Wilson, Njoki wa Hiramau, Ndumu wa Ndegwa, Grace wa Koiya, and many other young widows in our village whose lives were those of toil, of poverty, and anxiety over what children would eat, what they would wear and whether they would ever go to school. (Kabira, 2005:22).

These women's struggles are similar to the struggle of so many women in the aftermath of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). They were strong; they survived and some managed to get their children a good education. Kabira notes: "I cannot stop admiring these women for their resilience. They became widows in their early twenties, never got married again but brought up their children despite poverty and war," (Kabira, 2005:9). Only a woman with a strong self-image would have been able to make the sacrifices that Mau Mau women made during and after the liberation war.

The experiences of the women in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) uprising reveal a completely robust self-image that was based on honour and sacrifice. It is important to investigate the self-image of the Mau Mau women that saw many of them choose to remain single and fend for themselves instead of re-marrying and sharing the burden of raising their children. Through their stories we can also fill in the gaps of how their image, family and social roles changed once they became widows.

The literature suggests that the women of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) were brave, courageous and loyal, something that is not seen in traditional or patriarchal images of Gikuyu women. In *Our Mother's Footsteps*, (Kabira & Ngurukie, 1997) the authors note that regardless of the torture and mistreatment that the women went through, they never betrayed their fellow comrades. Former freedom fighter, Esther Mugunyi who lived in the forest for three years explains that,

Unlike many others who had betrayed their fellow freedom fighters after beating and torture, we the women refused to say anything about those we left in the forest. No amount of beating or torture would make us betray our fellow freedom fighters. None! (Kabira and Ngurukie, 1997:55).

*Our Mother's Footsteps* (Kabira and Ngurukie) also reveals the great strength of character and conviction for the cause that the women of the Mau Mau had. They did not break down even when tortured or bribed to testify against their husbands. "We would be given clothes and money so that we could give evidence against the freedom fighters. We refused", says freedom fighter Wambui Duncan (Kabira & Ngurukie, 1997:58).

The narratives in *Our Mother's Footsteps* reveal that women were also extremely clever and resourceful. They were able to organize themselves, arrange meetings and set their own agenda and missions. The women also secretly raised money for the movement. One of the ladies involved, Rahab Wabici, notes that

Our political meetings used to take place in the churches. That was the only place where we could meet, talk, strategize, and plan. The white man and the home guards were not as clever as us (Kabira and Ngurukie, 1997:57).

According to Kabira and Ngurukie, Gikuyu women were also very innovative and resourceful in how they communicated with each other. They came up with songs and their own mode of communication that allowed them to pass on crucial information in the presence of colonialists and home guards (Kabira & Ngurukie, 1997). *Our Mother's Footsteps* reveals a new side to women's self-images but it does not show how or explain why women were able to transition from their traditional subordinate place in the community to helping to run a war as leaders, spies, couriers, food suppliers, etc. This study will look at how and why women made these changes or whether these dimensions of their self-image were always there.

All these books provide valuable insight into the self-images of women during the Kenya Land and Freedom war (the Mau Mau war). They demonstrate the value and importance of recording more of the stories of the women of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) and their contributions to the struggle because this area of research has been ignored for a long time.

In her essay, *Our Second Homecoming: Voices from African Women* (2012), Kabira underlines the importance of female writers and storytellers because of their ability to share the invisible stories of women that reveal their self-images, hopes, opinions, desires and aspiration. She notes that:

...the women's movement in Kenya and in the East African region has gone very far in fighting for the rights of women particularly in the areas of representation, land rights, property inheritance, leadership, gender based violence, among other areas. But it is the women writers and storytellers that have explored the inner feelings, the alienation women experience, the struggle not to be that other, the efforts to be what society expects of you and therefore deny who you are (Kabira, 2012:1)

Kabira also discloses how female authors can uncover the secret lives of women through their conversations with them and as a result, bring to light hidden knowledge about women. The Story of Salempo, an elderly Maasai woman whose oral testimony Kabira recorded, illustrates how she felt at ease enough to share her secret life with the researcher, once she had confirmed that there were no men around (she was visually impaired).

She told me how she used to sneak out and go to sleep with morans. She sneaked out regularly from her hut and her husband never found out. She talked about her life exploits and the different lovers she had. She reflected on how men competed over her and how morans fought to get her. She relived those moments and concluded that if she could go back to those youthful days, she would do the same (Kabira, 2012:15)

Salempo's self-image goes against the stereotypical images of women and reveals another side to their character and image that is not typically documented. Salempo's story also confirms the importance of this particular study as the oral testimonies that will be well known.

Kabira notes that aside from revealing their secret lives, women's oral testimonies also help to bring to light the shared hardships and struggles that women face at the mercy of the patriarchal, polygamous system. Kabira shares a story of a woman called Akinyi who at the age of 24 years had already gone through the full life cycle of womanhood – gotten married, had children, worked for her children, etc.- and she was now facing a life of old age in her 20s.

Women young in years, women in their twenties who have gone through the full cycle at the age of 24. They were born, got married, gave birth, worked for their children and are now ready to live the lives of old women. She has reached old age at the age of 24. When you listen to her, she speaks like she was sixty-five years old- her tone, her language and her voice are that of an old woman (Kabira, 2012:19).

According to Kabira, the surprising part of Akinyi's story is that many women her age had similar stories. Akinyi's voice was echoed by many other young women who were in similar predicaments as she was where their life appeared to already be over, when in essence it had just begun. "Culture, tradition and patriarchal institutions, culture and myths that nurture them conspire to destroy their true selves even before they have time to grow, notes Kabira" (Kabira 2012:21).

Muthoni Likimani is another important Gikuyu author who has written significant works on the daily lives of Gikuyu women that help inform how the self-images of traditional Gikuyu women were impacted by Colonialism, Christianity and the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war). In *Thou Shall Be Chastised*, she offers a social critique of the impact Christianity had on Gikuyu women's self-image, particularly when it came to cultural practices such as traditional weddings, circumcision and even traditional dances and ceremonies which the missionaries looked down upon and dissuaded new converts from participating in. Through her stories she reveals the moral crisis Gikuyu converts faced when they became Christians.

On the one hand, many new difficulties and social problems were created. Converted polygamous husbands threatened to divorce their wives and stay with the first wives only. Converted second wives too threatened to leave their husbands giving him back to the first wives. This brought a lot of confusion, for to separate fathers from their children was unfair so was

separating mothers from their husbands, narrates Muthoni (Likimani, 1974:49).

Muthoni further explains how missionaries looked down upon practices such as polygamy but they did not offer any workable solutions to the newly converted Christians. In her book, she reveals how Christianity systematically demonized the traditional practices of the Gikuyu, especially when it came to marriage where it did not recognize traditional marriages and didn't allow its members to take the Holy Communion until they re-married in a Christian church (Likimani, 1974). While the book doesn't necessarily capture the self-images of women, it provides a good foundation for recording women's self-images because it offers insights into some of the challenges to Gikuyu women's self-concept that came with Christianity.

In *Passbook Number F.47927*, Muthoni Likimani looks at how the daily lives of women were affected by the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) in the 1950s. She tells nine fictitious stories that capture the different experiences women endured both in the city of Nairobi and in the colonial villages as well as the important role they played in liberating Kenya (Likimani, 1998). This book provides valuable insights into how women and their collective self-image were impacted by the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war). It will prove very useful in analysing some of the self-images of Women in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau).

*Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (2005) confirms that the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) revealed another side of Gikuyu women; one that was strategic, brave, resourceful and organized. Caroline Etkins (2005) notes that the colonial officers were initially unaware of women's involvement because they perceived women as docile, submissive and unable to act without the input of men. "Colonial officials were left struggling to reconcile female African Freedom militancy and solidarity with their simplistic notions of a passive and compliant African womanhood" (Etkins, 2005:186). She explains that when the colonial officers discovered how deeply women were involved in the Mau Mau war, they arrested hundreds of thousands of women,

The question of what to do with the hundreds of thousands of women who took the part in the Mau Mau plagued the colonial government from the Emergency inception. Colonial officials would eventually detain the vast



majority of them in some eight hundred Emergency villages scattered throughout the Kikuyu countryside (Etkins, 2005:186).

Literature such as *The Role of Kikuyu Women in the Mau Mau* by Dr Gachichi and *Passbook Number F.47927* by Muthoni Likimani both talked about the horrific experiences that women underwent in the colonial villages. But it is only Kabira's *Our Mother's Footsteps* and *Letter to Mariama Ba* that capture some of the women's voices of this experience. This research will ask women to share their experiences and their perspectives of women's involvement in the African Freedom in their own words.

Etkins goes on to mention a colonial officer called Askwith who was one of the first officers to write about the women's involvement in the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) to his superiors. In one of his letters he wrote, "There is evidence that wives have in many cases persuaded their husbands to take the oath and are often very militant. They are also said to be bringing up their children to follow the Mau Mau creed. It is therefore more important to rehabilitate the women than the men if the next generation is to be safe," (Etkins, 2005:189). Ask with went on to describe the Mau Mau women as the eyes and ears of the movement. This statement suggests that women had influence over their husbands, something that is not reflected very clearly in the literature. This study will explore women's leadership roles through their own voices.

Ironically, even after arresting hundreds of thousands of women, the colonial officers could not reconcile the women's involvement in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) with their chauvinistic perspective of the unassuming, passive African woman. Etkins reveals that even in Kamiti Prison for hard-core criminals, the prison wardens assumed that women were being pushed by men to participate in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) because they were not intelligent enough to have committed the crimes they were accused of, on their own volition (Etkins, 2005).

At Kamiti the gender stereotype curiously seemed to rend some of the hard-core women redeemable. Some of the female detainees may have been among the most militant of the Mau Mau, but most colonial officials simply could not attribute this behaviour to any kind of independent thought or agency, as they did the men of the movement (Etkins, 2005:205).

This statement demonstrates the patriarchal perspectives of the colonial officers. It also suggests that the images of women in historical literature that portrayed women as being docile and unassuming is not a true reflection of them.

Finally, there are the autobiographies of Gikuyu women themselves such as *Fighting without Ceasing* by Muthoni Likimani, *Unbowed* by Wangari Maathai and *It's Never Too Late* by Margaret Wakarindi Githinji. All three women talk frankly about their lives and experiences. Ironically, all three women separated from their husbands, with only Wangari Maathai actually going through an official divorce.

In *Unbowed*, Maathai provides insight into how the first career women were discriminated against by sharing her experiences as one of the first female lecturers at the University of Nairobi. Maathai and her colleagues were among the first women to work at the University because 'during colonial times, no professional women came to work in the colonies' (Maathai 2005:55). She goes on to narrate how female members of staff had to fight to be treated equally, especially when it came to salaries and other benefits that only their male colleagues were entitled to.

Professor Maathai explains how married women were not given 'housing allowances, insurance coverage or a pension' because it was assumed that they did not need them because they had husbands (Maathai, 2005:56). "That I or other women should be paid less than our male colleagues of equal standing was very irritating to us. Because of the type of discrimination, junior male staff took home more than we did despite our senior academic positions," she explains (Maathai, 2005:56). Such stories provided valuable insights into the experience of career women immediately after independence and it will be interesting to compare her experience to the perspectives of other career women that will be interviewed in the study.

Professor Maathai also explains how her academic achievements, particularly her Ph.D., caused problems in her marriage because she was more learned than her husband.

Nobody told me that men would be threatened by the high academic achievements of women like me. But Kenyan society idolizes education and considers it a panacea for all other problems. Traditionally, society also put more value on boys than girls: Boys are provided with education before girls and boys are expected to be greater achievers than girls. Therefore, it was an

unspoken problem that I and not my husband had a Ph.D. and taught in the university (Maathai, 2005:67).

Maathai was among the first women to get a Ph.D. and become head of a department at the University of Nairobi, something that had not been done previously by any other woman. Her story illustrates some of the challenges faced by the first women to be educated at university level because of a patriarchal system that was designed solely for men.

She believes that society's opinions of her being more educated than her husband eventually started to influence and shape her husband's perspectives of her and of their marriage, even though she still fulfilled all the expectations of a Gikuyu wife. Maathai explains:

The societal attitude toward me in regard to my husband shaped Mwangi's view of me: He saw me through the mirror given to him by society rather than through his own eyes. He was a product of the times and felt towards educated women the way most men in Kenya did then. Society's perception was part of the problem. It placed constant pressure on men to behave in certain ways. Even if their wives had more education or achievements, they were expected to demonstrate that they were in control of their households and were not henpecked by and under the control of their wives (Maathai, 2005:69).

It is interesting how Maathai saw men as also being victims of the patriarchal system because they constantly needed to measure up to society's standards and perceptions of what a man was at the expense of their own image of themselves (Maathai, 2005). She believes that the patriarchal system made it hard for her husband to cope with her education and success and eventually cost them their marriage.

Maathai talks about the torment and self-guilt she went through when she went home one day and found that her husband had left her, because society would inadvertently blame her for the collapse of her marriage.

I knew that he would blame me for the failure, even as the public, too, would blame me: It was always the woman's fault. I thought I had done everything: humbled myself, helped with his public role, served him, and loved him. I had tried to be a good mother, a good politician's wife, a good African woman and a successful university teacher (Maatha, 2005:59)

She narrates, adding that it was at this time that she reflected on her mother's experiences during the Mau Mau and how her mother had been able to overcome much without education or financial support (Maathai, 2005).

In her autobiography *Fighting Without Ceasing*, Muthoni Likimani shares with us her experiences of growing up in a family where her father was one of the very first African priests of the Anglican Church. Her story reveals how Christians kept themselves separate from the traditional Gikuyu and how she was never allowed to mingle with her non-Christian aunts or relatives for fear that she might be circumcised by force (Likimani, 2005).

She also talks of her marriage to a Maasai Moran, Dr J C Likimani, who was the first African doctor in Kenya. She met him through her older brother but at that time, Dr Likimani was in a relationship and she also had a fiancé. Muthoni explained that:

JC was older than me and initially I just took him as a good friend of my brother. My childhood boyfriend was planning to marry me. But the problem was that he was in too much of a hurry to marry me. I was trying to join another school in Uganda, where I wanted to take another course and I was not ready to get married (Likimani, 2005:86).

She offers special insights into the perspectives of young Christian women who were more concerned with their education than with marriage and this was a step away from Gikuyu tradition. Likimani reveals that educated girls were highly sought after by educated boys.

Girls with a good basic education had no problems getting good and well educated husbands. There were many young men with good education and good careers who were looking for the few young educated women such as teachers, nurses and others. Come to think of it, it was difficult to choose a husband. Girls never chased men, there were too many up-and-coming young men interested in you and we just enjoyed watching young men chasing us, some asking us to marry them. We girls were often spoilt for choice (Likimani, 2005:56).

This statement by Likimani is very interesting because it demonstrates how the Christian or educated members of the Gikuyu community created their own sub-culture with educated men and women marrying one another and having their own 'progressive families' (Likimani, 2005). Likimani implies that the few girls who did get an education were actually better off than their traditional counterparts because they had a variety of educated men to

choose from. But when compared to the experiences of Maathai in her autobiography, it becomes clear that a little education was good but too much education for a woman, threatened the men.

Muthoni Likimani separated from her husband mainly because of his infidelity and bad temper but especially after he took one of her daughters to a boarding school in a neighbouring country without telling her. But she is quick to point out that even after they separated they remained very good friends and he still offered her financial help when she needed it. She explains that she never got a divorce because the nature of African family meant that regardless of whether they were divorced or married, they would be in each other's lives forever. Muthoni explains that,

My relationship with my husband was confusing to many and particularly to those who became interested in me. The separation did not mean we had completely parted; that is why I say marriage certificate can be torn into pieces or be burned; but African marriage, values are never broken (Likimani, 2005:89).

She notes that she remains very close to her in-laws and participates in all their family functions, even though she separated from Dr Likimani many years ago and despite his passing in 1989.

One of the weaknesses that Likimani saw with her fellow African women was their commitment to their husbands.

An African woman is a special woman. Her tolerance is difficult to explain. She can be deprived her human leisure, be ignored and abandoned at her village, living in loneliness, but still holds tight to her marriage vows. Many develop high blood pressure, depression and even mental breakdowns which result in death (Likimani, 2005:98).

She explains at length how her missionary upbringing had not prepared her for the realities of marriage and particularly an unfaithful husband. She explains that many of the husbands who had careers in her time, would spend most of their nights outside the home and even entertain other women in their free time and their wives put up with it because he took good care of them financially. This is an indicator that polygamous behaviour did not disappear with Christianity but mutated itself to fit the career men's progressive lifestyle (Likimani, 2005).

The study will endeavour to confirm these perspectives through the voices of other women who got separated or divorced.

All three books give a special and personal insight into the women's experiences since the early 1900s and they also confirm the importance of recording women's stories as well as their perspectives so that we can have a more complete interpretation of history and how it has moulded and shaped women's self-image over time.

### **1.2.5. Impact of Colonialism, Religion & Education on Women's Self-Images**

The arrival of the missionaries and later the colonialists marked a significant turning point in the story of the Gikuyu people. It introduced a new language, culture, spiritual authority and economic system that changed the lives of the Gikuyu forever (Elkins, 2005). Colonialism also broke down the Gikuyu people's traditional family unit through the illegal confiscation of their land, followed by the imposed 'hut tax' which forced the Gikuyu people into wage and forced labour. The introduction of the 'hut tax' meant that for the first time in the known history of the Gikuyu people, men had to leave their homes for months at a time in order to look for work to pay it (Anderson, 2012).

Wangari Maathai (2005) talks of how her father left his family in order to go look for work on a colonial farm. "My father was part of the first generation in Kenya to leave their homes and families behind to find jobs and accumulate money, which could be found only in the cash economy the British established. He, like approximately 150,000 other young Kikuyu men, migrated from their Kikuyu native reserves to white-owned farms," she explains (Maathai, 2005:13). They found this work either on the farms or the town and cities, as intended by the colonialists. It is important to measure the impact that this mass migration of husbands and fathers had on the community by recording the stories of the women who were left (Maathai, 2006).

Absent husbands meant that women now became heads of their households, making decisions for their families and this transformed their self-image into one of a leader and decision maker. Muthoni Likimani notes that, "Even when men came back, women knew they could survive on their own. The family continued intact through all the problems" (Likimani, 1998:100). The effects of colonialism on the family unit meant that women had to step up into leadership roles. This meant that their strength, independence, industriousness and persevering aspects of their nature began to emerge and this set the stage for the

instrumental role that the women would play in the Kenya Land and Freedom War (Mau Mau).

During Colonialism and especially the Kenya Land and Freedom War (Mau Mau), Gikuyu women's images took on leadership roles in their community as well as in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). Muthoni Likimani describes the African Freedom women as the unsung heroes of the African Freedom War. They played many roles from spying and informing on their enemies, to supplying guns and other necessities to the men in the forest (Likimani, 1998).

Women were the unsung warriors. They were the fighters that no one talks about. They went to the forest with other men. They were seeing that people in the forest were fed, that the sick, were taken care of. Women raised money, stole guns, stole medicine, transported all kinds of good in the forest, they were even shoot (Likimani, 1998:56).

This new and necessary role shaped Gikuyu women's individual and collective images in a very significant way. As reported in previous chapters, the war left behind many widows who chose never to remarry

All in all, colonialism killed the native culture and replaced it with a western lifestyle. The changes that took place in Gikuyu culture were sudden, total and devastating.

After the coming of the white man, the Gikuyu traditions were much watered down by the influence of the white man. The younger generation could no longer pay tribute to the elders, as the colonial oppressors sank their talons of exploitation deeper into the land of the Gikuyu. Within the space of one or two generations, many rites and customs disappeared, and the young Gikuyu with their wider range of knowledge and their exposure to westernization and formal education, aimed at western systems of government and led their kinsmen into the stereotyped political life of the rest of the world (Turner & Neal, 1993).

The ramifications of colonialism transformed the traditional images of Gikuyu women and girls. According to the literature, colonialism still affects the image that Gikuyu men and women have of themselves today.

British colonialism has no doubt contributed immensely to the post-colonial identity of the Kikuyu people. In particular, the struggle against the British

settlers has played a crucial role in the post-independence political and economic architecture of this people. The proximity to the White settlers' farms also meant that Christianity, Western medicine and Western education was also introduced here earlier than elsewhere in the country and this has greatly impacted on the socio-economic changes and identity of the population (Ochieng, 1989).

The introduction of religion and colonialism into the Gikuyu way of life changed the traditional woman's image of herself. The colonialists' and missionaries' view of the traditional Gikuyu women was negative and very disempowering. According to Cagnolo, Gikuyu women were seen to be completely oppressed, primitive and bored with life (Cagnolo, 1933). In her book *Thou Shall be Chastised* (1974), Muthoni Likimani talks of how the missionaries demonized traditional practices and cultural ceremonies and forced their members to disconnect from them and adopt the Christian way of life (Likimani, 1974). The impact of this on the image of Gikuyu women was tremendous as women started moving away from the practices of polygamy and female circumcision. For the first time women became divided as some families became Christians and others chose to remain in their traditional lifestyle (Likimani, 1974).

The new social rules that Christianity aggressively introduced had a serious impact, particularly on polygamous households. In her book *Thou Shall Be Chastised* (Likimani, 1974), Muthoni Likimani noted,

On the other hand, many new difficulties and social problems were created. Converted polygamous husbands threatened to divorce their wives and stay with the first wives only. Converted second wives too threatened to leave their husbands and give them back to the first wives. And sometimes, men preferred the second wives! This brought a lot of confusion (Likimani, 1974:15).

According to the literature, one of the biggest impacts that Christianity had on Gikuyu tradition was in the area of female circumcision. Muthoni Likimani expounds on the tensions that developed between the Agikuyu and the Christian church, resulting in the creation of African churches.

Christians could not accept the White missionaries' interference with their traditional culture, and such confusion caused the split of the Church into Western-based churches that totally forbade female circumcision, and African-



oriented churches that did not frown at such traditional practices as female circumcision and many other practices (Likimani, 1974:18).

Today's generation need to be reminded that colonialism was designed to rob them of their culture and replace it with western culture and values.

Colonial mentality means a lower or negative self-image, lack of self-esteem and the belief in one's own inferiority. In colonial Africa, colonial mentality was the outcome of intensive European propaganda, brain washing and psychological warfare against Africans and anything African. Colonial mentality has affected all the segments of African society. Anything that is indigenous is looked down upon as unimportant. Unfortunately, Africans including the elites are ready to accept anything, if it has a western label (Okon, 2014:13).

Unfortunately, the residue colonialism, particularly through colonial education continues to impact today's generation of women in negative ways and this is seen in their complete adoption of western culture and behaviour at the expense of their own culture.

#### **1.2.6. Gikuyu Women's Images in Oral Narratives**

Genres of oral literature among the Agikuyu include oral narratives, poems, songs, and riddles. The Agikuyu used these to communicate, teach, and entertain the community. The Oral narratives are used to teach the younger members of the community about their people's values, social roles and cultural knowledge. This section looks specifically at oral narratives since most of the storytellers are women and represent women's images in popular songs.

The oral narratives were a genre of storytelling that was used mostly by women and yet the women and girls portrayed in their stories are depicted in a very negative light. In *Village Women Their Changing Lives and Fertility: Studies in Kenya, Mexico & Philippines (1977)*, Reining and Kamara suggest that the negative depiction of women is because of years of acculturation to playing an inferior and subordinate role.

“The women who are the main story tellers and socializers of children view their inferior status in the family and in society as natural and suggest, having listened to the stories themselves, having gone through rituals that encourage them to remain in their subordinate position, women perpetuate the same traditions. This kind of inscription is actually legitimized by centuries of tradition (Reining, 1977:32).

As this passage suggests, the negative images and stereotypes are born of centuries of inferior treatment that is legitimized by culture and tradition.

The Gikuyu Oral narratives, according to Wanjiku Kabira, in her unpublished thesis, *Images of Women in Gikuyu Oral Narratives* (1994), paint a very negative picture of a girl's image, generalizing all girls (*Airitu*) to be superficial, dependent, vulnerable and easily manipulated. "...girls are depicted as easily cheated, superficial, irresponsible, dependent, passive, careless, stupid and vulnerable" (Kabira, 1994). The oral narratives also portray girls as unintelligent, poor decision makers and always in need of being saved by young boys. "In this way, they are encouraged to continue being passive and dependent" (Kabira, 1994). Such concepts influence a girls' self-image because she will internalize, accept and eventually mould her self-image to reflect what these stories say. The stories also help to justify why young girls are inferior to boys.

In the oral narratives beautiful and proud girls always get into trouble. They were always victims of ogres, tricksters and outcasts. "The artists are clearly telling the girls to remain in their place and not be unique even if they are beautiful" (Kabira, 1994). Conformity was promoted as the best and safest path for a young girl.

The image of the rebellious girls is very rare in Gikuyu narratives. It remains true that the image of the girls as passive, superficial, careless, playful, immature, and dependent, dominates this society (Kabira, 1994).

The oral narratives also portray girls as being jealous of each other and especially the beautiful girls. Take the story of Wacici for example, on page 384. Wacici is described as an incredible beauty who was admired by all the people she encountered. Everywhere she went with her friends, she would stand out and people would always comment on her beauty. Wacici's friends became jealous of her and plotted to rid the community of her. They came across a bear hole one day and they decided to throw her down in it and leave her to die there, all because of her incredible beauty. Wacici was eventually rescued by her younger brother. The message comes out clearly in these narratives that beauty is not something to strive for but rather something that girls should downplay and better yet, hide away (Kabira, 1994). "The Gikuyu narratives do not even allow beauty to become the passport to happiness...." (Kabira, 1994). In fact, being beautiful is portrayed as disadvantage.

The only time Gikuyu girls are portrayed in a positive light in the oral narratives, is when they are in the role of 'daughter' or 'sister'. The same girl who is gullible and selfish

transforms into a clever, calculative, and resourceful daughter or sister (Kabira, 1994). “Gikuyu girls are described as passive, superficial, foolish, easily cheated and totally dependent on the brothers or fathers. But the same girls are active, calculating and intelligent in their relationships with their brothers” (Kabira, 1994). This striking contradiction between a girl as a girl and a girl as a sister or daughter demonstrates the conflicting images of young girls portrayed through the oral tradition. It would be important to investigate whether women suffer from this conflicting self-concept that is portrayed in the oral literature.

The oral literature says that “women are lazy, ungrateful, and quarrelsome, easily cheated, foolish, old women are depicted as witches, have a poor sense of judgment, and love of sweet things, they are victims, lack discipline and are greedy.” (Kabira, 1994) This negative image is found consistently throughout all the oral narratives. In *The Story of a Woman and a Bird*, for example, the woman goes and destroys the bird’s eggs for no apparent reason. This narrative portrays the woman as being both irrational and destructive. Gikuyu women are also portrayed as poor decision makers, jealous gossipers, and vulnerable individuals.

While it may be that these oral narratives aim to instruct girls on what type of women not to become, the consistently negative images of Gikuyu women in the oral literature reinforce their place as second class citizens in the community. “... the stories themselves contribute to socializing women to accept this prescribed behaviour and to not risk making decisions.” (Kabira, 1994). The persistently negative portrayal of women in oral literature socializes women to believe that they are useless and cannot make any decision without their fathers, brothers or husbands. It also makes her suspicious of other women and reinforces her dependence on men. (Kabira, 1994)

The negative portrayal of the wife is consistent among both male and female oral artists. The imagery is clear: “when men say women are stupid, they usually don’t include their mothers and daughters. However, they often include their wives” (Kabira, 1994). There is a gap in the research when it comes to the voice of the wife herself. Why were wives portrayed in such a negative light in the oral literature? It would also be interesting to understand her transition into a strange and hostile environment.

When it comes to mothers, they are very highly regarded in Gikuyu society and culture. They are portrayed in a positive light, in contrast to the negative images attached to wives and women in general. Traditionally, the Gikuyu have also always had a special place for mothers in the community.

The story of the origin of Gikuyu society shows the central position of mothers. The nine clans of the Gikuyu owe their origin and existence to the nine beautiful daughters of Gikuyu and Mumbi. The myth shows that men agreed to live under matriarchal systems and were called Mbari ya Mumbi, that is Mumbi's family. This was an honour to their mother Mumbi (Mugo, 1982).

The image of the mother is balanced as the stories reflect both her positive and negative personality traits. The mother's creative and destructive power is acknowledged and illustrated in the oral narratives. This positive imagery does not extend to step-mothers, however.

Popular music has been an important medium since the 1980s and 90s for female Gikuyu musicians to talk about the images of women and also to attack the patriarchal system. One of the biggest Gikuyu female musicians was Queen Jane who became an important voice for women in the 1990s. Her songs attack male conduct and expose the 'innocent male victim' narrative that was popular among male musicians, as a fallacy.

Queen Jane seeks to explore uniquely female perspectives. She does not hesitate to attack patriarchy and reverse images of female villainy and a victimized innocent male. Queen Jane does not take advantage of the seemingly gender-neutral language to be vague about the gender of the *dramatis personae* in her songs. She directly names the male villains in her songs. She describes the undesirable behaviours of men, totally reversing the images of male innocence portrayed by early male singers (Njogu & Maupeu, 2006:66).

In songs such as *Athuri* and *Gukua Nidarega*, Queen Jane speaks out strongly against the practice of old men marrying young girls. She also criticizes the modern culture of old men having sex with young girls their daughter's age and at the same time being fiercely protective of their own daughters. She accused rich men of spoiling and ruining the lives of young girls from poor families. In the song *Athuri*, in particular, Queen Jane goes one step further and advises young women against rich older men.

*Girls let me tell you*

*If you are not careful.*

*These sugar daddies I tell you,*

*Will not let you get education*  
*They are running the children of poor people*  
*When they show you money*  
*You lose your head*  
*You will eventually become a barmaid*  
*While his daughters become graduates*  
*The reason why your parents took you to school*  
*Is so that you can help them in future*  
*They have toiled hard for you to go through school*  
*Now you will get pregnant before you complete school*  
*From a man your father's age*  
*And he will ruin your life*  
*And poverty will remain in your home*  
  
(Njogu & Maupeu, 2006:66).

She reminds young girls that their parents and the community at large are relying on them to finish their school and make something of their lives so that they can pull their families out of poverty and misery.

Popular music has also been used by male musicians to promote certain images of women or criticize modern images of women. Joseph Kariuki and Sam Muraya, both wrote songs criticizing the modern day emergence of 'sugar mummies'. In his song *Nyina wa Turera* Kariuki sings about how wrong it is for a woman in her 40s to get married to a young boy in his 20s. Sam Muraya, in his song *Mama Kiwinya* criticizes modern older women who were making it a habit of taking young men as their lovers. These songs reveal an emerging perspective of women as heads of the relationship.

The virtuous woman or a *Mutumia Ngatha* is a common image that is popular among the Gikuyu singers. Over 10 songs have been written about her nature by artists such as: Henry Waweru, Louise Kim, Mary Mbugua, John Kihiko, Lucy Mwaura, Lilian Young, Mary Wanjugu Muchiri, Nancy Karuana Abraham and Lois Munjiari, among others. One of the songwriters, Nancy Wanja, explains that, "A *Mutumia Ngatha* means a virtuous woman.

When she helps the poor she lends to God. It is not in vain, whatever she does it with passion because she's doing it for the Lord" (Wanja, 2014). Her song describes a *Mutumia Ngatha* as:

A virtuous and honourable woman, you are of worth in God's eyes

Receive Song and grace from me, you are worth in God's eyes.

You have been fruitful and we have witnessed the harvest

And your prominence has spread to all, surely you are a virtuous woman

We've witness your good deeds for your family and to the community (Wanja, 2014).

Wanja and other songwriters use biblical references to describe a *Mutumia Ngatha*. The most referenced scripture is the Proverbs 31, entitled *The Perfect Wife*. According to Proverbs 31: 11 – 12, "A wife of virtuous character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life" (Proverbs 31: 11 – 12, New International Version).

Nancy Karuana is another Gikuyu musician who has written a song on *Mutumia Ngatha*. Her song however, is almost a replica of *The Perfect Wife* in Proverbs 31. She sings:

Her husband puts his confidence in her

She tells her handmaidens what to do,

She's a hard worker and industrious

Her husband will never be poor

As long as she lives, she does him good.

She's like merchant ships in that she brings home food from far places

Karuana has selected several verses from Proverbs 31 to describe her *Mutumia Ngatha*. This research will explore whether the *Mutumia Ngatha* is held in the same high esteem by the women to be interviewed and whether the women's perspectives of her have changed over the generations or not.

## **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

This section explores the various strands of feminism from liberal feminism, radical, feminism and social feminism to black feminism and African feminism so as to demonstrate why African Feminism was the Theoretical Framework selected for this study.

There are many different strands of Feminism that have attempted to address the inequality women face around the world. According to Betty Friedman in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, western feminism started in France in the 1880s, then in the United Kingdom in the 1890s and the United States in 1910. Betty Friedman defines feminism as the “...critical consideration and deliberation of practices, customs language and social roles and how these affect women in relation to men” (Friedman, 2001).

Susan Okin (1999) defines feminism as,

... the belief that women should not be disadvantaged by their sex, that they should be recognized as having human dignity equal to that of men, and that they should have the opportunity to live as fulfilling and as freely chosen lives as men can (Okin, 1999:10).

Feminist theories are for the most part based on the experiences of women in a bid to re-balance the patriarchal discrimination women face. “The development of feminist theory has been specifically concerned with understanding the way we think and how we can think differently,” says Betty Friedman in her book *Feminine Mystique*, adding that the lives and experiences of women was central to the feminist theories (Friedman, 2001). She was one of the first researchers to document the stories and experiences of women using an investigative journalist method and from the women’s stories she was able to identify and articulate the problems faced by the American housewife (Spender, 1985).

This section gives an overview of Western feminist theories before looking specifically at African Feminism which is the feminist theory used in this study.

### **1.9.1 Western Feminist Theories**

The first wave of feminism started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in France, the United Kingdom and Germany (Wood, 2013). It focused on women’s individual rights and self-determination.

Arising from the industrial and liberal political contexts, first wave feminists debated materialism, women’s self-determination as well as women’s individual, collective, social and political interests. These feminists campaigned for equal opportunities in the workplace, education, the public and material world, and for the abolishment of male dominance (Wood, 2013:50).

The feminist movement was spearheaded by Caucasian middle class women in Europe and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and therefore reflects the discrimination faced by middle class women (Wood, 2013).

The second wave of feminism started in the 1960s and was also spearheaded by middle class women, mainly in the United States and Europe. The movement was aimed at improving the overall status of women.

Second wave feminists began to look beyond oppression and shifted their scope to women's physical existence and experiences. They urged solidarity amongst all women in the Sisterhood as a political power and felt strongly that they could bring about cultural change for all women. Feminists in the second wave, however, had to acknowledge that a collective basis in women's experience is limited because of the existence of diverse social classes and racial groups (Wood, 2013:50).

There was a general complaint among women from the developing world who felt that their unique cultural and social context was not adequately addressed by the second wave of feminists. The African woman, in particular, felt that the feminist theories did not address the interconnected oppressions African women faced of gender, race and class discrimination (Goredema, 2010).

There were three main branches of feminism that emerged from the second wave of feminism, namely: liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism; All three of these movements, however, completely ignore issues of race and class that African women had to contend with (Spender, 1985).

Liberal Feminism was spearheaded by women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Hellen Taylor, Betty Friedman and Elizabeth Stanton who organized the very first women's rights convention known as the Seneca Falls Convention. It viewed freedom as a fundamental right, it pushed for women's right to live their lives on their own terms (Okin, 1999). It championed women's individual rights through legislation. Liberal feminists believed that most of the women in the world grew up in patriarchal societies. In her paper *Multicultural & Feminism*, Susan Moller Okin (1999) argued that the majority of women around the world were raised in patriarchal societies where their freedom and their expression were controlled by men.



Discrimination against and control of the freedom of females are practiced, to a greater or lesser extent, by virtually all cultures, past and present, but especially by religious ones and those that look to the past-to ancient texts or revered traditions-for guidelines or rules about how to live in the contemporary world (Okin,1999:9).

Baehr (2013) felt that women would only be able to live lives on their own terms when they were free of violence and the threat of violence, when they were free from the limits patriarchy placed on them and when they had improved access to career and personal options.

Radical feminism, on the other hand, examines the root causes of the inequality women face in society in a bid to overhaul and transform it. It was spearheaded by women such as Shulamith Firestone, Gloria Steinem, Melissa Farley and Mary Daly, among others. According to Mary Daly, it looks at changing society as a whole by dismantling the patriarchal systems that give men supremacy over women in all spheres of life (Daly, 1978).

Another popular feminist theory, Social feminism, which focuses on the oppression of women from an economic standpoint, also doesn't factor race into its equation. It was spearheaded by women such as Clara Fraser, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emma Goldman among others, who all believed that for women to be truly liberated, their economic and cultural oppression needed to be redressed. "Although socialist feminists focus on class and gender, they tend to dismiss race or they make a point of acknowledging that race is important and then proceed to offer an analysis in which race is not considered" (Hooks, 2000).

### **1.3.2 African Feminism**

African Feminism is considered to be part of the second wave of feminism that took place in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. It was born as a response to the failure of western feminism to comprehensively address the interconnected issues of gender, race and class oppression that the African woman had to contend with. Mainstream feminism failed to address the unique oppression experienced by the African woman. According to Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi in her book *Identity, Sexuality, and Difference* (2000),

The failure of western feminists to deal with issues that directly affect black women and their tendencies to sensationalize others, creates antagonism as does the fact that white women are often partners in the oppression of both African women and men (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2000:1).

For this and other reasons, African Feminism is the best suited theoretical framework for this study because it traces the journey towards attaining social, cultural, economic and political rights for African women.

When it comes to the African woman's experience, there are three interlinked schools of feminism that attempt to capture this uniqueness and define her struggle, namely: Black Feminism, Post-colonial feminism and African Feminism. Black feminism is a form of feminism that takes a comprehensive look at the oppression black women experience. It is based on the concept of intersectionality which examines the effects of racism, sexism and economic inequality on women. Intersectionality is the idea that racism, class oppression and sexism are bound together (Carby, 1982).

Black feminists argue that one cannot look at just one form of oppression (such as sexism) but must take all of them into consideration (Carby, 1982). Other feminist movements are not sensitive to this. While the theory of intersectionality of oppression is also relevant for African women, Black feminist research tends to focus primarily on the experience of the African American woman and does not explore the unique experiences of African women in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa (Chukwuma, 2000).

Post-colonial feminism on the other hand, seeks to account for the ways in which racism and long lasting political, economic and cultural effects of colonialism have affected third world women. While both Black and post-colonial feminism explore different aspects that are important to the African woman's context, African Feminism is more comprehensive and therefore, the best fit for this research.

This study will use African feminism as the theoretical framework because it is culturally based and has very clear tools for what this research is attempting to explore. In *African Feminism a Worldwide Perspective* Filomina Steady (1981) explains that "African feminism combines racial, sexual, class and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism through which women are viewed first and foremost as humans rather than as sexual beings" (Steady, 1981:5).

African Feminism addresses the public and private sphere of African women's lives (Chukwuma, 2000). It bears in mind the political, economic and social transformations that took place across sub-Saharan Africa in less than 100 years from the time of the advent of missionaries and colonialists, to the independence struggles, independence governments, corruption, multiparty democracy and complete westernization of the African society, while

acknowledging that African women have been the biggest losers of their identity and rights (Chukwuma, 2000).

According to Ruvimbo Goredema (2010), African feminism is a response to the biased western feminist ideologies that try to ignore the diversity of oppression that women face such as racial and traditional. It creates a difference between those women who were colonized and those who were part of the colonizers (Goredema, 2010). Filomina Steady agrees that African feminism is very different from Western feminism because, according to African women, men are not a separate or opposing entity but the other part of them. “parallel autonomy, communalism and cooperation for preservation of life are more useful concepts in developing an appropriate framework for examining African Feminism, that the framework of dichotomy, individualism, competition and opposition which western feminists foster,” says Filomina (Steady, 1981:8).

African Feminism has been criticized as being a movement of mainly educated urban women and not truly reflective of the majority of women who live in rural Africa.

In *African Feminism: the African Woman's Struggle for Identity* Dr Goredema notes,

There is no doubt that African feminism is largely made up of the responses of middle-class educated black women who are taking action upon the claims set up by middle-class white women. Yet those who are uneducated, poor and in the majority serve the function of highlighting the differences between African and Western feminism (Goredema, 2010:5)

However, in *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in sub-Saharan Africa* Dr Mikelll (1997) argues that African feminism was not spearheaded by the middle class woman but was shaped by women's resistance to colonialism.

The African variant of feminism grows out of a history of a female integration within largely corporate and agrarian-based societies with strong cultural heritages that have experienced traumatic colonization by the west (Mikelll, 1997:3).

Another misconception about African Feminism is that it is a western driven movement because of the international push on African governments by western governments and Nongovernmental Organizations, to be more inclusive. This was especially pronounced in the 80s and 90s during the United Nations Decade of the Woman.

In the 1980s, pressure from western countries and international lending agencies forced African leaders to begin restructuring their economies and political systems, integrating women into development and creating greater equity for women and families (Mikell, 1997:4).

This international pressure forced African women to find a balance between their push for more public involvement while at the same time supporting the sovereignty of their nations against western ideology (Mikell, 1997). African feminism acknowledges the unique perspectives of African women who believe that men's and women's roles can complement each other because gender roles are corporate. It also recognizes the importance that African women place on their reproductive roles, a stark contrast to western feminist theory. Motherhood is very important to the African woman; "...what it means to be an African woman differs radically from the increasingly anti-naturist conception of women in industrialized nations" (Mikell, 1997). African Feminism also acknowledges that African women perform a wider range of public roles than women from other parts of the world.

For this study we will use the framework of African Feminism because it addresses the intersectionality of the African woman's experience of sexual and racial oppression and discrimination during colonialism and the patriarchal social order that African women have been contending with since time immemorial.

Three important dimensions of African Feminism will form the basis of this conceptual framework, namely patriarchy, tradition and race. Patriarchy is a social system that places all the power and leadership roles in the hands of men (Kolawole, 2002). It comprises political and psychological systems that value and give men more power than women. According to Bell Hooks:

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (Hooks, 2004:16).

Patriarchy in Africa is reinforced by intricate systems of laws, tradition, education, division of labor, language, etc. that keep women subordinated to men (Kolawole, 2002). According to Kabira and Burkeywo in *Creating Women's Knowledge: A Case Study of Three African Women Writers*,

Patriarchy looks at women as objects. During dowry payments, it is men in society who negotiate and determine how much should be paid as a dowry. This turns a woman into a commodity that can be quantified (Kabira & Burkeywo, 2016:A29).

This research will look at how historical systems of patriarchy have defined men's and women's social gender roles in Gikuyu society and influenced the woman's self-image in her home and in the community.

One of the biggest problems with patriarchy is that women's voices become increasingly absent.

Men make knowledge. White, privileged men .... This ability to define reality, to tell us what is objective, rational and important, is their basic power. Knowledge is the most important thing men make. It is the power to declare that their view is the truth [the only truth. Such knowledge makes women or indigenous peoples invisible. We become deviants from the great white reasonable norm when we insist that what we do does count (Spender, 1985:123).

Other literature such as Betty Friedman's *Feminine Mystique* (2010) reveals that historically, most western articles about women were written by men and that the media that informed women's self-images was also controlled by men. The aim of African Feminism was to fight patriarchy in order to create more balance between men and women.

Race is the second dimension of African Feminism that will be used in the conceptual framework. Race examines the ongoing ramifications of colonialism and racial politics on the Gikuyu woman's self-image, particularly when it comes to her physical image and beauty. This will be done by comparing their perspectives of beauty compared to other generations and particularly to today's generation. Lastly, tradition will be the third dimension, particularly when it comes to polygamous unions, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, women's lack of access to power in their private and public lives. African feminists are quick to point out that they are not fighting tradition but in fact, value it and wish to ensure that it adapts to the changing reality that has come about as a result of women's empowerment.

Traditional African cultures allowed women to participate in public and societal affairs and they had their own influence but colonialism excluded the women from any leadership

position or position of influence.

Using colonial control to insert capitalist economics and the ethics of Western Christendom into managing African life, the colonial regime became the major force in changing women's roles during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and through World War II (Mikell, 1997:45).

This exclusion of women is what gave birth to the African Feminist movement which was essentially a fight for the re-establishment of the corporate rights they had in traditional African society.

According to Gwendolyn Mikell, in her book *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in sub-Saharan Africa*, in traditional African communities, women and men had complementary roles. "The sexual division of labour was essentially along parallel rather than hierarchical lines thereby giving, in general terms, equal value to male and female labour" (Mikell, 1997:48). She believes that colonialism systematically broke down the family and community unit and separated men from women.

Through the successive processes of forced labour for colonial projects, induced wage, labour migration to pay taxes, male urbanization, mining, resource extraction, and rural cash cropping, the colonial regime created a sexual division of labour and of community.... (Mikell, 1997:48)

To add to this, missionaries also aimed at completely transforming African society and culture. Eventually all these external bombardments started to separate the community into two distinct groups: those who changed and those who remained traditional.

In traditional African society, leadership roles and gender roles were corporate. Women held a wide variety of positions in the public sphere and they also had their own domains and women's assemblies where they were in charge and made decisions independent of the men. There were even female chiefs, women leaders and what Ronald Cohen and Henri Claessen called 'high-status women'. Such women built and ran empires and formed movements to liberate their people from oppression. Filomina Steady also underscores that in certain societies women were among the top leadership either as chiefs, priestesses or monarchs (Steady, 1981:4). While independence governments promised to reintroduce traditional corporate structures into the public spheres and have more women involved, they did not honor their promises.

One thing that colonialism did was to create class, social and religious divisions among the

women, particularly with the women who chose to become Christians and moved into mission communities. “The creation of these mission communities perpetuated schisms in traditional polities and politics, further dividing Africans and creating cultural class and status differences between women” (Mikell, 1997:47). It will be important to document how the self-image of Gikuyu women has been influenced and changed over the years.

This chapter has explored the background and context of the study before exploring the different literature on women’s self-images and images of women. Finally, it has looked at Feminism as a theoretical framework before settling on African Feminism as the theoretical framework for this study.

### **1.10 Research Hypothesis**

The self-image of Gikuyu women has transformed from a traditional self-image to one that is shaped by western culture as a results of colonialism, religion and western education.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This section looks at the methodology used to collect and analyse Nyeri and Nairobi Gikuyu women's Images of themselves. It provides information on the research design used to answer the research questions and address the objectives. It also provides detailed information on the study setting, the informants, how the data was collected, and how it was analysed.

#### **2.2 Research Design**

A comparative case study of three generations of Gikuyu women was carried out in order to analyse the self-images and self-perceptions of women from 1900 to 2000. The research design was a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods; the qualitative methods recorded the women's perspectives of their social gender roles, generational perspectives of different women, ideas of physical beauty and image and their hopes and aspirations for today's generation. The quantitative methods were used in the face-to-face questionnaires to provide empirical support for the key findings.

The Caroline Moser Gender Planning Framework was used to record information on how the social gender roles were distributed between women, men, boys and girls. A lifecycle analysis was also used to cover the life cycle of men, women, boys and girls. The Activity Profile simply looks at who does what in terms of productive and reproductive roles. The questionnaire went one step further, however, and looked at the woman's community roles and how she spent her free time.

The oral testimonies method was used to collect the women's self-images by systematically recording the women's perspectives of their experiences across their life cycle using a guide that also allowed them to tell their story without hindrance. This method was also used to document the women's perspectives on beauty and their hopes for today's generation because it allowed women to freely share their perspectives.



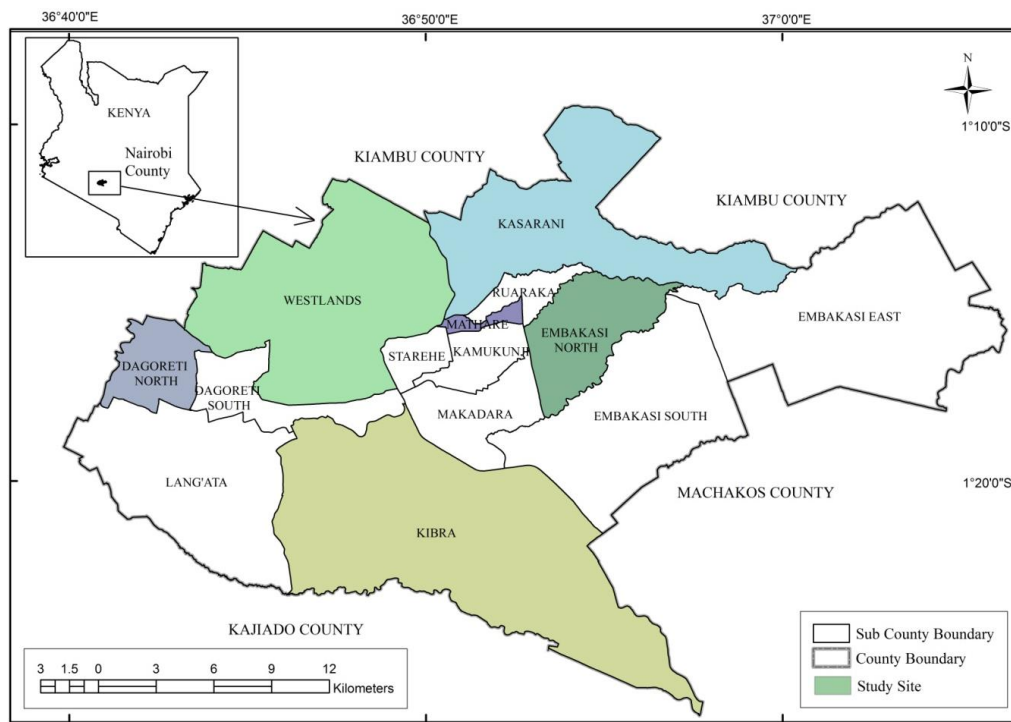
### 2.3 Study Setting

Two counties were selected for this research, namely Nairobi County and Nyeri County.



Figure 1: Map of Kenya indicating the two selected counties i.e. Nairobi and Nyeri

## 2.2.1 Nairobi County



*Figure 2: Map of Nairobi County*

Nairobi County is the capital city of Kenya and the main administrative centre of the national government. It is also the commercial centre of the country. Nairobi shares borders with three counties, namely: Kiambu, Kajiado and Machakos. The city was created in 1899 by the British colonialists and it became the capital city of Kenya in 1907 (Nairobi County Government). Its topography is made up of steep valleys on one side, open plains, the Nairobi National Game Park and Karura forest. The County has nine sub-counties: Starehe, Kamukunji, Kasarani, Makadara, Embakasi, Njiru, Dagoretti, Langata and Westlands. In the last national census of 2009, the population of Nairobi County was 3,138 million people (Nairobi County Government).

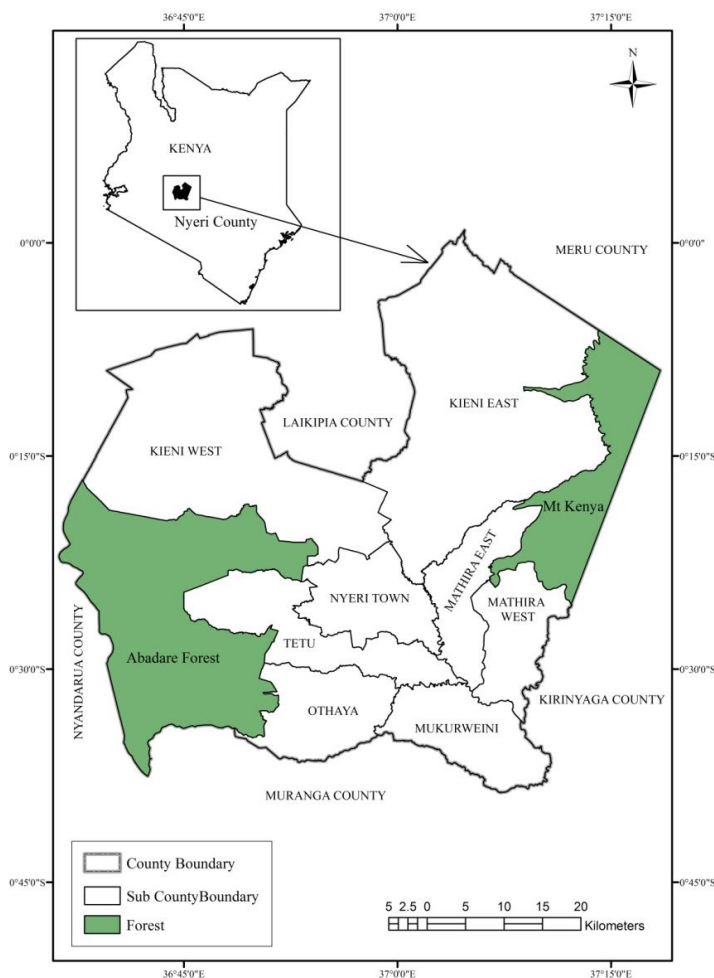
Nairobi County is culturally diverse and all the major Kenyan ethnic groups are represented in the city, particularly the Kikuyu, Kamba, Kalenjin, Luo, Kisii, and Luhya. There is a large population of Gikuyu people living in Nairobi because of the city's proximity to their ancestral home. According to a report by Oxfam (an international confederation of charities working in over ninety countries to eradicate poverty), the Agikuyu make up thirty-two percent (32%) of Nairobi's population (Oxfam, 2009).

The majority of the people living in Nairobi can read and write as ninety-six percent (96%) of the population is literate. According to Oxfam, forty percent (40%) of Nairobi residents live

below the poverty line; the majority of these being women and other persons from vulnerable groups. In fact, women living in slum areas are five times as likely to be unemployed as men although there are more men (54%) in the city than women (46%) (Oxfam, 2009).

Nairobi County was selected because it is the capital city of Kenya and because of its close proximity to the former Central Province, the region in central Kenya known as the ancestral home of the Agikuyu. The Gikuyu have been migrating to Nairobi in search of work from the time the railway was completed in 1899 (Jenkins, 1996). There was also, a wave of rural to urban migration in the wake of Independence. Nairobi was the city that both single and married women moved to in search of education and career opportunities (Jenkins, 1996). Nairobi provided the urban perspectives of women which were compared with the rural perspectives to see if there were any major differences in the women’s self-image because they lived in an urban setting.

### 2.2.2 Nyeri County



Central Kenya is the ancestral homeland of the Gikuyu. There are five counties that make up the Central Province of the old constitutional dispensation, namely: Kiambu, Murang’a, Nyeri, Kirinyaga and Nyandarua. Nyeri County was selected out of these five counties to represent informants from the rural setting because of the following reasons. Nyeri County was the headquarters and administrative centre of Central province, for a long time before the new constitution in 2010. Central Province is where the majority of Gikuyu people live and Nyeri County is at the heart of it.

Figure 3: Map of Nyeri County

Nyeri County is located in the central region of the country. It borders Laikipia County to the north, Murang'a County to the south, Nyandarua County to the west, Kirinyaga County to the east, and Meru County to the North East. The County is characterized by hills, mountains and deep ridges. It is primarily rural; there is only one town in the county (Nyeri town) and five major urban centres. As the only town, it is no surprise that Nyeri Town has the highest population out of the six sub-counties.

The people of Nyeri County are primarily farmers and are known to be hardworking. In the last National Census, carried out in 2009, the population of Nyeri was 693, 558. Women make up fifty-one percent (51%) of the population and seventy percent (70%) of the farmers. According to the Nyeri County Integrated Development Plan, only twenty-four percent (24%) of the population is employed and the unemployment rate stands at seventeen percent (17%). According to the Gender Inequality Index of the Sixth Kenya Human Development Report of 2009, the women are discriminated against in the labour market, in reproductive health and women's empowerment. The county has 4,489 women's groups, however, who task themselves with pushing for women's rights and accessibility (Nyeri County Integrated Development Plan, 2013- 2017).

Nyeri people were also amongst the first to come into contact with missionaries and colonialists. They were also among the first to be forcibly evicted from their ancestral land, and to also receive education, medical health care and religion (Mugo, 1982). It is no surprise that the literacy rate in Nyeri County is ninety-two percent (92%) (Nyeri County Government). It was home to the most renowned Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) Generals, namely Dedan Kimathi, General China as well as Field Marshall Muthoni, the only female general in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau).

There are a total six sub – counties in Nyeri, namely: Nyeri Town, Othaya, Tetu, Kieni, Mathira and Mukurwe – Ini. Women were sampled from all six sub-counties.

## **2.4 Sampling Framework**

This section looks at how the study participants were selected.

### **2.4.1 Study Population**

The Study population was limited to Gikuyu women which meant both their mothers and fathers were Gikuyu. The women had to have lived in either Nairobi or Nyeri County for most of their lives. For the purpose of this study the researcher used the 2009 Kenya Housing

and Population Census, which is the most recent National Census to have been carried out in Kenya.

There were three age groups used in the study forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59), sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) and women who were eighty years old and older (80+). The lower age limit was placed at 40 years because the study required women who had interacted with both older and younger generations of Gikuyu women. Women below 40 rarely had granddaughters and their daughters were still very young and so they could not reflect on the changing self-image between them and their daughters.

The women aged forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) were mothers of at least teenage or even older Gikuyu girls in their oral testimonies it turns out that ninety-five percent (95%) of them were already grandmothers. The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) age group and the eighty years and older (80+) generation were selected because they had been born at a time when Gikuyu culture was still largely alive, despite the arrival of missionaries in the early 1900s and the colonialists soon after that.

### **Nairobi County**

According to the 2009 Census, the population of women who were forty years (40) and above was about 166, 172. While there was a large population of Gikuyu women living in Nairobi County, the exact percentage had not been calculated by the Kenya Bureau of Statistics.

*Table 1: Study Population: Nairobi County*

Age Group	Total Female Population, Nairobi County (2009 Census)
40 - 49 years old	98,594
50 – 59 years old	39,875
60 – 69 years old	15,769
70 – 79 years old	6,759
80+ years old	5175
Total	166, 172

Source: 2009 Population & Housing Census, Kenya Bureau of Statistics

### **Nyeri County**

In Nyeri County, 94, 023 omen were aged forty years (40) and above. We see the number reduce significantly as the population grows older. We can assume that this trend has

continued in the last five years. In the former Central Province, over 90% of the population is from the Gikuyu community.

*Table 2: Study Population Nyeri County*

Age Group	Total Female Population, Nyeri County (2009 Census)
40 - 49 years old	37,377
50 – 59 years old	22,123
60 – 69 years old	17,343
70 – 79 years old	8,980
80+ years old	8,200
Total	94,023

Source: 2009 Population & Housing Census, Kenya Bureau of Statistics

#### **2.4.2 Sampling**

Thirty oral testimonies were recorded for key informants – fifteen in Nairobi and fifteen in Nyeri. Five categories of women were identified to reflect the different faces of Gikuyu women. These were: traditional women (women who were eighty years old and above), women who were members of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), women who had leadership roles in the community, career women and post-independence women (women below sixty years who had been born after independence). Post-independence women were included because they represented the majority of women in terms of sample population size.

There were three women interviewed in each of these five categories from each county so that common themes and perspectives could be identified and confirmed. For example, if two women had different perspectives on a dimension of their self-image, the third key informant would help shed light on which of the two perspectives was more commonplace. The snowball sampling method was used to identify the women. The researcher worked with a community mobilizer from each county to identify the first key informant. Three names were given to the researcher by the community mobilizer from which the first interviewee was selected. The researcher then got the first participant to suggest three more women and selected one from that list and repeated the same with the second participant.

Due to time limits and financial constraints, it was decided that twenty women should be interviewed from each of the three generations so as to provide a wider sample of women's perspectives of their self-image that would help to either confirm or disprove the perspectives from the Key informant in the oral testimonies. A total of one hundred and twenty women were selected for the face-to-face questionnaires of whom sixty were from Nairobi County and sixty from Nyeri County.

In Nyeri County women were interviewed from each of the six counties, namely: Tetu, Mathira, Kieni, Othaya, Mukurweini, Nyeri Town; three from each age group and one randomly selected from the three age group. An equal number of sub-counties were selected at random in Nairobi County by writing the names of all nine sub-counties on separate pieces of paper, putting them in a bowl and having an independent party select the six counties. The sub-counties selected were: Dagoretti North, Kibra, Embakasi North, Mathare, Westlands, and Kasarani.

There were ten women interviewed from each sub-county, three from each age group and one randomly selected from the three age groups. The women were identified using the purposive sampling method. The researcher was introduced to a sample of women from each age group, in each sub-county and selected one to interview. The respondent was then asked to propose three women from her community to be interviewed and one was selected from the three. This went on until the desired sample size was achieved.

In addition, a total of six focus group discussions were carried out; three from each county and two for each of the three age groups. Eight participants were selected randomly by the researcher from a list of women provided by the community mobilizer for each of the focus groups.

## **2.5 Data Collection Tools**

Three research tools were used to collect the data, namely: an oral testimonies questionnaire, a face-to-face questionnaire, and a focus group discussion guide.

### **2.5.1 Oral testimonies Questionnaire**

The oral testimonies method was used to gather in-depth information on women's perspectives of their self-image in terms of their social gender roles across their lifetime, their generational perspectives of women, their ideas of physical beauty and image and their hopes and aspirations for this generation. A semi-structured Oral testimonies Questionnaire was created and acted as a guide for the interviews.

A total of thirty (30) women were interviewed using the oral testimonies method. These women were selected through the purposive sampling method. Fifteen women were from Nairobi County and fifteen from Nyeri County. To be considered to be from Nairobi County, the women had to have spent most of their lives living in Nairobi (more than fifty percent). In Nyeri we looked for women who were born and raised there. For both counties, I selected: three women from the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), three traditional women (women above eighty years), three women leaders, three career women and three post-independence women (below sixty years). Post-independence women were included because they represented the majority of women in terms of population size. The researcher used her discretion to ensure the sample was as representative of each county as possible.

### **2.5.2. Interviewees for Oral Testimonies**

This section gives a brief description of the women who recorded their narratives. A total of thirty (30) women were interviewed from all age groups; fifteen (15) were from Nairobi and fifteen (15) from Nyeri.

#### **2.5.2.1 Eighty Years and Above Generation**

There were twelve (12) women interviewed from the eighty-year-old women and older age group, six (6) of them were ordinary Gikuyu women, three (3) were involved in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) three (3) were women leaders. There were five (5) women interviewed from Nairobi County and seven (7) from Nyeri County. Below is a brief background of each woman.

Flora Nyumbura is eighty-three years old (83) and she is from Nairobi. She was born in Nakuru in 1932. Her father died when she was young and she was raised by her grandmother. Flora never went to school. She got married in 1948 at the age of sixteen (16) to a casual labourer. Her husband never went to school but he knew how to read and write. They had nine children, five boys and four girls.

Sarah Nyeri is eighty-two years old (82) and she is lives in Nairobi. She grew up in Kijabe, Rift Valley. Sarah never went to school. She got married in Nyeri in 1951, a year before the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) began. She has seven children, two boys and five girls.

Margaret Wakarindi Githinji is eighty-two years old (82) and has lived in Nairobi for over sixty years. She was born in Murang'a in 1934 and moved to Nairobi in 1952 to marry a young man from Murang'a. She has five children, one boy and four girls.



Veronica Kirigo is eighty-six years old (86). She grew up in Thogoto, Nyeri. She has a standard two education. She is married to a mason and they have ten children, six girls and four boys.

Veronica Nyawira is eight-four years old (84) and she is from Karagia constituency in Nyeri. She has never gone to school and her parents also had no education. Her husband, who is from Tetu constituency. They have seven children, five boys and two girls.

Esther Murugi is eighty-seven years old (87). She was born in Kiado, Nyeri. She never went to school. She married a man from the same village and they have five children, three girls and two boys.

Maria Wangui is eighty-four years old (84). She grew up in Mukurweini, Nyeri County. Maria received a standard two education. She married a man from the same village and they have two children, a boy and a girl.

Miriam Wambugu is an eighty-year-old (80+) former fighter in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) from Tetu constituency in Nyeri. Miriam has a nursery school education. She is married and has five biological children, two girls and three boys, and she also adopted one girl.

Lucy Macharia is an eighty-one-year-old (81) former member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), from Nyeri. She grew up in Mukurwe-ini and never went to school. She is married and has one daughter.

Tabitha Nderu is an eighty-five-year-old (85) former leader of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) from Nairobi. She grew up in Kawangware. She is married and has eight children, four boys and four girls.

Field Marshall Muthoni is an eight-two-year-old (82) former General of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) from Kieni in Nyeri County. She got married in 1949 to a man from Tetu. They never had any children.

Muthoni Likimani wa Gachanja is a ninety-year-old (90) leader from Nairobi and author of many books. Muthoni is the only women in the women above eighty years' generation who had an inter-cultural marriage; her husband was a Maasai Moran. They had three daughters.

#### **2.5.2.2 60 – 79 years Generation**

A total of eight women were interviewed from this age group, five women from Nairobi and three from Nyeri County. There were three women from the Kenya Land and Freedom Army

(Mau Mau), three career women, one leader and one ordinary woman. Following is a brief background of each woman.

Virginia Gitau is a seventy-nine-year-old (79) member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), from Nairobi. She grew up in Kawangware and has no formal education. Virginia married a man from Gachie in Nairobi and they have eight children in total, five girls and three boys.

Mary Muthoni Munyoki is a seventy-eight-year-old (78) woman from Nairobi who was involved in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). She grew up in Nyeri and did not go beyond standard two. Mary moved to Nairobi in 1951. She is married and has six children.

Mary Mwhaki is a seventy-seven-year-old (77) former fighter in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) from Nairobi. She grew up in Gatundu. Mary received a standard three level education. Mary has six children, two sons and four daughters although she never married their father.

Florence Mwhaki is a seventy-nine-year-old (79) career woman from Nairobi. She grew up in Nakuru. She and Her husband were part of the Mboya/Kennedy airlifts. They have three children together, one boy and two girls.

Njeri Mburu is a seventy-seven-year-old (77) career woman from Nairobi. She grew up in Dagoretti. Njeri got married at twenty-five years (25). Her husband was from Gatanga in Murang'a County. They have one daughter together.

Grace Wairimu Ngambi is a seventy-year-old (70) leader from Nyeri. She got her Kenya Certificate of Education in 1959. She is married and they had eight children together, five girls and three boys.

Peninah Kiretu is a seventy-six-year-old (76) career woman from Nyeri. She has a form four education. She is married to a man from Muruguru, Nyeri and they have five children, three boys and two girls.

Monicah Kimiah is sixty-nine years old (69). She was born in Thuguma, Nyeri and has a standard two education. She is married and has ten children, six boys and four girls.

#### **2.4.2.3 40 -59 years Generation**

There were eleven (11) women interviewed from this age group, five (5) of them were ordinary Gikuyu women (three (3) from Nairobi and two (2) from Nyeri), three (3) of them

were career women from Nyeri and three (3) women leaders (two (2) from Nairobi and one (1) from Nyeri). The following is a brief background on each of the women.

Jane Wairimu Ngang'a is a forty-nine-year-old (49) career woman from Nairobi County. She grew up in Limuru. She has a Master's degree and is married to a man from Murang'a. They have two daughters.

Ruth Mwaniki is a fifty-year-old (50) leader from Nairobi. She grew up in Murang'a County. Ruth has a Master's Degree in Public Policy and Administration. She has never been married and she has two children.

Susan Waithera is a forty-one-year-old (41) lawyer. Susan has a Law degree from Makerere University in Uganda. She also married a man from Makerere University. They have three sons.

Lucy Njoki is fifty-seven years old (57) and lives in Nairobi County. She has a standard seven education. She married a man from Nairobi. They had two children, one boy and one girl.

Patricia Waithera is a fifty-year-old (50) business leader from Nairobi County. She grew up in Nairobi and has an MBA from the United States International University in Nairobi. She is married and has two daughters.

Rose Wairimu Kamau is a fifty-year-old (50) women's leader from Nyeri. She grew up in Othaya constituency. She has a form four education. She is married and has three daughters.

Jane Wambui Maigwa is forty-eight years old (48) and she lives in Nyeri County. She has a class eight education. She is married and they have three children, one boy and two girls.

Mellina Kamoche is forty-three years old (43). She grew up in Nyeri and went up to form four in school. She is married and they have three sons.

Jane Wambui Ngang'a is a fifty-year-old (50) career woman from Nyeri. She has a diploma. She is married and has three children together, one boy and two girls.

Anne Wanja Thairu is a forty-six-year-old (46) career woman from Nyeri. She has a form four education and is married. They have six children, four girls and three boys.

Olive Njambi Murage is forty-one years old. She has a diploma in community mobilization. She married a man from Narumoro. They have one daughter.

### **2.5.3 Face-to-Face Questionnaires**

The face-to-face questionnaire was designed to provide empirical support to the findings of the oral testimonies. The results from the questionnaire were compared to the responses recorded in the oral testimonies. The questionnaire collected a mix of quantitative and qualitative data and comprised mainly closed questions. This was useful in either validating or disproving the perspectives from the oral testimonies and focus group discussion.

The face-to-face questionnaires were conducted by 6 research assistants from each county – four women and two men. Each one was from one of the sub-counties where the women were being sampled from. Women were already organized down to the village level and so the researcher engaged two community mobilizers, Ms. Veronica Kinyanjui from Nairobi and Mrs. Nyathogora from Nyeri. The role of the community mobilizers was to identify 6 research assistants and invite them for a training seminar on the questionnaire as well as to assist me in supervising the research assistants once they were in the field.

The research assistants received one-day training on the research instrument. During the training seminar, they were taken through the objectives of the study and were guided on how to conduct the administering of the questionnaire, what questions to probe, etc. The research assistants then administered the questionnaire on each other and this was followed by a question and answer session on the research instrument. Once they were comfortable with the tool and understood the objectives of the study, they were given three days to complete the 10 questionnaires assigned to each one of them. During those three days, they were supervised by the community mobilizer and the researcher.

On the last day the team met once again for a debriefing seminar where each research assistant submitted his/her questionnaire which were reviewed and verified by both the researcher and the community mobilizer. Once this was completed the research assistants shared their experiences and challenges in the field. The number one challenge was finding women in the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) age group, although they could not understand why. Women who were eighty years old and older (80+) and between forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) were easy to locate.

#### 2.5.4 Focus Group Discussions



*Figure 4: women who were eighty years old and older (80+) focus group discussion in Kibra, Nairobi*

The third method used was Focus Group Discussions. The focus group discussions helped to explore the Gikuyu women's collective self-image and to clarify issues that had not come out very clearly in the oral testimonies and face-to-face questionnaires, particularly when it came to women's perspectives of physical image and beauty.

A total of six focus groups discussions were conducted, two for each of the three age categories. Three focus group discussions were conducted in three different sub-counties, in each county. The sub-counties selected were different from the ones used in the face-to-face questionnaires and were based on the mobility of the women.

Eight women participated in each of the focus group discussions and the community mobilizer in identifying local community leaders that were tasked with assembling the women. I moderated the focus group discussions using the Focus Group Discussion guide. In Nyeri, I had a translator to assist me in moderating because some women preferred speaking in Gikuyu.

#### 2.6 Data Analysis

Two methods were used to analyze the data. The Oral testimonies and focus group discussions used the thematic analysis method and the face-to-face questionnaires were examined through frequency distribution.

### **2.6.1 Thematic Analysis**

In order to analyze the rich data that was collected in the oral testimonies and focus group discussion, the researcher first reviewed the women's stories and identified common themes and patterns in each of the three age groups. These were ordered according to pre-determined categories that had been developed from the objectives of the study. For example, the four major categories for analysing the data on social gender roles were: reproductive roles, productive roles, community roles, and free time activities.

The researcher then analyzed the key findings and thematic areas across the three generations using the African feminist theory. Once the data were analysed the areas where more information was needed were put into the focus group discussion guide so that the discussions would complement and inform these gaps. Key findings were also analysed further in their cultural and historical context. They were also compared to the perspectives that emerged in the literature review.

### **2.6.2 Frequency Distribution**

The face-to-face questionnaire was designed to provide empirical data to either support or disprove the key findings and themes that emerged from the oral testimonies. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) in order to provide the frequency distribution for each of the age groups, by county.

## **2.7 Observations**

There were two interesting observations from the study. These are explored below as the insider-outsider perspectives of the researcher and the namely the researcher being both an insider and outsider.

### **2.7.1. Insider – Outsider Perspectives**

As a Gikuyu woman herself, the researcher of this study was an insider of the community and this enhanced the depth and breadth of the understanding and questioning in the interviews. But with her academic background and having studied abroad for eleven (11) years, she was also an outsider and this ensured neutrality as she knew nothing about the phenomenon being studied.

The research assistants who either helped to mobilize the participants or conducted the face-to-face questionnaires were insiders, meaning they were all Gikuyu and spoke the language fluently. A total of six research assistants were selected, four of whom women and two men.

The research assistants from Nairobi were Ann Wanjiru, Salome Wambui, Esther Mwaura, Chris Muchuki and John Mugo. From Nyeri the six research assistants were: Rose Wairimu Kamau, Mary Wamuyu Wamui, Olive Njambi Murage, Amos Kinguku, Jane Wambui Ngaina, and Ndungu's Muchai. They also lived in the communities of the women they interviewed and interacted with women from all walks of life and age groups, on a regular basis. This was a necessary requirement for the research assistants because the majority of the women above sixty (60) years old were more comfortable answering the questionnaire in Gikuyu.

Out of the twelve research assistants, four were male. This was done to see if there would be a difference in the information the women shared. The outcome showed that there was no real difference between the information recorded by the male and female researchers with the exception of women's discussion about sex.

### **2.7.2 Location of Interviews**

An important observation is the location of the interviews. All the face-to-face questionnaires took place in the women's homes. All the oral testimonies in Nairobi were conducted in the participant's homes but in Nyeri, due to limited time the women came to a central location where they were interviewed by the researcher. The women were very impressed that the researcher had brought her mother along on the research trip and this put them at ease when answering the questions. This was particularly true from the women who were part of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army who shared very intimate details about their experiences.

In Nairobi County, the researcher conducted all the interviews in the presence of her research assistant, translator, and community organizer Veronica Kinyanjui. One surprising observation was that only one out of the eleven women in the eighty years and above (80+) age group was living with her daughter, the other ten women were living on their own, mainly in the communities where they had lived when they first moved to Nairobi. For example, Margaret Githinji (82) had lived in Buru Buru for the last thirty years. She lived alone in a one-bedroom house where she cooked for herself and did the daily chores. There was a young lady who came to help her once a week with the general cleaning. Several other women had similar stories. The three women still living in informal settlements were actually landlords but did not have the money to build proper structures.

All the women's homes were extremely clean and neat and the researcher was offered something to drink everywhere she went, as is customary in Gikuyu tradition when visitors came to visit.

## **2.8 Ethical Considerations**

The objectives of the research were clearly explained to the participants and their full consent was obtained prior to the study. Permission was also sought for use of all information from the interviews, including any sensitive information. All the participants signed a consent (examples of which are found in the appendix). I also obtained permission from both county governments to do the research (see letters in the annex). All communication in relation to the research was done with honesty and transparency. The highest level of objectivity was maintained in discussions and analyses throughout the research. In order to protect their privacy, the women agreed that only their first and second names be used but not their family names.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In summary, the overall methodological approach was two qualitative research tools, namely, the oral testimonies and the focus group discussion guide; and the face-to-face questionnaires which were a combination of the two. The face-to-face questionnaire helped to provide empirical support for the key themes and patterns that emerged from the oral testimonies. A total of thirty (30) oral testimonies, one hundred and twenty (120) face-to-face questionnaires and 6 focus group discussions were conducted. Research assistants were trained to administer the face-to-face questionnaires. The Oral testimonies were analysed by emerging themes in pre-existing categories. The SPSS program was used to analyse the data from the face-to-face questionnaires.



## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL GENDER ROLES**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This Chapter presents the demographic data and then looks at the respondents' perspectives on gender social roles. In looking at the gender social roles, data from the oral testimonies and the face-to-face questionnaire were used. The cradle-to-grave methodology was used to explore how the respondents viewed social gender roles across three generations. Using the Caroline Moser framework, the triple roles of women were explored, namely: reproductive, productive, and community roles. In addition, the research considered what women did during their free time.

Reproductive roles explored what Gikuyu women did in the house as girls, women (wife and mothers) and grandmothers. The productive roles looked at what work women did outside the house to help generate incomes for their family. Community roles looked at the activities women engaged in, in their community. These activities included: church activities, cultural activities, collective work, etc. Finally, free time activities, looked at what activities women engaged in during their free time.

The Chapter also explores women's generational perspectives of social gender roles and analyses how social gender roles were distributed between men and women across their lifetimes. The oral testimonies tool and the face-to-face questionnaire were used in the collection of this data. The cradle-to-grave methodology was used to explore the different social gender roles that Gikuyu men and women had throughout their lives.

#### **3.2 Demographic Data**

Three research instruments were used to explore Gikuyu women's images of themselves: the Oral testimonies Questionnaire which was administered to thirty (30) women, the Face-to-Face Questionnaire, which was filled out by one hundred and twenty (120) women and a total of six (6) Focus Group Discussions.

##### **3.2.1. Age Distribution**

The following two tables (Table 3.1 and Table 3.2) look at the demographic distribution of the respondents who participated in the Oral testimonies and Face-to-Face questionnaires.

Table 3: Respondents Demographics \_ Oral testimonies Questionnaires

COUNTIES	ORAL TESTIMONIES QUESTIONNAIRES					
	Age Group	Ordinary	Leader	Mau Mau	Career	Total
Nairobi County	40 - 59 years	3	1		1	
	60 – 79 years			3	2	
	80 years old and above	3	2			
Nyeri County	40 – 59 years	3	2		2	
	60 – 79 years		1		1	
	80 years old and above	3		3		
TOTAL		12	6	6	6	30

A total of thirty (30) women gave their Oral testimonies, fifteen (15) of whom were from Nyeri and fifteen (15) from Nairobi. Five types of women were selected, namely: women aged eighty years and above (80+), women who had been in the African Freedom movement, career women, women in leadership, and post-independence women (forty to fifty-nine). The age distribution was as follows: twelve women were from the eight and older (80+) age group, six women were aged sixty to seventy-nine (60 – 79) and twelve women were aged forty to fifty-nine (40 to 59). The Sixty to seventy-nine age group only represented twenty percent (20%) of the Oral testimonies because they were the one group that did not have a special category. The eighty years and older (80+) women were the traditional women category and most of the women in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) category were from this age group. The forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) generation were of the post-independence category and most of the career women came from this age group.

Table 4: Respondent Age Groups \_ Face – to – Face Questionnaires

COUNTIES	FACE-TO-FACE QUESTIONNAIRES			
	40 – 59	60 – 79	80 years +	TOTAL
Nairobi County	19			60
		18		
			23	
Nyeri County	26			60
		19		
			15	
TOTAL	45	37	38	120

One hundred and twenty (120) women were interviewed using the Face– to–Face Questionnaires of whom sixty (60) in Nyeri and sixty (60) in Nairobi. Out of one hundred and twenty (120) women, thirty-eight (38) were aged eighty years and above (80+), thirty-eight (38) were aged sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) and forty-four (44) were aged forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59). It was expected that twenty (20) women from each age group and County would be interviewed but more women were interviewed of the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) group because they were more accessible.

In terms of population size versus respondent size, the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group was the largest population in both counties especially in Nairobi but the researcher tried to make the sample size equally distributed among the three age groups. The lowest population group was sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) both in Nairobi and particularly in Nyeri County and, as a result, fifteen out of the expected twenty women were interviewed in Nyeri there. In Nairobi, the eighty years and older (80+) age group represented the largest sample group because they were more accessible as they had social networks either through their women's organizations, organizations for the elderly or the church.

The eighty years and older (80+) generation represented the smallest population group in both Nairobi and Nyeri counties. This underlines the importance of recording their perspectives because they are the last living holders of traditional knowledge, history and tradition. Many of the respondents in this age category felt that they would go to the grave having never shared important cultural information with today's generation. They were frustrated because of the younger generation's lack of value for the information they carried and lack of time to listen and learn. In fact, women across the three age categories agreed that today's Gikuyu women had abandoned the traditional values of their people because their culture had progressively been diluted by modern life. If we are to salvage Gikuyu culture, how do we connect this five percent (5%) of the elderly population who have the cultural knowledge to the majority who don't even know they need it?

According to the Kenya Bureau of Statistics, the life expectancy in Nyeri County is sixty-five (65) years for women and sixty-four (64) for men. The life expectancy for women above sixty (60) years is seventy-eight (78) years for women and seventy-nine (79) years for men. In Nairobi County, the life expectancy for men and women in Nairobi County was sixty-eight (68) years old. For women above sixty (60) years, their life expectancy went up to seventy-eight (78) years old and for men of the same age, it was seventy-nine (79) years old. This implies that women above sixty (60) were not expected to live beyond seventy-eight (78)

years old. This means that the eighty years and older (80+) represented a small minority of their generation. Women below sixty (60) years were not expected to live beyond sixty-four (64) years old, which shows that women’s life expectancies have dropped by fourteen (14) years between the two generations.

### 3.2.2. Marital Status of Respondents

In the Oral testimonies, eighty percent (80%) of the thirty (30) women interviewed were married. Only two women had never been married, two had been divorced and the other two were separated. The two women who were divorced came from the youngest age category; forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59), whereas the two women who were separated were from Nairobi, one was from the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) age category and the other one from the eighty years and older (80+) age category. One of the divorced ladies was from Nairobi and the other from Nyeri. Of the two women who never married, one was a women’s leader in her forties; the other was a member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). Both women had children, however.

In the Face – to – Face Questionnaires, just under half the women interviewed were married; a total of forty-eight percent (48%). All age groups had single women although there were slightly more single women in Nyeri over all; at fifteen percent (15%), as compared to Nairobi at twelve percent (12%). Only three percent (3%) of the one hundred and twenty (120) women who participated in the face-to-face questionnaires were divorced. All the women who were divorced were from Nairobi: two were from the youngest study age group forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) and one each from the Sixty to seventy-nine and women who were eighty years old and older (80+) age groups respectively. This implies that women living in urban centres were more likely to get divorced than those living in rural areas.

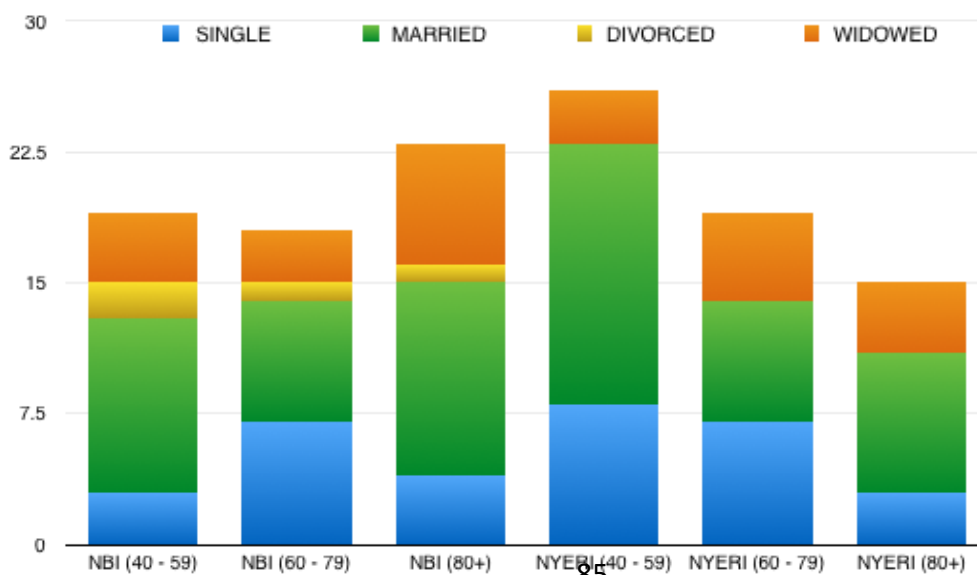


Figure 5: Respondent Age Groups \_ Face – to – Face Questionnaires

The majority of widowed women were from the eighty years and older (80+) generation from Nairobi and who had been involved in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). Many of their husbands were killed during the Kenya Land and Freedom war. The middle age group, sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) had an equal number of single and married women. This was in contrast to the other two age groups, forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) and eighty years and older (80+), respectively, where a larger number of women were married.

Ironically, all the women who were single, divorced, or separated, gave basic information for their 'spouse' in the bio data. It was not until they were asked about their spouse's social gender roles that it was revealed that they were in fact single, widowed or separated. This shows how having a partner was perceived to be important by the women. For a single woman, for example, to say she is single and then proceed on to give details of her partner's age, occupation, level of education, points at conflicting perceptions of self. It may also be because she was widowed but saw herself as single.

### 3.2.3. Level of Education

The graph below depicts the level of education for each generation in both counties. The data on the respondent's level of education, revealed a steady progression towards more education from the 1930s to today.

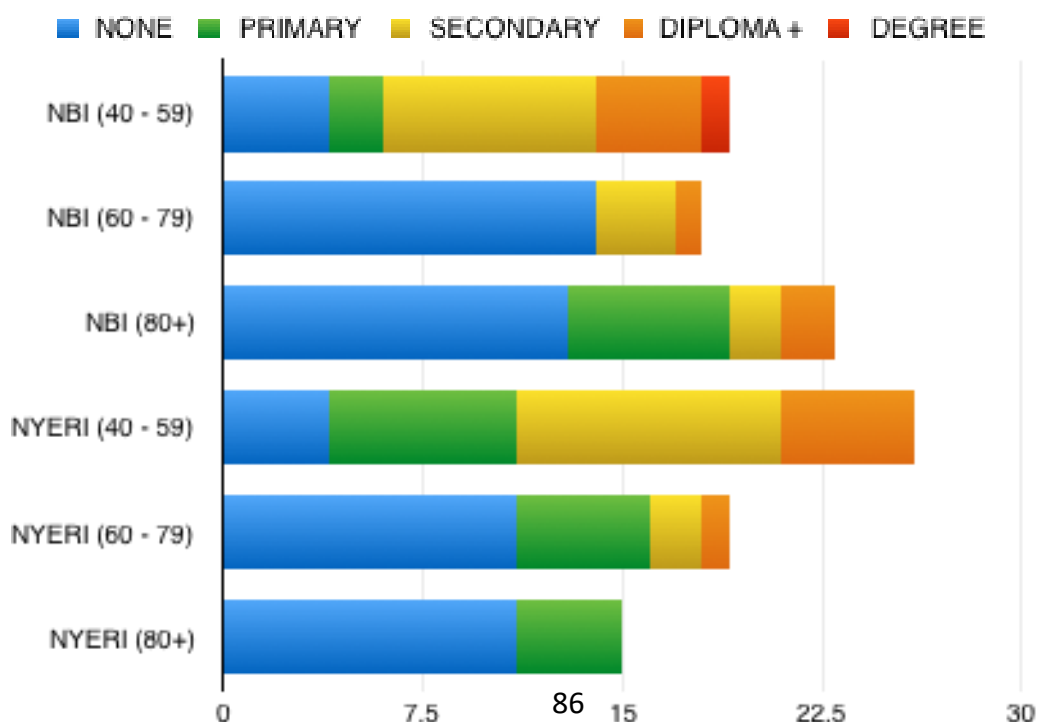


Figure 6: Respondent's Level of Education (Face-to-Face Questionnaire)

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) and eighty years and older (80+) years age groups had the highest number of uneducated women. Sixty-three per cent of the eighty years and older (80+) generation, fifty-six percent (56%) in Nairobi and seventy-three percent (73%) in Nyeri were uneducated. In the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation, sixty-three (63%) of the respondents never received any education; seventy-eight percent (78%) in Nairobi and 58% in Nyeri) suggesting that even the sixty to seventy-nine did not have much access to educational opportunities. In both age groups, more women from Nyeri received an education than those from Nairobi which confirms what the literature says about Nyeri County being a pioneer region for education where schools were established by the missionaries as early as in 1906.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group also had the highest number of women with a secondary school education. Forty percent of the women in this age group received a secondary school level education with forty-two percent (42%) of them from Nairobi and thirty-eight percent (38%) from Nyeri. One can conclude that this is because higher levels of education became more available after independence. According to Eddah Gachukia,

Only 25 percent of children were enrolled in primary school in 1960 in Sub-Saharan Africa with twice as many boys as girls attending primary school. By 1980 over 60 per cent were enrolled (Gachukia, 2004:2).

Only one woman had a degree. She was in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age category, from Nairobi.

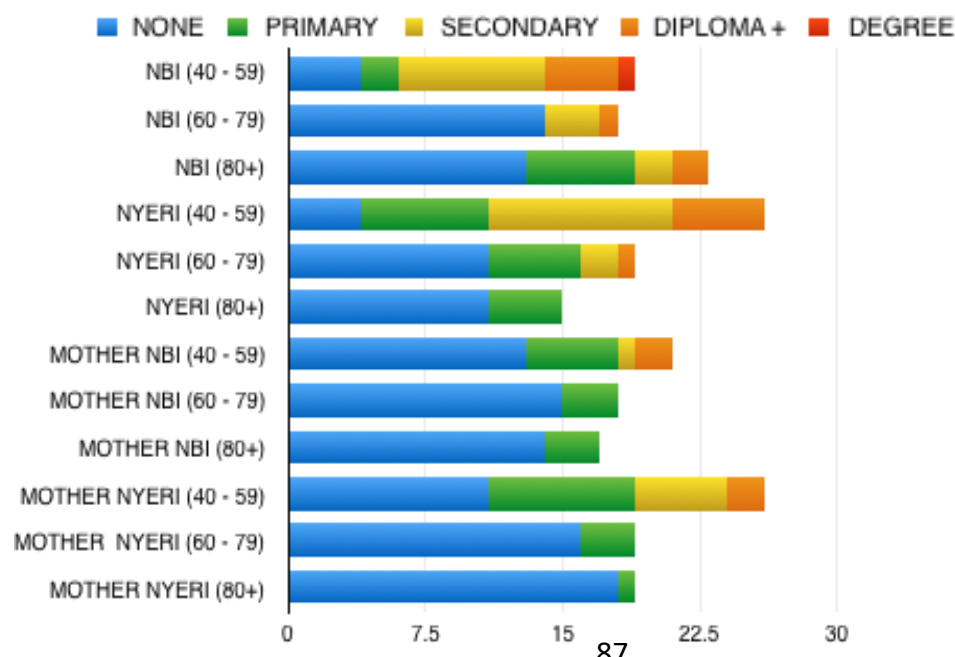


Figure 7: Comparing Respondent's Education to Her Mother's

The majority of mothers across the age groups were uneducated. There were more uneducated mothers in Nairobi than in Nyeri, particularly in the mothers of the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) age group. In this particular age group, more mothers in Nyeri had a secondary school education in comparison to their Nairobi counterpart. The four mothers who had diplomas were mothers of the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) age group, two from Nairobi and two from Nyeri.

According to the literature, education started entering Gikuyu land at the time of the women who are now above eighty years old which would be at around 1910. While Nairobi is more urban than Nyeri, Nyeri County was a pioneer County when it came to education. Two of the first ten schools to open in Kenya were opened in Nyeri County, namely *Tumutumu* Mission School, now *Tumutumu* Girls High School which was opened in 1908, and *Thogoto* School which was opened in 1910 (Nthamburi, 1991).

The table below looks at the level of education of the women interviewed as well as their spouse's, mother's and father's education. The respondents' education level was compared to that of their spouses, mothers and fathers.

*Table 5: Level of Education of Respondent, Her Spouse, Mother and Father*

Education Level		Women's Education					Education Spouse					Mother's Education					Father's Education				
COUNTY	Age Group	None	Primary	Secondary	Diploma +	Degree	None	Primary	Secondary	Diploma +	Degree	None	Primary	Secondary	Diploma +	Degree	None	Primary	Secondary	Diploma +	Degree
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Nairobi	40-59	21	11	42	21	5	47	16	32	5	0	68	26	5	0	0	74	21	5	0	0
	60-79	78	0	17	6	0	39	39	11	11	0	83	17	0	0	0	67	33	0	0	0
	80+	73	26	9	9	0	57	35	4	4	0	87	13	0	0	0	87	13	0	0	0
Nyeri	40-59	15	27	38	19	0	30	20	40	10	0	42	31	19	8	0	54	23	19	0	0
	60-79	58	2	11	5	0	54	31	8	0	8	84	16	0	0	0	68	32	0	0	0
	80+	57	27	0	0	0	72	18	9	0	0	93	7	0	0	0	93	7	0	13	0
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>48</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

The majority of the respondents, their spouse and their parents had no education and this is very visible in figure 3.4 below. The respondents' parents had a higher frequency of people with no education. Only twenty-six percent (26%) of the respondents' parents were educated, as compared to sixty percent (60%) of their spouses. This may be indicative of men having

more access to education than women. None of the respondents' parents had a degree and only one spouse had a degree. He the husband of a respondent from the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) age group, from Nyeri.

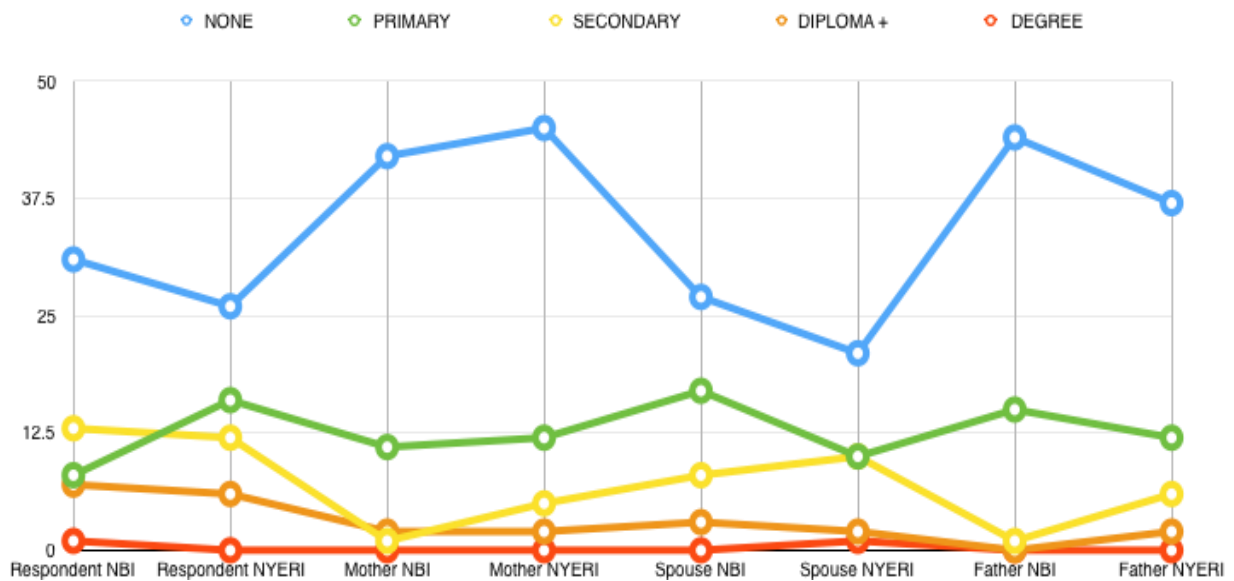


Figure 8: Level of Education Women, and their Spouse, Mother & Father

Only 6 out of the one hundred and twenty (120) fathers had a secondary school education. Only one was from Nairobi, the other five were from Nyeri. All of them were fathers of respondents from the youngest age group, forty to fifty-nine (40 – 59) years. The two fathers who had diplomas were fathers of women who were eighty years old and older (80+) respondents, both from Nyeri, and were probably beneficiaries of the first educational opportunities brought by the missionaries to Nyeri in the early 1900s.

### 3.2.4 Occupation

The most frequent occupation across age groups was farming. The eighty years and older year old respondents had the highest number of farmers, although there were more farmers in Nyeri than in Nairobi. The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group from Nyeri had far more women in business than any other age group. There were no respondents engaged in business from both the eighty years and older (80+) old women from Nyeri or the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old from Nairobi.

There was a high number of women who considered themselves to be unemployed across the age groups because they could not find casual work to make money on a regular basis. Overall, there were more women who did not have productive roles in Nairobi than in Nyeri, particularly the women from the eighty years and older (80+) generation. This was surprising



because although they were past the average retirement age, they still perceived themselves as being unemployed.

*Table 6: Respondent's Occupation Compared to Mother*

COUNTY	Age Group	RESPONDENT'S OCCUPATION					MOTHER'S OCCUPATION				
		Unemployed	Employed	Farmer	Business	Other	Unemployed	Employed	Farmer	Business	Other
Nairobi	40 – 59	5	2	6	2	4	2	3	8	0	6
	60 – 79	6	5	5	0	2	1	6	2	0	4
	80 years +	8	4	7	1	3	3	4	10	0	6
Nyeri	40 – 59	3	5	6	11	1	2	5	12	0	7
	60 – 79	5	1	7	2	4	2	2	11	0	4
	80 years +	3	1	10	0	1	10	3	10	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29</b>

From the table above, we see that none of the respondents' mothers had their own business. This comes as no surprise since the respondents' mothers were born before the colonial market system had been established or before and the literature establishes that there was no such thing as business at that time as we know it today. The majority of the respondents' mothers were farmers and many of their daughters followed in their footsteps.

When it came to unemployment, it was interesting to note that more than half of the eighty years and older (80+) respondents perceived their mothers to have been unemployed since there was no real employment in their mothers' time. This points to what the women's perception and value is for the work they did around the house.

The data also looked at the women's occupation compared to their husbands. The respondents' spouse had the highest frequency of employment followed by the respondents' father. Overall more men were employed than women, implying that it was easier for men to get employed than women. The respondents had a higher frequency of unemployment than their husbands. There were more farmers, among the respondents' parents than there were either for the respondent or her spouse. This illustrates a shift from farming to other forms of work, especially regarding the respondents and their mothers.

### 3.2.5 Children

Below is a table of the number of boys, girls, and overall children that the respondents had by generation and county.

*Table 7: Number of Children by Age Group (Face – to – Face Questionnaire)*

County	Age Category	NUMBER OF GIRLS, BOYS & CHILDREN														
		0 Girls	1 – 2 Girls	3 - 4 Girls	5 – 6 Girls	7 – 8 Girls	0 Boys	1 – 2 Boys	3 - 4 Boys	5 – 6 Boys	7 – 8 Boys	0 Children	1 – 2 Children	3 - 4 Children	5 – 6 Children	7 – 8 Children
Nairobi	40 – 59	3	10	4	2	0	4	7	6	2	0	4	9	5	1	0
	60 – 79	0	5	9	4	0	5	3	7	3	0	3	3	8	2	2
	women above 80	1	9	8	4	1	1	10	7	2	3	2	10	7	2	2
Nyeri	40 – 59	2	22	0	2	0	5	13	5	2	1	4	17	3	1	1
	60 - 79	0	10	4	3	2	3	4	8	3	1	2	7	6	2	2
	women above 80	2	4	7	1	1	1	5	3	5	1	0	5	5	2	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

The highest number of respondents had one to two children; followed by three to four children. Half of the respondents had one to two girls in their family. The majority of women in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation received an education and they were also the majority of women who had two children. The data shows that as women got more education they started having fewer children. The Sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79), age group had the highest number of respondents with seven to eight children; five from Nairobi and three from Nyeri.

### 3.2.6 Summary

This section looked at the demographic data of the women interviewed. It looked at the respondents' age distribution, marital status, the number of children they have, their education levels, and occupation. Half of the women considered themselves to be single even though they may have been divorced, or separated. The data revealed that from 1900 to 2000, a growing number of women receive some education and they have also started having fewer children. The majority of the women were farmers.

### **3.3 Women's Social Gender Roles**

This section looks at how the respondents perceived women's individual social gender roles and correlates women's generational perspectives of their social gender roles by comparing their social gender roles to those of their grandmothers, mothers, daughters and granddaughters.

#### **3.3.1. Reproductive Roles**

According to Caroline Moser reproductive roles were naturally considered to be women's roles because women gave birth to children and then went on nurturing and caring for that child. Moser defined reproductive roles as:

The reproductive role comprises the childbearing/rearing responsibilities and domestic tasks undertaken by women, required to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force. It includes not only biological reproduction but also the care and maintenance of the workforce (husband and working children) and the future workforce (infants and school-going children (Moser, 2012:58).

##### **3.3.1.1 The Respondents' Perception of Reproductive Roles**

Cooking was one of the major reproductive roles for women across their lifetime. Peninah Kiretu (76) remembers being left alone at home from a very young age to watch over the cooking. *"I was the first born, so my mother and father misused me. I used to be left at home when they went to their respective jobs to ensure that nobody left the homestead. I was also responsible in ensuring that the boiling pot cooked properly without topping up the water"*, she reveals.

In her oral testimony, Ruth Mwaniki (50), revealed that her main tasks in the house was cleaning. *"As a girl my main responsibility was cleaning the house, cleaning clothes, and other house chores. We grew up on the farm and dad was away during the week so mum managed the farm and us girls helped her around the house"*, she said. The table below displays the percentage of women who were responsible for the seven leading reproductive roles, namely: cooking, cleaning the house, fetching water, fetching firewood, taking care of siblings, working on the family *shamba* and looking after goats and cows.

Table 8: Women's Reproductive Roles Across Their Lifetime

REPRODUCTIVE ROLES	COUNTY	Age group	Cooking		Cleaning the House		Fetching Water		Fetching Firewood		Siblings		Family Shamba		Goats & Cows	
Girls	Nairobi	40-59 (19)	19	100%	18	95%	19	100%	17	89%	13	68%	9	47%	5	26%
		60-79 (18)	18	100%	17	94%	17	94%	18	100%	14	78%	8	44%	4	22%
		80+ (23)	23	100%	22	96%	23	100%	23	100%	22	96%	9	39%	3	13%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20%</b>
	Nyeri	40-59 (26)	26	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	96%	18	69%	14	54%	4	15%
		60-79 (19)	18	95%	19	100%	18	95%	19	100%	10	53%	11	58%	2	11%
		80+ (15)	15	100%	15	100%	15	100%	13	87%	8	53%	7	47%	3	20%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15%</b>
	Women	Nairobi	40-59 (19)	17	89%	17	89%	14	74%	16	84%	2	11%	8	42%	8
60-79 (18)			17	94%	17	94%	17	94%	17	94%	4	22%	8	44%	5	28%
80+ (23)			23	100%	23	100%	21	91%	23	100%	2	9%	9	39%	5	22%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30%</b>
Nyeri		40-59 (26)	23	88%	23	88%	22	85%	21	81%	3	12%	13	50%	4	15%
		60-79 (19)	19	100%	19	100%	18	95%	19	100%	4	21%	11	58%	2	11%
		80+ (15)	14	93%	14	93%	14	93%	12	80%	0	0%	6	40%	2	13%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13%</b>
As Grand Mothers		Nairobi	40-59 (19)	17	89%	19	100%	14	74%	1	5%	11	58%	13	68%	6
	60-79 (18)		16	89%	12	67%	11	61%	12	67%	14	78%	11	61%	7	39%
	80+ (23)		21	91%	16	70%	16	70%	13	57%	12	52%	15	65%	10	43%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38%</b>
	Nyeri	40-59 (26)	24	92%	26	100%	16	62%	19	73%	16	62%	20	77%	17	65%
		60-79 (19)	19	100%	17	89%	10	53%	14	74%	11	58%	13	68%	8	42%
		80+ (15)	14	93%	12	80%	10	67%	10	67%	7	47%	11	73%	5	33%
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>57</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>50%</b>

*I used to do a lot of housework as a girl, mainly sweeping and washing utensils so that my mother could access her capabilities and pursue her talents”, she explained. For Maria Wangui, 84 years, one of her main tasks when she was a girl was to fetch water. All girls did this so as to help their mothers with their work. “When I started understanding things, I would go to the river to fetch water. But before then, I would go to school. When I got older, I would go pick firewood. I also swept the house, cooked and cleaned the utensils, whatever I could do to ease the burden from my mother,” she explained. Lucy Macharia, (81) also fetched water from the river. “Part of my role as a girl was fetching water (Gutaha Mai) and fetching firewood. I did this work out of obedience to my parents she said.” Miriam Wambugu also fetched water from the river with jerry cans. In her oral testimony, Mary Munyeki (76) said that her primary task was fetching water and firewood because this was the work for children. “As a girl my many jobs were fetching water and cutting firewood because I grew in in Nyeri and this was the work for children”, she notes.*

Taking care of siblings was an important reproductive role for girls. Veronica Nyawira (84), said she mainly took care of her younger siblings and younger children. *“My primary role in the homestead was to take care for small children. I would just stay in the house with the little ones aged five to six years, making the house cleaning. When I wasn’t doing this, I used to sweep and fetch water”, she said explaining that she did this work to help her mother.*

In her oral testimony, Lucy Njoki, (57) from Nairobi County, said she spent her time looking after her siblings because her mother had a career and was away from the home a lot. *“Looking after my young siblings was my main job because my mother was busy running her business. I took care of my younger brothers, cooking for them, washing them and babysitting them”, she explained. When she had a free moment, she helped her mother to clean the house. Patricia Waithera was responsible for her younger brother and taking care of him was her main task in the home. Peninah Kiretu reveals that she always had to carry her younger sister around. “I was always followed by my younger sister. I assisted with carrying her around. In everything we did, I carried her”, she said.*

According to their oral testimonies, both Veronica Kirigo, (86) and Tabitha Nderu, (86) primarily worked on the family *shamba* as girls and would fetch water and firewood when this work was done. Veronica said she did the work so that she could help her mother, whereas Tabitha perceived it as a girl’s work. Flora Nyumbura, (83), on the other hand, worked on the family *shamba* and took care of her family’s goats because, *“household chores*

*were very few because didn't have many utensils or things so my work was mainly on the family shamba.”*

The only time a girl's reproductive roles changed was when she started attending school. According to Mrs. Githinji (82), *“There were two types of girls: those that went to school, who were the minority and those who had no leisure time but worked 24/7”*. Respondents of the Oral testimonies, who had had a chance to receive some education, echoed these sentiments. Most girls who went beyond the basic education, lived in missions, or went to missionary boarding schools where studying and reading took the place of their reproductive chores.

In the oral testimonies of the eighty years and older (80+) age group we see that only two girls went to school. Margaret Githinji from Nairobi went up to class seven and Maria Wangui went to up to class two. In those days, however, the majority of the girls did not get a chance to go to school because their fathers linked giving a girl education to prostitution. Esther Murugi (87) from Nyeri County notes that *“Our Father refused to send us to school because he believed that sending girls to school was equal to sending her to prostitution”*. Many of the eighty years and older (80+) women from both Nairobi and Nyeri, confirm what Esther said. Flora Nyumbura (83) explained that girls were denied a chance to go to school because it would not be of economic benefit. The literature confirms that, *“Traditional attitudes towards marriage that view investment in girls' education as “watering another man's garden” – after all any benefits will go to another family!”* (Gachukia, 2004)

But contrary to their fathers' opinions, research shows that educating a girl has the power to transform her entire community. According to Eddah Gachukia in *Accelerating the Education of Girls and Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Development Imperative* (2004),

The education of girls is today widely recognized as the most effective development investment a country can make. Girls' education raises economic productivity, reduces fertility rates, lowers infant and maternal mortality, improves the health, nutrition and well-being of families, and ensures better prospects of education for children. It promotes sound management of environmental resources and is closely associated with the reduction of poverty, by enabling women's absorption into the economy as employees and in self-employment. Education increases the participation of women in community and national affairs and in the democratization of societies

(Gachukia, 2004:10).

In Nairobi County, Sarah Njeri (82) explained that she never got a chance to go to school because her mother died when she was young. *“My mother died when I was young so I went to live with my Aunt (father’s sister) who was very mean to me and made me do all the housework, while her daughters went to school.”* Sarah Njeri never got a chance to go to school because her Mother was not alive.

The forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) generation was the only age group where the majority of women went to school. Ruth Mwaniki said she went to school but they still worked hard on the family *shamba* when they were not in school. Olive Njambi said that all she did was school because her parents were very traditional and strict. *“School was the only activity we did outside the house. We were restricted to being in the house and even having friends over was a problem”*, she reveals. Susan Waithera, a forty-one-year-old lawyer from Nairobi, was the only respondent who said she never had any reproductive roles. *“We had a cook and a house help so we did no reproductive chores growing up”*. This was because both of her parents had good paying, white collars jobs.

Women across all three age groups were forced to bear the burden of all reproductive roles, regardless of their health or opinion. As a young woman, eight-four-year-old (84) Veronica Nyawira’s primary role was to clean her parent’s house. She also helped her mother cook so that she could learn how to take care of her own home one day. *“My mother made sure I learnt how to take care of a home when I was growing up because she wanted to help me prepare for a better future,”* she explained. Women usually lived in their parent’s house and performed the same reproductive roles until they got married. Tabitha Nderu, (85) lived with her parents until she got married at the age of thirty-five (35). Her main role in the home was to keep the house clean and sometime she would help her mother cook.

Esther Murugi (87) said that as a young woman, she continued with her reproductive chores in her parents’ house because she had not been educated and there was not much else she could do apart from wait to be married. When she got married, Esther’s husband bought a farm and she became the farm manager. Most of her reproductive work was farming.

Maria Wangui (84) said she also continued her reproductive chores because it was still not widely accepted for single women to work. *“It was not common in that time for young women to engage in productive roles so I just continued with the same work I had done as a girl, helping my mother around the house.”*

As a girl, Grace Wairimu (70) did not work on the family *shamba* but she helped her mother take care of the family's goats and pigs. She said, *"I was in school but I helped my mum with the pigs and also milked cows because I was the only one who knew how"*. Virginia Gitau also took care of herded cows because they were an all-girls family. *"My main task was herding cows but I also took care of household chores. Girls did both girls and boys chores because we had no brothers"*, she explained.

As a young woman, Grace Wairimu (70), was living in a colonial village during the Freedom war. She assisted her mother to carry the vegetables from the *shamba*. *"We lived in the colonial villages and we had a kitchen garden where I helped my mother carry produce from the shamba. We only went once a week because the farm was close to the Aberdares and we had to go with security"*, she explained.

In their oral testimonies several respondents from the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation said that as young women they reduced their house chores or stopped them altogether because they developed an attitude. *"I stopped doing my regular chores, because there was a behaviour change and I thought I was grown up,"* said Anne Wanja Thairu (46).

Susan Waithera also did very little house work because she was in law school and hired a house help. *"I studied Law in Makerere University. I had a child when I was 14 so I kept a home while I attended classes but I had a house help to assist me with the housework. She cleaned the house, cooked and took care of my son while I was in school"*, she explained.

As a young woman, Ruth Mwaniki (50), was attending the University of Nairobi but whenever she visited her parents, she would cook. *"Whenever I was home it was my duty to cook. It was expected of me. I was duty bound, even if I was in University"*, she explained.

Patricia Waithera (50) was also in University but when she went home, she used to cook and clean the dishes. *"Once I was in University, I did less housework because I refused to do it. I had a bit of an attitude and I never enjoyed it. I mainly washed the dishes and cooked"*, she said.

Later when Patricia got married, she cooked for six years because she enjoyed it and her husband insisted on her cooking. She hired a house help to do the rest of the work. Once she had her children, however, she stopped cooking and started caring for her two daughters. Her narrative implies that while Patricia rebelled against the reproductive roles women were expected to perform in the home, she nonetheless cooked once she got married, because her



husband expected it of her. This implies that women's perspectives of their reproductive roles are influenced by their husband's expectations.

Rose Wairimu Kamau also did very little housework because she was pregnant. *"I was expectant by the time I was in form 4. My husband was in the navy so he travelled a lot. I was left with the responsibility of building and furnishing our home. There was not much work I did apart from supervising the construction. Besides, I did not know how to look after the cattle, only how to cook and clean"*, she explained.

Jane Wambui Ngang'a (50) explains that she became pregnant in form four and moved into her own home where she was responsible for all the housework. *"I was expectant but I did the normal housework. I used to wake up at three am to milk the cows, fetch firewood cook and feed my husband. There was nobody else to do this work as I was newly married. I also wanted to impress my husband and become economically stable,"* she explained.

Jane Wairimu Ngang'a, (48) however, said that when she first got married, she used to do all the house work. But when she got pregnant her husband agreed for them to hire a house help to assist her around the house. Anne Thairu (46) said she controlled all the house work because this was a woman's responsibility. Jane Wachira also said she did most of the work because that was her duty as a woman. *"I did what a normal woman does: clean the house, cook, take kids through homework, take care of my husband"*, she explained.

Jane Wambui Maigwa (48) also considered raising her children as the primary role she performed in the house. *"When I got married, supporting my husband in bringing up the family was my main role in the home because we had workers to do the rest. I ensured that I instilled discipline and values in all my 5 children"*, she explained

As a wife, Rose Wairimu (50) lived with her mother-in-law because her husband worked for the Navy and was away for extended periods of time. She did not have to work for money because her husband always financially supported her, but she did help out her mother-in-law on the farm. *"When I was living with my mother in law, I was given the responsibility of taking care of her calf. I had to go to the river to cut grass for the calf but I didn't know how to because I had grown up in a home where girls only cooked and cleaned"*, she explained.

As grandmothers, nine out of the eleven, women in the eight years and above (80+) age group interviewed were widows and they had chosen never to remarry. Half of them still did their reproductive chores. Tabitha Nderu (85) Flora Nyambura (83) and Margaret Githinji (82) all lived on their own and did the daily reproductive chores for themselves. They had young

ladies who came to help them do the general cleaning once a week. “*I relax and cook for myself and eat. I still wash my own clothes and clean the house*”, explained Flora Nyumbura. Mary Mwihaki, (77) did all the housework as a grandmother because she lived alone. She did get help from young people in her extended family, once in a while. Jane Wambui Ngang’a (48) and Susan Waithera (41) were both divorced and therefore, all the responsibilities of their home and children fell on them.

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old women were very involved in the lives of their grandchildren. Peninah Kiretu (76), Florence Mwihaki (79), and Mary Munyeki (78), all took care of their grandchildren. Several women in the forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) age group reported in their oral testimonies that they were supporting their grandchildren. Lucy Njoki (50) paid school fees for her grandchildren because her own children were not financially stable. Mellina Kamoche (43) also spent a lot of time with her grandchildren instructing them on the correct behaviour because she wanted them to have a bright future.

As grandmothers, half of the women in the eighty years and older (80+) generation did no reproductive work. Muthoni Likimani (90) did no house chores but she still cooked because she enjoyed doing it. Lucy Macharia, Miriam Wambugu, and Sarah Njeri all did nothing. Veronica Kirigo was not involved in any reproductive work but she supervised and gave orders to the house helps she had. Veronica Nyawira (84) was the only woman who took care of her grandchildren.

As a grandmother Virginia Gitau (79) did nothing around the house because of her poor health. Njeri Mburu (77) had assistance around the house but she reared some chicken in her home for sale. Grace Wairimu (70) did no work at her home because she supervised the farm she owned. In the forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) generation, the majority of women in the age group were not yet grandparents. They all had house helps who assisted them with their house chores.

### **3.3.1.2. Generational Perspectives of Women’s Reproductive Roles**

The results from the face-to-face questionnaires showed that the majority of the women performed all the reproductive roles across the three generations. All the respondents engaged in the same activities throughout their lifetime, namely: cooking, cleaning the house, fetching water from the river, fetching firewood from the forest, taking care of younger siblings, and working on the family *shamba* (small farm).

According to the eighty years and older (80+) age group women, their own grandmothers had less work to do within the home than they themselves did because everything - the goats, the *shamba*, etc. - was within the homestead. Some of their grandmothers also supported polygamous unions. Tabitha's grandmother only had 2 children because she had many miscarriages and so she encouraged her daughters and granddaughters to get married. She also encouraged Tabitha's father to marry 4 wives and he ended up having 26 children in total.

They believed that their grandmothers lived healthier lives than they did because they were peasant farmers and grew all the food for their families. They lived very long lives and according to their granddaughters, they never got sick. "They lived long, over one hundred and thirty years (130). My grandmother was close to that when she died," said Tabitha Nderu. Margaret Githinji explained that there were no diseases in her grandmother's time because they lived simple lives and had a simple diet.

One big difference in their reproductive roles is the way their grandmothers lived. Mary Mwihaki notes that her grandmother slept with the goats in the same house whereas by the time she herself was born, the goats had their own shed. "*In cucu's (grandmother) time, they all slept together so that the goats were not eaten by wild animals. The goats would have their own area in the middle of the hut and their grandmother and her children had their own area, and there was a place for cooking*", she explained.

Peninah Kiretu, (76) remembered her grandmother as a traditionalist. "*She was very active and clean in the home*", she recalls adding that her grandmother never even sat down and relaxed. She only remembered seeing her grandmother working within her homestead. She never saw her grandmother leaving the homestead except on the day she got married. "*Cucu is the one who came to my wedding since my mother refused to come because I was marrying a man who was taking alcohol*" said Peninah.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) cohort women perceived their grandmothers as having a very strong work ethic. Rose Wairimu (50) said that the women in their grandmothers' generation were hard workers and they never complained about any of the work they did inside the home or on the *shamba* or even about doing more work than their husbands. For Susan Waithera the biggest difference in her home life compared to her grandmother's is the location where lives. Her grandmother does not have tapped water or access to electricity and gas for cooking.

What Patricia Waithera, remembers most about her grandmother's generation is that tremendous value was placed on being a hard worker, particularly in the home. Olive Njambi believed that she has the same responsibilities that her grandmother had because women's role at home had remained the same. The only difference between them was the number of children women have today. While her grandmother had 9 children, she only has one.

One thing that Margaret Githinji from Nairobi remembers of her mother's time is that food was plentiful. *"My mother didn't have much hardship because food was available and plentiful. Anyone could eat when hungry, there were no protocols"*, explained Margaret. Tabitha Nderu notes that while they didn't have money to go to school or buy things, they always had food. *"Our mothers worked long hours on the farm and therefore, food was available and plentiful. Anyone could eat when hungry, there were no protocols"*, recalls Tabitha.

Grace Wairimu (70) believes her mother's life was not as difficult as hers. Grace's mother just stayed at home and didn't have to earn a living. Her father was the sole provider. She believes their lives were also easier because they had big *shambas* and could grow enough food to feed their families. This is not the case today, however, because *shambas* have become so small and many people do not even have land. *"Our mothers had big shamba but in our time the shambas got smaller and smaller and so the women had to plan how to grow enough food for their whole families from the small shambas"*, said Grace.

Peninah Kiretu (76) remembers her mother as being completely dependent on her father. She did not have her own money and was not in control of her life. Her primary activity was cooking, cleaning and taking care of the households. Njeri Mburu (77) concurred with Peninah, noting that her mother was also completely dependent on her family. She was not free to move around and only left the homestead to work on the *shamba*. Her father would drive her mother to the *shamba* every day and drive back home in the evening; she never learnt how to drive a car because that was not a woman's place. She never left her homestead for any other reason.

Susan Waithera viewed her mother as being privileged. Her mother grew up in the village; she had workers and did not do any chores inside or outside the house. She was even able to continue her studies after she was married because Susan's father was not very traditional.

*My mum was privileged she grew up in the village setting but as a wife she had workers – a cook, a house help and a shamba boy. She had a lot of*

*comfort and a stable marriage life. My dad was not very traditional because he was educated and exposed; he had a degree. He encouraged my mum to study and improve herself and she was able to get a diploma while she was married,* said Susan.

She believed her mother was very lucky to have a husband that supported her and treated her well and always sought her opinion. Ironically, Susan married a very traditional man who was the complete opposite of her father and the marriage ended up in divorce.

One of the big differences between the eighty years and older (80+) women and their daughters, explained Veronica Kirigo, was that today their daughters have house helps to do the house work for them. Sarah Njeri (82) added that while they worked so hard in the home, their daughters now have help that they can pay for. Flora Nyambura (83) also from Nairobi, said one reason their daughters don't like doing housework is because of their manicured nails, which were unheard of in their time. This demonstrates the extent to which their daughters have immersed themselves in modern, western life.

Esther Murugi explained that while they did not have house helps, the community organized itself in such a way that women helped each other, especially through their children.

*During our time, there was a group of children who would visit me. For example, my sister's children would come and dig for me and my children would also go to my sister's house and dig for her. Moreover, even with the small cents one had could employ a helper. Fetching the water also cost money if you had a child on your back who was crying for attention,* said Esther.

She is the only woman from the eighty years and older (80+) generation to mention the possibility of hiring people to do reproductive work in their time.

One thing that Maria Wangui (84) mentioned was the willingness of their daughter's generation to pass on their parental responsibilities to their mothers. In her time, people never took their children to their mothers; in fact, they never left their children with anybody. She only had one daughter herself but she has become a mother once again in her old age because her daughter is not responsible enough. *“When my daughter has a lot of work or if she wants to pursue a course in something, she brings her children to me. She is more involved in the outside world, in the church and in the community, than she is with her own home,”* said Maria.

The 60 -79 women viewed their daughters as still having the same reproductive roles. Mary Mwihaki said that her daughter is still as hardworking as she was. *My daughters' reproductive work is still very good; they are very clean.* Njeri Mburu explained that her daughter is very active and clean in her home. *"We basically did the same work in the home"*, said Njeri.

Florence Mwihaki (79) agreed with Njeri Mburu (77) that her daughters still do reproductive work even though they had house helps. Her daughters still cooked for their families and one of them cleaned around the house on Sundays when she has her off day. For Virginia Gitau, however, her daughter did not do any reproductive work because she had a house help. *"I did more work at home than my daughters because they can hire someone to do the work for them"*, said Virginia.

For Grace Wairimu (70) the biggest difference between her and her daughters at home is that they are not satisfied with what they have and they always desire more things. Grace said,

*My daughter has a lot of work in her home because they are competing with their friends. When she goes to her friend's house, she said 'my house must look like my friends', so there's a lot of competition. Me, on the other hand, I am satisfied with what I have because there is nobody I am competing with. But that is life.*

Jane Wairimu Ngang'a (49) said that her teenage daughters are very lazy because of house helps and do not like doing any house work. Anne Thairu (46) said that her daughters also avoided housework. Lucy Njoki (57) believed her granddaughters have a better life than she did but they are not active enough at home. Whenever she visits her daughter or they come to visit her, all her grandchildren want to do is sit in front of the TV. *"We used to play a lot more than them, they sit in front of the TV all the time,"* said Lucy, adding that this is another reason they are frequently failing sick, as they never go outside and play.

In summary, the women's perspectives demonstrated just how overburdened women were with their reproductive roles, which also consumed most of their time. The literature confirmed that women's reproductive roles were *"...petty, isolated and monotonous and requires virtually unending hours of work, much of it hard and unrewarding. It is highly labour intensive but at the same time unpaid"* (Rogers, 2005 p.15). She added that women's reproductive roles were often not valued because they were unpaid.

### 3.3.2. Productive Roles

This section looks at women perspectives of their productive roles followed by their generational perspectives of their grandmother's, mother's and daughter's productive roles. Lastly it looks at the women's perspectives of the distribution of productive roles between women and men.

#### 3.3.2.1. Women's Perspectives of their Productive Roles

The majority of women who were interviewed in the face-to-face questionnaires worked as farmers either on their own farms or as casual labourers. Interestingly, more women worked as casual labourers when they became grandmothers than they had as women. The highest percentage of women working as grandmothers was in the eighty years and older (80+) generation where sixty-seven (67%) of the women engaged in casual labour for money.

In the oral testimonies women increasingly found themselves taking on productive roles as the generations got younger. According to the eighty years and older (80+) generation, it was not always easy for women to find work because most jobs were reserved for men. Among the productive roles that the women engaged in was casual labour which is work that is not permanent and pensionable. For the women it included, picking tea and coffee or cultivating someone's farm for a daily wage, assisting someone with reproductive roles such as washing clothes, etc. As a woman, Esther Murugi (87) worked in a sugarcane farm. *"I worked on a sugarcane factory. I carried sugarcane and was paid 70 cents. Was also paid 2 cents per day for cultivating. We were paid weekly because of poverty. To buy clothes, like a sheet, was one shilling". We had no shoes, she explained.*

Flora Nyumbura (83) was born in Nakuru in 1932. She never knew her father because he died when she was very young. Her and her three brothers and 4 sisters were raised by her father's mother. Flora never went to school because her father's mother refused to educate. She and her sisters. "She always used to tell us that we would be educated by our husbands," says Flora. Her mother was a farmer but only grew food for the home and never had money.

Sarah Njeri (82) got married in Nyeri in 1951, a year before the Kenya Land and Freedom war (the Mau Mau war) began. Her husband was employed by a *mzungu* (a Caucasian person) as a driver and never got involved with the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). In 1953, the colonialists raided Sarah's village. She and her three children were arrested but her husband hid himself and managed to escape. "The father to my daughters hid himself. Once he hid himself, it is us that were found with a caravan of lorries that lined up

on the side we were. I was put in the vehicle with my children and taken to Gilgil,” says Sarah.

Sarah lived in the colonial village for almost ten years. During this time, she engaged in forced labour, building trenches that isolated the villages. She was among those who built the Nyandarua trenches. At this time, she was also secretly involved in feeding the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). Her husband continued working for the *mzungu*. He never got in touch with her for fear of being mistaken for the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). Sarah and her husband reunited after independence.

In the sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) generation, Peninah Kiretu went to school but in the evenings and weekends, she helped her uncle with a small kiosk he had because she was good at math. Virginia Gitau from Nairobi, said she did landscaping and planted grass. Grace Wairimu said she went to school but she engaged in casual labour on the weekends. “*On Saturdays I picked pyrethrum with other girls my age and took it to the factory,*” she explained.

Lucy (81) took the Mau Mau oath in 1953 and started her service for the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) thereafter. Her job was to give them food and watch for the government while they ate so that they would not be ambushed and killed. Lucy eventually moved to the Kirangiini forest and lived there for 7 months. “Once the Europeans knew that a certain person was feeding the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), then they would start looking for you and you would have to escape to the forest,” she explains. Virginia Gitau (79) engaged in casual labour for the colonial government. “*I had no work, no food, I couldn’t cultivate, and so I did communal work for the government,*” she said. Mary Mwhaki (77) also engaged in casual labour, mainly farming on other people’s land.

In 1954, she was arrested for giving the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) food, beaten badly and sent to prison in King’ong’o for 1 year. The King’ong’o prison had not been built at that time. “We were surrounded by barbed wire and used to sleep on the ground before it was built. We built it ourselves with most labourers being young girls,” explains Lucy. She was part of the *Gang of Kailo*, whose job in the prison was to carry buckets full of human waste. (Lucy got extremely emotional when telling the story of her time in prison and the inhumane treatment she endured and we had to pause the interview).

Margaret Githinji (82) came to Nairobi in 1952 to marry a young man from Murang’a who was working as an accountant in the city. Margaret suffered great hardship during the state of



emergency, she lost two children, and her husband was jailed for 1 ½ years for stealing money from the company he worked for. She and her husband were reunited once he was released from jail. They lived together with their 5 children, 1 boy and 4 girls, until her husband died from alcoholism in the 90s.

Jane Wambui Ngang'a (50) went up to standard 6 then started working. "*After class 6 I used to do casual labour, I also did crochet to earn money,*" she noted. Only a small percentage of women engaged in casual labour as girls, eleven percent (11%) from Nairobi and twelve percent (12%) from Nyeri because the majority of girls were in school. Before she got married, Jane Wambui Maigwa (48), did casual jobs within her community until she got married. "*I used to look for small jobs that I could do for people in my village in return for money. When I was not working, I worked on the farm picking tea,*" she explained.

As grandmothers, a third of the women in the eighty years and older (80+) generation still worked as casual labourers. In Nyeri County, sixty-seven percent (67%) of the women worked as casual labourers in their community, performing small tasks such as washing clothes, working on the *shamba* or babysitting children for their neighbours in return for money. Forty-seven percent of the women also sold produce from their *shambas*

Table 3.7 shows the productive roles that the respondents from the face-to-face questionnaire held as girls, women and today as grandmothers.

Table 9: Women's Productive Roles Across Their Lifetime

PRODUCTIVE ROLES	COUNTY	Age Group	Family Shamba		Coffee/Tea Picking		Casual Labour		Attended School		Formal Employment	
As Girls	Nairobi	40 - 59 (19)	7	37%	10	53%	2	11%	2	11%	0	0%
		60 - 79 (18)	7	39%	4	22%	1	6%	0	0%	0	0%
		80+ (23)	10	43%	9	39%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
	Nyeri	40 - 59 (26)	12	46%	8	31%	3	12%	5	19%	1	4%
		60 - 79 (19)	9	47%	5	26%	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%
		80+ (15)	4	27%	5	33%	2	13%	0	0%	0	0%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2%</b>
	As Women	Nairobi	40 - 59 (19)	3	16%	2	11%	3	16%	2	11%	4
60 - 79 (18)			4	22%	1	6%	3	17%	0	0%	0	0%
80+ (23)			3	13%	1	4%	6	26%	0	0%	2	9%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10%</b>
Nyeri		40 - 59 (26)	6	23%	5	19%	4	15%	5	19%	4	15%
		60 - 79 (19)	1	5%	1	5%	4	21%	0	0%	0	0%
		80+ (15)	2	13%	1	7%	3	20%	0	0%	0	0%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7%</b>
As Grand Mothers		Nairobi	40 - 59 (19)	11	58%	10	53%	11	58%	1	5%	5
	60 - 79 (18)		5	28%	5	28%	8	44%	0	0%	2	11%
	80+ (23)		5	22%	10	43%	8	35%	0	0%	8	35%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25%</b>
	Nyeri	40 - 59 (26)	15	58%	14	54%	17	65%	6	23%	7	27%
		60 - 79 (19)	5	26%	6	32%	12	63%	0	0%	4	21%
		80+ (15)	7	47%	3	20%	10	67%	1	7%	1	7%
<b>Total</b>			<b>27</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20%</b>

There were some women who had their own businesses. Muthoni Likimani (90) opened the very first Public Relations company owned by an African. When Veronica Nyawira (84) got married, she got a small stall in the local market where she sold various products from Nairobi and she also sold *mbaki* (sniffing tobacco) for her husband. Mary Munyeki (78) started a food business where she sold *githeri* to bus drivers at the main bus station, but she also used the job to traffic secret messages for the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau).” *I used to cook githeri for bus drivers and other workers, I also worked as a courier transporting secrets for the Mau Mau*”, she explained.

After University, Patricia Waithera (50) started her own successful business in PR and Marketing. After getting married, she started investing in various real estate projects with her husband. Mellina Kamoche (43) and Olive Murage (41) both had their own businesses. Susan Waithera (41) set up her own law firm after her divorce and she is now successfully defending women and children. “*Once I got divorced, I became more stable in my Law career. I became better in court and I was now able to market myself and grow,*” she explained.

As a grandmother, Muthoni Likimani (90) was the only woman who was still active in her career as an author and women’s activist. She had recently published her autobiography *Fight without Ceasing*. Three of the women who were former teachers, were now retired. Esther Murugi was only able to supervise the work on her farm because her health was failing her. Maria Wangui also suffered from poor health and only visited her farm once in a while. Sarah Njeri was now retired from her job of making *ciondos* (baskets) and carpets for the African Inland Church (AIC).

Mary Munyeki (77) was part of a traditional dancing group where they performed at various events for money. “*I am part of a traditional dancing women’s group. We perform at public functions, weddings, etc. we have even danced for the president,*” she explained. This demonstrates that there was a demand for cultural performers because most people today are completely immersed in western, capitalistic culture.

It is important to note that women’s productive roles were in addition to their reproductive roles and therefore, added an extra burden on women’s energy and time.

Women across different regions, socio-economic classes and cultures spend an important part of their day on meeting the expectations of their domestic and

reproductive roles. This is in addition to their paid activities, thus creating the ‘double burden’ of work for women (Leboutte, 2015:1)

Eloise Leboutte went on to explain that women’s reproductive roles limited women’s chances of getting good jobs because they were so time consuming. *“Unpaid care activities constitute a time and energy-consuming occupation that limits women’s access to the labourmarket, relegating them to low-income and insecure employment,”* she noted (Leboutte, 2015:2). This was confirmed by the results which showed that less than a quarter of the women were employed or had careers. Most women were casual labourers or peasant farmers.

### 3.3.2.2. Generational Perspectives of Women’s Productive Roles

The grandmothers of the eighty years and older (80+) cohort never worked outside the home. According to Esther Murugi (87) *“my mother’s mother died when I was a child but we grew up with my father’s mother. Cucu didn’t do any work outside the home. In that time marriage was a partnership. Wives took care of the home and husbands fed the animals. There was a division of labour”*. In their time, however, many of the respondents’ husbands were forced to leave the home because of the Kenya Land and Freedom war (the Mau Mau war) and so they had to take on all their husbands’ roles.

Flora Nyumbura, (83) believed that her grandmother had less work because she always saw her grandfather helping her grandmother with feeding and shepherding the goats. *“The women would look for the branches and their husbands would hang them from the ceiling of the goat shed so the goats could reach them. Therefore, the women did not have as much work as the men,”* said Flora.

The mothers of the eighty years and older (80+) cohort lived at the time when money was being introduced into the community. Tabitha Nderu from Nairobi said that her mother’s life was easier than hers because she did not have to work and earn money. She said that unlike her mother’s time, the women of her time lived and died in tremendous hardship because the money system had just been introduced. *“My mother was not in the money system. I was born in the money system, money was necessary to educate my kids”*, said Tabitha. In order to send their children to school, or buy the *Shukas* (a piece of material used as traditional dress) that came into fashion they needed money and money was not easy to come by.

Maria Wangui also believed that her mother’s time was better than hers because they did not have to leave the homestead to work. *“My mother never left the homestead, I was more active because of competition”*, said Maria. She went on to explain that money was what brought

competition in the community and forced people to go to work in order to keep up. Esther Murugi (87) believed that her mother had an easier life than she did, especially when it came to work. *“My life was hard; my mother’s life was easier. I had more work than my mother. She only cooked and cleaned whereas I used to go to the market, make ciondos and sell”*. Maria Wangui also believed that her mother had a better life than she did overall because she never had to leave the homestead to look for work.

Virginia Gitau (79) believed that her grandmother had more work than she did although she was lucky that she never left home to look for money. *“I made money from casual farming. She is lucky she never had to work for money”*, explained Virginia. Njeri Mburu, however, believed that her grandmother had less work because their children did all the work. *“In her time, children did most of the work at home which was mainly farm work”*, said Njeri.

The grandmothers of the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) generation were perceived to have not been interested in or had not had the opportunity of having careers. The one thing that Jane Wairimu Ngang’a (49) remembers about her grandmother was that she never seemed interested in having a career. Her grandmother placed a lot of emphasis on teaching her housework. *“I never heard her talking about a career, she concentrated more on washing clothes and cooking,”* she said. Jane Wambui Ngang’a viewed her life today as more aggressive because of the capitalist system, but there is also more exposure and international opportunities.

According to Mary Munyeki (78) a former fighter in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), there were a lot of problems in her mother’s time, especially because her mother was forced to leave her land where there was easy access to food and move to a colonial village. According to Mary, many Gikuyu women and children died because the colonialist cut their food supply by removing them from their farms. *“My mother was forced to work on the coffee farms, from dawn to dusk, for no pay. The colonialist left them with little time to work on their shambas and this caused many to starve to death in our village”*, recalls Mary.

Florence Mwihaki (79) described her mother’s life from the perspective of the opportunities and experiences she has had as a result of being a career woman. *“I had access to jobs so I had my own money. My mother never had her own money,”* said Florence. On the other hand, Florence’s mother had a better relationship with her than she did with her own children because she was able to spend more time with them as children whereas Florence never did. According to Florence she gained some things and lost others by having a career.

Jane Wambui Ngang'a (50) was of the opinion that having a career had left her with less time for her children. She believed that her mother was able to spend more time with her children because she did not have the demands of a full time job. *"I have to work more outside the home so I have less time to spend with my children, because of economic demands,"* she said. Anne Thairu, on the other hand, feels that she does more work than her mother did because she has a career and she also does most of the house work, whereas her mother just rested when they were younger. Jane believed that technology has however, helped to simplify her life.

Lucy Njoki (57) viewed her life overall as being better than her mother's because her mother had more work and less free time than she did. Susan Waithera's mother got to study and get a diploma in Public Health while she was married and later on she had a good career as a public health officer. This job set her aside from other women in the village. Susan herself was married to a traditional man who she later divorced so this may influence her perception of her mother's married life.

When it came to their daughters, Lucy Macharia (81) said the biggest difference between her and her daughter was their ambition. *"Our daughters are quite different in the way jobs are done. They look for property to become rich while we worked for the basic commodities, we worked for food. There was no other reason, just food to keep us alive"*, said Lucy.

Esther Murugi (87) on the other hand said that her daughters' generation did not like their jobs and they work out of necessity. *"We would go to work on our shambas because we wanted to and were able to and not because anyone forced us to. It was common-sense since we had children who needed to eat. My daughters have jobs but they completely hate them."* said Esther. Sarah Njeri believed life was harder for her daughter because of economic pressures that they did not have. Maria Wangui saw her daughter's life as being harder than hers because of technology.

One big difference between the eighty years and older (80+) women and their daughters was education. Many of their daughters had managed to get education, have their own career, and earn their own money. *"I was a housewife but my daughter has a career and her own money. I would have loved to make my own money. My daughter has had her eyes opened by technology and education"*, explained Veronica Kirigo. Esther Murugi (87) concurs adding that because her daughter got education she has been able to set up her own successful business. Sarah Njeri (82) also agrees that education has been one of the greatest advantages

of her daughter's time. *"There was no education available in my time. Today at least, the girls can work, go to school, etc.,"* said Sarah.

In the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation, Mary Mwihaki (77) says the major difference when it came to work was that their daughters were employed and they even travelled as far as Uganda and beyond to look for goods to sell. Mary Munyeki (78) believed that her daughter's life was better than hers because her daughter could look for a job, work and earn her own money which gave her access to clothes, food and financial independence. Virginia Gitau agreed with Mary and observed that their daughter's money had reduced their domestic chores because they could afford to hire house helps. Grace Wairimu (70), on the other hand, viewed her daughters as being worse off than her because of their careers. *"I was never employed so I am the master of myself but my daughters are employed"*, said Grace, implying her daughters are enslaved by their careers and jobs.

When it came to their work life, Jane Wambui Ngang'a (50) did not see much difference between her life and her daughter's life because they were both career women and therefore they both had their own money. For Rose Wairimu (50) the greatest difference between her and her daughter's productive roles was because of their education. She believed that education has enabled her daughters to be more exposed and know about life and to make better use of the opportunities they have had. *"I was very naïve about life,"* reveals Rose adding that this influenced all the decisions she made and limited her opportunities and experiences even down to the man she married.

### **3.3.2.3 Distribution of Productive Roles between Women and Men**

The top two activities outside the home for boys and girls were working on the family *shamba* and picking coffee/tea. All children worked on the family *shamba* and picked coffee. In the Nairobi, the eighty years and above (80+) age group had twice as many girls who worked on the family *shamba* and picked coffee than their brothers did. In the Oral testimonies of the eighty years and older (80+) age group, particularly in Nyeri, girls were denied education either because their fathers' were afraid education would corrupt them or because their brother was being educated with the limited family funds. Esther Murugi (87) from Nyeri County, for example was denied education because she was a girl. *"Boys went to school but we didn't; they were favoured,"* explained Esther.

Unlike the reproductive roles, the work done outside the home was more evenly distributed between girls and their brothers. In the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) age group in

Nairobi County, more boys worked of the family *shamba* than their sisters and more girls picked coffee/ tea than their brothers. More children in Nyeri engaged in casual labour than those in Nairobi. The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) age group had the highest number of boys engaged in casual labour. In Nairobi County the majority of brothers went to school. Only four out of fifteen respondents had brothers who did not go to school, but instead helped in herding the family live stock and worked on the Shamba. Mary Munyoki (78), a member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) notes that *“Only my last brother went to school. The rest of us had no school because of poverty.”*

The only girls and boys who were employed were from Nyeri County, more specifically, the boys and girls from the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) age group and boys from the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) age group.

Only respondents from the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) age group went to school with their brothers. The same number of respondents and their brothers went to school, so there was no case of boys getting more education than girls. In the younger age groups, namely 40–59, there was more equality when it came to education.

As adults, more husbands in the eighty years and older (80+) age groups in Nairobi, were employed than their wives but had blue collar jobs. For example, Veronica Kirigo (86) was married to a mason, her age mates were married to drivers, farm workers, etc. There was only one woman in the whole group who was married to a preacher.

The husbands of the women in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), both in Nairobi and Nyeri County were either in the forest fighting or if they had been captured they were doing forced labour in concentration camps. *“My husband was arrested and taken to Embu for 6 - 7 years. There he did forced labour planting rice, etc. For 7 years, women didn't give birth. Women built houses for themselves, and took over the chores of men”*, explained Virginia Gitau, (79) from Nairobi County. Other women’s husbands were involved in the work of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). Njeri Mburu’s husband, for example, was an oath administrator. *“He came with the oath taking drink and distributed it to the community. He was part of the Mau Mau and that is how we met,”* she explained.

Interestingly, Njeri met her husband and got married at the age of 35 which was very late for women her age. In Nairobi County, none of the women in the sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) age group or their husbands were employed. In Nairobi County, the sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) cohort had the highest frequency of husbands who went to school but



none of their wives did. In Nyeri County, the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59), age group had the highest frequency of women and their husbands who went to school.

Overall, husbands did more work outside the home than their wives. The leading work that husbands engaged in was casual labour. Seventy-four percent of men from Nyeri in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group engaged in casual labour. In Nairobi fifty-eight (58%) of the men in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group engaged in casual labour. More husbands picked coffee/tea than their wives. More husbands worked on the family *shambas* than their wives. In Nairobi more husbands in the forty to fifty-nine and women above 80 age groups were employed than their wives. Every age-group in Nairobi and Nyeri had husbands who were still in school as adults.

Very few women were living with their husbands as grandmothers either because they had separated from them or they were widows. One of the few women in the eighty years and older (80+) generation whose husband was still alive was Veronica Nyawira; her husband stayed at home looking after their cattle. She also stayed at home and performed the reproductive roles. In the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation, Florence Mwihaki's husband was retired. In the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) generation Rose Wairimu Kamau's husband was a consultant with the U.S. Navy, the other husbands were all retired.

### **3.3.3. Community Roles**

The third role of the triple roles that women engaged in was community roles. Below we take a look at women's perspectives and generational perspectives of their community roles followed by a look at how they feel about the division of community roles between women and men.

#### **3.3.3.1 Women's Perspectives of their Community Roles**

In the face-to-face questionnaires, there was no single activity that the majority of women engaged in but women were nevertheless very active in the community and especially helping other women.

Collective work was one of the top roles that women had in the community. Collective work was defined by the respondents as women coming together to assist each other with different reproductive roles as well as major roles such as hut building. Esther Murugi (87) a traditional woman from Nyeri notes, "*I helped my mother's friends with house work and shamba work because they had no children of their own*". Tabitha Nderu, 85-year-old

women's leader from Nairobi also noted that, "*after farming, we would go and farm on the land of women without children or the older women our village*". Gikuyu women helped one another and looked out for each other.

Tabitha Nderu assisted the women in their collective house building where women thatched the houses:

*People used to gather to clean that house and get ants away and then pour new Murari. A woman would gather enough grass and it would be noted by the neighbours and they would come help you thatch the house. Our mothers would come, clean the house, thatch it and ensure it has been plastered and then make it even we followed our mother everywhere so they always found something for us to do, she said.*

Even though Muthoni Likimani (90) lived in the church compound, she still engaged in collective work. "*We used to engage in communal labour on friend's garden. We worked in community, shared and socialized,*" she explained.

Sarah Njeri (82) lived in a colonial village and worked 7 days a week in forced camps. In her oral testimony, she explained that women divided the reproductive roles amongst themselves because they had strict curfews in place.

*The Emergency came one year after I got married. Families were completely separated as men went to the forest or were detained. I was given a small hut in one of the colonial villages. There I fetched water, etc. every day when the askaris blew the whistle once, we divided tasks among the women. Some rushed to the shamba to get produce, others went the river for water. When the whistle was blown again, we had to rush back to the colonial villages, she explained.*

Sarah believed that without this team work the women would not have survived. Virginia Gitau (79) was the second wife in a polygamous union. She and the first wife became friends. "They used to divide the house chores. In some instances, the wives had different huts which they took care of but they worked collectively on the shamba, explained Mary Mwihaki.

In the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation, Rose Wairimu Kamau (50) said that she "*took care of the elderly in her community. As a girl, I used to look after old women because they were many during my time. We would go to their houses and help them with their chores or go and work on their shambas,*" she explained.

Below is a table depicting the community roles of the women interviewed using the face-to-face questionnaires. It looks at the women's community roles as girls, women and grandmothers.

Table 10: Women's Productive Roles Across Their Lifetime

Community Roles	COUNTY	Age group	Church Activities		Cultural Activities		Collective Work		Performance		Taking Care of the Elderly		Community Policing	
As Girls	Nairobi	40 - 59 (19)	9	47%	3	16%	2	11%	6	32%	4	21%	0	0%
		60 - 79 (18)	8	44%	7	39%	4	22%	5	28%	4	22%	0	0%
		80+ (23)	4	17%	7	30%	5	22%	5	22%	3	13%	1	4%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2%</b>
	Nyeri	40 - 59 (26)	13	50%	11	42%	10	38%	7	27%	6	23%	2	8%
		60 - 79 (19)	4	21%	9	47%	9	47%	1	5%	2	11%	0	0%
		80+ (15)	6	40%	3	20%	4	27%	2	13%	2	13%	0	0%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3%</b>
	As Women	Nairobi	40 - 59 (19)	1	5%	3	16%	3	16%	4	21%	6	32%	0
60 - 79 (18)			1	6%	7	39%	4	22%	4	22%	5	28%	0	0%
80+ (23)			1	4%	7	30%	5	22%	4	17%	3	13%	0	0%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
Nyeri		40 - 59 (26)	6	23%	11	42%	10	38%	5	19%	7	27%	4	15%
		60 - 79 (19)	1	5%	10	53%	10	53%	2	11%	2	11%	0	0%
		80+ (15)	2	13%	3	20%	4	27%	1	7%	1	7%	1	7%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8%</b>
As Grand Mothers		Nairobi	40 - 59 (19)	6	32%	6	32%	9	47%	7	37%	10	53%	6
	60 - 79 (18)		2	11%	5	28%	6	33%	3	17%	4	22%	10	56%
	80+ (23)		4	17%	6	26%	6	26%	4	17%	6	26%	16	70%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>53%</b>
	Nyeri	40 - 59 (26)	11	42%	13	50%	12	46%	12	46%	6	23%	20	77%
		60 - 79 (19)	4	21%	14	74%	4	21%	3	16%	3	16%	18	95%
		80+ (15)	4	27%	6	40%	6	40%	5	33%	5	33%	8	53%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>60%</b>	

Tabitha Nderu (85) engaged in collective work with other women from the community. *“When one of us was giving birth, for example, women would assign themselves her household duties such as cutting firewood and fetching water, and do them for her for one month”*, she said. Sarah Njeri (82) noted that she was part of the team of women in her village who were involved in feeding the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). She was responsible for gathering the food from different women and finding a way to deliver it to the forest with a few selected women.

The women from the sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) age group said they didn’t participate in any cultural activities as girls because it was during the colonial period when the Gikuyu were moved to colonial villages where such activities were banned; this was followed by the Kenya Land and Freedom war (Mau Mau). But the forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) generation girls started participating in cultural dances as part of their school curriculum.

Other women were involved in taking food to the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). Mary Mwhaki (77) from Nairobi, explained, *“We had no community work because we lived in colonial villages. As young girls, we ferried food from Manga to Murang’a. We were always on the alert and look out because we could be sent at any time.”* Virginia Gitau (79) also of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) agreed with Mwhaki.

Women also considered their church activities to be community work. From the Oral testimonies it transpired that a few of the respondents grew up in the church, either because their parents were Christians or preachers as was the case of 90-year-old Muthoni Likimani’s father. She lived on a mission compound because her father was a priest; but she did not mention engaging in church activities. *“We did communal labour on friend’s gardens. We were living in a close-knit community, we shared and we socialized”*, explained Muthoni.

Virginia Gitau (78) from Nairobi said she went to church as a girl because it was the only place that she could go to as a girl and also to get a break from her endless work in the homestead. Ruth Mwaniki, a 50-year-old CEO of a parastatal in Nairobi, explained that *“Church on Sunday was our main community activity. We thought it was compulsory; we also did collective farming on other girls’ farms since my mother had farm workers”*. She explains that her father had a big farm and was also a COOP leader, while her mother managed the farm. From the oral testimonies of the forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) group, it appeared that the majority of the women were also involved in the church choir.

As women, the majority of the eighty years and older (80+) age group did community work for the church where they cleaned the church or volunteered to spread the gospel. Fewer women in the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation participated in church activities, however. In fact, Mary Mwihaki (77) was the only woman in this generation who did community work for the church. As grandmothers, most of the eighty years and older (80+) women who did community work were involved in their local churches. Flora Nyumbura was involved in church meetings and other events; she also helped others in the preparation of their weddings and funerals. Sarah Njeri (82) was a church leader for women in the church.

As women started to receive education, they also started adopting other western behaviours, activities. It was from the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) age group Oral testimonies we learn that the girls who had a chance to go to school started engaging in western oriented community activities. Seventy-nine-year-old Florence Mwihaki, from Nairobi, who went to Alliance Girls High School, explained that, "*in 1950, 10 girls were collected from Alliance and we became brownies. We attended many functions at the government house*". One lady from Nyeri, Grace Wairimu Njambi (70) was a member of the girl's scouts through her school life as well.

As a married woman, Muthoni Likimani (90) was the only woman from this age group who lived in a different community. She moved to Narok to live with her Maasai husband who was a medical doctor. While living in the Maasai community, she worked closely with the women to purchase milk from them and turn it into Ghee which she sold in the towns. The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) age group was the generation where women started to form women's groups to help one another financially such as the *Mabati* women's group where women came together to buy for each other iron sheets for their homes, mattresses, etc. Formal women's organizations also emerged such as *Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization* which both Florence Mwihaki (79) and Grace Wairimu (70) were members of.

Women in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation were involved in a diverse range of community-based and national charitable organizations. Mellina Kamoche (43) leads women in table banking and the merry-go-round system. Table banking is a system where women meet once a month to contribute to a fund that they can all borrow from, there and then, on the table, either as a short term or long term loan. The merry-go-round systems were women contributed a certain amount of money that went to a different woman every month.

There were other women who volunteered their career skills. Susan Waithera (41) volunteered as a lawyer at FIDA where she defended women in divorce and reproductive abuse cases. Jane Wachire (40) was involved in an environmental organization that engaged in cleaning the streets and clearing bushes. There were also women who were involved in organizations that helped orphans and street children which implies that this is another emerging concern in society.

The majority of women from the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation were involved in community based organizations. Mentorship was a popular activity for the women. Both Susan Waithera (41) and Rose Wairimu (50) were involved in community-based mentorship organizations. Rose was also involved in civic education. Only Ruth Mwaniki (50) was involved in her local church where she taught Sunday school.

### **3.3.3.2. Generation Perspectives of Community Roles**

The grandmothers of the eighty years and older (80+) age group helped each other during cultural ceremonies such as circumcision and *Ngurarios* (traditional Gikuyu wedding ceremony). *“There were no meetings or community life in our time, only weddings and funerals,”* said Sarah Njeri (82). Veronica Kirigo (86) was the only respondent among those interviewed whose grandmother was a community midwife. *“My grandmother was a midwife in the community, helping women give birth because there were no hospitals at that time”*. She further explained that women who were circumcisers were different from midwives.

In the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) age group, Mary Mwihaki (77) informed that their grandmothers helped each other during cultural ceremonies such as marriage. Virginia Gitau (79), on the other hand said, there were no community roles available for women of her grandmother's generation because there was no real community life. Njeri Mburu (77) said her grandmother had no community work and did not have any activities in her free time and 4 other women agree with her.

In the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation, Anne Thairu says her grandmother was respected as a bishop's wife and this title elevated her to a leader in the community. Olive Njambi's grandmother was very active in the community. *“Cucu was more involved in the community despite her responsibilities at home, she always had visitors!* She said.

Grace Wairimu (70) viewed her community as very different from her mother's. She makes no mention of her mother's community work, but concludes that her community work is more involving because of the modern time we are living in. In her opinion there are more

activities for her generation because of the modern times they live in. Secondly, there were no women groups or *Chamas* (an informal cooperative society that is normally used to pool and invest savings) in her mother's time but today she belongs to several. Mary Mwihaki notes that women assisted each other when it came to cultural events.

The eighty years and older (80+) women saw their daughter's as having more of a community life than they did. They were either a member of a *chama*, women's groups, women's organizations or church based organizations. There are also more opportunities for their daughters to interact with women from different communities and nationalities. "*I only had access to women in church; my daughter goes far and wide to interact with women from everywhere*", explained Veronica Kirigo (86).

Njeri Mburu's (77) daughter does community work with matatu services such as helping the elderly. Njeri and her daughter also do charity work together, such as visiting children's homes. For Mary Mwihaki, on the other hand, the only community work her daughters do is to help each other during weddings and funerals. Virginia Gitau's daughter is very involved in *chamas*. They belong to the same *chama* and her daughter attends the meetings on her behalf because she is old and not able to move around easily. Grace Wairimu also does community work with her daughter.

When it came to their granddaughters, Veronica Nyawira (84) felt that they did not engage in collective activities to help one another the way they did in their time. "*In the past, women would come together and help each other prepare food for family events such as weddings. Women today are so divided that they don't help one another. That's why outside catering is used to cook for people when they have functions. Outside catering companies would never have made it in our time, women helped one another in such occasion,*" says Veronica.

According to the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) women, their granddaughters are not involved in community work since they are not interested because the dynamics of the community life has changed. When it came to her granddaughter's generation, Grace finds them to be very different because they no longer trust each other or help each other out. Lying and cheating have become the norm and so people always have their guards up. Everyone lives their own lives and people don't even want to know who their neighbours are. She said

*There is a lot of dishonesty because people are cheating one another. But cheating is a negative part of civilization. In our time, if my friend would have*



*asked me for 1000 shillings I would have given her without even writing it down. She cannot refuse to return it; she must return it. Today, you must have a witness otherwise you might not get that money back and this is why our community life has disintegrated.*

Overall she believed that her granddaughter's life is much harder because of this lack of trust in the people she shared a compound with. She also believed that all the choices and options she has, makes it very difficult to navigate through life.

Forty-eight-year-old Jane Wambui Maigwa's mother, introduced her to community work at a very young age and they actually did it together, helping elderly women in the community, etc. Forty-one-year-old Olive Njambi's said she had fewer community roles than her mother but nevertheless, she had followed in her mother's footsteps and was involved in the same *chama* that her mother started. Olive was involved in the Church, however, but her mother was a chairlady of CWA, a secretary in her church and mentor to children.

### **3.3.3.3. Distribution of Community Roles between Women and Men**

There were some women whose brothers engaged in similar community activities as them. For 90-year-old Muthoni Likimani, however, girls and boys did the same collective work at the mission. "*They did the communal digging and clearing in preparation for the planting season*", explained Muthoni. Career woman Florence Mwihaki (79), who was a brownie when growing up, had a brother who was a boy scout. For women of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), such as Njeri Mburu (77) their brothers did nothing because it was during the emergency. There was a clear difference between how girls spent their free time, compared to their brothers. In both counties girls went to church and were more involved in church activities than boys were. For example, more girls went to church than their brothers did. The brothers of those girls who went to church, especially in Nairobi County, seldom went with them.

Jane Ng'ang'a (50) also from Nairobi explained that her brothers "*didn't like church because they felt we were being misused by the pastors*". The only community role that the boys engaged in more than girls did (in both counties) was community policing. More boys in Nyeri were involved in community policing than in Nairobi.

As adults, women were more involved in community activities than men, particularly cultural activities. All husbands were involved in community policing, although more husbands from Nyeri were involved than those from Nairobi. In the Oral testimonies, 9 out of 15 husbands of

respondents from Nairobi County did no community work because they were too busy with their careers, or they were in the forest as part of the African Freedom or they were simply not interested. Virginia Gitau (79) said *“there was no time for community events, we were at war,”* as she describes the times of the Kenya Land and Freedom War (Mau Mau). There was one respondent’s husband, however, who was involved in community work on behalf of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). *“My husband was part of the group that destroyed all the alcohol before the war began. For 7 years, no one drank”*, explained Tabitha Nderu (85). Ninety-eight percent of husbands from Nyeri did no community work.

In the younger age groups in Nairobi County, forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59), and Sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79), more women took care of the elderly than men. Women and their husbands in all the age groups were involved in collective work. Women in Nyeri were more involved in collective work than their husbands. The eighty years and older (80+) age group of women and their husbands were the least involved in community activities. Cultural activities were performed more by women than men in Nyeri County, particularly in the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59), and Sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79), age groups.

A small number of women and their husbands from each age group participated in cultural performances, and also went to church in their free time. The 40 – 50 years’ age group from Nyeri had the highest frequency of respondents who went to church. In fact, all the husbands of women between forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) in Nyeri did no community work because they were too busy working for the family, or were involved in drinking like Jane Wambui Ngang’a’s husband who spends most of his time in the bar.

As grandparents, Veronica Nyawira (84) and Florence Mwhiki’s (79) husbands were not involved in any kind of community work. Rose Wairimu Kamau’s (50) husband was involved in community work for the first time. *“He’s starting to get involved now. He’s advising a local men group he’s formed teaching them about how to save money”*, she explained. Jane Wambui Maigwa (48) was involved in a social group and in a local chama. Anne Thairu (46) and her husband were both community leaders, she was the chairperson of a local community organization and he was head or a county fertilizer board.

### **3.3.4. Free Time Roles**

Aside from the triple roles, women were also about their free time and how they spent it. Below we explore women’s perspectives of their free time, their generational perspectives of

women's free time across generations and a comparison of their free time activities compared to men.

### 3.3.4.1. Women's Perspectives on their Free Time

When it came to free time the majority of women across the three generations said they had none. The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) and women in the eighty years and above (80+) generation said they also did not have the freedom of movement. In the eighty years and older oral testimonies, Flora Nyumbura (83) said "*Growing up we had no free time except on Sundays when we went to church*".

In the Face-to-face questionnaires, the majority of women responded that they engaged in knitting and crocheting as girls of whom 74% from Nairobi and 53% from Nyeri. More women were involved in knitting and crocheting in Nairobi than in Nyeri. As grandmothers, more than a third of the eighty years and older (80+) women were still involved in knitting and crocheting. As girls, several women from the eighty years and older' generation said they did their reproductive chores during their free time. Esther Murugi (87) said she had responsibilities on the family *shamba*. "*We watched the millet and made sure the birds didn't eat it,*" she explained. Maria Wangui also never had free time because she always had reproductive chores to do.

Margaret Githinji (82) also assisted her mother around the house when she was done with her homework. In the oral testimonies the eighty years and older (80+) women talked about the special dances boys and girls participated in called *Gwatio*. On the night of the full moon, girls would meet in a particular homestead to eat, dance and hang out with boys. "*We hung out with boys and even danced together but there was no funny business. There was no kissing or flirting with boys. That was saved for the wedding night*", she explained and the women agreed with her. One of the few girls to go to school from the eighty years and older (80+) age group, Muthoni Likimani, said she spent her free time reading and doing her homework. "*I read a lot, especially when I went to a missionary boarding school,*" she explained. Margaret Githinji also spent her free time working on her homework. Below is a table that looks at how women spent their free time as girls, women and grandmothers. There were six main activities that women participated in, namely: practicing singing and dancing, knitting and crocheting, cultural activities, playing with or as children, church activities and sports.

(Overleaf) Table 11: Women's Free Time Roles Across Their Lifetime

Free Time Roles	COUNTY	Age group	Practising & Singing & Dancing		Knitting & Crocheting		Family Cultural Activities		Playing (as/ with Children		Church Activities		Sports (western)	
As Girls	Nairobi	40 - 59 (19)	13	68%	12	63%	6	32%	8	42%	3	16%	7	37%
		60 - 79 (18)	8	44%	10	56%	8	44%	5	28%	3	17%	1	6%
		80+ (23)	17	74%	5	22%	12	52%	6	26%	7	30%	3	13%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18%</b>
	Nyeri	40 - 59 (26)	16	62%	12	46%	15	58%	12	46%	8	31%	6	23%
		60 - 79 (19)	8	42%	11	58%	6	32%	3	16%	6	32%	6	32%
		80+ (15)	8	53%	9	60%	6	40%	5	33%	5	33%	2	13%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23%</b>
	As Women	Nairobi	40 - 59 (19)	8	42%	12	63%	8	42%	3	16%	11	58%	3
60 - 79 (18)			6	33%	14	78%	11	61%	4	22%	10	56%	4	22%
80+ (23)			9	39%	14	61%	14	61%	3	13%	15	65%	4	17%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18%</b>
Nyeri		40 - 59 (26)	9	35%	18	69%	15	58%	5	19%	18	69%	9	35%
		60 - 79 (19)	12	63%	13	68%	12	63%	2	11%	9	47%	4	21%
		80+ (15)	5	33%	8	53%	7	47%	1	7%	9	60%	2	13%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25%</b>
As Grand Mothers		Nairobi	40 - 59 (19)	7	37%	6	32%	14	74%	10	53%	5	26%	6
	60 - 79 (18)		3	17%	7	39%	15	83%	10	56%	3	17%	5	28%
	80+ (23)		4	17%	9	39%	22	96%	8	35%	2	9%	7	30%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30%</b>
	Nyeri	40 - 59 (26)	12	46%	9	35%	26	100%	18	69%	13	50%	8	31%
		60 - 79 (19)	4	21%	3	16%	19	100%	6	32%	5	26%	6	32%
		80+ (15)	3	20%	5	33%	13	87%	6	40%	4	27%	4	27%
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>19</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30%</b>

In the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation, Virginia Gitau (79) said young girls always played even if they were on the *shamba* or taking care of the cows. Grace Wairimu, 70-year-old women's leader from Nyeri said, "*I was an athlete and I played netball, etc. My mum and dad were also athletes and wanted no idleness in their house.*" Grace Wairimu's parents were both farmers and they could read and write.

On the other hand, Florence Mwihaki (79) years, said that there was never any free time for her and her older sister because they were burdened with household responsibilities but they always made time to play. Njeri Mburu (77) said she also never had any free time because she was always working at home or assisting in the community with other girls. Mary Munyeki (78) said she never did anything in her free time because they were living in the colonial villages and her mother was very strict. "*We could not leave the house or visit with friends or even play with neighbours; we always had to stay close to home because our household was very traditional. In fact, our mother was a housewife and I never saw her leave the house except to go to church*". Several women from the Sixty to seventy-nine age group said they did not have free time as girls.

The oral testimonies of the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group reveal that this was the generation that started to engage in western free time activities as girls. Patricia Waithera (50) said she played tennis in her free time. Ruth Mwaniki (50) said she spent her free time playing. "*I had a lot of free time and didn't have as much homework as children have today, so I played with other kids and did a few allocated tasks around the house*", she explained. Susan Waithera (41) also played in her free time, but she also watched TV. She was the only girl from this age group who mentioned watching TV in her free time. Jane Wachira (40) played a traditional game called *chamamana* and she also loved playing 'house'.

As adults, none of the women in the eighty years and older (80+) age group had any free time because of the time it took to do their daily reproductive roles. Maria Wangui (80+) said, "*I had no free time, I always had reproductive chores.*" The majority of women who managed to find free time, crocheted, knitted and made *ciondos* in order to earn extra money for the family. Veronica Nyawira (84) was the only woman who said she visited her friends in her free time. Sarah Njeri (82), on the other hand, said she was not free because she lived in a colonial village at that time and they had a curfew and had no freedom of movement.

Few women in the Sixty to seventy-nine generation had free time because they were either involved in the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) or their reproductive

responsibilities took up all their free time. Virginia Gitau (79) explained that, *“we had no free time and no freedom of movement either. Women lived in darkness and fear and never left the house after dark because of the curfew”*.

In their oral testimony questionnaires three women in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group responded that they spent their free time enjoying what they loved. Jane Wachire read novels and gave tuition classes in her free time. Patricia Waithera, on the other hand, plays golf in her free time. Olive Njambi Murage used to go dancing in her free time; she also loved drawing and painting and taking care of her garden. As a grandmother, Rose Wairimu Kamau (50) had gone back to school to get a diploma in leadership.

The majority of the forty to fifty-nine age group women still had no free time. Lucy Njoki (57), Rose Wairimu (50) and Jane Wairimu Ng;ang'a (49) had reproductive responsibilities and young children to raise and these activities occupied all their free time. Susan Waithera spent all her free time working for her in-laws. Anne Thairu used her free time to catch up on her household chores.

As grandmothers, Virginia Gitau (79) Mary Munyeki (78) and Mary Mwihaki (77) all spent their free time doing their house chores. Seventy-six year-old Peninah Kiretu said she spent her free time resolving issues of young people who had sought her out. Muthoni Likimani, aged 90, was the only woman who still worked in her free time. She was still writing books and was currently working on a book about human trafficking. The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group were the most in control of their free time as grandmothers and spent it engaging in activities they enjoyed. Patricia Waithera, (50) played golf whereas Rose Wairimu (50) years, and Jane Wachire (40) enjoyed reading in their free time. Mellina Kamoche (43) spent her free time composing songs.

#### **3.3.4.2 Generational Perspectives on Women's Free Time**

The grandmothers of the eighty years and older (80+) generation were all part of polygamous marriages. They were perceived by the eighty years and older (80+) women to have lived very restrictive lives with many rules and regulations. Their husbands would take off for months at a time leaving them alone to run the household. *“Cucu was left at home for many months by her husband. They lived really restricted lives and were not free to move around”*, said Maria Wangui.

All the women in the Sixty to seventy-nine generation believed their grandmothers and mothers never had free time. Njeri Mburu (77) said her mother was always working and

never had free time. In fact, she believed that work and free time were almost the same for her mother because she was always doing something. Florence Mwihaki (79) describes her mother's free time in the same way as Njeri. She explained that her mother's free time was all mixed in with her housework, work on the *shamba*, and community responsibilities so there was no difference for her.

One thing that Jane Wambui Ngang'a (50) had in common with her grandmother was how they spend their free time. *"Today, free time is limited; my free time was spent crocheting for cash. My grandmother made ciondos but not for money."* Jane added that while free time was limited, they both loved to make things with their hands.

Patricia Waithera said that one thing her grandmother did not have was free time, partly because of her reproductive responsibilities and partly because of her work ethic. She believed that the lack of free time was what drove women of her grandmother's generation to church. Susan Waithera's (41) and Olive Njambi's (41) grandmothers also never had free time. Olive Njambi (41) said her grandmother never had a chance to just sit and relax. Rose's grandmother spent her free time telling her grandchildren stories and getting them to walk on her back. She also used to go to women's homesteads to build houses.

Grace's Wairimu (70) was the only woman who said her mother had a lot of free time and she loved to sing in her free time. *"My mother had a lot of free time because by that time there was no new technology so what she did was enough for her. In her free time, she was just singing because my mother loved to sing. If we wanted to find her we just listened to where we could hear a song"*, said Grace.

Sixty-nine year-old (69) Monicah Kimiah, on the other hand, said her mother had no free time and even when they gave birth, they did not take time to rest and recover. *"Once the mother gave birth, she would go to the field with the baby tied to her back. On my side, once I gave birth, I would relax for like a month just sitting down"*, said Monicah.

All the respondents in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation viewed their mothers as having less free time than they enjoyed today. Olive Njambi explained that this was primarily because of their mother's need to constantly be working. Patricia Waithera (50) took this perspective one step further and revealed that for her mother, free time was actually a sin because she believed that women should be up with the sun and always working because a woman's value was based on how hard of a worker she was perceived to be.

*When I was growing up, lying in was a sin. My mum's expression which I grew up with and completely rebelled against was 'when the sun has risen, the sun has risen, people are supposed to wake up.' They never allowed themselves to have free time because it was not right for a woman to have free time. Even my mother in law is the same. She was telling me the other day how her husband would come home in the evening, and mind you she has been working around the house all day with no house help, and as he was eating if he saw her going to sit down he'd always be looking for something chore for her to do. He just didn't like to see her sitting down. It was a combination of society not expecting you to have free time and then you yourself psychologically start believing it.*

She said that she loves to lie in on a Sunday or just sit around the house and do nothing and she wished her mother had allowed herself to experience that. Patricia also believed that her mother's generation was more discriminating and prejudiced about who they hung out with than her generation are today.

*They had a lot of prejudices about who you hung out with, for example, if someone was divorced they would all tell each other not to hang out with the divorcee because she might steal their husbands. Being divorced was the biggest scandal and even divorcee was a dirty word. I reflect of some of these things and I think my goodness we have come a long long way.*

Jane Wairimu Ng'ang'a (49) viewed her freedom of movement as the biggest difference between her free time and her mother's. In her free time, she could go dancing and hang out with friends over a glass of wine, or go swimming, etc. Her mother, on the other hand, was always busy and so did not get to enjoy such activities. She did; however; remember her mother drinking alcohol in her free time but this was on rare occasions. Jane believes that women of her generation have more engagements and activities than in her mother's time.

In terms of their daughters, the eighty years and older (80+) generation believed they didn't have any free time. Margaret Githinji (82) from Nairobi said, *"my daughter has no free time but it's her time to work hard and build her life, her time will come for her rest"*. Esther Murugi agreed with her, adding that her daughters had so much work in their careers that the little time they have they just sit on the couch and rest, but this in itself, was rare. Tabitha Nderu (85), on the other hand, saw her daughter's generation as being extremely lazy and



irresponsible because they did nothing in their free time. There are no other mothers who share her sentiments.

According to Mary Mwhaki (77) the biggest difference in how their daughters spend their free time was their regular consumption of alcohol. *“Women in our time only drank during special occasion, not every day like they do today. Alcohol was harmless back then because it was made in the traditional way and it was not abused,”* explained Mary. She said the only times she remembered drinking as a young woman was when they had gone somewhere to sing for a bride. The women would be given a small calabash of *Muratina* to give them energy to sing. Mary Munyeki agrees with her namesake, adding that the behaviour of hanging out in bars with men that are not your husband was also something her daughters did that women of her time would never have dreamt of doing.

Njeri Mburu (77) felt that her daughter had a lot of modern activities to do in her free time. *“She has a lot to do during her free time like going to town to make her hair and nails, or moving around with her friends, etc. she is very active”*, said Njeri. For Florence Mwhaki (79) the major difference between her and her daughters was how they spend their free time with their children. *“Nowadays they take their children out for entertainment and to the movies. As some of the first career women in this country, we were too busy making money for our children to afford such luxuries”*, said Florence.

In contrast to the members of her age group, Grace Wairimu (70) believed that she had more free time than her daughters because they are employed.

*I have free time because I’m a manager and I can just report to the work in the evening and check on it whereas my daughters are employed and they do not have this freedom. The limited free time they do have was very limited, because they want to go to the salon and to the market and to visit friends and they do not know how to plan their time nicely,”* said Grace.

For Jane Wambui Ngang’a (50) her daughter never had any free time, but on the few occasion that she did, she took her child out to entertainment spots whereas in her time, there was no entertainment for children. Girls would either be working in the *shamba* or they played together outside. Rose Wairimu believed her daughters have more freedom than she did because they can hang out with their friends and go for outings with them, something they never had.

For Jane Wambui Maigwa (48), a major difference between how she and her daughter spend their free time is her daughter's love of socializing and going to bars and nightclubs. Lucy Njoki (57) agreed, noting that her daughter's generation do more of partying and socializing than they ever did. *"They party like they don't have a care in the world. They use all their money for clothes and going out and do not plan for tomorrow"*, she added.

For Patricia Waithera (50) the one big difference in how her daughter spent her free time was her interaction with boys her age. Patricia said she openly talked to her daughter about her boyfriend and he even came to visit. *"When it happened the first time, my husband was very shocked, but it is better that they meet in our house than outside in secret"*, said Patricia.

Susan Waithera (41) doesn't have daughters but she talks of the same behaviour of her sons where they bring their girlfriends to the house and they are very free with each other. In their time, said Susan, they were not allowed to have friends of the opposite sex.

Anne Thairu (46) explained that the biggest challenge with her daughters when it came to free time was their desire to always be hanging out with their friends in the malls. She said that this was particularly true of her teenage daughter because:

*She always she wants to be free with what she wants to do and no for this generation is not necessarily no. As a result, we argue a lot which is extremely frustrating for me because my daughter does not seem to realize that I am only trying to protect her. I don't know if it's because of technology or whether we have allowed too much freedom but the things that are happening now are getting out of control because you find children in drugs and alcohol and even sex at a very young age. All I want to do is protect her but she doesn't see it like that, said Anne.*

Jane Wairimu Ng'ang'a explained that what was going on today when boys and girls socialize, would never have happened in her time or even in her mother's time.

*When our mothers' were girls our parents would decide that today we are going to farm on the shamba of these families and all the boys and girls of the village would assemble together under the moon and go digging. There'd be singing and dancing and eating but no sexual indulgent. Today when there is a party the first thing is drugs nobody cares what happens so we are saying they need to be free but how do we measure this freedom. So I think it is a*

*challenge to us as parents to know what level of freedom we can offer our children.*

She added that parents must learn to set boundaries for their children and stick to them, otherwise they will lose their children to the world.

Jane Wairimu Ngang'a (49) explained that while she was never allowed to sleep outside the home by her mother, she allows her daughter to spend the night outside the home. Jane said,

*Growing up, I don't remember ever spending a night out. Even when I was in college, I remember the only time I could spend a night out was if I had come to visit my brother. That time he was living in Nairobi. But nowadays my daughter will come and tell me 'I am going for a Kesha (overnight praise and worship service in church) and I choose to trust her because at the end of the day, whether it is the Kesha or not, I have told her about her responsibilities so if she listens to the information well and good and if she doesn't, then there are consequences. So we are able to negotiate all that*

She was quick to add that this was not so much out of choice but because it is very hard to say no to her daughter's generation.

### **3.3.4.3 Women's Perspectives on the Distribution of Free Time between Women and Men**

All the women said their brother had more free time than they did. They also had freedom of movement which the girls did not enjoy. Miriam Wambugu, a traditional 80-years-old woman from Nyeri, explained, "*We could not leave the house or visit friends.... Our brothers were free to roam around and visit friends*". Many women across the age groups agree with Miriam. The most popular activity for boys across all three age groups was sports. In both counties and across age groups more boys engaged in sports in their free time than girls did. The most popular activity for girls in their free time was practising singing and dancing for cultural and school events. In both Nairobi and Nyeri County girls engaged more in church and community activities than their brothers did.

In Nairobi County more girls were involved in cultural activities than their brothers. It was the same case in Nyeri except for the Sixty to seventy-nine age group where an equal number of boys and girls engaged in cultural activities. Only Florence Mwhaki's brother from Nairobi County had a small business as a boy. "*He was very enterprising, he had an evening class teaching other kids to read and write. When he was not available, I taught the class*

*because I was very clever*”, narrates Florence with a smile. She went on to explain how funny it was to have a class full of older boys being taught by a young girl. *“But people didn’t care who was teaching them because they had a hunger to learn”*, she added.

As adults, when they did have free time, women engaged in more activities during their free time than their husbands. Family/cultural activities, attending church and knitting or crocheting were the top three activities for women in their free time. For their husbands, family/cultural events and sports were the top two activities they engaged in across age groups and counties. More women participated in church activities and practised singing and dancing than their husbands did. On the other hand, there were more husbands involved in sports during their free time, than wives.

From the Oral testimonies it transpired that both men and women worked in their free time. In Nyeri County, the majority of husbands worked on the *shamba* in their free time. Lucy Macharia (81) a traditional woman explained, *“My husband was involved in farming, raising cattle and helping me on the farm in his free time. There was no free time for either of us because there was always something to do,”* she explained.

In Nairobi County, the different generations of husbands engaged in different activities during their free time. According to Virginia Gitau (79) men from the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) had no free time and most had no freedom of movement. Her husband could only move around Nairobi with his pass. The three career men married to career women in their seventies all adopted western social habits and norms. Njeri Mburu’s (77) husband, for example, read newspapers and watched TV in his free time.

Husbands of the respondents in the forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) cohort engaged in western social activities such as reading novels, watching movies and listening to music One such example was Jane Wachira’s husband. They also started to socialize outside the home in bars drinking alcohol as is the case with Jane Ng’ang’a’s (49) husband. All the husbands in all age groups spent their free time relaxing and doing nothing.

### **3.3.5 Women’s Leadership Roles**

Lastly, women were asked about their leadership roles. Below we look at women’s perspectives on their leadership roles as well as generational perspectives of women’s leadership roles.

### 3.3.5.1 Women's Perspectives on their Leadership Roles

The only leadership roles that women in the eighty years and older (80+) age group had were within the Church. Esther Murugi and Veronica Kirigo were both Church leaders and treasurers. Sarah Njeri and Flora Nyumbura believed there were no leadership roles for women. Muthoni Likimani and Tabitha Nderu had no leadership role because they had young families.

Half of the sixty to seventy-nine cohort women said in their oral testimonies for this age group that they were not involved in any type of leadership, either because there were no opportunities, or because women like Njeri Mburu (77) were not interested in becoming a leader. This age group was the first to be involved in formal women's organizations. Florence Mwihaki was the national treasurer of the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) and Grace Wairimu was the Nyeri Chairperson. Mary Mwihaki (77) was a woman elder in her community.

But during the Kenya Land and Freedom war (the Mau Mau war) women took leadership positions such as Field Marshall Muthoni who was the only female General and Dedan Kimathi's right hand 'man'. The literature confirms that there were many renowned female freedom fighters such as Njoki Waicere from Murang'a who was celebrated for her courage, and Marshall Muthoni, who entered the forest when she was twenty-two (22) years old and spent ten years fighting. Cinda Reri is another good example of this. Cinda was an excellent marksman and fierce fighter. She was also in charge of two hundred women.

Cinda Reri alone had 200 women under her command, a fact that is easily verified by those who were in the forest with her. Such women were allocated duties which ranged from transporting luggage, fetching firewood and water, mending clothes and delivering messages to the reserve (Kabira, 2005).

Women had never been allowed to fight before but during the Kenya Land and Freedom war (the Mau Mau war) they were allowed to both take the oath and become warriors. Unfortunately, the important role that women played in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) is rarely mentioned in accounts of the struggle. *"...Though the activities of women which were indeed heroic, do not feature prominently in most African Freedom accounts, it is quite indisputable that women were the backbone of the resistance movement"* (Gachihi, 1986). Regrettably, women such as Cinda Reri, Njoki Waicere, and Marshall

Muthoni among many others are rarely celebrated. It is up to the women of this generation to ensure that their stories of great courage and sacrifice are shared with the world.

Gikuyu women were treated as equals in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). The Mau Mau Oath was the first one to be administered to women. *“Before the Mau Mau, women had never received the Oath. But although they took the oath, they were never administrators”* notes Dr. Gachihi. But the women in who were in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) contradicted this statement. Esther Njeri Mugunyi who was a former freedom fighter, for example, was taught to administer the oath by her brother. She provides us with an insight of just how seriously the Oath was taken by Gikuyu women:

The Oath we took...was to fight for our country’s freedom and our land, our land which the white man had taken away from us. You see it was not that I just went to take that oath. No, I was first enlightened by other girls. It was serious business. My own brother was an expert in administering and taught me how to do it to others (Kabira, 2005:10).

Former freedom fighter, Esther Mugunyi who lived in the forest for three years, explains,

Unlike many others who had betrayed their fellow freedom fighters after beating and torture, we the women refused to say anything about those we left in the forest. No amount of beating or torture would make us betray our fellow freedom fighters. None! (Gachihi, 1986:171).

This demonstrates that women took the oath very seriously and endured all kinds of torture and ill-treatment in order to uphold it. It shows great strength of character and conviction among these women. Women of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) were not just tortured but the colonialists also attempted to bribe them for secrets and more specially to testify against their husbands. *“We would be given clothes and money so that we could give evidence against the freedom fighters. We refused”*, says freedom fighter Wambui Duncan (Kabira & Ngurukie, 1997).

Certain traditional roles that women had performed, particularly trading with neighbouring communities, came in very handy during the Kenya Land and Freedom. *“Kamba women were known to have transported food all the way from Kangundo to Thika on foot to deliver it to the kikuyu women, acting as Mau Mau agents, who would buy the food specifically as provisions for the Mau Mau”* (Gachihi, 1986). Women were able to communicate with women from neighbouring tribes, especially from the Kamba tribe. This demonstrates their

incredible resourcefulness and communication abilities. The Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) relied solely on Gikuyu women for their food and crucial information. *“Women performed excellently as Mau Mau couriers maintaining contact with fighters in the forest and acting as links between the urban and rural areas”* (Gachihi, 1986). All these responsibilities and roles that Gikuyu women played, clearly demonstrate how instrumental they were in the success of the movement. But has history accurately recorded this or adequately celebrated the important role that women played?

As grandmothers most of the eighty years and older (80+) women had no leadership roles as women. Only one woman had a formal leadership role, namely Muthoni Likimani who was the trustee of the first school she went to in her village. She was also a trustee of YWCA. Tabitha Nderu (85) and Veronica Nyawira (84) were the heads of their families and they took the responsibilities of guiding the younger generations very seriously.

As grandmothers, Virginia Gitau (79) believed she was never a leader because she was uneducated. Mary Munyeki (78) and Florence Mwiwaki (79) were no longer involved in any leadership roles because they had left that to the younger generation. Mary Munyeki was the leader of the Kikuyu Traditional Dancers, Westlands, a group that performed at traditional events for money. Three women were still very involved as leaders. Njeri Mburu was the secretary in two women groups, Grace Wairimu was the Nyeri chairperson and national treasurer of the Kenya Farmers Federation. Peninah Kiretu was a nominated councillor.

All the women in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group had leadership roles at some point of their adult lives and some even had multiple leadership positions which implies that more opportunities for leadership were available to women of this cohort. For example, Jane Wambui Ngang'a said, *“I was the branch executive for the KNUT for 7 years. I am currently the ASK Central Kenya Show, in charge of protocol for 8 years. I am also the TNA sub-county chair in Mathira”*. Mellina Kamoche and Rose Wairimu Kamau were also local political leaders.

The results indicate that women's leadership was often limited to the realm of women's organizations and groups but there were very few women who had held public leadership positions. The literature confirms that it was very hard for Kenyan women in general, to get a public leadership post because of the burden from their social gender roles and cultural and gender discrimination.

Women's limited participation in the competitive world of politics is in part due to heavy responsibilities and workloads associated with their multiple reproductive roles....Negative socio-cultural attitudes and customary practices also posed a major barrier to women's political empowerment (Mikell, 1997:247).

### 3.3.5.2 Generational Perspectives on Women's Leadership Roles

The eighty years and older (80+) cohort felt that their grandmothers had no opportunities to be leaders. Esther Murugi believed there were no leadership roles in general because there was no community. Sarah Njeri, Veronica Kirigo and Tabitha Nderu are of the opinion that women could not be leaders in their grandmothers' time because there were no leadership roles for women, all leaders had to be men. This is reflective of the patriarchal system that African Feminists are working to remove. "*Patriarchy was a social system where all leadership and decision making positions were reserved exclusively for men*" (Goredema, 2010:34).

According to Peninah Kiretu from the Sixty to seventy-nine generation, her grandmother could never have been a leader because her husband wouldn't let her to be one and she was under his control. "*She was never a leader because her husband believed they married wives to stay at home and cook for the children*", said Peninah. Njeri Mburu, Peninah's age mate, also mentioned that her grandmother could never have a leadership position because of her grandfather.

Mary Mwhaki (78), however, notes that her grandmother led women in her community, especially when organizing food for cultural events and when they travelled far to trade with the Maasai and the Kamba. "*Whenever they would go on one of their missions, Cucu was always chose by the women to lead them*", said Mary. Monicah Kimiah was the only woman to say her mother had a leadership role. Her mother was in charge of coordinating the preparation of food for the weddings. "*My mother would communicate to the women in the village on how to make the food and porridge,*" remembered Monicah. All other respondents from this age group said their mothers were not leaders because there were no leadership roles for women. Even Grace Njambi (70) who was a leader herself, said her mother was never a leader because she was not given a chance to be one.

When it came to their mothers, Esther Murugi (87) believed there were no leadership roles available for women during their mothers' time. However, Veronica Kirigo and Muthoni



Likimani (90) disagreed with each other. Veronica explained that her mother coordinated food preparation whenever there was a big community event. Muthoni said her mother was a leader within the Anglican Church where her father preached. *“She was a church leader by the simple fact that she was the wife of an Anglican Priest but she did a lot for the mission and took messages to the villagers”*, said Muthoni.

The sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) women believed that their daughters had more leadership opportunities than they did. Njeri Mburu (77) said that she was never a leader but her daughter is. Mary Munyeki said she never wanted to be a leader but her daughter is the leader in her church and in her *chama*. Grace Wairimu (70) and her daughter are both leaders but she emphasizes that their leadership styles were very different. Grace said:

*They cannot organize the women the way we did because the trust is no longer there. People do not trust one another because humans have become something else and there is a lot of dishonesty. Everybody is just interested in themselves: ‘me and my people’ or ‘me and my family’. But this is just part of civilization. When civilization comes, it comes with everything both good and bad*

Virginia Gitau and her daughter were both leaders as well but different types of leaders. Virginia was a leader in her community whereas her daughter is a business leader where she works.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter looked at women’s perspectives on their social gender roles. It emerged that between 1900 - 2000, women have gone from having only reproductive roles to the burden of triple roles which, in addition to the reproductive roles, also include productive and community roles. This is because women did not replace reproductive roles with productive roles, for example, but instead took on productive roles in addition to their reproductive work. Women also continued to be very involved in their communities, particularly with helping each other through women’s groups. With all these responsibilities, it is not surprising that the majority of women have no free time even for themselves (Leboutte, 2015).

The women feel overburdened by their reproductive roles which remain the same across the three generations and throughout the women’s life-cycle. The main reproductive activities that the respondents remained responsible for at home throughout their life time are cooking,

cleaning the house, taking care of the children, fetching water and fetching firewood. In *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies*, Barbara Rogers explained that

*Women had been socialized to perceive all the reproductive work as theirs simply because they were the ones who gave birth. "It is thought natural that a woman's place is in the home and that she has a very specific set of tasks which are thought to be universal because they are based on the biological imperatives of sex (Rogers, 2005:4).*

Caroline Moser agreed that women were assigned all the reproductive roles because of their role to give birth and nurture children as they grow up (Moser, 2004).

Moser added that one of the greatest challenges to women's reproductive role was that it is not valued because it is unpaid.

A crucial issue relating to women's reproductive work concerns the extent to which it is visible and valued. For despite its actual character, because it is seen as natural work, it is somehow not real 'work, and therefore is invisible (Moser, 2004: 52).

Women's reproductive roles were also never ending and so it was hard for women to establish when their work began and when it ended.

Surprisingly, a high percentage of women from Nairobi still fetch water and fire wood because they are women, even though they live in an urban centre. This is because most of the women interviewed in the face-to-face questionnaires were from low-income households and live in informal settlements such as Mathare and Kibera which have no access to running water or electricity. In *Urban Poverty and Labour Force Participation in Kenya*, Odhiambo and Manda note that,

"A large and increasing number of the urban population in Kenya is living in overcrowded and unsanitary slums and squatter settlements which often do not have access to basic infrastructure and services" (Odhiambo & Manda, 2003:13).

The majority of poor people in urban centres are women.

The introduction of education started to shift the girl's reproductive roles as school work started to replace some of the house chores they did. Girls would be gone from the homestead all day at school. Education also changed a mother's role in her child's life, particularly when

it came to teaching her children about their culture. In traditional Gikuyu society, parents were the primary teachers responsible for schooling their children on the culture and moral standards of their people. Kabira explains that,

Girls received no formal training (except at initiation). From their mothers, sisters and female cousins they learned the duties of women: to rear children, to prepare food, to tend the goats at home, to cultivate the fields (Kabira, 1992).

When it came to their productive roles, less than half the respondents worked outside the home throughout their lifetimes because of the burden of their reproductive roles and gender discrimination when it came to available jobs for women compared to men. Even fewer women had good paying jobs and careers. For the Women in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), however, the reality was completely different from the rest of the women. They were moved to colonial villages and then forced into forced labour for no pay.

The women's perspectives revealed that productive roles did not change women's reproductive roles and if more of their time had to be spent on productive roles, they were forced to pay for a house help to do their domestic chores for them.

In *Gender Paradigm Shift within the Family Structure in Kiambu, Kenya* Wamae and Njoroge explain that

Even when women make major headways in formal employment, equal with men in the workplace, they still are responsible for the traditional domestic roles of home maintenance and child rearing. While the women were still responsible for the reproductive roles, they delegated it to house helps who they paid to do their reproductive roles (Wamae-Ngare, 2011:34).

Overall the distribution of social gender roles reflected the patriarchal system that Gikuyu women were under in that they did all the reproductive roles, they had no free time or freedom of movement and they had community roles but not community leadership. This was in line with the patriarchal system that African feminism spoke out against. The African Feminist Ruvimbo Goredema notes in *African Feminism: The African Woman's Struggle for Identity*:

Historically, the sexual division of labour was organized in such a way that women were (and still are) the primary caregivers, and were responsible for the bulk of food cultivation and/or processing. Women therefore played

central, but socially subordinate roles in African society, resulting in their being denied access to institutions that were gendered a male preserve (Goredema, 2010:35).

This study revealed that this appears to be the situation with today's generation where women are increasingly becoming responsible for the productive roles while still fulfilling their reproductive roles and that in many cases they have even become the main breadwinners of their family.

The respondents were asked to compare their own social gender roles to those of different generations of women. The reproductive roles remained the sole responsibility of women across all generations. The younger generations, however, have the additional burden of productive roles. As regards their community roles, the results showed that women had always come together to help each other but this had become more formalized from the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation onwards when women started forming women's groups and national women's organizations.

The respondents were also asked to give their perspectives on how social gender roles were distributed between men and women across their lifetimes. The results confirmed that there were distinct gender roles that Gikuyu had for women and men and most of these roles remained the same till today. Caroline Moser confirms that, "*Men and women play different roles in society with their gender differences shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants*" (Moser, 2012: 45). The respondents were also asked to give their perspectives on which gender did the most work in the household, outside the home, in the community and during their free time. Women did all the reproductive work, they perceived the productive work to be evenly distributed between women and men, they felt women did more community work than men and men had more free time than women.

Overall, women's burden has increased between 1900 to 2000 because aside from their reproductive roles, they are also increasingly taking on productive roles and they are very involved in the community which means they never have any free time. In *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training*, Caroline Moser referred to this dynamic as the triple role of women where women have reproductive roles, productive roles as a secondary earner and community roles (Moser, 2012).

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### PHYSICAL IMAGES

This chapter explores women's perspectives on physical image, beauty and style. All three tools, namely the oral testimonies tool, the face-to-face questionnaires tool, and the focus group discussions tool asked women to share their perspectives on beauty. The first section looks at the characteristics of *Mutumia Ngatha*. This is followed by an exploration of how women across three generations measured beauty, in the second section. The third section explored how women across the three age groups enhanced their beauty. The final section of this chapter looked at the factors that influenced on women's beauty and style.

#### 4.1. Characteristics of *Mutumia Ngatha*

The first section looks at the characteristics of *Mutumia Ngatha* (a virtuous woman). The oral testimonies and face-to-face questionnaires explored the respondents' perceptions of the characteristics of a beautiful woman. According to the women interviewed, a beautiful woman was defined more by her character and manners than her physical features and so this section looks at how women defined a woman's inner beauty.

The major characteristics of *Mutumia Ngatha* were a woman who had good behaviour, was hardworking, had respect for self and others, and good relationships with other women. Below we explore these characteristics further.

All the women correlated beauty to youth especially when sharing how they perceived their own beauty. It was not uncommon to hear women talk about 'when I was younger' or 'before I got married' even though they were asked the questions on beauty in the present tense. Esther Murugi (87) believed she was physically very beautiful in her time, explaining that her time was when she was a young woman just before getting married. She went on to explain that she did not believe that beauty mattered at her age because she was old. Esther's self-image is that she was beautiful when she was younger, when it mattered. She also believes that once a woman has children and starts to get older, her physical beauty matters less and less, implying that it disappears.

*Mutumia Ngatha* can be described as a woman who had a good character and manners, was hardworking, had happy temperament/nature, respected others and had good relationships with other women.

#### 4.1.1 Character and Good Behaviour

For the eighty years and older (80+) age group, character was an important measure of a woman's physical beauty but not in the way character is perceived to be today. According to the respondents from this age group, a Gikuyu girl or woman with character was someone who was soft-spoken, cooperative, helpful, generous, humble, kind and respectful. They explained that this was an important measure of beauty in their time.

According to Lucy Macharia (81) says, a beautiful woman was always polite and respectful.

*A beautiful girl always had good behaviour, and according to my parents, respect. People would say that that young woman is good, she is respectful and does her chores back home. Just like they would see an uncircumcised girl and say that one is a kihuguiya (irresponsible one). We hated girls that were uncircumcised or an irresponsible girl who men could not approach, she explained.*

In the face-to-face questionnaires, ninety-three (93%) of the eighty years and older (80+) women from Nyeri saw good behaviour and a soft-spoken character as an important measure of beauty for girls as compared to seventy (70%) of the respondents from Nairobi. This suggested that good manners were more important for girls in the rural areas where people lived in close-knit communities with their extended families, than it was in Nairobi where only the nucleus family existed.

All the women in the eighty years and older (80+) age group from Nyeri saw good morals as a key characteristic of *Mutumia Ngatha*, compared to only seventy (70%) of the women from Nairobi. In the Sixty to seventy-nine age group, eighty-nine percent (89%) of women in both Nyeri and Nairobi believed the same. By good morals they meant that a woman was honest, respectful to others, loyal to her husband and family, generous and kind.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nyeri believed that the most important characteristic of *Mutumia Ngatha* was her commitment to her family. The participants believed that a woman who was committed to her family was the epitome of *Mutumia Ngatha*. The focus group from Nairobi agreed adding that one could tell *Mutumia Ngatha* by how much her family loved her. "*Atumia Ngatha were loved by their husbands and blessed by him and their children for her actions,*" said Cecilia Wairimu (81).

The women from Nyeri discussed how *Mutumia Ngatha* made every effort to maintain peace with her husband and raise her children in the right way. "*Mutumia Ngatha was one who got*

*along well with her husband and mentored her children by teaching them to always respect their family members, their elders and people of their parents' age whether they were familiar to them or strangers,"* explained Agnes Njoki (80+).

In the oral testimonies, *Mutumia Ngatha* was seen as the primary teacher and disciplinarian for her children. She was responsible for teaching them good morals, values and how to be a good person. *"All the work regarding moulding the children to be responsible and respectful people in society was a woman's job, and we took it very seriously"*, explained Virginia Nyumbura (85). She added that a woman was often the one who was judged for her children's bad behaviour.

The eighty years and older (80+) generation were of the opinion that a woman with a happy nature and temperament was peaceful, happy, gentle, kind, soft-spoken and good-natured. Veronica Nyawira (84), for example, described such a woman as having *"a good nature and being peaceful."* The majority of respondents perceived a happy nature to not be an important measurement of beauty for Gikuyu girls but as an important characteristic for women. In the face-to-face questionnaires, sixty-nine percent (69%) of the women from Nairobi and sixty (60%) from Nyeri felt that a woman's temperament or happy nature were a measure of women's beauty. *"Beauty is not the face but all about inner beauty and behaviour. A beautiful woman is peaceful, kind and avoids getting into fights or argument,"* said Jacinta Muriithi (84).

In their responses to the face-to-face questionnaires the majority of women from the Sixty to seventy-nine cohort saw a happy nature as an important measure of beauty for women; of whom eighty-three (83%) were from Nairobi and seventy-nine percent (79%) from Nyeri. *"A woman with a happy nature is someone who was content, loving and welcoming,"* explained Charity Muthoni (65) from the Nairobi focus group. The group agreed that such women would even open their hearts and homes to a co-wife when the husband brought her home. Such women were not jealous of each other but had a lot of love and respect for other women.

The women from both focus groups agreed that *Mutumia Ngatha* has good behaviour and reconciliatory character, especially if she actively engaged in bringing her family together, including all the children and her co-wives. This was a shared perspective because most of the respondents grew up in polygamous families where a woman's behaviour and character determined the peace of the homestead.

*In our time, the wife who was kind and cooperative with her co-wives was the most admired. The other thing Mutumia Ngatha did was she never separated the children so you never knew which children belonged to the first wife and which children belonged to the second wife. All the children in the homestead grew up as brothers and sisters. All children loved one another. There was nothing like step-children*

Character was viewed as an important trait for girls but for women, from eighty-three percent (83%) for girls to eleven percent (11%) for women in Nairobi and eighty-nine percent (89%) as girls to sixteen (16%) as women in Nyeri County. This implies that a good character was seen as an important trait for young girls growing up during the Kenya Land and Freedom war (the Mau Mau war), especially since many of them were used as couriers and spies.

The ability to love and treat all children equally without any discrimination was seen as an important characteristic of *Mutumia Ngatha* by all women in this age group. Mary Veronica (71), from the Nairobi focus group, explained that, “*Mutumia Ngatha never cared about whose children belong to who since all the children belonged to her. If she found a child at her home, she would regard the child as hers and offer them some food.*”

In their oral testimony all respondents in the forty to fifty-nine cohort said that physical beauty had no value because it could not be eaten. Olive Njambi Murage (41) agreed and noted that “*A woman’s beauty is in her behaviour, what she values, and her principles. Majority of the men with a good upbringing will not go for physical beauty alone when selecting a wife. It is so important to have good values*”, she explained, adding that beauty went beyond one’s features to include a woman’s attitude and behaviour. “*It had nothing to do with physical beauty it was all about heart beauty*”, said Jane Wambui Ngang’a (50).

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) focus group were of the opinion that physical beauty was not as important as inner beauty. “*There is nothing like beauty, only good manners and respect for elders, matters. It is also important to use good language and be soft-spoken so that you show other people respect. In our time a beautiful woman was one who listened and obeyed her parents, she had good behaviour and dressed decently*”, said Alice Wanjiru (55).

The focus group from Nairobi believed that *Mutumia Ngatha* had good behaviour; she did not gossip, she was soft spoken, friendly, kind and accommodating. The women in the oral testimonies agreed. “*Good character was everything and girls and women went to great lengths to safeguard their reputations,*” said Alice Wanjiru (55). Eighty-one percent of the



women from Nyeri and seventy-nine percent from Nairobi believed *Mutumia Ngatha* was someone who was honest, polite and respectful of others.

All the women in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation agreed that *Mutumia Ngatha* displayed a strong commitment to her family. The focus group from Nairobi believed that *Mutumia Ngatha* was one who took care of her home and family and ensured there was always peace in the home. *"Mutumia Ngatha gave herself respect and even the children. Her children were also obedient. Whenever there was a fight between other women, she acted as a mediator,"* said Mary Wanjiku (52). The focus group from Nyeri described *Mutumia Ngatha* as one who had time for her family and especially for her children. They believed that virtuous women spoke politely to their children and coached them by telling them stories and riddles. She also gave her children respect and they were respectful and obedient to her in return.

According to Jane Wambui Maigwa (43) a post independent respondent from Nyeri, character today meant being different, and standing out from the pack whereas in her time it meant being uniform, not standing out from the rest, not asking questions and being obedient to one's elders. So we can see that there has been a shift from uniformity to individuality overtime, among Gikuyu women. For CEO Patricia Waithera (50), a woman's character was an important pillar of her beauty. *"You can tell a beautiful woman by her outlook, how she sees life, the way she presents herself, and her presence, confidence and neatness"*, she said.

Character and good manners were seen as important for girls but not for women. Eight-four percent of respondents from Nairobi and 81% from Nyeri thought it was a measure of beauty for girls. When it came to women however, only the Nairobi respondents saw it as an important measure of beauty; seventy-nine percent (79%) of women from Nairobi felt character and good manners were important compared to only sixteen percent (16%) in Nyeri. This implies that good manners and character were perceived to be more important for the urban woman, potentially because she interacted with many strangers.

A happy nature, as a measure of beauty was not mentioned by the forty to fifty-nine cohort in either of the two focus groups or in any of the oral testimonies. In the face-to-face questionnaires, however, seventy-nine percent (79%) of the women from Nyeri and sixty-three percent (63%) of the women from Nairobi perceived it to be an important measure of

beauty. These percentages imply that a happy nature was perceived to be more important in Nyeri than in Nairobi.

#### 4.1.2 Hardworking

In the eighty years and older (80+) generation all the participants believed that being a hard worker was one of the important and necessary characteristics of *Mutumia Ngatha* because all the responsibility of the homestead, children and food production was hers.

*Mutumia Ngatha would take care of the goats and the homestead; she would also take care of the children; feed them and not shout at them. Once she had taken care of the goats, she would then go back to the shamba. As she came out of the shamba in the evening she went back to check on the goats to feed them then she would ensure the meal for her husband was ready. When visitors came, she would also ensure that they were fed and happy. The Mutumia Ngatha's (virtuous women) still exist even today but they are not many* said Virginia Nyumbura (85), from the Nyeri focus group.

Virginia's comment confirms that not only did the traditional patriarchal systems overburden women with reproductive roles but that women were also socialized to label this burden as hard work and make it part of their self-image. The results indicate that all the women in the eighty years and older (80+) age group placed a lot of value on hard work. According to Virginia, some of the women's daughter's had also adopted the same self-image of hard work. The literature confirms that it is commonplace for girls to follow in their mother's footsteps, particularly when it comes to self-image and reproductive roles. In her poem *I am Becoming my Mother* (1986), Lorna Goodison talks about how she feels she is morphing into her mother. She said:

*I am becoming my mother*

*Brown/yellow woman*

*Fingers smelling of onions.*

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group in Nairobi discussed how a woman's hard work was linked to her marriage prospects because a man would not marry a woman before he had seen her work.

Hard work was perceived by respondents to be a more important measure of beauty for girls in Nyeri than for girls in Nairobi. In the face-to-face questionnaires 93% of the respondents

from Nyeri perceived hard work to be a measure of a girl's beauty, as compared to only nine percent (9%) in Nairobi. For women, however, this percentage rose to ninety-two percent (92%) in Nairobi as compared to eighty-percent (87%) in Nyeri. This implies that while girls may have not had as many reproductive roles in the city, when they became women, they automatically acquired them.

In her oral testimony, Margaret Githinji (82) from Nairobi explained that a woman living in Nairobi had to be hard working because there were no house helps or extended family at that time to help with the domestic chores and taking care of the children. She added that one of the reasons that her husband married her was because of her hard working nature because he lived in Nairobi and was looking for a woman to take care of his home and his needs. The women in both of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus groups agreed with Margaret and explained that before they got married, young men would sit somewhere and watch young women cultivating and they would also inspect the fields of the girl they were interested in.

In *Aspects of Traditional Gikuyu Morality* Dr Kinoti confirms the women's views when she notes that it was more important for a girl to have a good moral standing and be hard working, than it was for her to be beautiful. "*A good name is very important in Gikuyu society,*" notes Kinoti (1983:279). Father Cagnolo confirms this by explaining that even when a girl was ready to get married, the men did not look at her physical appearance but instead inspected her fields and asked around about her nature and temperament. "*A girl was appraised more for her work, temperament and behaviour than her physical attraction,*" he explained (Cagnolo, 1933:29).

In their responses to the face-to-face questionnaires the Sixty to seventy-nine cohort claimed that hard work was seen as a measure of beauty for young girls in Nyeri by ninety-five percent (95%) of the respondents as compared to only six percent (6%) of the respondents in Nairobi. This implies that young girls did not have as much work to do in the cities as they did in the rural areas. However, ninety-four percent (94%) of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) respondents from Nairobi perceived hard work as a measure of beauty compared to sixty-three percent (63%) in Nyeri. The women in both focus groups explained hard work was also an important characteristic that young men looked for when deciding whom to marry.

In *Ways of Seeing* (1973), John Berger says patriarchal societies socialized women to define themselves based on feedback from men, meaning their self-image was defined along the lines of what is attractive to men. In this context, what was attractive to men was hard work and therefore, the women adopted it as part of their self-image.

#### 4.1.3 Respect

In terms of self-respect, only the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nyeri described *Mutumia Ngatha* as one who respected herself. They explained that a woman who respected herself would never lose her temper, or raise her voice. "*Mutumia Ngatha gives herself respect in her dressing and the way she carries herself. You will never catch her being rude in public or fighting with other women. When there is a fight, she acts as the moderator,*" said Regina Wambui (47). The women felt that a good woman respected herself so much that she would not date or mix with just anybody. "*She has good and mature behaviour. She is not a loose woman who welcomes any man to her,*" explained Josephine Muthoni (44).

Dr Kinoti reflects the views of Josephine in *Aspects of Traditional Gikuyu Morality* (1983), where she discusses how young women would guard her virginity and innocence until she got married because her reputation was a valuable part of her self-image and also determined her marriage prospects. According to Dr Kinoti, if a woman got married or was known to be having sex before marriage, the young men would reject her and she would have to become a second or third wife (Kinoti, 1983).

A self-respecting woman was also equated to the way women who had been circumcised carried themselves. "*Once a girl was circumcised, they never talked badly, they were given a lot of respect and they respected themselves. Our generation were not circumcised so we missed out on the coaching that young women got during that process,*" said Jacinta Nyagah.

In the face-to-face questionnaires for the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation, eighty-nine percent (89%) of the women from Nairobi and sixty-eight percent (68%) from Nyeri were of the opinion that *Mutumia Ngatha* dressed modestly which was similar to the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) description of self-respect. By this they meant that she wore dresses or skirts that were below the knee and she never wore trousers.

In the face-to-face questionnaires for the eighty years and older (80+) generation, one hundred percent (100%) of the women from Nyeri and ninety-six percent (96%) from Nairobi

perceived respect for one's husband as an important characteristic of *Mutumia Ngatha*. Aside from the husband she also respected her father and other elders. Showing respect for her husband meant that she was kind to him, she listened and she was also obedient to him. Ninety-one percent (91%) of women from Nairobi and ninety-three percent (93%) from Nyeri believed *Mutumia Ngatha* was also obedient to her husband and submitted herself to his authority and direction.

All the women in the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation also believed that *Mutumia Ngatha* was respectful to her husband. According to the focus group from Nairobi such a woman was compliant, well-mannered and submitted to her husband. She would never argue with him or ask him where he had been if he came home late at night. They explained that in their mother's time, women respected their husbands so much that they would never have sat down or even eaten in their presence.

This perspective suggests that women were relegated to the role of a house girl in their own homes because there was little difference between how women were treated and how house girls are treated today. In his poem, *I Too* (1994), Langston Hughes describes how a slave boy is treated:

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

The description Langston Hughes gives of the slave boy matches the women's perspectives of their own place within the home, suggesting that women's self-image in the home was similar to slavery.

In the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) face-to-face questionnaires one hundred percent (100%) of the women from Nairobi and eighty-four percent (84%) from Nyeri described *Mutumia Ngatha* as one who respected her husband in the way she treated him. However, forty-four percent (44%) of the women from Nairobi and seventy-nine percent (79%) from Nyeri believed that *Mutumia Ngatha* was obedient to her husband. This implies that the women in Nairobi perceived respect and obedience to be two different concepts. Respect was

described as having a deep admiration for one's spouse and understanding they were important whereas obedience meant submitting to their husband's authority. So while all the women interviewed in Nairobi felt it was important to respect their husbands, the majority of them did not feel it was necessary to submit to their husband's authority.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi, however, believed that *Mutumia Ngatha* submitted to her husband and put him first. She listened to him and they worked through the difficult times together. They felt that women today did not respect their husbands or their in-laws because they constantly went back to their mothers whenever there was a problem in their marriage. "*When you get married, you are meant to forget your parents and adopt your in-laws as your new parents and you make them your family,*" explained Loise Wamuyu from the Nairobi focus group.

In the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) face-to-face questionnaires, eighty-nine (89%) of the women from Nyeri and eighty-four percent (84%) of the women from Nairobi believed that *Mutumia Ngatha* respected her husband and other male authorities in her life such as her father by being polite and kind to him and putting him first.

#### **4.1.4 Relationship with Other Women**

Contrary to common myths that women are their own worst enemy, all women of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation, believed that *Mutumia Ngatha* was kind and polite to other women and she was not in competition with them. The focus group from Nyeri said that *Mutumia Ngatha* genuinely loved other women, particularly her co-wives, did not hold grudges, did not lose her temper or got upset at her co-wives. This was a great confirmation of women's love for one another, which explodes the myth that women were their own worst enemy. She would treat other women's children like she treated her own and was quick to volunteer to help other women in collective work activities, a tradition that continues today with women's groups and chamas. Mary Nyumbura (70) says:

*In the past women really loved one another. Even when a co-wife was brought, they did not get angry. In fact, they are the ones that told the husband to get a co-wife. They wanted the husbands to have peace as compared to now. For example, my grandmother who I am named after, had four children; 2 boys and 2 girls. So she searched for a wife for her husband and welcomed her and gave her to the husband. There was no one who was jealous about it.*

This is a very important statement because it dispels the common understanding that women don't like each other. Mary was the only woman to mention this extreme case of women looking for wives for their husbands which implies that it was not as commonplace as she would like us to believe. But according to the Nairobi focus group, women were OK with polygamy because having many wives and children was a sign of being wealthy. Nevertheless, one can see why a polygamous setting would necessitate women being loving and accommodating to one another because all the wives lived in the same homestead, even if they each had their own huts.

According to the participants in both focus groups of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation, the public recognition of *Mutumia Ngatha* was that she was respected by the community. The focus group from Nairobi noted that *Mutumia Ngatha* was the one people sought out to settle their disputes, because she was a peacemaker. Being peace maker is a very important role identified by the women which gives reason for women to be involved in conflict resolution at the county level. The Nyeri focus group said that *Mutumia Ngatha* was highly admired by her peers and often used as an example to their daughters.

## **4.2 Physical Beauty**

The following section looks at women's perspectives of physical beauty. It looks at characteristics of physical beauty such as skin colour, cleanliness, smart and modest dressing, etc.

### **4.2.1 Skin Colour**

Fair skin was perceived to be a measure of beauty by women living in Nairobi County. In the face-to-face questionnaires, fifty-four percent (54%) of the eighty years and older (80+) women from Nairobi saw fair skin as a measure of beauty compared to only twenty-seven (27%) from Nyeri. This means that seventy-three percent (73%) of the Nyeri women did not think of fair skin as a measure of beauty. These percentages reflect the perspectives of the focus groups and the oral testimonies which mirror the views expressed in *It's Never Too late* (2010), that skin colour was valued in the city where people were starting to be segregated against by the colour of their skin (Githinji, 2010).

Fair skin was also admired by most of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) women in Nairobi County because as young women, the lighter one's skin was, the more privileges one had in a segregated city. This age group grew up at the time of the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) and Independence. At that time, Nairobi was segregated, particularly

when it came to where African families could live, send their children to school, or even use the washrooms in the city. In the face-to-face questionnaires, ninety-four percent (94%) of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation from Nairobi County believed fair skin was a measure of a woman physical beauty compared to forty-seven percent (47%) in Nyeri.

In the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) face-to-face questionnaires, eighty-four percent (84%) of the respondents from Nairobi County, believed that fair skin was a leading measure of physical beauty compared to only forty-seven percent (47%) in Nyeri County. Ruth Mwaniki, a fifty-year-old CEO from Nairobi, confirms that young women with fair complexions were the most sought after by men in the cities. Even though she is very fair, she explained that she used to put baby powder on her face in order to look even lighter and younger.

Sarah Njeri (82) from Nairobi, believed she was beautiful as a young woman because she was fair skinned but she was quick to add that dark skinned women were also beautiful. *"I was very beautiful because I was brown and my skin was very smooth. I was also slim. The fair skinned girls were very sought after in the city. But sometimes the black girls were more beautiful,"* said Njeri. Her statement shows resistance to western concepts of beauty. Through her statement, she was rejecting stereotypes of western images of beauty. In the article, *Discriminatory Experiences and Depressive Symptoms among African American Women*, written by Keith et al. in 2010, the European Standards of beauty are described as

...The notion that the more closely associated a person is with European features, the more attractive he or she is considered; these standards deem attributes that are most closely related to whiteness, such as lighter skin, straight hair, a thin nose and lips, and light coloured eyes, as beautiful (Keith, 2010:48).

While the western standards of beauty promoted lighter skinned women, only twenty-seven percent (27%) of the eighty years and older (80+) women from Nyeri, however, did not view fair skin as a measure of physical beauty because. *"Where would all the dark skinned girls go if only the fair skinned were chosen? Skin colour was really not an issue for us, so long as the woman would get along well with her husband"*, explained Virginia Nyumbura (85) from the Nyeri focus group and the rest of the women unanimously agreed with her. These perspectives of dark skin tones was contrary to the western promoted ideas of beauty that defined fair skinned women only as beautiful.



The focus group from Nyeri felt that skin colour, be it dark or fair, was not as important as other measures of beauty such as hard work. Njeri Mburu (77), a career woman from Nairobi said she knew she was beautiful because of her dark skin. *“People said I was beautiful but I didn’t know. I had a lot of hair and I was a black beauty.”* She added that because of the community preference for light skinned girls, there were dark skinned women who did not find themselves beautiful because of their darker skin colour.

Njeri added that women in Nairobi started to bleach their skin as early as the 1960s, in order to be more fair. *“In Nairobi, if you were fair, you were a beauty. In the 1960s, girls started bleaching themselves to look brown. In my time, girls used to bleach their skin with Jik (bleaching agent for clothes)”*, she explained. She described herself as a black beauty with very dark skin and long hair. But the above statement points to a perceived community preference for fair skinned women.

Florence Mwhaki (79) another career woman from Nairobi, explained that fair skinned girls were admired by the community and favoured by their families,

*Every time, I was walking with my older sister, who was very brown and beautiful, villagers would stop us and exclaim over her beauty. They never paid me any compliments because I was short and very dark, so I grew up knowing I was ugly. My sister was so beautiful that other families would ask her to be in their weddings or part of their singing or dance groups. In our time, beautiful girls would be called to other villages to be in weddings, they also didn’t do much work because they were regarded as too beautiful to work.*

This statement from Florence Mwhaki (79) implies that physical beauty was greatly admired in the community. For her sister to do less work around the home because of her beauty also implied that in some instances a girl’s physical beauty was more important than her hard work.

Patricia Waithera (50), a CEO from Nairobi, believed she was unattractive growing up because she was dark and very skinny. But she contradicts herself because in her opinion, a beautiful girl is *“a girl who is skinny with nice legs and fair skin. Half caste girls were the most beautiful.”* This is most likely because of her upbringing. It is important to note that Patricia was one of the first respondents to live in a household where both parents had good jobs. As a result, she attended schools that had white, Indian and African students. Her

opinions of beauty implied that she was negatively influenced by the mixed schools she attended to the point of believing that she was not beautiful because she was dark skinned.

In the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation, most women associated physical beauty primarily with one's face. A woman's body size and shape were not discussed in any of the focus groups, nor did they come up in the face-to-face questionnaires when women were talking about beauty. But things like a slender woman or even a fat woman, were mentioned in passing by a few women in the oral testimonies.

Jane Wambui Ngang'a (50), went to the gym to keep fit and enhance her figure. *"I went to the gym to keep fit, I was very concerned with my figure and shape and I always made my hair. I also avoid stressing myself by living beyond my means,"* she said. Susan Waithera (41) also went to the gym and tried to stay in shape because she had grown up as a chubby child and this had affected her self-esteem.

According to Susan Bryant in *The Beauty Ideal: The Effects of European Standards of Beauty on Black Women*, black women have been excluded from the global standards of beauty and this fosters feeling of self-hatred and low-self-esteem and results in women bleaching their skin, wearing weaves and wigs, etc. all to fit the global standards of beauty which are based on a fair-skinned, slender Caucasian woman.

The results show that the self-image of women living in Nairobi had started to be affected by the racial segregation of colonialism and the global perspectives of beauty that came with westernization. *"Black women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of European standards of beauty, because these standards emphasize skin colours and hair types that exclude many black women, especially those of darker skin,"* notes Susan Bryant (2013:13). This is particularly evident today where skin bleaching has become rampant in Kenya and other African countries that were former colonies.

White supremacy is the cause behind skin bleaching because of their persistent promotion of the European woman as the ideal image of beauty. This has a negative effect on the self-image of African women.

As a result of slavery and colonialism, some African peoples believed that their dark skins were ugly and indicative of their inferiority. Some in the population began to make substantial efforts to change their inferior racial characteristic, even at the risk of their health. The marketing of bleaching creams exploits this psychological legacy. However, the fact that in most parts

of the world, there are very real material benefits to having relatively lighter complexion than one's peers further complicates the issue (Perry, 2006:578).

#### **4.2.2. How Did Women Know they were Beautiful?**

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) cohort defined women's beauty according to the number of compliments they received or lack the lack of any compliments. Women admired and complimented each other and that is how most respondents knew they were beautiful. Virginia Gitau (79), said she knew she was beautiful because people always told her she was. Njeri Mburu (77), echoes Virginia, explaining that people always told her she was beautiful even though she didn't know why although she suspects it's because she was a black beauty and had a lot of hair.

Just as women knew they were beautiful because others told them so, Florence Mwihaki (79), on the other hand, perceived herself to be physically unattractive because no one ever told her she was beautiful. *"I knew I was ugly because the villagers told me I was ugly, they made that verdict. Every time, I was walking with my older sister, who was very brown and beautiful, villagers would stop us and exclaim over my sister's beauty. They never paid me any compliments because I was short and very dark, so I grew up knowing I was ugly,"* said Florence.

She explained that it was these experiences with her sister that set her on the path of education because she decided from a very young age that all she had going for her was her intelligence. This intelligence not only got her into Alliance Girls, one of the best high schools for girls, but she was also one of the beneficiaries of the Mboya / Kennedy airlifts.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation believed that women's beauty was also affirmed by the opposite sex. According to Jane Wambui Ngang'a (48) a post-independence woman from Nyeri she knew she was beautiful because of the attention she got from boys. *"I was teased a lot by boys. When boys teased you, you knew you were beautiful,"* explained Jane Wambui. She explained that a boy would never have married a girl on her physical beauty alone but would look at other aspects of her such as her character and work ethic.

In summary, the results showed that women did not regard beauty by a woman's physical attributes alone as was promoted by the global view of women. The early description of the word *beauty* by the Webster Dictionary in 1913 captures how the women interviewed perceived beauty today. *"In 1913, Webster's dictionary defined beauty as 'properties pleasing the eye, the ear, the intellect, the aesthetic faculty or the moral sense' But this is not*

*how Gikuyu women defined beauty. Their definition of beauty goes contrary to western definitions of beauty. The contributions of the ear, the intellect, the broader aesthetic faculty or the moral sensibilities are gone.*" (Etcoff & Scott, 2004:29) This mirrors how the global perspectives of beauty have also shrunk to the European standards of beauty, locking out women from the rest of the world.

A study was conducted in 2004, by Dove, a women's product for Unilever, entitled *The Real Truth About Beauty* where 3200 women were interviewed from 10 countries on their perspectives of female beauty. The results confirmed that women regarded beauty from a broader perspective. *"As this ten country survey so clearly shows, women see emotional qualities, character and individuality as equally expressive of beauty as the narrow physical aspects of beauty that currently dominate popular culture"* (Etcoff & Scott, 2004:32). Just as the literature suggests, women had a more comprehensive perspective of what made them beautiful.

Such perspectives were especially detrimental to the Gikuyu woman's self-image because she had immersed herself in a western culture that did not value her or accommodate her people's measures of beauty. This reflected the racial dimension of oppression that African women had to contend with, as outlined in the African feminist theory. In *The Beauty Ideal: The Effects of European Standards of Beauty On Black Women*, Susan Bryant said, *"Black women today are subjected to incessant messages about European ideals of beauty through family, peers, partners, the media, and larger society. If young black women stand in contrast to what society dictates as attractive, they may find it difficult to grow to accept themselves"* (Bryant, 2013:32).

### **4.3 Women's Enhancements of Beauty**

Gikuyu women have always enhanced their beauty by embellishing their faces and wearing necklaces, earrings and bracelets to adorn their bodies. The only thing that has changed is the ways in which women choose to enhance their faces and the way they adorned themselves. Following we look at traditional methods of enhancement such as face and ear cutting, cleanliness and creating an artificial gap in the teeth. This is followed by the western methods of enhancing one's face with cosmetics, get one's hair straightened, etc.

The picture below is a picture of a traditional Gikuyu woman in 1919.



*Figure 9: Taken From Kikuyu / Ethnic Group / British East Africa / 1919*

There is an omission in the written literature when it comes to the self-images of Gikuyu women, especially their physical attributes and the importance of beauty among them, for example. From the cultural practices it becomes evident that women went to great lengths to adorn themselves. From cutting their ears and decorating them with colourful beads, to embellishing

their traditional clothes and yet the literature pays very little attention to the physical attributes and beauty of Gikuyu women.

#### **4.3.1 Traditional Methods of Enhancing Beauty**



In traditional Gikuyu societies, for example, women used to embellish their faces by cutting small lines on their upper cheek bones and darkening them with ash, as is seen in the picture to the left. Veronica Kirigo, an 86-year-old traditional woman from Nyeri explained that “for beauty we had no make-up but we used to cut lines on our faces about our cheeks to add character to our features.”



*Figure 10: An old Kikuyu woman near Fort Hall Murang'a – 1936 (Matson, 1936)*

The picture above is of an old Gikuyu woman taken near Fort Hall Murang'a in 1936. According to the women from the eighty years and older (80+) age group, Gikuyu women have always had their own ways of enhancing their beauty.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group in Nyeri observed that women used to cut their ears and adorn them, in order to enhance their physical image. *“To be beautiful, a woman would cut her ears and adorn them with beads, although some earrings were reserved for married woman. We also cut small lines on our cheeks. Our hair was cut all around our heads to give us a protruding head and then we would put on our hangies (traditional earrings),”* explained Agnes Njoki (80).



Figure 11: Young Kikuyu woman on the road to Nairobi, Kenya. (Matson, 1936)

Women started cutting their ears as young girls. The above picture shows a young Gikuyu woman on the road to Nairobi. Esther Murugi (87), said women enhanced their beauty with decorations in their ears. *“We also pierced small holes in our ears and put grass sticks. Staying clean, shaved heads and grass in our ears were the main things,”* she explained. Veronica Nyawira (84) had her ears pierced when she was younger. *“My ears were cut to put nyori I also removed two of my bottom front teeth to look nice”*, said Veronica Nyawira, (84).

Hannah Wanja (82), during the Nairobi focus group discussions revealed that not all women from this time got holes in their

ears. *“There are people that came from other places such as Nyeri that made holes in the ears. I come from Kirinyaga, and we didn’t do that so much,”* she explained. Not all women had shaved heads, either. Maria Wangui (84), a former African Freedom fighter, explained that *“plaiting and combing the hair, long dress for dignity and bangles”* was how they enhanced their physical features.

Mary Munyeki (78) said young women used to cut their faces with small lines for decoration. *“We admired girls who had been cut on the face or had a natural gap in their teeth (thenya). Some of the girls even gave themselves an artificial gap,”* she explained.

Mary Mwhaki (77) a former fighter in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army from Nairobi, said that traditional Gikuyu women used to cut their ears so that they could adorn them with earrings and beads. *“Aside from the fairness of one’s skin, a Gikuyu woman had adornments on her ears and necklaces around her neck to make her look beautiful. We had no hair. All the women were bald,”* said Mary.

Virginia Gitau (79) said that women also used to use chalk to draw on their faces. *“When we were going to cultural or community events, women would wear bangles and necklaces and paint themselves with special chalk dust,”* she recalls.

Mary Munyeki (78) said that a woman with a gap between her teeth was seen as very beautiful and women would actually create a fake gap by plucking one of their teeth. *“We admired girls who had a natural gap in their teeth (thenya). Some of the girls even gave themselves an artificial gap,”* she explained. Njeri Mburu (77), confirms that women with a middle gap were found to be extremely attractive adding that young women would go as far as to create fake ones by plucking one of their teeth.

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi was of the opinion that a woman’s beauty was enhanced by the jewellery she got from her father or husband. Loise Wamuyu said, *“The beauty of a woman is to be adorned by jewellery from her father or husband. Women who were beautified had many different coloured beads around their neck.”* Some women said they adorned themselves with western styled necklaces to look good.

Muthoni Likimani (90), used to do her hair and put make-up because she lived in a community with Caucasians. She reveals that after she got married to the first African Doctor, she learnt how to set her hair from the wives of the Caucasian doctors her husband socialized with.

In her oral testimony, Sarah Njeri (82), explained that when soap first came to the village, they would use it as oil to make their skin shine. *“We used to oil ourselves with soap, we would apply it on our legs and even on our face and the face would be very shiny. If someone’s legs were shiny, you knew that indeed soap was used.”*

Maria Wangui (84) also liked to plait and comb her hair. *“I used to like plaiting or combing my hair and wearing bangles and earrings. I didn’t like it when my head was shaved. I pierced my ears in 1948,”* she reveals. Veronica Kirigo (86) also plaited her hair to enhance her beauty. In their oral testimonies, Njeri Mburu (77) and Peninah Kiretu (76) both mentioned plaiting their hair to enhance their beauty as young women.

Lucy Njoki (57), from Nairobi, said she enhanced her beauty by making her hair, applying powder and wearing earrings and good clothes. Susan Waithera, (41) also from Nairobi said she started visiting the salon when she was a little girl and this ritual continues to this day. Women from the focus group in Nairobi also talked about straightening their hair and getting it done at the salon regularly. However, fewer women in Nyeri mentioned doing their hair.

Olive Njambi Murage (41) said she has also been influenced by western methods of enhancing her beauty with make-up. *“Before I was all natural, now I use chemicals because of trying to keep up with new trends. I don’t want to look old fashioned,”* said Olive. There



are numerous hair and beauty salons in Nairobi County nowadays which confirms that more and more women from the younger generations are regularly doing their hair and nails to enhance their beauty. Lucy Njoki (57) used powder to enhance her beauty. Jane Wachira (40) said women in her time started to get manicures and pedicures to enhance their beauty. Ruth Mwaniki (50) also did her nails to enhance her beauty. Half of the women from the Nairobi focus group also did their nails.

All the eighty years and older (80+) respondents complained that today's generation used too many cosmetics and wore too much make-up to hide their ugliness. *"I prefer the beauty of yesterday. Today there are too many cosmetics and chemicals. Women use so many products on their face and some even bleach their skins to look like the mzungu."* said former fighter in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) Tabitha Nderu (85). She added that in her time, natural beauty was the most admired. They did not have all the lipsticks and make-up that girls used today and yet they still looked beautiful.

Margaret Githinji (82), a woman from Nairobi County said that everywhere she went in Nairobi, women had their mask of make-up on that hid who they really were. *"Today's style is very different. Now people value and put more emphasis on cosmetics beauty. Everyone has a mask on, be it a weave, wig, make - up, etc. You cannot tell the difference between a good and bad woman"*, she noted.

Margaret explained that women were using cosmetics in order to hide what they thought was unattractive about themselves and enhance their assets. She felt that this behaviour eventually affected the women's perceptions of themselves because it made them focus too much on their exterior beauty. As a result, they were constantly making themselves up on the outside at the expense of cultivating a good character on the inside.

The eighty years and older (80+) women perceived this obsession with cosmetics to be a consequence of the influence of western style and measures of beauty on today's generation. Veronica Nyawira (84) traditional woman from Nyeri, explained that western influence was the reason why young women were even bleaching themselves to be lighter and fit the western measures of beauty. *"Today's generation put so much stuff on their face including bleaching, in order to be what they are not,"* said Veronica.

All the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation women agreed that today's generation used too many cosmetics and make-up on their faces. Peninah Kiretu (76), noted that in her time they did not use chemicals to straighten their hair or wear weaves because

traditional Gikuyu women kept their heads bald. According to Virginia Gitau (79), Gikuyu women today used a lot of cosmetics to enhance their features whereas in the past, a woman only relied on her natural features. She added that her generation still valued natural beauty till today. *“The big difference between us and today’s generation is the amount of cosmetics that young women use to look beautiful. We were natural beauties. We had no cosmetics so there was no way to hide our features unlike today where you can hide your ugliness. I am still natural till today. I still use natural soap. I do not use any products on my skin,”* said Virginia, adding that today’s generation of women appeared unconcerned with the effects of all the chemicals that were in the products.

The sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) women were also of the opinion that today’s generation of women focused so much on a person’s outer beauty that they failed to see a person’s inner nature. Florence Mwhiki explained that, *“today’s generation is more about physical beauty. Women focus more on outer beauty more than inner beauty and values. In our time a woman’s character and inner beauty were her most valuable assets.”* Njeri Mburu (77), a career woman, also from Nairobi, added that in their time even when it came to marriage, a man would never pick a woman based on her outward beauty but today young men were picking women based on face value. She believed that this was the cause for many divorces because people were marrying strangers because they looked good or in the case of women, had money.

Njeri Mburu (77) explained that in her time, when a boy was interested in a girl, he would enquire about her nature and character from those that knew her. He would also observe her how she worked in the fields to assess if she was a hard worker or not. *“We were natural beauties. We had no cosmetics so there was no way to hide our bad features unlike today where even ugly, mean girls can transform themselves into a beautiful thing,”* said former fighter in the Kenya Liberation Army (Mau Mau), Virginia Gitau (79). She added that many young women spent so much time and money making themselves on the outside without doing anything to improve their nature and or investing in their character.

The forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) women felt that an over-focus and over-emphasis on outward appearance had led to today’s generation’s misuse of cosmetics, weaves, wigs, and other products to enhance their beauty. *“The young generation first think of appearance, to them it is the most important thing and they would never leave the house without make-up. They use so many cosmetics on the face because they believe this makes them beautiful,”* said Rose Wairimu, a fifty-year-old (50) woman’s leader from Nyeri. Lucy Njoki (57), a career

woman from Nairobi, explained that beauty today was manufactured and not natural like it was in their time.

The women's perspectives were in line with the literature. In *Ways of Seeing* (1973), John Berger wrote that a woman was socialized to constantly be aware of and try to improve her physical appearance. "*A woman must continually watch herself... she is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself*" (Berger, 1973:9). The results above show that as women became more educated and westernized, they also became more aware and spent more time and resources on trying to make their physical appearance fit the western standards of beauty. According to Naomi Weisstein in *Psychology Constructs the Female* (1968), there is an over emphasis on physical standards of beauty which are based on the opinions of Caucasian males. Weisstein also criticizes the global standards of beauty that socializes women to believe that their physical appearance is critical to their success in life.

The biggest transformation of physical image took place among the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation and today's generation where women started to wear weaves and make-up in order to fit into the western standards of beauty, yet there is no depth of beauty even for today's generation. Between the eighty years and older (80+) generation and the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation, women's style remained very traditional and conservative. But as more women received education and adopted western lifestyles, they moved away from their own traditions. The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation and today's generation of women were the two generations that have been most exposed to and inducted into western culture through education, media, technology, etc. Their perceived over use of cosmetic products implied that their self-image was negatively impacted by the global standards of beauty that did not accommodate their community's ideas of beauty.

#### **4.3.2 Cleanliness**

Aside from the above four measures of beauty, Gikuyu women also valued a woman who was clean and neat. In the eighty years and older (80+) generation, Muthoni Likimani (90) grew up in one of the first missionary compounds in Murang'a County. She explained that the community admired people who were natural and neat. She perceived that this was because of the influence of the missionaries. Muthoni accredited cleanliness and neatness to the influence of the missionaries.

Ester Murugi (87), a traditional Gikuyu woman from Nyeri County disagrees with Muthoni's perception that cleanliness and neatness were only important to missionaries. Esther said that

she knew she was very beautiful because, *“I was clean, my clothes were clean and my skin was very smooth.”* Maria Wangui (84), a former fighter in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army from Nyeri, said that she especially admired women like her mother who had good personal hygiene, and a beautiful home that was neat and clean. *“My mother was very beautiful. I copied her because she was extremely clean. I would strive to be like her bathing and washing the calabashes as she did. My home was clean and I prayed that I would always have such a place,”* she notes.

In the eighty years and older (80+) age group, Esther Murugi (87) explained that women used to clean themselves in the river to enhance their beauty. *“The only thing we did back then was washing ourselves. We didn't have oil in those days so we used fat from goats. We also shaved our heads.”* Flora Nyumbura (83), also used to wash herself and put oil to enhance her beauty.

She also felt that a beautiful woman was known by how clean she was. In our time being clean was very important. *“I used to shower well; there was no soap. After my bath I would oil myself with oil from Mbariki. The wool from the sheep acted as storage for the oil. The oil was good since it made the skin shiny. Every day, I would wash my cloth before I went to sleep, I'd let it dry overnight and wear it in the morning,”* she explained.

In the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) cohort Grace Wairimu (70) explained that in her time *“I took care of my body. Staying clean, being active and making sure I didn't have jiggers. We had no shoes in those days. We also did not have make-up. In fact, you were lucky if you had two different clothes. 1. uniform and 2. homes clothes. I enhanced my beauty by being clean and neat and by being polite and hardworking.”*

For Grace Wairimu (70) from the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) age group, a beautiful woman was identified by her cleanliness and neat appearance. *“In our time we had no shoes, no make-up and we were lucky if we had earrings so being clean and neat was very important,”* she explained. Grace's perspective reveals actions of self-love where women were not doing it for anyone else but for themselves.

Anne Thairu (46), said that she enhanced her beauty by remaining clean. *“Washing myself and putting on clean clothes was what I did to enhance my beauty.”* Ruth Mwaniki agrees, saying they were lucky to grow up with many clothes compared to the older women who only had one dress.

### 4.3.3 Dressing

Smart or modest dressing was perceived by the respondents as a supplementary measure of beauty for Gikuyu woman. In the eighty years and older (80+) generation, Sarah Njeri (82) a traditional Gikuyu woman from Nyeri said the community admired women who wore full dresses that hid their nakedness. Margaret Githinji (82) felt that the way her teachers dressed became a measure of beauty for her. *“I admired lady teachers because of the way they dressed. I loved the style of the skirt and blouse with combed hair,”* she notes.

In the opinion of Veronica Kirigo (86) a woman from Nyeri County, the arrival of dresses and long skirts gave women a welcome alternative to the traditional dress. *“Before women’s style left them half naked and exposed their breasts and bodies but western dresses don’t do that. We didn’t even have sweaters then to hide our nakedness”*. This implies that some women were not comfortable with their traditional Shuka or animal skin clothes because they exposed too much skin. But is this as a result of the missionary influence on Gikuyu women’s physical image?

Maria Wangui (84) said that for her modest dressing was very important. *“A beautiful girl wore clothes that did not go beyond here (she points to her knees), she never wore any types of trousers or miniskirts.”* She revealed that she had never once worn a trouser in her life although that is the only thing her daughter wore.

In the sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) generation, Virginia Gitau (79) believed that a beautiful woman was identified by her style of dressing because she was always dressed in clean, neat clothes and looked presentable. One of the main ways that women knew they were beautiful was when other people told them so. Grace Wairimu (70) said that she admired her aunt who was a teacher because she was always so smartly dressed. *“My aunts because they were educated and very smart with their suitcases. They also had a lot of self-discipline,”* she said.

Njeri Mburu (77), believed that smart dressing was one of the characteristics of a beautiful woman. She admired teachers for their smart dressing. *“In our time we looked up to teachers. They were smart ladies, well dressed, self - confident and self-disciplined,”* she explained. In the forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) generation, smart or modest dressing was perceived by the respondents as a supplementary measure of beauty for Gikuyu woman. Rose Wairimu (50), a women’s leader from Nyeri said that to look beautiful, she looked how she was

dressed and was always in long skirts because modest dressing was defined by long skirts or dresses that covered the body.

Peninah Kiretu (76) explained that a woman enhanced herself with her clothes and how she did her hair. *“You know a woman is her clothes. Therefore, in terms of wearing our generation always wore long skirts or a long dress that would not reveal any flesh and we would comb our hair properly,”* she notes. The women from the Nairobi focus group agreed with her.

Rose Wairimu Kamau (50) believed that modest dressing enhanced a woman’s beauty. *“For me, I looked after my dressing. I was always in long skirts, or a long dress and I never wore trousers.”* The focus group in Nyeri agreed with Rose and three out of the 8 women confessed to having never worn trousers.

Female teachers were greatly admired by other women in the village because they dressed smartly, like their European counterparts and were among the first to start doing their hair. Jane Wambui Ng’ang’a (50), a career woman from Nyeri, said she admired women who were smartly dressed in long skirts or dresses. *“I especially admired teachers who were very common in our village: the way teachers dressed and the special food they cooked for their children,”* explained Jane Wambui.

The forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) generation admired women who were smartly dressed the most because they embodied new styles that had come to Kenya as a result of westernization. *“Smartly dressed women with tidy hair and that were beautiful like Nancy Wettstein who had the very first salon for African women’s hair in Nairobi in 1980,”* explained Ruth Mwaniki (50), a woman’s leader who grew up in Nairobi and is currently a CEO of a major company. She explained that Nancy Wettstein was the first woman to own a hair salon that offered black women hair and beauty services. In summary, career women, particularly teachers, were role models of beauty.

#### **4.3.4 Perspectives of their Mother’s and Grandmother’s Dressing**

The eighty years and older (80+) women remembered their grandmothers as wearing clothes made from animal skin or they wore shukas. They had no dresses, no shoes and no underwear. *“Our grandmothers used to wear skin clothes which they called Nyathiba. Women made the skin clothes from goatskin and oil from Mbariki (goat fat),”* explained Veronica Nyawira (84). They would wash their *Nyathiba* every evening after herding the goats into the shed and leave them to dry overnight.

The eighty years and older (80+) women's mother's still wore animal skins or *Nyathiba*. Veronica Kirigo (86) said that the biggest difference between her and her mother was in their style of dress. Her mother wore animal skins but when Veronica became a woman, she started to wear Shukas. Maria Wangui also notes that her mother had no shoes but she is quick to emphasize that her mother was nonetheless very clean. Tabitha Nderu (85), a traditional woman from Nairobi explained that, *"Our mothers grew up in a time of no money, no western clothes and no shoes. We also didn't have shoes growing up but now we have. This is the fashion of the time and now there's more money available to women."*

The eighty years and older (80+) women believed that tradition and religion were the only two factors that influenced their mother's fashion. In the face-to-face questionnaires, ninety-three percent (93%) of the women from Nyeri saw tradition as a major influencing factor on their mother's style compared to seventy-four percent (74%) in Nairobi, implying that tradition was more dominant in the rural areas. When it came to religion, ninety-one percent (91%) of the women from Nairobi and one hundred percent (100%) of the women from Nyeri perceived religion to have been the greatest influencing factor on their mother's fashion.

The women said that their mothers grew up at a time when women were still wearing shukas or animal skins and dresses came about in their own generation. When dresses were introduced at around the 1940s, a woman would have only one dress which she would wear for several days before washing it. *"When we were growing up, I had only one dress that I used to wash in the evening, let it dry overnight and wear it again the next day, but today I have more dresses"* explained Veronica Nyawira, (84) traditional woman from Nyeri.

On special occasions, women would lend each other their beautiful dresses. Maria Wangui (84) former member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) from Nyeri explained that whenever a woman was going to the city or had a special occasion, she would borrow the most beautiful dress in the village and even shoes and necklaces from other women. *"It was rare for a woman to have more than one dress. When you managed to buy a new dress, you knew that other women would come and ask to borrow it. We never had an issue with this"* said Maria.

Veronica Kirigo, an (86) traditional woman from Nairobi believes that her generation's fashion was better than her mother's because her mother could never hide her nakedness. *"Before women's style left them half naked and exposed their breasts and bodies but today's style doesn't do that. They didn't even have sweaters then to hide our nakedness."* This

highlights the rapid changes that have taken place in women's style and physical image from their mother's generation.

The major perceptions the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) age group had of their mothers was that they never had any shoes, soap or lotion because there was no money and westernization had not reached them. They believed that the two major influences on their mother's style were religion and tradition. In the face-to-face questionnaires, one hundred percent (100%) of the women from Nyeri and ninety-one percent (91%) from Nairobi believed that their mothers' style had been influenced by religion and this was visible in the conservative way their mother's dressed and covered their heads with a headscarf.

Their mother's generation also grew up without shoes. Former fighter in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) Mary Mwiwaki (77) said, "*Our mothers did not have body lotion and even when we were growing up our feet were cracked because we didn't have shoes. This only started changing when we became young women.*" This was the reality for Gikuyu women and their mothers. For Monicah Kimiah, the biggest difference is that her mother wore animal skins whereas she had a shuka and a belt to tie it with.

Former member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) Peninah Kiretu (76), also from Nyeri, adds that in their mother's time, the women did not have clothes, let alone trousers. But even after women started wearing trousers, their mothers never did because they believed that they should only be worn by men. Mary Mwiwaki (77) member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) from Nairobi also admits to never wearing trousers because her tradition and her mother would never have allowed her to.

According to the respondents, the biggest difference between them and their mother's generation was that their mothers never wore trousers. "*The dressing is very different. My mother could not wear trousers but now we do. My mother was natural and simple,*" explained Jane Wachire (40) a career woman from Nyeri. "*Before you could not wear a trouser, people believed they were not meant for women but now we can wear trousers,*" explained Lucy Njoki (57), a post-independence career woman from Nairobi.

In fact, many respondents grew up with the perspective that trousers should never be worn by women. Mellina Kamoche (43) a post-independence career woman from Nyeri, said she never wore trousers as a girl, the only thing they were allowed to wear were long dresses or skirts. "*We didn't wear trousers but today I hardly have a dress in my wardrobe,*" explained



Rose Wairimu, (50) a women's leader from Nairobi. She adds that this was partly because of the influence conservative missionary style on their physical image.

Another major difference between the respondents and their mothers' generation was that they perceived their mothers to be more conservative in dress, especially when dresses and skirts came into fashion. The women in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group, in particular saw their mother's style as being very conservative. *"Yesterday's style was more conservative. Our mothers wore long skirts or dresses. Today's fashion leaves a lot to be desired. Parents want children to be trendy and so do not stop them when they see them dressed inappropriately,"* explained Olive Njambi Murage (41), a post-independence career woman from Nyeri County.

In terms of images of themselves, women see themselves as dressing better today than their mothers' did and dressing well was associated with women teachers who were role models. They do not regret the past style. They dress differently from their mothers but their perspectives of modest dressing are the same, particularly when it comes to their disapproval of today's generation's dressing.

All respondents perceived today's generation to be extremely revealing in the way they dressed. *"The biggest difference is we never wore minis or exposed our bodies,"* said Maria Wangui (84). The three biggest problems they had with today's style were: how short the skirts or dresses were, how tight the trousers were and how much cleavage and skin the shirts and dresses revealed.

According to Tabitha Nderu (85) the biggest difference between her and her granddaughter's generation was the size of their wardrobes. *"Today they have so many dresses, shoes, and clothes. In my time we only had one shuka and later one dress, said former Mau Mau leader from Nairobi County,"* she explained.

Not all the eighty years and older (80+) women perceived their daughters dressing in a negative light, however. To them, today's dressing was better than their time. Lucy Macharia (81) said that the biggest difference in the dressing is that they grew up without any underwear and they never had bras whereas nowadays their daughters will have dozens of each. Esther Murugi (87) from Nyeri, sees her life as being tougher than her daughters because she had no shoes, no underwear and not as many clothes as her daughter has. *"The dressing between me and my daughter is different. In our days, we used to wear Shukas and big skirts and in most cases we had no undergarments,"* said Lucy.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) women from this age group were of the opinion that today's generation of women dressed indecently. In her oral testimony, Mary Mwhaki (77) said,

*The biggest difference between our time and today's generation is the dress. We never wore minis or exposed our bodies, in fact we did everything we could to hide our bodies with our shuka. Girls today dress indecently it's like they feel good half naked. We would never have worn a mini skirt in our time even if it was the fashion. We respected ourselves too much.*

So the women felt they dressed better than their granddaughters who were sexualized and exposed their bodies. Njeri Mburu (77) agreed with Mary that young women today dressed very inappropriately and they did not want to be corrected. She explained that:

The way girls dress today is not modest; all girls want is short, tight clothes. Very inappropriate dressing, no decency and if you try and correct they can even insult you. We would have never dreamt of wearing such things in front of our fathers and ignite their desires. Today is very different. They have no self-respect and they are half-naked and they will even abuse you if you try to correct them.

These sentiments were shared by all the women. Mary Munyeki (78), a former member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) also believed that today's generation of Gikuyu women needed to stop dressing so promiscuously and selling their bodies to men for money because in her opinion, a woman's dignity was a vital part of her self-image and reputation. Mary Mwhaki believed that her granddaughter's dressing was even more revealing than that of her daughters. *"My granddaughter's dressing and style is different. Now those are the ones beyond us. Even their breasts are open for the public's eyes. They want people to see it all,"* said Mary.

Njeri Mburu (77), also felt that her granddaughter's generation dressed in very revealing clothes. Njeri said:

I saw a woman, among our children, wearing a trouser and small top that did not even cover her properly and you could see her inner wear. She appeared a little drunk. She was walking with her teenage son and you could tell that he did not want to look at her because she was badly dressed. Why doesn't she see that the trousers need to be worn a bit higher?

Mary Munyeki (78) believed that her granddaughter's generation has been deceived into thinking that the more flesh they displayed, the more attention they would get but they don't seem to be aware that this is the wrong type of attention. *"They cannot be told to pull up their trousers or even to dress decently, they will not listen. They might even insult you,"* said Mary. Monicah Kimiah (69) said that she could not believe how short some of the dresses her granddaughter wore were. *"There is a big difference in dressing today, for example, I cannot dress in anything that is above the knee,"* she explained.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) cohort also felt that today's generation of women, or their daughters' generation, dressed indecently. Patricia Waithera (50) was of the opinion that today's women's clothes were too tight and revealing. Patricia blamed it on over exposure to western culture without enough exposure to their own Gikuyu culture and values.

Olive Njambi Murage (41) a post-independence career woman from Nairobi, blamed the parents of today's generation of women for not guiding them in their dressing when they were younger. *"Yesterday's style was more conservative; today's fashion leaves a lot to be desired. Parents want children to be trendy and so do not stop them when they see them dressed inappropriately,"* said Olive adding that some parents actually felt powerless when it came to preventing their daughters from dressing in a certain way.

Overall, all the women are in agreement that today's generation of women dressed badly and exposed too much of their bodies.

#### **4.4 Factors Influencing Women's Beauty and Style**

There were three main influencing factors on women's beauty and style: tradition, religion and western culture. Below is a deeper look at each of these.

##### **4.4.1 Tradition**

Tradition is defined by the Miriam Webster Dictionary as the beliefs, customs, and principles, or ways of acting that people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time (Miriam Webster Dictionary). For the women interviewed, it also meant to be conservative or to wear 'traditional dress', which was the animal skins and *shuka* that the women wore in the past.

Tradition was the biggest influencing factor on the eighty years and older (80+) generation's beauty and style. In the face-to-face questionnaires, ninety-eight percent (98%) of the women from Nairobi and ninety-three percent (93%) from Nyeri said that tradition was the

biggest influence on the way they dressed and enhanced their beauty. But tradition for the women did not mean of dress but of demeanour such as what *Mutumia Ngatha* would wear. Tradition was also seen as a major influence on the physical image for their generation by women in the oral testimonies and the focus groups.

Tabitha Nderu (85) a former member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau), said that tradition has influenced her all her life. *“I have followed the Gikuyu custom all my life. In fact, I just stopped wearing shukas, recently,”* she confesses. Veronica Nyawira (84) a traditional woman from Nyeri, said that tradition has been the biggest influence on her physical image adding that even today, she will not wear trousers.

Tradition was also the biggest influencing factor on the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation's style. In the face-to-face questionnaires 83% of the women from Nairobi and 85% of the women from Nyeri said their style was influenced by their tradition. Grace Wairimu (70) said that tradition and religion were the two biggest influencers on her physical image. Mary Mwhaki (77) also felt that tradition had been the biggest influence on her physical image. *“For me it has always been tradition, till today I can't wear trousers,”* she explained. Virginia Gitau (79) and Mary Munyeki (78) also concurred. Peninah Kiretu (76) said that she has also never worn trousers and her wardrobe has only long skirts and dresses. *“I am influenced most by my tradition. I cannot wear short things or even trousers. All the dresses and skirts I have, are long till the ankle,”* she noted.

When it came to their mothers and grandmothers of the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation, the women saw religion and tradition as the only two influencing factors on their mother's style. In the face-to-face questionnaires, tradition was perceived to be the number one influencing factor on their mother's style; ninety-five percent (95%) of the women from Nairobi and eighty-eight percent (88%) from Nyeri felt that that their mother's style was influenced by their traditional setting. Religion was perceived to be the second biggest influencing factor on their mother's style; eighty-one percent (81%) of the women from Nyeri and sixty-three percent (63%) Nairobi perceived this.

Patricia Waithera (50) believed that her mother's generation had too many rules even when it came to what they wore. She remembers that her mother always had to be in a skirt below the knee and dressed very conservatively. *“On the other hand, if I lost a bit of weight, I could probably fit into my daughters' clothes and I see absolutely no problem with that,”* she said

adding that she has no problem with her daughter's fashion. Tradition, however, had no influence on today's generation's beauty and style.

#### 4.4.2 Religion

Religion was the second highest influencing factor on the physical image of the eighty years and older (80+) age group; seventy-seven percent (77%) of the women from Nairobi County and 87% from Nyeri County said their style was influenced by Christianity. Esther Murugi (87) a woman from Nyeri County, explained that religion is what made her abandon her traditional dress and start wearing long dresses. She said:

When I converted to Christianity, I went from wearing a *shuka* (a piece of material that women used to cover their bodies and tied on one shoulder), to wearing dresses. I got married in a *shuka*, and gave birth in a *shuka*. Christianity brought about the covering on our heads.

This story is echoed by Sarah Njeri (82) and Flora Nyumbura (83) who are also from Nyeri County. They both said that the Church was the biggest influencing factor on their physical image which Njeri emphasized was “*modesty of dress, cooperative behaviour and a gentle spirit.*”

Religion was the second biggest influencing factor on the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) woman's style. In the face-to-face questionnaires, seventy-two percent (72%) of women from Nairobi County and 63% in Nyeri County were influenced by religion in their beauty and style. The focus group from Nyeri said Christian values had influenced them to dress modestly in long dresses and long skirts and it had also introduced the covering of heads with headscarves. This is in line with the literature because this was the time when missionaries were building churches and schools in the local communities. Muthoni Likimani (90) points out in her book *Thou Shalt Be Chastised (1974)* that as the Agikuyu started converting to Christianity, they also adopted the Christian culture, while the Church encouraged them to abandon their traditional cultures. Therefore, it is not a surprise that religion would be the second highest influencing factor on the women's style. Religion was seen as having no influence on today's generation's beauty and style.

#### 4.4.3 Western Style and Fashion

There were a few women who were eight years old and above (80+) old women who believed that the western conservative style of long dresses and skirts with shirts that showed no cleavage, was better than their traditional style. Veronica Kirigo (86) explained that:

*Modern style is better because it hides the body. Clothes before exposed our breasts and it was embarrassing. As a young woman, I wore a shuka with a belt. We would struggle to make sure our breasts did not show.*

Margaret Githingi (82), a woman from Nairobi County said that being among the first girls to go to school, she really admired her teacher's beautiful dresses and her neat hair. Three out of the 8 women from the Nairobi focus group also said they admired the way teachers dressed and this influenced how they dressed when they became young women. She also admired western style because it equalized people from different walks of life and tribes. *"These days, dressing is going with foreign styles. You cannot tell who is Kikuyu, Luo, etc., we can't differentiate tribes because everyone wears the same,"* noted Margaret Githinji (82) a woman who has lived in Nairobi for more than sixty years.

Career women were also a big influence on the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old women's style and image, particularly in Nairobi where most women were getting employed. In the face-to-face questionnaires, sixty-seven percent (67%) of the respondents from Nairobi County said their style was influenced by career women or their own careers compared to only thirty-four percent (34%) in Nyeri County. This was the first generation of women to have their own careers.

Western style had more influence on sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) old women living in Nairobi than those living in Nyeri. In the face-to-face questionnaires, more women in Nairobi believed their physical image was influenced by western style, at forty-four percent (44%) compared to only to fourteen percent (14%) in Nyeri County. Njeri Mburu (77) felt that fashion was a major influencer on her style and dress. *"For me it's fashion. I love wearing something fashionable and matching together,"* she said. This was important because it suggested that women from Nyeri were not as affected by western fashion.

The respondents in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation believed western fashion was the biggest influencing factor on their style. They believed that western fashion was the continuously changing western European or North American styles that included jeans, trousers, dresses of all lengths, etc. Most women's fashion had changed with the trends throughout their lives. In the face-to-face questionnaires, ninety-five percent (95%) of the women from Nairobi County and ninety-two (92%) from Nyeri County said their fashion was defined by western style and fashion trends. Out of the three generations, this is the one that

has been most influenced by western style because they grew up in the post-independence period when there was rapid westernization and modernization of society.

Patricia Waithera (50) a successful career woman from Nairobi said, *“I love fashion. I follow western trends, especially fashion trends. I also love travelling a lot. I have always kept up with fashion trends but over the years, I have also moved more towards comfortable yet fashionable clothes.”* Susan Waithera (41), a Lawyer from Nairobi also said that western style had always influenced her physical image because the clothes were readily available in the city and they were practical.

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) old women were especially influenced by the way their teachers dressed and carried themselves. In the face-to-face questionnaires, eighty-four percent (84%) of the respondents from Nairobi and eighty-five percent (85%) from Nyeri believed that their style had been influenced by their education. They were also influenced by the way career women dressed and acted. Jane Wairimu Ngang’a (49), a post-independence career woman from Nyeri County, admired a teacher called Mrs. Wairugu because of her mannerisms and guidance.

One of the biggest influencing factors of western style was that women started wearing trousers. Jane Wairimu Ngang’a (49) said, *“I have become modernized and now I wear trousers but I am still very conscious about what I wear to church. I have been influenced a lot by my children who tell me how to dress.”* This suggests that for some older women, trousers are still not appropriate for Church. Before the introduction of western style, women never wore trousers.

When it came to influencing factors on today’s generation of women, Margaret Githinji believed that they had focused so much on western fashion, that they had lost their cultural identity. *“These days, styles are going with foreign styles. You cannot tell who is Kikuyu, Luo, etc. We can’t differentiate tribes,”* she noted. Tabitha Nderu, (85) a leader in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) said that today’s generation of women spent so much money on their fashion that they were not able to financially plan their lives. *“Instead of planning and saving for their futures, they misuse themselves and their money and they are not responsible or reliable,”* said Tabitha and the women from the two focus groups agreed with her. According to Virginia Gitau (79), today’s generation of women were always looking to buy the latest shoes or the latest bag before their neighbour did, even if they

couldn't afford it. She believed that this obsessive accumulation of things is what led many women to sleeping with men for money because they were living beyond their means.

In the Sixty to seventy-nine cohort face-to-face questionnaires, seventy-two percent (72%) of the women from Nairobi and eighty-four percent (84%) from Nyeri believed that one of the biggest influences on today's generation was western fashion trends. Mary Mwhaki (77) was convinced that this obsession with western fashion trends and ways of life had created an unhealthy and superficial competition among women. It is interesting to note that more women from Nyeri perceived dressing to be a problem than those from Nairobi, which suggests that women from the city had less of a problem with it because they were exposed to it daily.

There was a consensus among the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) old respondents that today's generation of Gikuyu women had been spoilt by fashion. In the face-to-face questionnaires, ninety-five percent (95%) of the women from Nairobi and ninety-two percent (92%) from Nyeri felt that today's generation obsessively followed Western Fashion. *"Women today spend more money than they can afford to on their clothes, make-up and weaves. They have been spoilt by fashion which they follow religiously. When you are yourself, you live within your limit and never admire other people's things,"* said Grace Wairimu Kamau (50) a woman's leader from Nairobi.

Olive Njambi (41) a post-independence career woman from Nairobi agreed, adding that, *"Young Gikuyu women today are influenced so much by the fashion trends that they have lost themselves in the process. They will sell anything including their bodies so that they can buy the latest dress or bag. Today, women really compromise themselves before and after marriage. They really loose themselves in the process of trying to fit in with today's trends and they lose the real them,"* said Olive.

From the perspective of the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) generation, women today placed too much value on one's outward appearance instead of their inner character or inner beauty. *"Today's generation focus too much on outer beauty and this is reflective in their dressing and make-up. The only thing they value is their physical appearance and they will only complement one another on how good they look,"* explained Jane Wairimu Ngang'a (49), a career woman from Nyeri County. She believed that today's generation of women's revealing dressing was a consequence of this over focus on outer beauty because women felt pressured to package their bodies to get attention.



Anne Wanja Thairu (46) a career woman from Nairobi said that today's perception of beauty makes it hard for the young Gikuyu women to differentiate between genuine and non-genuine people. *"They think beauty is the way one dresses but that is external, it does not have much value. What matters is who someone is on the inside, but oftentimes they miss this. In the clubs, they mix with all sorts, killer, thieves, murders, without knowing because they have taken everyone at face value"* said Anne.

However, as the literature suggests, this did not start with today's generation but with the very first generation to receive an education. Maathai explained that

The *athomi* culture brought with it European ways and led to profound changes in the way Kikuyus dressed and adorned themselves, the kinds of food they ate, the songs they sang, and the dances they performed. Everything that represented the local culture was enthusiastically replaced. Clothes of animal skin were put aside in favour of cotton dresses for women and shirts, shorts and trousers for men. In traditional kikuyu society, young men and women braided their hair; once they got married, they shaved their heads completely, then you became a muthomi ("a person who reads"), you no longer braided your hair or shaved your head. Men cut their hair short while women let theirs grow long to resemble that of Europeans (Maathai, 2006:11).

This implies that the transition from Gikuyu to western culture started with the educated community and has increased as more and more Gikuyu women have received education.

In summary, there was also a general consensus among the women that today's generation was negatively influenced by western style fashion and how they dress because of music videos, movies and magazines. One of the greatest concerns of the women interviewed was the obsession today's generation had with cosmetics, beauty, bleaching, wearing make-up, weaves, wigs, etc. The women felt that today's generation was too influenced by the western culture and style as a result of generation of racial marginalization. They agreed that the way today's generation dresses in revealing clothes that expose their bodies is because of this negative influence.

The literature confirms that this can be expected because colonial education was designed to make Africans despise their own culture and admire the foreign culture. In his article, *Potted Plants in Greenhouses: A Critical Reflection on the Resilience of Colonial Education in Africa*, Francis Nyamnjoh explained that:

Beneficiaries of colonial education are expected to aspire to think, look like and be like the white man, to bleach and slim themselves physically and culturally to the point of the ludicrous and the ridiculous. Provoked by “ignorance and shame” in local indicators of value and beauty, Africans so educated turned to “foreign things (Nyamnjoh, 2012:15).

Today’s generation is the most educated generation in Kenyan history and it is also the generation that is most removed from their African heritage.

#### 4.4.4 Media

Modern media and music were perceived to be a major influencing factor on today’s generation of women because they inform their self-image and style. In the women above 80 group face-to-face questionnaires, more women in Nairobi perceived themselves to be influenced by media and music at eighty-nine percent (89%) than respondents from Nyeri at 69%. According to the respondents, media and music did not influence their mother’s generation because they did not exist in their time. “*Today we have a lot of influence from the West through media, especially social media*”, explained Jane Wambui Ngang’a (50).

The views of Faith Nguru in *Foreign TV Shows and Kenyan Youth* (2014) agree with Jane Wambui. She notes that,

The life of a typical Kenya urban youth is currently characterized by exposure to foreign TV programs. Content diversity ranges from Mexican soaps, American series, sitcoms and drama, European football, Nollywood movies, and a smattering of South African and Indian programs. A few channels also show Chinese and Korean programs with sub – titles.... Given the limited capacity to produce content locally, it is expected that digitized television will initially rely on foreign content, further exposing local audience to a tsunami of foreign programming that will continue to undermine, overwhelm and supplant local cultural indigenous knowledge heritage (Nguru, 2014:1).

Nguru (2014) goes on to explain that in the last sixty years since Kenyan media was established, many citizens have complained about the negative influence foreign programs have on their children, particularly because they promote foreign cultures. She explained that this problem was not unique to Kenya as, “*African scholars and novelists have made mention of the role of foreign programming in the propagation of cultural imperialism,*” (Nguru, 2014: 5).

There was a general consensus among the eighty years and older (80+) women that their granddaughter's generation was very heavily influenced by modern music, television shows, movies, western celebrities, fashion, fashion models and media in general. The women believed that today's generation mimicked the behaviour, language and even the relationships they saw in the music videos and movies. Even in the face-to-face questionnaires, eighty-seven percent (87%) of the women from Nairobi and 93% from Nyeri County, saw western music and media as the most influential external factor on today's generation.

In addition, the eighty years and older (80+) women perceived education to be a major influence on today's generation because they spend most of their lives at school studying up to form 4, and in some cases even up to the diploma and degree level. In the face-to-face questionnaires, eighty-seven percent (87%) of the women from Nairobi and the same percentage of women from Nyeri saw education as a major influencing factor on today's generation. The women from the Nairobi focus group believed that education affected all aspects of their lives from the way they thought about the world, to the food they ate, to the religion they followed and even the type of life they went about creating for themselves.

In *Feminine Mystique* (2001), Betty Friedman also discusses how magazines, movies, TV shows have all influenced the western middle class women's images of themselves by feeding them a manufactured ideal that all women try to match. She notes that:

This image – created by women's magazines, by advertisements, television, movies, novels, columns, and books by experts on marriage and the family, child psychology, sexual adjustments, and by the popularizing of sociology and psychoanalysis shapes women's lives today and mirrors their dreams (Friedman, 2001:4).

This same influence was now being witnessed among today's generation of women who had been completely westernized in their dressing and their behaviour.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter looked at women's self-image through their perspectives on beauty, physical image and style. Women's perspectives were explored through their perspectives of *Mutumia Ngatha* (a virtuous woman), the methods they used to enhance their beauty and the factors influencing their beauty and style. As is seen in table 4.1. on the next page, each of the three generation their own unique perspectives of *Mutumia Ngatha*, characteristics of a beautiful woman and definitions of good character.

The women's perspectives of *Mutumia Ngatha* imply that hard work was important for the older generations of women because it was linked to their marriageability but by the time of the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation, men no longer looked at hard work as a requirement for marriage but focused more on women's physical features and attributes instead. The women's perspectives suggest that in the older generations, women valued hard work because it was valued by men and would attract good marriage partners. It also demonstrates how women's self-images are affected by external, male patriarchal perspectives of their beauty and even value as women.

In her book, *For The Record, the Making and Meaning of Feminist Knowledge*, Dale Spender notes that in western culture, men had always been the ones who wrote about women.

It was men who formulated the theories about women, who made the pronouncements and proffered the advice on how women should live their lives. It was mainly men who wrote about women in the academic press and who talked about women in the media (Spender, 1985:28).

Women wasted countless resources and hours trying to fit into this male ideal instead of defining their images for themselves. The women's perspectives in this study showed how the self-images of the eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation of women were still based on traditional patriarchal ideas of a women.

Table 12: Summary of Women's Perspectives of Beauty

CHARACTERISTICS OF <i>MUTUMIA NGATHA</i> (a virtuous woman)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good personality and manners,</li> <li>• hardworking,</li> <li>• happy temperament/nature,</li> <li>• skin colour,</li> <li>• cleanliness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• smart dressing.</li> <li>• compliments from the community,</li> <li>• connection to youth,</li> <li>• facial features</li> <li>• attention from the opposite sex.</li> </ul>	
METHODS USED TO ENHANCE BEAUTY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• facial cutting,</li> <li>• cleanliness,</li> <li>• hair and make-up, and</li> <li>• smart dressing</li> <li>• clothes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using soap as oil to shine</li> <li>• body painting</li> <li>• a gap in top, front middle teeth</li> <li>• regular manicures and pedicures</li> <li>• jewellery</li> </ul>	
FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN'S BEAUTY & STYLE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tradition,</li> <li>• religion,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• career,</li> <li>• western style</li> </ul>	
CHANGING IMAGES OF <i>MUTUMIA NGATHA</i>		
80 +years Generation	60 - 79 years Generation	40 - 59 years Generation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good behaviour,</li> <li>• commitment to family,</li> <li>• hardworking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• respects her husband,</li> <li>• loves / respects women,</li> <li>• respected by community</li> <li>• clean,</li> <li>• dressed modestly,</li> <li>• values their culture.</li> </ul> <p>Nyeri Women only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good cook <i>Gukia Ucuru</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good behaviour</li> <li>• good character</li> <li>• commitment to family,</li> <li>• self-respect,</li> <li>• respect for husband.</li> </ul>
CHANGING CHARACTERISTICS OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN		
80 +years Generation	60 - 79 years Generation	40 - 59 years Generation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleanliness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleanliness</li> <li>• natural beauty,</li> <li>• a slender figure,</li> <li>• community compliments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good values</li> <li>• attention opposite sex.</li> </ul>
CHANGING PERSPECTIVES OF GOOD CHARACTER		
80 +years Generation	60 - 79 years Generation	40 - 59 years Generation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-control (emotions &amp; tongue)</li> <li>• Polite</li> <li>• Obedient to husband</li> <li>• Commitment to family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love children equally</li> <li>• bringing children together</li> <li>• working well with co – wives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good behaviour</li> <li>• good reputation</li> <li>• not a gossip</li> <li>• self-respect</li> <li>• takes care of family &amp; children</li> <li>• peace at home</li> <li>• has obedient children</li> </ul>

What the perceptions on fair skin by women from Nairobi reveal is that racial discrimination had started to impact on women's self-images from as early as the eighty years and older (80+) generation and this was because Nairobi was a city built and operated by colonialists. In her article, *The Beauty Ideal: The Effects of European Standard of Beauty on Black Women*, published in 2013 Susan Bryant explained that,

Black women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of European standards of beauty, because these standards emphasize skin colours and hair types that exclude many black women, especially those of darker skin (Bryant, 2013:15).

She believes that the exclusion of African women, particularly darker women, from the global ideals of beauty inculcates feelings of self-hatred and low self-esteem, especially among younger women who are more influenced by external forces.

The women's perspectives show how western culture had changed women's lives in the last three generations, particularly when it came to their own personal beauty. In the eighty years and older (80+) generation, women had no soap, no inner garments, no shoes and either a single shuka or a single dress that they washed every other evening, dried overnight and wore the next day. By the time of the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation women had numerous dresses and shoes and different soaps and other hygiene products for their bodies.

Over the period of three generations, women have gone from washing in the river and sometimes putting oil from goat fat on their bodies to washing in one's home daily with soaps and special cleansers for the face and special lotions and oils for the body and then putting on fresh new clothes and underwear. This also implies that aside from having more 'stuff', women's living conditions have improved in the last three generations.

The results showed that from 1900 - 2000, women have always had ways of enhancing their physical features in a bid to look more beautiful. The women's perspectives confirmed that women had always worked on enhancing their faces, their ears and their hair but over the last three generations, the methods women use has become more westernized. For example, women no longer cut small lines on their faces or plucked out their middle tooth like they did in the eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generations, but they use make-up, tattoos and even cosmetic surgery to enhance their facial features and other features to fit modern standards of beauty. Over the last three generations, women had also started to enhance the nails of their hands and feet with coloured polish.

The women's responses on what influences their beauty and style, show that from 1900 - 2000, women's clothing has been significantly influenced by their environments. Their dress was also a reflection of the dominant culture on their generation. For the eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generations, the dominant cultures were tradition, religion and education. As the literature suggests, both of these cultures were at war with each other.

The *athomi* culture brought with it European ways and led to profound changes in the way Kikuyus dressed and adorned themselves, the kinds of food they ate, the songs they sang, and the dances they performed. Everything that represented the local culture was enthusiastically replaced (Maathai, 2006; 11).

This explains why women were either influenced by tradition or by religion but not by both. For the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation, the dominant culture was western culture and all women based their fashion on how western Europeans and North Americans dressed and looked.

In their generational perspectives, all three age groups believed their mother's style was influenced by tradition and religion only. Women from older generations did not have many material things such as clothes and shoes and were very conservative and modest in their dressing. It also shows that their mother's self-images were very limited and self-discriminatory.

According to the women, the difference between the older and the generation of women is how they relate with one another. According to the eighty years and older (80+) generation, when a woman got a new dress, it was commonplace for her to lend it to other women from her village when they had a special occasion. This comradeship suggests that women were not in competition with one another, the way they are today, but rather, they were willing to share even their most prized possession with each other. This relationship among women, however, significantly changed from 1900 to 2000 from being about sisterhood, unity and sharing in the older generations to becoming about women competing with one another and trying to outdo each other with the latest dress or bag.

The three age groups had similar perspectives on today's generation. The women blamed the sexual promiscuity that they felt was rampant in today's generation on their exposure to western culture through new technology such as the internet and mobile phones. The

respondents explained that historically, colonial education had taught the Agikuyu to love western culture and despise their own way of life. They were of the opinion that technology and western media were corrupting children and adults alike because it made bad behaviour look cool and normal. They also felt that today's generation of women were more involved with their phones and less interactive with people and this made them loose touch with reality and develop unrealistic expectations about life.

The women from all three age groups felt that the kinds of TV shows, movies, and music today's generation of women watch gives them false ideas about marriage, relationships, children, and even their values, particularly because women inform their life decisions from what they watch. Having limited interaction with older women meant that many of their misperceptions were going uncorrected.

Overall, the women's generational perspectives of beauty demonstrated that women's self-images have remained unchanged for generations until the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation when independence, widespread western education and modernization of national culture gradually eradicated the influence of traditional culture on women's lives. Today's generation of women were perceived to be completely westernized and at the same time exposed to the negative vices, cultures and people that came with westernization and on top of this, they lack the necessary discernment to tell genuine and non-genuine people apart in a society where people look more and more alike.

The intersectionality of race and patriarchy in African feminism are clearly visible in the evolving changes of women perspectives of their self-images to a more westernized orientation. This was particularly evident in the women's perspectives of the beauty standards of today's generation of women which is overly western and based on global standards of beauty. The women's perspectives and beauty practices show that their self-images are being affected by the global standards of beauty which exclude them completely.

In 2004, a study was conducted by Dove, a women's hygiene product manufactured by Unilever, entitled *The Real Truth About Beauty* where three thousand, two hundred (3200) women were interviewed from 10 countries on their perspectives of what female beauty was and the role it played in women's lives. The majority of women felt that physical beauty was a crucial component of a woman's success today and yet only two percent (2%) of the women claimed to be beautiful which demonstrated how they had been negatively influenced by the global standards of beauty. The study revealed that on average, women were exposed



to over two thousand (2000) advertisements that promoted this western idea of beauty as the standard for all women's beauty

The psychological male system that defined and promoted an external and superficial global ideal of beauty that is based on the western European woman's slender and fair features, is a clear indicator of the damage that both patriarchy and racial oppression have had on the Gikuyu woman's image of herself. As more and more women became educated and entered the western culture, they abandoned their culture and with it their cultural identity with standards of beauty that catered for them.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### WOMEN'S HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS

This chapter explores women's hopes and aspirations for today's generation of women. The focus group discussions guide and the oral testimony tool asked the respondents what advice they would give to today's generation of women.

#### 5.1 Introduction

From the focus group discussions and oral testimonies five major themes emerged which were: the need for a cultural revival, responsible parenting and motherhood, respect for themselves, their husband, elders and other women, and mode of dressing. Although the questionnaires did not directly ask women to give advice on modern day relationships, marriage and sex emerged as a major theme of discussion for the women.

Below we take a deeper look at each of the points of advice given to today's generation of women.

#### 5.2A Call for a Cultural Revival

All the women across the three age groups felt that the Gikuyu culture was diminishing and today's generation of women urgently needed a cultural revival otherwise the traditions, customs and beliefs of their people would be lost forever. According to the Miriam Webster dictionary, culture is defined as:

The cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving (Miriam Webster Dictionary, 2016 p.125).

According to T.S. Elliot (1949) in *Notes Towards Definition of Culture*, culture had three dimensions, namely: individual, group and a whole society. An individual's culture could not exist separate from a group. T.S. Elliot also believed that culture could not exist outside of the people's religion because the two were interlinked. In *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom (1993)*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o describes culture as a product of the development of that society and the storehouse of all the society's values that have evolved over time. "Culture gives that society its self-image as it sorts itself out in the economic and

*political fields,*” explains Thiong’o (1993:11). The women from the focus group discussions defined culture as the Gikuyu people’s beliefs, customs, values and social rules and hierarchies that were observed in the original Gikuyu culture, particularly the naming system that the Gikuyu used to practise.

In their oral testimonies the respondents defined Gikuyu culture as the language, food, behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, rites of passage and spiritual practices of a people. These were based on long established social protocols on how women and men were to interact with each other and how children and young people were to interact with their elders. These social protocols included how women and men were supposed to address different members of their family, extended family and community at large. The social protocols were tied into rites of passage where young people were continuously tutored about their culture and tradition by their mothers using the apprentice model of learning. According to Maria Wangui women also got special instruction during each rite of passage, particularly circumcision. During the circumcision ceremony, women were assigned an older woman to counsel them about being a woman, marriage and motherhood.

The respondents felt that the only way to get the women of today’s generation back to their culture would be to teach them in schools, through the media and through public forums and seminars. They feared that if this generation did not embrace their culture they would be forever misplaced in a foreign culture that has eroded their self-image and values. Margaret Githinji explained the women’s perspectives very comprehensively when she said,

Today's generation of women needs to go back to tradition, including our traditional diet. They also need to give older people a forum / chance to share their knowledge and wisdom. Young children need to be taught to respect older people. They also need to be taught about the proper positions for boys and girls because they don't know what they're supposed to do.

The majority of women across the three age groups agreed with Margaret.

Muthoni Likimani’s granddaughters were born after the 1960s, and she is currently living with one of them who is in her thirties. *“I understand them, they are very international. They cook, they are educated, but they have lost touch with their culture though,”* says Muthoni. She acknowledges that one of the casualties of their modern lifestyle is a complete disconnection from their traditional heritage. Veronica Kirigo agrees with Muthoni, adding that their granddaughters are not to blame because they were raised in education and western

thinking. “She has grown up through western style education whereas I grew up traditionally,” says Veronica.

Lucy Macharia says the greatest difference between their generation and their grand daughters’ generation is that they have no interest in their grandmother or her story and they speak a different language. “*They gossip about us and we can’t understand,*” says Lucy. Tabitha Nderu says her granddaughters are so busy with modern life that they do not have time to sit and teach their children about anything but particularly their people’s values and culture.

All three generations talked of the need for a cultural revival because they felt that the aggressive nature of colonialism, religion and education had all but erased Gikuyu culture, values and language. One area of young people’s lives that has been adversely affected by colonialism and imperialism is the change of diet. All the women interviewed felt that today’s generation of women were completely addicted to the western diet that left them sick and weak, and made their children susceptible to the common flu because of low immunity. The women’s views agree with Rachke et. al, who notes:

Indoctrination has negatively impacted traditional food habits in East African since early colonization. The primary vectors for the cultural indoctrination were the mission schools, the boarding schools, public health programs responsible for educating the youth. These methods of ‘education’ have uniformly reduced knowledge related to the cultivation and preparation of traditional wild foods. Traditional knowledge has been devalued as the education of children has shifted away from the tribal elders, the primary educations in the past, to their imperial powers via the church and school (Rachke & Cheema, 2007:3)

Rachke and Cheema noted that globalization had systematically pushed out indigenous food production in order to replace it with global food staples such as wheat which was exported to Kenya and the wider East Africa. They also claimed that most people in urban areas did not know the benefits of indigenous food and had become accustomed to eating fast food which caused many non-communicable diseases.

All three generations advised today’s generation of women to learn their culture through:

- i. Teaching their children by speaking Gikuyu in their homes,
- ii. Holding cultural seminars,

- iii. Coaching and mentorship of older women,
- iv. Teach about Gikuyu spirituality,
- v. Give teachers cultural training, and
- vi. Return to the traditional diet.

Let's take a deeper look at each of these points of advice below:

### **5.2.1 Gikuyu Language and Self – Identity**

The women from the eighty years and older (80+) age group felt that today's generation of women were losing their language because parents talked to their children in English or Kiswahili at home, instead of Gikuyu. As Mary Wangui, a former teacher and participant in the Nyeri focus group explained:

*Language is linked to your identity. If you don't know your language you cannot know the cultural identity of your people because language communicates the knowledge and traditions of your people, it is the one thing that connects you to those who came before you. This also means that your identity becomes rooted in the culture of the language you speak regularly.*

She went on to say that a lot of the confusion being witnessed among today's generation of women was because of this disconnection from their language and identity. All the women were of the opinion that today's generation of women needed to urgently learn their language so that they could reconnect to their culture.

Mary's views were echoed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (2010), where he says:

Language, any language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Take English. It is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for the Swedish and Danish people English is only a means of communication with non-Scandinavians. It is not a carrier of their culture. For the British, and particularly the English, it is additionally and inseparably from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture (Thiong'o, 2010: 13)

What Mary was implying in her statement is that through colonial education, English had become a carrier of British culture that the people were socialized to adopt as their own

through what Ngugi wa Thiong'o terms as, "*the elevation of the language of the colonizer*" (Thiong'o, 2010: 16).

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi were of the opinion that today's generation of women should endeavour to learn their people's language and culture. One way that they advised young people to do this was to start listening to Gikuyu vernacular radio stations such as *Kameme FM* and *Coro FM*. The women explained that the vernacular stations were doing a good job in educating the community on traditional Gikuyu culture, morals and values.

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) cohort believed that their daughters were completely disconnected from their Gikuyu roots because they did not know their people's morals or standards of behaviour, nor their values or the beliefs and ideals shared by members of the Gikuyu community. Mary Mwhaki said that her granddaughters were so modern and western that they were completely disconnected from their culture and didn't even speak the Gikuyu language. "*I can't deal with them. They don't care, they are .com, you can go crazy, they don't speak Gikuyu so they are confused. the language is diminishing,*" says Mary.

Mary Munyeki agreed, adding that the major problem was that parents were not teaching Gikuyu to their children. Florence Mwhaki felt that her granddaughter was not disciplined enough. "*She has too much freedom and she is too obsessed with technology (mobile phones, computers and television). She has a lot of say in a lot of things. In our time, kids had no say,*" explained Florence.

The women from the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) generation also urged parents to teach their children Gikuyu while they were still young. They observed that one of the greatest failures of modern mothers was their failure to teach their children the Gikuyu language. They believed that today's young people had been completely disconnected from their roots because they did not speak the language of their people. The focus group from Nyeri explained that language was linked to cultural identity and since they did not speak Gikuyu they could not possibly know who they really were. They stated that this significant failure by modern parents had also created a serious barrier between grandmothers and their grandchildren because they could not communicate with one another.

In her oral testimony, Mary Mwhaki explained that being disconnected from their language and culture was causing an identity crisis in young people because they didn't fully belong in the western culture and yet, through education and modern life, they had abandoned their

own people's way of life. *"They don't speak Gikuyu so they are confused about who they are. Sadly, the language is diminishing,"* she opined.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi urged young parents to respect their culture and language. They believed that today's generation of women did not respect their culture and as a result they were not teaching their children about it. *"Our grandchildren do not speak in Gikuyu even though we only communicated with our daughters in Gikuyu,"* explained Sharon Wamuchii, adding that many young people today believed their culture was inferior to the western culture of education and technology.

Virginia Kamau believed that the reason modern children were so badly behaved was that they didn't know their culture and so they had no moral or ethical foundation on which to base their behaviour. *"Children today don't listen because they don't know their culture. When we started speaking other languages, we lost our culture, identity and way of life. Our children should be taught so that we return the water to the river,"* she said. She believed that learning the Gikuyu language was imperative for all young people today, otherwise the language and culture would not survive the onslaught of westernization.

All the women across the three generations advised today's parents to speak their mother tongue in their homes and make a concerted effort to make sure their children spoke Gikuyu. They also advised young people who did not speak Gikuyu fluently to take a few classes or start listening to vernacular stations so that they could improve it. The women felt that this was important not only for the survival of the culture, but also for the development of a robust self-image in young people today.

The women interviewed believed that western imperialism had come to dominate and influence young people's image of themselves and their views concurred with Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2010) when he explains that:

Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest subsequent political dictatorship. But the most important are of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others (Thiong'o, 2010:16).

This was seen in the perspectives of the women interviewed who described young people today as only speaking English or Kiswahili because their parents believed that this would help them to do better at school since those were the languages they were taught in.

It is important for today's parents to also be aware of the imperialistic efforts to replace indigenous languages with their own and this should inspire them to ensure they revive their own language and culture so that this does not come to pass. In *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o revealed that at the time of emergency in the early 1950s, the colonialists not only started to teach English in all the schools but they also started to punish children who spoke Gikuyu. He says:

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY (Thiong'o, 2010:11).

This systematic demonization of the Gikuyu language explains why the generation of the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) old women were the first generation that did not speak in Gikuyu to their children. This singular move has had the greatest impact on the self-image of today's generation of women because language defines a person and the reality they operate in (Thiong'o, 2010).

The literature reveals that sixteen out of forty-two indigenous languages in Kenya were facing the threat of extinction. Since language was the vehicle of traditional culture and knowledge, there was a fear that globalization would completely eradicate local cultures and as a result, traditional self-images. Unfortunately, many of the respondents said that their grandchildren did not speak their mother tongue which implied that they were already completely disconnected from their culture and tradition.

In *Song of Lawino* (1966), one of the most well-known poems from Uganda, Okot p'Bitek blames the educated elite for the loss of African culture. Lawino is married to a university educated man called Ocol who has started to adopt western behaviour and customs which included marrying another wife, Clementine, who is westernized like him. Lawino reveals that Clementine wears a wig “the hair of ... someone who died many years ago”. After marrying his new wife, Ocol started to reject Lawino in favour of Clementine and even started to look down on Lawino (p'Bitek, 1966).



In the *Song of Ocol*, which is his response to the *Song of Lawino*, Ocol explains how he is no longer happy with Lawino because she is completely traditional and in order to make progress, he believed he needed a progressive, educated woman.

He [Ocol] declares himself unable to live with his wife any longer, because she is “a thing”, “just a village woman”, “an old type” who is “no longer attractive” and “cannot distinguish between good and bad”. She is “blocking his progress” and he must clear the way for Clementine, the “modern woman” he loves, and “who speaks English (Nyamnjoh, 2012:15).

According to Lawino, education is what brought about her marital problems because when Ocol learned how to speak English, he slowly started to abandon African customs and traditions such as, for example, traditional dances which he replaced with western practices such as ballroom dancing. “*Bile burns my inside! / I feel like vomiting! / For all our young men / Were finished in the forest, / Their manhood was finished / In the class-rooms, / Their testicles / Were smashed / With large books!*” cried Lawino (p’Bitek, 1966:44). She urged Africans to be proud of their ‘Africanness’. P’Bitek viewed western education as the major force behind the diminishing use of African languages and he used both the *Song of Lawino* and the *Song of Ocol* to demonstrate this through fiction.

Francis Nyamnjoh’s article *Potted Plants in Greenhouses: A Critical Reflection on the Resilience of Colonial Education in Africa* (2012), supports p’Bitek’s view that education has had a corrosive effect on indigenous languages and culture in general.

With the advent of colonial education, Africans were devalued in the same measure and order that Europeans were glorified, which in some cases meant the erosion of self-worth and the power women already wielded in society. The involvement of the missionary church in education, created “an unprecedented alliance of State, Capital and Church” that “gave a divine aura and authority to the colonial brainwashing, whitening and subjection” of Africans, mind, soul and body. Together with armed might, the colonialists used education to disarm and silence Africans in body and soul and to reduce their warriors into “cringing cowards (Nyamnjoh, 2012:16).

Nyamnjoh felt that the dualistic approach of colonial education to praise the European while devaluing the African was what had driven many of the educated elite to completely adopt western culture at the expense of their own because they had been socialized to believe that

the western culture was superior. As the women interviewed suggested, this situation must be reversed by today's generation of women by learning their language and teaching it to their children so that they could simultaneously preserve and discover their own people's way of life and rich culture.

### **5.2.2. Cultural Seminars**

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi believed that the community should start having cultural seminars to educate the younger generation about their people's culture, morals and values. According to the female respondents, culture was the Gikuyu people's beliefs, customs, values, social rules and hierarchies; morals were the standards of behaviour and values were the beliefs and ideals shared by members of Gikuyu society. Sarah Njeri said

Children should be brought together and taught about their tradition and history so that they can maintain their people's culture. There should be seminars for each tribe across the country to guide the people on their particular cultures so that everyone can have a strong self-image.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nyeri believed that there should be public forums where the older generation could teach and coach the youth. Retired teacher Charity Gathoni, however, was sceptical about whether the youth would even attend such events. *"If they are told to attend the forums they will pretend to have attended and if they do, they will not be attentive. They will say how boring it is,"* she said, adding that the biggest problem with this generation was their attitude. The focus group from Nairobi agreed, adding that a special team of male and female elders should be created to guide the young people into this new age.

When probed on what kind of topics they would teach at such seminars, the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nyeri said they would teach young women what they portrayed when they wore a short or tight dress and when they exposed their bodies and their tattoos because they believed that today's generation of women was not fully aware of *"the madness their dressing placed in the minds of men"*. They would counsel girls on the negative and lustful attention they attract when they expose their bodies. They would also teach them how women used to carry themselves and behave in the traditional Gikuyu setting.

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) focus group from Nyeri felt that one of the reasons young people are losing their way is because of the company they keep. Given the opportunity, they would teach young people about the importance of protecting themselves from the negative effects of hanging out with bad people or people who misbehaved. Jane Wanjira explained:

Young people need to be taught to question the people they keep around them. They should always ask ‘whom do I travel with? Because friends influence you in a negative way and you become them. If I walk with a drug trafficker, I will definitely take drugs.

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) focus group from Nyeri believed that there is an urgent need to protect young people from the negative external forces of society.

### **5.2.3 Coaching and Mentorship**

The eighty years and older’ women recommended that today’s generation of women should listen to old people such as their grandmothers, especially when it came to dressing and what they wore around their elders and in particular, their fathers. In her oral testimony, Lucy Macharia explained that her generation was often overlooked by their grandchildren because they were less educated and didn’t speak English. *“The way they take older women as if they don’t know anything is wrong. They are also growing older,”* she noted. The other women agreed, noting with frustration that they had so much knowledge and wisdom to share with their grandchildren but the latter were not interested because they perceived them to be *‘old fashioned’*. They encouraged young people to learn from the old and respect the value of experience and wisdom.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nyeri were of the opinion that older women today should meet regularly with young school girls and coach them by listening to them and giving them advice and also teaching them on morals and virtues. They felt that the greatest obstacle was the language difference because they only spoke Gikuyu while the children of today only spoke English or Kiswahili.

In her oral testimony, Maria Wangui encouraged young women to take time to talk to and get advice from their grandmothers. She said:

They should look for the women, such as the grandmother. We will try to advise them that in this place we did this and this but again they would say that we are affecting their beauty and clothing. In the real sense, we are trying

to make them better women. Like for instance, I would tell them that when we go together, they should be smart. You should wear this way, but there is some dressing that would make me not accompany you. And where the smartness is spoiled is in the way one is dressed.

These sentiments were shared by women from both Nairobi and Nyeri county who believed that today's generation of women should respect the experience of elderly women.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi believed that today's generation of women lacked good morals because they did not have mentors in their lives. The women explained that in their time, when a woman got circumcised, she was given a mentor who would coach her on life matters. They felt that young women today did not have the proper guidance they required and that is why many were ending up pregnant out of wedlock. The women also explained that before they got married they were given counsel by their parents on what to expect in marriage. They urged their age mates to make time to coach and mentor young women.

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old women encouraged today's generation of women to make time to seek advice and to be coached by their grandmothers. When Mary Mwihi was asked what advice she would give to young women today, she responded,

Today's generation of women doesn't care and have no time to ask us so why should we bother giving them advice. They think they know everything better. They need to learn to ask questions about how things were.

The women from the focus group discussion were in complete agreement because they believed that a lot of the mothers of today's young women did not know any better themselves or chose to ignore their culture altogether. The women believed that regardless of the reason, their daughters were ignorant of their heritage and they should take the time to learn from their past.

In their oral testimonies the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old women said they felt that their grandchildren neither respected older people nor saw any value in them and this is why they never sought advice from them. *"This generation does not respect older people and this needs to change because it hurts us,"* noted Florence Mwihi. She advised mothers to identify an older female relative who could advise and guide their children and to foster a relationship with them from a young age.

#### 5.2.4 Balancing Education with Tradition

The eighty years and older (80+) women advised today's generation of women to create a balance between education and tradition because both had valuable things to teach them. The focus group from Nyeri believed that education had cut today's young people off from their culture and historical gender roles because they no longer had time to be taught anything at home. They felt that education had replaced a lot of the training and coaching that young girls received from their mothers. Peninah Wairimu said:

For example, when a mother tells a daughter to prepare chapattis, the daughter will not have any idea how to do so. What I think has caused this is because of schooling; the child will go to nursery school, then class one to university or rather college; she will not have had the time to be taught the basic home things.

The women were of the opinion that education had corrupted today's generation of women and they urged the modern woman to re-educate herself about her culture. *"Education has made children proud and arrogant, they think that because they are educated they know more than their parents,"* observed Lydia Wanjira adding that the failure of the education system was its extreme focus on western knowledge with total disregard for our local traditions and values. *"It was the missionaries that made women get education. Our fathers believed that an educated girl would become a harlot and this has turned out to be true. Christianity has also contributed to today's woman,"* said Lydia Wanjira, and the majority of women in the Nyeri focus group agreed with her.

Peninah Wambui disagreed with Lydia, however, and said that the only reason fathers didn't want their daughters to go to school was because they were jealous that once educated, the girl would take all that richness to their husband's family. She believed that the real problem with education today was that it had replaced traditional education rather than running parallel to it.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) generation described their granddaughters as having had the opportunity to go as far as diploma and degree level. Virginia Gitau, said that her granddaughter was the first one in her family to have a degree. The biggest difference that Grace Wairimu saw between her and her granddaughter was also her granddaughter's education. Her granddaughter studied law at Makerere University.

But Grace believes that one of the drawbacks of her daughter's education was that it had encouraged her to cultivate a selfish attitude where she put her needs even before those of her own child. *"My granddaughter got a letter for a green card for America. She has left her child with her mother, to go to the USA. We would never have done that,"* says Grace. She was amazed at how this generation behaved towards their children. In her opinion they didn't seem to care as much for them or even have time to bring them up. Such narratives are confirmed by the literature which shows that as women become more westernized and educated they tend to think less about others while focusing on themselves and becoming selfish.

In their article, *Individualism Versus Collectivism: A Comparison of Kenyan and American Self-Concepts* Dr Ma and Dr Schoeneman discuss how education has made today's generation of Kenyan women move from a collectivism self-image to an individualism self-image. A collectivism self-image is one that is based on one's relationship to others and how one fits into a group or community. A person with a collectivism self-image only sees themselves in terms of their relationships and roles within the group and they will sacrifice their own interests and ambitions for the good of the group. An individualism self-image, on the other hand, emphasizes a person's individuality to the extent that even when they interact with a group they are very aware of their own individualism. They place their goals and ambitions above others and they are mainly concerned with advancing themselves physically, materially, emotionally, etc. As more women have adopted western culture, there has been a shift away from the community and more into one's individual goals and ambitions.

### **5.2.5 Gikuyu Spirituality**

In their oral testimonies, all the women above eighty years that were part of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) said that today's generation of women needed to be taught about *Ngai* (God) and traditional Gikuyu religion. Field Marshall Muthoni explained that hidden in the Bible was the story of the Gikuyu. *"Now in the Bible, we have information of the Agikuyu. But it is translated incorrectly for the purposes of people's understanding. They are very precious words. The words of the Agikuyu. Because every word prophesied by a Gikuyu is not his but God's,"* she noted. She went on to say that she was saddened by the way today's generation of women had no knowledge or reverence for *Ngai* (God) who had answered their ancestor's prayers and brought down the entire British Empire.

In her oral testimony, Miriam Wambugu encouraged today's generation of women to learn about the spiritual ways of their ancestors, especially how they communicate with Ngai. She believed that today's generation of women is uninformed of the spiritual dimensions of life and as a result is vulnerable to being manipulated by external forces. She said:

“For instance, you may hear that your father and mother were sick but you are told that there are no curses and yet even the Bible has curses. Never be lied to by anyone that curses do not exist. Even prophetic warnings should be taken seriously. Do not be cheated that such a warning can be ignored, they should never be ignored. People should honour warnings,”

Lucy Macharia encouraged young people to learn about the secrets of Mt Kenya. She asked:

“Haven't you seen that when a plane attempts to fly over the mountain it crashes! That mountain has a heritage. It has mighty things. God loves us even if you do not know it. He is for the Gikuyu. Don't you know that Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi were taken on top of the mountain by God. He told them that everything you can see, the plains, the valleys, and everything is yours. I have given them to you to live in and cultivate. He also gave them a club and a stick known as a *Muthangari*. The Lord Himself did that for our people”.

She believed that today's generation of women did not understand the importance of facing Mt. Kenya when they prayed or even the hidden blessing that the mountain had for the Gikuyu.

From the literature, we learn that it is not the fault of this generation that they are out of touch with Gikuyu spirituality but that this was the plan of colonial education from the start.

“The colonial subjects recruited as students are commanded to uncritically ignore and disparage things held dear by the Africans they are groomed to insult, laugh at and term “primitive” and “pagan” and to unquestioningly champion and glorify the ways, deeds and dreams of white men and Europe. Beneficiaries of colonial education are expected to aspire to think, look like and be like the white man, to bleach and slim themselves physically and culturally to the point of the ludicrous and the ridiculous (Nyamnjoh, 2012:15)

When one looks at today's generation of women, these statements become very true. Gikuyu women are completely out of touch with the spiritual heritage of their ancestors.

### **5.2.6 Give Teachers Cultural Training**

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi felt that one of the reasons cultural values were being lost was because the teachers themselves did not know the cultures and values of their students' tribes. They believed that education had shifted from the mother being the primary teacher of her children to the school teacher and therefore, it was important to educate teachers on the different cultures and tribes in Kenya otherwise this information would be lost forever. *"The only person that can help us is the teacher. If this information can be found in our teachers, only they can be able to correct this ignorance our children have of their cultures,"* said Josephine Wairimu.

### **5.2.7 Traditional Diet**

The eighty years and older (80+) cohort unanimously agreed that there was a serious problem with the modern diet and they encouraged today's generation of women to return to the traditional diet. They discussed how in their time, they only ate boiled foods and had a mainly vegetarian diet whereas today's generation of women ate primarily fried foods and a lot of food that had no nutritional value. Esther Murugi spoke at great length in her oral testimony about how her granddaughters' diet was making them weak and sickly because it lacked nutritional value. *"The difference between us is the diet. We would eat a goat for a whole month; they eat it in a day. We would cook it most of the day, they cook it in less than one hour. There was no butchery in our time either, today they are on every corner and in every estate"* said Esther.

One thing that all the eighty years and older (80+) cohort agree on was that their granddaughters' generation had a worse diet than they themselves ever had because they ate a lot of fried foods, and meat with every meal whereas in their time meat was only eaten on special occasions. *"Our diet was better than our daughters. Today life is hard because of economic pressures and the demands of modern life. Our daughters do not even have time for themselves,"* said Muthoni Likimani (90) alluding to the fast food generation where people bought fried food on the go because they were too busy to cook.

According to 83-year-old Flora Nyambura, her daughter's generation did not have the food security that they did. Very few of their daughters grow their own food today and so they are dependent on their husband's jobs for their survival. *"I loved farming and digging, they don't. I always had food, but today there is no food security. Today, the women rely on their*



*husbands for food. I raised my children on natural food, but today they eat a bad diet,”* explains Flora.

In her oral testimony, Lucy Macharia (81) agreed with Esther adding that their granddaughters and their children are very weak because they have grown up on food such as chips, meat and rice, with no vegetables or githeri. *“This is why they are always rushing their children to the hospital, because they have a weak immune system because of the western-style fried foods they eat, and all the lollipops and crisps they buy for them,”* said Lucy. She was shocked at how many sweets and sugary things her granddaughters feed to their children almost on a daily basis.

Esther Murugi (87) believed the major difference between her and her granddaughter is also the diet. Her granddaughter has a completely different diet and they do not eat leftovers in the morning but prefer to eat bread that added no the nutritional value to the body.

According to Tabitha Nderu, 85 years, diseases were another challenge to their granddaughters' health because of their poor lifestyles and promiscuous behaviour. *“I heard on Coro FM that they are now injecting themselves with drugs to protect themselves from illnesses and they are even closing their tubes because they also don't want to have children,”* said Tabitha.

In the face-to-face questionnaires, 87% of the eighty years and older (80+) cohort from Nyeri and 74% from Nairobi encouraged young people to return to their traditional diet as well as the traditional methods of food production and preparation. They believed that most of the health problems were caused by the modern diet. In the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) age group, eighty-nine percent (89%) of the women from Nyeri and 78% from Nairobi advised young people to return to their traditional diets and traditional cooking methods as well. They believed that many of the illness in society today were caused by the western diet of fried foods and refined sugar.

In the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) face-to-face questionnaires, 68% of the women from Nairobi and fifty-four percent (54%) from Nyeri advised young people to return to the traditional diet and traditional cooking methods. In her oral testimony, Lucy Njoki criticized the diet her grandchildren were growing up on because it was making them obese at a tender age. She believed that the modern diet of too much meat, starch, sugar and fried food was the reason today's generation of children are so weak and fragile, and sick all the time, adding that there was a reason her grandmother lived to be over one hundred (100) years and it had

to do with her diet. Mellina Kamoche agreed with Lucy. She added that their granddaughters ate too much meat and sugar and they were always catching the flu or needing to go to the dentist for fillings.

### **5.3 Addressing the Failure of Modern Parenting Styles**

All the women interviewed believed that many of today's societal problems are the result of poor parenting. They observed that parents today abscond their parental duties because they never make time for their children, they also do not want to discipline or guide them in the right way. They all concurred that the women's adoption of western parenting skills such as trying to negotiate with children and be friends with them at the expense of their role of disciplinarian, is at the heart of the parenting problem.

The eighty years and older (80+) women agreed that today's parents are not raising their children correctly and they are always absent from their lives because of their careers and societal pressures for survival. The women from the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) age group believed that lack of good parenting is one of the major reasons that there are so many dysfunctional families and children in society today. The women described some parents as being *'faulty'* themselves because they have not been brought up the right way and as a result, they lead their own children astray. *"In Chinga boys, there was a student who was found selling drugs and he was expelled, only for the teachers to find out that it was the father who had given the son the drugs to sell in that school,"* said retired teacher Charity Gathoni.

Monicah Kimiah added that unlike their time, her grandchildren did not fear their parents. They could suddenly lose their tempers, shout and even talk the way they wanted to them, which was a sign of disrespect and a strict taboo in Gikuyu culture. This would never have happened in the past, explained Monicah, because their generation feared their parents. They also had a lot of respect for their parents and they would never have wanted to be cursed by them.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi believed that today's generation of women had adopted too many western values in their parenting style and this had disconnected their children from their own culture. *"Young people have been deceived by western culture, it is not their fault,"* said Virginia Kamau. As a result, they see today's generation of women as being very rebellious because they are disconnected from their own cultural identity and heritage.

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) old generation of women were of the opinion that today's generation of women are not parenting their children but are leaving them to be guided and moulded by the world. They could not understand why this generation was so quick to have children that they could not afford to take care of. In their oral testimonies the women were especially vocal about how their grandchildren were being raised by house helps and teachers with whom their parents had sometimes never even interacted or properly assessed.

The respondents from all three age groups complained about the modern parenting style of today's generation of women. They felt that modern parents do not spend enough time with their children, do not discipline or nurture their children enough, and they try to be their children's friend instead of their guardian. This general consensus on the mode of parenting was extremely worrying, especially when one considered the important role parents play in shaping a child's self-image.

“The family has the greatest socializing influence on children. This is because through words and deeds of parents, children's personality is shaped and their ways of doing things become habitual. Moreover, it is the prime responsibility of the parents to socialize their children in order to conform to societal standards and be able to function successfully in the community” (Ashioni & Mwoma, 2013:17).

Modern parents were seen to be absent from this instrumental role they are supposed to play in their children's lives. The respondents also complained about how some women dress, behave and gossip in front of their children as if they are unaware that their words and actions are moulding their children's character and self-image. They believed that all this behaviour is the result of the rapid westernization of the education of today's generation of women and their parents' generation.

The women from the three age groups advised modern mothers to:

- i. Put their children first.
- ii. Stop having adult conversations and relations in front of their children
- iii. Unite with other parents and reintroduce 'collective responsibility'
- iv. Raise their children with a strong value system so that they will not be misled by the world.

- v. Discipline their children instead of trying to be their friends.
- vi. Join a church that will help them to establish a spiritual foundation for their children.
- vii. Balance education with traditional knowledge and life skills

### **5.3.1 Making Your Children Your First Priority**

The women from all three age groups advised young mothers today to put their children first, otherwise they would regret it later in life. All the women from the eighty years and older (80+) age group felt that modern mothers were not as committed to their children and they had been. Jane Wanjiru from the eighty years and older (80+) Nyeri focus group said:

“In a nutshell, women in the past tended to put their children above everything else and had a high level of self-sacrifice in order to ensure their children grew up knowing right and wrong, being responsible and respectful to others”.

They advised modern mothers to be more committed to their children and make time to nurture and mould them into responsible members of society.

The eighty years and older (80+) women from the two focus groups discussed at great length how women in their time put their children first. It emerged that all of them chose never to re-marry after losing their husbands in the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) because of their commitment to their children and not wanting them to be mistreated by their new husbands. *“Look at us and the age we are in. We made sure that we brought up our children well while also fending for our families. Myself, I lost my husband in the year 1977, and I have taken care of our children ever since. I never remarried. In fact, none of the women from our time remarried,”* explained Hannah Wanja and the rest of the women from the Nairobi focus group confirmed that they did not know of a woman from their generation who had remarried.

The stories of the eighty years and older (80+) cohort who never re-married because of their children, were numerous. *“Like in my case, I lost my husband when I was fairly a young lady in the year 1974. My last born at that time was only 21 days old. I had three children and was just a secondary school teacher, yet I endured all that and raised them single handed,”* explained Margaret Wanjeri from the Nyeri focus group. Her friend Jacinta Muriithi confirmed that she had raised all her children all by herself and had even managed to educate them up to the university level.

Another focus group participant from the eighty years and older (80+) generation, Mary Wangui from Nyeri, said that she too never remarried and neither did any of the women that she knew. *“A woman used to raise her children on her own without thinking about anyone else. Mostly it was because no woman wanted to risk getting into another relationship then to see her children being mistreated by someone who is not even their father. The young generation on the other hand, don’t want to go through hard times,”* said Mary Wangui adding that this generation was even putting men before their children which was a big shame. She encouraged young women to inculcate the trait of *ngukindiria* (to remain in one place and not move around, to be patient) when they became mothers which meant that they would not wander around and go to bars but would instead put their children first, spend time with them and dedicate their lives to giving them a proper upbringing.

The eighty years and older (80+) women from the oral testimonies shared similar stories. Veronica Nyawira explained that:

*We never thought of marrying a man to assist us with our children. We believed only Jesus would help us. To accept any other assistance would mean casting a bad spell on the fate of our children. Even if you were not lucky enough to have a fortune left behind by your husband, your first priority would be to think of ways to raise your children into responsible and respectful adults and above all, protect them from all evil and harm. It would have been very sad for you to hear that your children have been battered or mistreated by the same man you married to seek assistance in raising them*

All these personal narratives confirmed that women of their time sacrificed their own happiness in order for their children to be happy. The women urged today’s generation of women to learn from them and stop putting their boyfriends before their children.

The sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi also believed that single mother’s today were not putting their children first. They would bring strange men around their children or they would entertain and even get married to men who did not love their children. Josephine Nyumbura said:

*Many women of our time [the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau)] never remarried even after their husbands died because of their children. We had a lot of respect for ourselves and we loved our children so much so we*

*made many sacrifices so that we did not teach our children the wrong ways or expose them to any dangers*

She encouraged young single mothers to learn to be alone and be courageous for the sake of their children. Mary Veronica agreed with Josephine, adding that in their time they would never have brought strange men around their children. *“We never brought men home because we respected ourselves and we also didn’t want them the way today’s women do. My husband died in 1974 and left me in my 20s with three young children but I chose never to re-marry. All three of my children went to University,”* said Mary. Wanjiku wa Kiragu also chose never to remarry because she believed that this would have put her children at the mercy of other men to be abused, beaten, and mistreated. The women advised modern mothers to stop having children if they did not have time to raise them properly. They also urged them to respect their children enough, not to expose them to boyfriends and other strange men that were not their husbands.

The sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) Nyeri focus group believed that today’s mothers were so busy trying to earn enough money to provide a good life for their children that they overworked themselves and forget them their children. *“This is why house helps do bad habits to the children yet the parents never know because they have no time for them. Every day we should ask our children how they have spent their day since some of these maids do not even give them food,”* advised Jane Wanjira adding that women are so exhausted when they came home from work that they did not even see their children sometimes.

Charity Mumbi believed that house helps had made mothers lazy when it came to their parenting responsibilities and spending time with their children. She further explained that no matter how tired a mother is in the evenings, she had has to have daily contact with her children. *“A mother should come in the evening to watch over the children, clean them and have time to talk to them. Unfortunately, women of today’s generation do not make time for this and that is why their children are being messed up by strangers,”* she said.

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi believed that children were becoming lazy because parents did not have time to engage them in outside activities and so on weekends and holidays they stay in the house all day watching TV. *“Today’s children are lazy because they are brought up in big towns so there are no activities, and their parents are too busy to take them out to play and get some exercise,”* explained Peninah Wairimu. She encouraged modern parents to find regular outside activities that they could all

engage in as a family for the sake of their children's health and well-being. Consequently, they are not aware of what is going on in their children's lives or even who is influencing their self-development and behaviour. Mary Wanjiku said:

*I think there have been so many duties making the parent arrive home late without knowing how the children spent the day. Parents today are so busy so there is no time to sit and talk with their children. Some do not even ask if the homework has been done. Our parents had a lot of time for us, they really advised their children*

She added that most parents today actually think they are doing what is best for their children by working long hours to make money so that they could improve their lives but this is not the case. She urged modern mothers to make time for their children even if it means waking them up when they get home late at night to find out how they have spent their day.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nyeri were of the opinion that single mothers in particular, face this challenge of not having time for their children the most because they lack the support of the father. Lucy Wanjiru noted that:

*Being left by their husbands or having children out of wedlock, has made many women stressed. The men have abandoned their duties and women have to be both mother and father while earning money to feed and educate their children. It is not easy.*

The women in the Oral testimonies also agreed. They advised single mothers to develop a support system through their extended family, particularly when it came to discipline and supervision.

The literature demonstrates that women in the past were very persevering and many women actually chose not to remarry after losing their husbands in the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war). *A Letter to Mariama Ba* by Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira confirms that many widows from the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) chose never to remarry even though they had been left to raise young children. They became widows in their early 20s but they still took care of their children and got them through school despite the harsh circumstances of poverty and war (Kabira, 2005). The tremendous resilience displayed by the widows of the Kenya land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) should encourage young mothers today to put raising their children above finding another mate.

### 5.3.2 Safeguarding Your Children's Innocence

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nyeri felt that one of the reasons children are growing up to be so undisciplined is that their parents have adult conversations in their presence. They also expose their children to situations in their relationships that are inappropriate at their age. *"We never saw our mothers and fathers meet or even kiss but today a husband and wife will sleep in one room with their children and they will do things thinking the child is asleep and the child is watching and hearing everything,"* Peninah Wambui.

Lydia Wanjiru added that couples today did not respect each other and they would even argue and fight in front of their children whereas when she was growing up, a man could not shout at his wife in front of the children. The women from the Nairobi focus group advised modern parents to allocate times for intimacy when their children were not around and to stop shouting at each other in front of them but instead find ways to resolve their conflicts away from the impressionable minds of their children.

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) focus group from Nyeri were also of the opinion that parents today were corrupting their children by having adult conversations in front of them. They said it was commonplace to find mothers gossiping about other people and even arguing with their neighbours in their children's presence. *"In the old times, parents never used to speak in the midst of children but today there is no secrets between adults and their children, they will do and say anything in front of them and then they wonder why their children are misbehaving,"* said Elizabeth Nyumbura. She advised young mothers to stop gossiping about people in front of their children and to be more sensitive to how their words and actions influence their children's behaviour.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi agreed. They explained that in their time adults would never have had adult conversations in front of children. *"Today's parents are the problem. They abuse other adults in front of their children and then the children go and share. Before, our parents never had any adult conversations in front of us,"* explained Sharon Wamuchii. Women from Nairobi advised today's parents to stop treating their children like little adults and to start separating their adult lives and interactions from the time they spent with their children so as not to rob them of their innocence at a young age.



The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) old women advised today's generation of women to begin establishing boundaries and limits for their children. They encouraged young mothers to reinstate some of the traditional values, morals and community responsibility by finding a way to blend the old with the new. *"Today's generation of women need to establish boundaries within their families and stop being friends to their kids. They need to return to the way their culture raised children,"* said Jane Wairimu Ng'ang'a.

### **5.3.3 Re-Introducing Collective Responsibility**

All the eighty years and older (80+) women advised young parents to earnestly endeavour to reintroduce collective parenting in their neighbourhoods by establishing relationships with their neighbours and other parents in their communities. They felt that parents today have isolated themselves from each other so much that they do not even trust other parents to discipline their child. They believe that this is primarily because people live in compounds or apartment complexes with strangers whom they do not know or trust. Cecilia Wairimu from the Nairobi focus group noted that:

*Today it's a different story because as we all know it's an individualistic society and you cannot have that level of collective responsibility like we had in the past. You can easily land yourself in trouble if you for example, discipline another person's child.*

The eighty years and older (80+) women felt that today's generation of young women were also disconnected from their extended family. This is especially true for those who have moved to major towns and cities. *"In the past children would distinguish their uncles from either their father or their mothers side and could tell a strange man in their compound. Nowadays, children don't even know their uncles and every other friend of their mother is termed as an 'Uncle',"* said Margaret Wanjeri.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi believed that women of today's generation were raising their children alone because they live away from the support of a trusted community. As a result, their children misbehave when their parents are absent and get away with it because other adults in the community do not intervene because of the feared backlash from the child's parents. *"Any child that was naughty was beaten even if you didn't know the parents and if you reported to your mother, you were beaten again for bringing shame to the family. But nowadays you cannot dare to beat another child,"* said Hannah Wanja.

According to the eighty years and older' focus group from Nyeri, the biggest challenge for this generation are their children. They believed that parents need to start working together for the sake of their children by reintroducing community parenting. Sarah Muthoni said:

*In the olden days it took a village to raise a child, and that was because of collective responsibility. Therefore, parents today should be open to having collective responsibility in raising their children in order to have a collective change.*

The other women agreed. They all felt that collective responsibility is extremely beneficial to parents because they can't monitor and supervise their children all the time. They urged modern parents to unite instead of fight one another over their children.

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old women advised today's generation of women to re-introduce collective parenting so that they will have help in guiding and disciplining their children. In her oral testimony, Mary Munyeki advised young people to reintroduce collective parenting in order to save this generation. *"Community parenting should come back. Growing up, we believed all adults were our parents, today they only see their parents as the authority. There is no respect for elders or fear of other adults,"* she explained.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi also felt that collective parenting has to be reintroduced in order to save this generation. They believed that collective responsibility is the only way parents can reintroduce discipline in their children's lives, because the parents cannot do it on their own. *"Parents should be quick to report the behaviour to the parents of the children. Also, when a child makes a mistake, stop calling the child's mum, instead pinch her,"* said Grace Muthoni, a retired teacher.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi believed that today's generation of women is missing out on the benefits of collective parenting and responsibility which was a vital aspect of social discipline in their time. *"In our time there was a community discipline but now if you dare beat a child that is not yours today, it will be a police case,"* said Sophia Njeri. In the past, any adult had the right to discipline any child they found misbehaving in the community. But the community knew each other very well, whereas today many young people are living in communities with strangers.

The women believed that the benefits of collective parenting were that parents did not have to raise their children alone but they could rely on the entire community to raise them. *"There was a time we were seriously beaten by my friend's mother for sleeping around boys. You*

*could not even mention at home that you have been beaten since you feared another beating. The next day whenever we saw boys, we would run away from them,”* explained Susan Wanjiru, adding that parents needed the help of the community because they could not monitor their children all the time.

#### **5.3.4 Teach Your Children Good Values**

According to the women interviewed, values were a person's principles or standards of behaviour that they oriented their lives around. The eighty years and older (80+) cohort focus group from Nyeri encouraged modern parents to raise their children within a value system such as the Church. They all felt extremely frustrated because children were not being raised with the right values. They felt that parents today were not bringing up their children in the right way and as a result their children are growing up with no value system that establishes limitations and boundaries for them. *“I think parents of today are too lenient on their children and don't want to tell them when they are wrong. Therefore, the children grow up disregarding what is wrong and right because he or she has not been taught good morals by the parents,”* said Joyce Wangari. The rest of the women agreed with her observation.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi also agreed that children are not being raised the right way because their parents don't know the right way themselves. *“Today's parents don't take care of their children and show them the right way because many do not know the right behaviour themselves,”* explained Sarah Muthoni, referring to a *mutumia ngatha*, or a woman who was hardworking, modest, virtuous, cooperative, etc., as the perfect reference for the right behaviour. She encouraged young mothers to lower their pride and seek the guidance of their mothers and grandmothers on the proper way to bring up their children.

The forty to fifty-nine (40 – 59) years old women encouraged today's generation of women to re-establish a value system within their families and not to rely on what society values otherwise they will get lost. In her oral testimony, Patricia Waithera said,

Women of today's generation has too much information and they are losing it in terms of who they should listen to and take advice from. We need to re-establish a value system in the family because society's western influenced value system has disintegrated in this highly competitive society we live in.

In the face-to-face questionnaires, eighty-nine percent (89%) of the forty to fifty-nine (40 – 59) years old women from Nairobi and eighty-one percent (81%) from Nyeri advised young parents to teach their children good values and manners so that they can become productive members of society.

### **5.3.5. The Importance of Disciplining Children**

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi believed that modern women not want to discipline their children because they do not spend enough time in their children's lives to be disciplinarians. They criticized the modern mothers for never being there for their children and when they do have time for them, they overcompensate for their absence by spoiling them with things instead of guiding and teaching them. They advised today's mothers to stop spoiling their children with material things and instead give them their time and attention which is much more valuable than anything money could buy.

Sarah Njeri agreed that her granddaughter's generation are very different from her own in that they freely express their opinions and lack discipline. They transmit that lack of discipline to their children by spoiling them which they do because they have money and can buy them anything. Margaret Githinji notes that *"today, parents have money so they can get their kids anything. we didn't have money in our time."* Margaret believes that this is what is creating an undisciplined generation because their parents spoil them but are not there to discipline and guide them. They also have the freedom to reject their parent's advice and opinion which was unheard of in their time.

The eighty years and older' focus group from Nyeri felt that today's parents should change their parenting styles and start instilling more discipline in their children. Virginia Nyambura said:

*I think parents of today are too lenient on their children and don't want to tell them when they are wrong. Therefore, the children grow up disregarding what is wrong and right because he or she has not been taught good morals by the parents. Today's parents should make sure they teach their children from an early age, right from wrong and the importance of respect.*

The focus group from Nairobi felt that today's parents should also know their children's friends so that they ensure that their children are not being influenced negatively by children from bad backgrounds.

In her oral testimony, Lucy Macharia told young parents that in order to be strict with children and set boundaries for them they should not be their friends but have to be their parents and guardians. She explained that:

I would tell them that when their children mature, they should not talk to them as if they are they are age mates. Even when their grandchildren mature, they should stop talking to them as they talk to their age mates. They should instead respect and advise them. Maintain your boundaries as a parent.

In the face-to-face questionnaires, ninety-three percent (93%) of the eighty years and older' women from Nyeri encouraged women to teach their children good values compared to only sixty-five percent (65%) from Nairobi. This implies that more women from Nyeri saw a problem with the values children exhibit today because they are still connected to their traditional culture and can see the changing behaviour among children more clearly than the women who live in urban setting can.

The eighty years and older (80+) women also advised modern parents to take back the control and authority from their children. Josephine Nyambura explained that children were in control of their parents today which would have been unheard of in their time. She observed that:

*Children are in control today and they are the ones who give orders, they are in charge. They are very undisciplined and manner less and they are being taught to doing as they please. In our time we told children what to do and disciplined the child. We let our children know that we were in charge and we were in control so that they could grow up into responsible adults.*

The rest of the women were in complete agreement with her. Cecilia Wairimu added that while the parents thought they were showing love to their children, they were actually spoiling them and failing to prepare them for the world by teaching them about limits and boundaries. She believed that this resulted in children not respecting their parents because they knew there was no consequence for their actions. They urged modern parents to reverse this trend before it was too late.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi County held the opinion that today's generation of children do not respect their parents because their parents have not taught them to be respectful. Isabella Kagwong noted that:

We had respect for our parents. If father said I would not go to school, that is how it would have happened. I was the oldest in my family but my father never allowed me to go to school because he believe it would make me a prostitute and I accepted his decision even though I didn't like it. One time my cousin was teaching the alphabet and all of a sudden my father hit me on the back. My mother shouted 'you will kill her!'

She contradicted herself, however, because by trying to learn the alphabet she was indirectly disobeying her father behind his back. But when asked this, Isabella said that was nothing compared to the public disobedience of today's young people.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nyeri were of the opinion that today's parents not only failed to discipline their children but they also entertain and encourage their promiscuity by allowing them to have boyfriends from a young age. Charity Gathoni, a retired teacher, explains: *"I happened to have taught at a private primary school in town and during the visiting the parents would come with big cars; the class 7 and 8 pupils would take their girlfriends to their parents. That never happened during our time sometime you asked yourself whether this was indeed a reality and they do not fear and to make it worse the parents are so excited,"* she explains.

In her oral testimony, Monicah Kimiah observed that her grandchildren did not fear their parents and talked to them however they felt like. She blamed the parents for their children's lack of discipline because they never correct or discipline them which sends the signal to the children that it is OK to behave that way. *"They can suddenly lose their tempers, shout and even talk the way they want to their parents. This would never have happened in the past because their generation feared their parent. They also had a lot of respect for their parents and they would never have wanted to be cursed by them,"* she noted. She told modern parents to toughen up and correct their children when they are wrong, adding that that is more demonstrative of their love than trying to always please and spoil them.

All the women in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group told modern mothers to stop trying to be friends with their children and instead start being parents and the disciplinarians in their lives. They complained about how rude and unmanageable today's children are saying it was a burden on them when their grandchildren visited because they touch everything and can't be told anything. The Focus group from Nairobi were also of the opinion that today's parents are unable to discipline their children because they do not want

to fall out of favour with them. *“I often wonder who the adult here is. Somehow, we lost our culture of raising children the Gikuyu way. We are no longer strict because we are afraid of being hated by our children. Our mothers never concerned themselves with whether we loved them or not, they just did what was right for us even if it was unpopular in our eyes,”* said Jane Wanjiru, adding that modern mothers have to learn to do the same.

Sharon Wamuchii believed that parents of today are also rebelling against the way they were raised. *“My mum was very strict and principled and we didn’t want to bring our children up in the same way. We wanted our children to grow up more free,”* she explained, adding that this had been done at the expense of bringing up their own children properly. Rosabell Wanjiku agreed with Jane and Sharon. She believed that the modern parent’s desire to be friends with their children instead of disciplinarians has brought a lot of confusion to the family unit. *“Today they want to friends with the children and have that closeness where their children tell them everything and this has compromised their primary role of disciplining and guiding the children,”* said Rosabell adding that what children needed was guidance, not friendship.

The forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) focus group from Nyeri encouraged modern parents to stop calling their children ‘kababa’ or ‘kamama’ because the name itself gives the child authority over the mother. The women also advised young mothers to start having more children so that they stopped this habit of spoiling them. *“Having only 2 children is also the problem because parents get obsessed brining up a ‘mum’ and ‘dad’,”* adds Alice Wanjiru. Jane Wambui Maigwa agreed saying that modern parents pampered their children too much especially when they referred to the children as “mommy” or “daddy”. *“In fact, it is their kids who dictate to them what they want to do, what they want to eat and where they want to go, this is very wrong,”* said Jane Wambui.

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) focus group from Nyeri advised young women to have children when they are mature themselves. They felt that it was their generation that had started the trend of poor parenting because they became mothers when they were still girls. *“For example, I got my first born at the age of 15, was my mind fully grown? Then the child became a mother at the age of 12; so tell me what will become of the children? Who will now lead the other?”* asked Jane Wangari. The women were all in agreement that while their generation may have been the first to explore western parenting styles, they felt that they were not to blame because the majority had become mothers while they themselves were still children.

However, it is interesting to note that their own mothers had had them when they were teenagers and yet they were still able to raise their children well. But they did not see themselves as girls because they had been circumcised by then. This implies that the perception of the age at which one matures, has shifted by the time of the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) generation.

The forty to fifty-nine (40 – 59) years’ women also advised young mothers to stop giving their children money because this is what corrupts them and enables them to buy alcohol and drugs. They encouraged modern parents to establish a work ethic in their homes where a child is given money after completing certain chores so that they can learn to appreciate money and the hard work it took to make it.

Anne Thairu believed her daughter’s generation had a big problem on their hands and they knew it because her granddaughters could not be told what to do or not to do or to be corrected when wrong and yet they are not even teenagers as yet. According to Wairimu, another challenge was that parents of today do not want their children to be disciplined by the community. In traditional Gikuyu society, community parenting meant that kids were disciplined both inside and outside the home.

For Mellina Kamoche, the one difference between her and her granddaughters is that her granddaughters like to speak their mind and say what they feel. According to Mellina, they have no filters because their parents have not taught them about boundaries. They also do not speak a word of Gikuyu but only speak English and Kiswahili.

Lucy Njoki also believed that their daughters have no control over their children today and to make it worse, their generation has also destroyed community parenting by always being suspicious of one another. *“Community parenting meant that kids were disciplined both inside and outside the home,”* notes Lucy. Her daughters no longer have the community support in raising their children which places all the burden of their discipline and guidance on the parents.

Jane Wambui Ngang’a believed that children lack discipline today because their parents are not teaching them boundaries and limits and also because the community parenting that they grew up with is no longer there. She explained that:

*Long ago if I made a mistake and your mother who is a stranger to me, found me she would beat me up. Today if my child is beaten I am up in arms. People are looking for legal issues and I don’t know what. So I think the child is no*



*longer a community child. We have become very individualistic because we have kept to ourselves. But when I look at the advantage of the community, everyone was eyeing what you were doing so it was very easy to maintain discipline at home and even in the community.*

She went on to say that since the parents were divided and suspicious of one another, the child no longer belongs to the community and can misbehave in public but the parents will never know. As a result, a lot of indiscipline among children of today's generation goes going uncorrected and children become more daring and mischievous because they easily get away with things.

Jane Wambui Maigwa saw her granddaughters as being very naughty and undisciplined. She blamed it on the modern parenting styles which her daughter uses. *"They want to be friends with their children and they don't want to discipline them. They pamper them too much and by always referring to them as 'mommy' or 'daddy' they are spoiling them even more. In fact, it is their kids who dictate to them what they want to do,"* she said.

Jane Wairimu Ngang'a perceived her granddaughter as having her own mind and not wanting to listen to authority because she has not been taught about boundaries. She explains that her eight-year-old granddaughter, whom she lives with, was invited to a birthday party by her father's family and she didn't want her to go because her mother and father were no longer together:

*So I called the three of them, my two daughters and the grandchild, and I said this is what I would want to happen, that you don't attend this birthday party. Now you see I cannot give details to my grandchild but I had said to my daughters 'you can't take her there'. Now my granddaughter left us in the bedroom went to the sitting room. Now as I was continuing the discussion with my daughters about why this is not good, she came back very forcefully and said 'shosh (grandmother), I am who I am. My mother asked me whether I want to attend the birthday and I said yes, so I'm going.' It took me aback but I said to her 'you can't talk to me like that, if you want to make a request then you have to do it in a better manner' so she said 'please shush I would like to attend' so I gave her the permission but imagine at 8 is she is telling me that. What is going to happen when she becomes a teenager? I am very confused because I feel that I need to put boundaries but the mother thinks its ok and*

*now when you look at who has rights over this child, it's the mother, but now you see they are also living in my house under me. So it becomes very tricky because the boundaries are blurred.*

She was very worried for her daughter's generation because they are not in control of their children to the extent that their children tell them what to do.

### **5.3.6. Invest in Your Children's Relationship with God**

During the oral testimonies and focus groups discussions the eighty years and older (80+) women advised today's parents to return to the church so that they may be assisted in instilling proper values in their children, especially those parents who were not brought up in the right way themselves. They advised young women to teach their children about God from an early age so that they are moulded in the right way. *"Get closer to God and pray for your children for them to have peace and not to be lured into today's demonic culture. All we can do is pray for our errant behaviours,"* advised Sarah Njeri, during the oral testimonies interviews. She believed that today's world is filled with dangerous temptations which could only be resisted with divine help.

In their responses to the face-to-face questionnaires, however, sixty-five percent (65%) of the eighty years and older (80+) old women from Nairobi and 60% from Nyeri advised young women not to embrace western religion blindly but instead to revisit the spirituality of their own people.

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old women were of the opinion that young people today should reconnect with God (*Ngai*) and pray more than ever before because they live in very evil times. *"We are approaching the end time so Satan is at work and temptations are everywhere. Young people should pray for themselves so that they do not get pulled into witchcraft or devil worship,"* explained Jane Wanjira from the Nyeri focus group. The women agreed with her, adding that only prayers could help young people to navigate the dangerous times they live in.

In the face-to-face questionnaires, on the other hand, seventy-four percent (74%) of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) women from Nyeri and sixty-seven percent (67%) from Nairobi, encouraged today's generation of women not to follow western religion blindly but to instead explore the spirituality, beliefs and practices of their people. They felt that religion was misleading many young people today.

The forty to fifty-nine (40 – 59) years old cohort from Nairobi encouraged during the focus group discussion modern parents to establish a spiritual foundation for their children to grow up in. They felt that today’s generation of parents do not provide any spiritual or moral foundation for their children. They are also not developing a moral compass in their children which they could use to navigate through the complexities of modern life. *“In our generation our parents were so much into church and could show you the church path. Nowadays if you ask a child if he will go to church he will just say no. We used to get punished for not going to church,”* explained Jane Wachire. She advised parents to take their children to church even if they did not want to go.

#### **5.4 Let’s Respect Ourselves and Others**

All the women from the three age groups believed that lack of respect was one of the major shortcomings of this generation. They all explained how respect was central to traditional Gikuyu culture and was instilled in children at a very age. *“In the past young people had respect and it was a very paramount virtue in society. Lack of this virtue would sometimes lead to punishment of the children in terms of canning in order to instil that high level of discipline and respect for elders,”* explained Agnes Njoki. The women viewed modern women as having no respect for their elders, men, or their culture. They encouraged young women to:

- i. Have Self-Respect;
- ii. Respect and honour their parents;
- iii. Respect Elders;
- iv. Respect other people;
- v. Respect and unite with other women.

##### **5.4.1 The Importance of Self-Respect**

All the eighty years and older (80+) old women agreed that today’s generation of women, first and foremost, needed to learn to respect themselves. *“Give yourself respect first and foremost and be mature. If you respect yourself then you will be able to respect others and to be respected,”* was Rosabell Wanjiku’s advice to today’s generation of women. The focus group from Nairobi encouraged young women to carry themselves the way they would like others to see them. In her oral testimony, Lucy Macharia said, *“Let us refrain from any*

*immoral behaviour and anything that undermines our principles,*” adding that self-respect would enable young women to resist the evil temptations of modern society.

The eighty years and older (80+) cohort encouraged today’s young people to be content with their family’s financial situation and stop this *tamaa* (lust/obsession) for big things and getting rich quick. They believed that poverty is at the root of today’s immoral society because it creates *tamaa* and makes women compromise their character and morals in order to get more money.

In the face-to-face questionnaires, ninety-six percent (96%) of the women from Nairobi advised young women to avoid peer pressure which is what often leads them to being dissatisfied with their family’s financial situation. Only sixty-seven percent (67%) of the women from Nyeri advised the same which suggests that peer pressure was more prevalent in the city than in the rural areas.

In her oral testimony, Muthoni Likimani encouraged women to respect themselves even in their marriages. *“A girl even when she becomes married should behave like a woman and not have other secret men out there. She should not allow any other man to climb on top of her when she has a husband,”* she explained, implying that women today were not faithful to their husbands.

All the women in the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) bracket were of the opinion that today’s generation of women has the wrong attitude towards life, towards themselves and everyone around them and this makes them behave badly. They termed it a ‘don’t care’ attitude although they were not sure where the younger generation of women had developed it from. *The character and attitude of today’s generation of women is all wrong and it’s all because of the way they see life and take life. They just lived today and forget about tomorrow,*” explained Jane Wambui Ng’ang’a during the oral testimonies. Susan Waithera urged today’s young women to work on their self-esteem and self-worth first because what they think about themselves and their abilities will determine how they carry themselves. She also encouraged women to actively understand the law, particularly as it applied to their own rights.

#### **5.4.2 Respect for Parents**

At the focus group discussions, the forty to fifty-nine (40- 59) years’ cohort from Nairobi felt that today’s generation of women has no respect for their parents. They were saddened at

how today's generation of women would openly disobey and even shout at their parents. *"There has never been a more misbehaved generation than today. Today's girls will even slap their mothers. This is a curse. Lang'ata prison is full of young girls who have murdered their parents,"* said Rosabell Wanjiku. The other participants were in complete agreement with her.

### **5.4.3 Respect for Elders**

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nyeri believed that today's young women did not respect their elders. *"Nowadays young people cannot even give the elder a seat in a public place or in public transport,"* said Sarah Muthoni. The focus group from Nairobi agreed. *"If I was walking and I tend to meet an elder I would change the direction or walk on another path out of respect. Again people respected their elders,"* said Beatrice Wambui. She went on to explain that in today's society young women would never go out of their way to show respect to an elder, particularly if she is a stranger.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi shared the same opinion. *"Nowadays the situation is different, young people don't bother moving at all to let older people pass and will often brush their shoulders with people on the streets,"* she observed. The women unanimously agreed that this is because young people today have not been taught the social rules concerning *Rika* (age sets). *"It was very easy to maintain respect in the past because a lot of emphasis was placed on one's Rika (age sets) and there was collective responsibility unlike today where everyone is mixed in with everyone,"* noted Mary Wangui. They urged today's generation of women to respect their elders and stop dismissing them as 'old fashioned' because they have a lot of wisdom and knowledge to share with them.

Another problem that the eighty years and older Nyeri focus group highlighted was the erosive effects of the concept of equality. Elders are no longer given the respect they deserved because of this idea that everyone is equal. *"An age mate to my father could not be asked by a less age person 'how are you?'"* explained Sarah Njoki. All the women placed the blame on the parenting styles and rebelliousness of their grandchildren on the failure of the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) old generation to bring their children up properly.

The eighty years and older (80+) women from Nyeri were quick to point out that even the young men of today were not respecting their elders. *"Can you imagine today a young man casually hugs his mother-in-law and there is no big deal about it. In laws were accorded a very high level of respect in the past,"* said Margaret Wanjeri. This statement implied that for

the women, any kind of intimate contact between men and women was seen as a sign of disrespect whereas in modern culture, hugging one's mother-in-law or father-in-law is regarded as a sign of affection and closeness.

The women from the eighty years and older (80+) generation complained about today's women's negative attitude which manifests itself in their rudeness, unfriendliness, impatience, and 'don't care' attitude. They attributed it to the challenges they face in their jobs, in their marriages and with their children.

“Today's generation of women have a 'don't care' attitude. They don't care about rules or protocols or their people's culture and traditions. They don't care about authority and they can even insult an elder in front of you. In our time, one would never have done such a thing for fear of being cursed by that elder. But this generation is no longer God fearing,” noted Sophia Njeri from the Nairobi focus group.

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) old focus group from Nairobi was of the opinion that today's generation of women had no respect for their elders unlike the way they had had. *“I stand in the bus from town to home and young men cannot give me a seat out of respect, they will not even make eye contact”* said Jane Wanjiru. All the women were in agreement and shared similar stories where young people do not show them the respect they felt entitled to from a cultural perspective.

All the women believed young people were not being equipped with the necessary social skills they need to operate within the community and this is why they have no respect for their elders. *“In our time anyone our parents age was highly respected. If we encountered them on a path we would immediately walk off the path and allow them to pass. Today it is you who has to move out of young people's way,”* said Elizabeth Nyumbura. She added that they had had the advantage of being coached by their mothers, aunties and the community at large on how to conduct themselves, whereas the modern adults are guided by what they read in newspapers and magazines and what they watch on TV.

#### **5.4.4 Respect for Other People**

The one virtue that the eighty years and older' Nyeri focus group felt should be re-introduced to the community was respect for other people. *“Respect is very important. I would love very much for my grandchildren to grow up respecting other people. This means respecting their*

*elders, learning to listen to people, and being polite and courteous to all,”* said Josephine Muthoni. The women from Nairobi encouraged today’s generation of women to get rid of that ‘don’t care’ attitude because it is very corrosive to their lives and relationships. Virginia Gitau, a former Freedom fighter said in her oral testimony that they could show respect to other people by learning how to listen instead of constantly interrupting them. She advised young women to cultivate the skill of listening to others, particularly those who are older.

In the face-to-face questionnaire seventy-four percent (74%) of the eighty years and older (80+) women from Nairobi and eighty percent (80%) from Nyeri advised today’s women to cultivate a more positive attitude towards other people. They encouraged women to learn to be kind and polite to their peers and elders. They were of the opinion that the bad attitude many young people displayed today is a big hindrance to their lives.

In the face-to-face questionnaires, eighty-nine percent (89%) of the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old women from Nairobi and eighty-four percent (84%) from Nyeri advised young people to change their negative attitude by becoming politer and showing kindness to other people, particularly towards their parents and elders. Eighty-nine percent of the women from Nyeri also encouraged women to develop a good moral character so that they can avoid the temptations and social traps of this time. Only thirty-three percent (33%) of the women in Nairobi gave the same advice, however, which implies that this was not seen as a priority by women from Nairobi.

#### **5.4.5 Respect and Unite with Other Women**

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old women perceived a lack of trust, particularly among women, as one of the fruits of the modern urban society. In her oral testimony, Grace Wairimu said she found today’s generation of women to be very different from previous generation of Gikuyu women because they do not trust each other or help each other out. In her opinion, lying and cheating has become the norm and as a result, everybody has their guards up. She also felt that because of the way modern life is modelled, everyone lives their own individual life and does not interact with others. In fact, most don’t even want to know who their neighbours are.

“There is a lot of dishonesty because people are cheating one another. But cheating is a negative part of civilization. In our time, if my friend would have asked me for 1000 shillings I would have given her without even writing it down. She cannot refuse to return it; she must return it. Today, you must have

a witness otherwise you might not get that money back and this is why our community life has disintegrated,” she said.

Overall Grace believed that her granddaughters’ life is much harder because they live in apartments within compounds where they do not know their neighbours and hence cannot trust them. She encouraged today’s generation of women to first be trustworthy themselves and inculcate a good moral character in their children.

The forty to fifty-nine (40-59) years old focus group from Nairobi believed women are no longer as united as they had been in the past and they no longer respect one another. They saw money and the western lifestyle as the cause of this disunity because it has introduced competition and rivalry among women.

“Today women are jealous of each other because one woman will have nicer things than the other, or a bigger house. In our mother’s time everybody had the same clothes and lived in the same sized house so they did not have this jealousy for one other. In fact, they loved each other very much,” said Grace Gathoni.

The other women agreed with her, adding that it was sad that women were less united than ever when the world required them to come together in order to overcome the tremendous challenges they faced. They believed fewer women gave of their time and energy to volunteer for women’s organizations.

The women encouraged young women to develop positive relationships with other women because there is a lot of power and goodness that comes when women came together. She urged today’s generation of women to learn about the Women in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) and how they were able to play an instrumental role in the war because of this unity. The literature confirms that in the past Gikuyu women were united and organized. In her unpublished thesis *The Role of Kikuyu Women in the Mau Mau*, Dr Gachihi discusses how women used to respect one another in traditional Gikuyu society and they even had their own assembly of women called the *Ndunda ya Atumia* which handled all women’s affairs and also advised the male council of elders on societal matters (Gachihi, 1986). She explains how women were the ones who held each other up to the highest codes of conduct and social behaviour. As the perspectives above imply, today’s generation of women no longer hold each other accountable but rather encourage one another to misbehave.



In *Passbook F.47927*, Muthoni Likimani advocates for women's unity and cooperation. She highlights how women's unity helped them to survive in colonial villages during the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) .

“Women during emergency time survived because of unity and the sense of sharing. Those in one village would share whatever they had, one would run to the river for water, the other would collect firewood or vegetables and each would exchange whatever the other did not have” (Likimani, 1998: 25)

## **5.5 Women's Perspectives of Modern Relationships**

This section looks at women perspective of marriage today from two perspectives. The first perspective is the behaviour and conduct of married women. Secondly the women look at single career women and the challenges they face in trying to find a suitable partner.

### **5.5.1 Perspectives of Married Women**

During their focus group discussion, the eighty years and older (80+) cohort from Nyeri believed that there is a big problem with the way today's generation of women treats their husbands. They were of the opinion that today's generation of women treat their husbands too casually and make them babysitters; they found it unusual that husbands open the doors for their wives; they accused today's generation of women of being unfaithful to their husbands and they have no perseverance in their marriages. They felt that women today do not respect their husbands and they are even too casual with them. According to one of the participants *“Nowadays men have been reduced to baby sitters and it is not uncommon to see a man on the streets carrying his child. In the past, no man could have been seen handling his child because that responsibility was solely handled by the mother.”* But should the father's increased involvement in the upbringing of their children be regarded as a negative thing?

In their oral testimonies the eighty years and older (80+) women were in agreement with the women from the focus groups that today's generation of women does not respect their husbands. *“This generation is so lost. We find that it is husbands that are opening doors for their wives late at night, this is wrong. Before if we were late, we came with other women to explain why,”* noted Mary Munyeki. The women encouraged today's wives to be more faithful to their husbands and more persevering in their marriages.

Maria Wangui believes that her daughter's generation are not faithful to their husbands. *“We used to be very loyal to our husbands in our time because we were satisfied with our husbands. Today's generation of women are not satisfied with their husbands, they want*

*other people's husbands as well,"* explains Maria. She adds that another major challenge to the marital home is money and the compromising things that women will do to get easy money.

In her Oral Testimony, Muthoni Likimani agreed with Mary, noting that, *"A girl even when she becomes married should behave like a woman and not have other secret men out there. She should not allow any other man to climb on top of her when she has a husband."* The women also urged today's generation of women to have more perseverance in their marriages and not leave at the first sign of difficulty. In their responses to the face-to-face questionnaires eighty-seven percent (87%) of the eighty years and older (80+) cohort from Nairobi and the same percentage from Nyeri encouraged women to respect the institution of marriage by being more persevering and patient and by respecting their husbands.

The eighty years and older (80+) generation of women perceived today's generation of women as being unfaithful and uncommitted to their marriages. According to Tabitha Nderu, one of big differences between her and her daughters was the way they treated their husbands. She observed that her daughters didn't respect their husbands, or take care of them, or bring them any happiness. *"They want to keep their money and take their husband's money and use it. No wonder their men cheat on them,"* said Tabitha.

She also believes that her daughters don't have the same level of loyalty that she had because they are quick to abandon their husbands and homes at the first sign of disagreement or trouble.

"My husband was verbally abusive, but I stood by him. He had no money but I used to give him some so that he didn't look bad in front of our children. He had to be the head of the home. Even though I knew he was a useless man I never showed this to our children; I always made him appear to be the man of the house" explained Tabitha.

The women from all three age groups instructed today's women to learn to be faithful and submissive to their husbands. The women in the eighty years and older (80+) generation were in agreement that today's women are not as loyal or faithful in their marriages as they had been. In her oral testimony, Maria Wangui said,

"we used to be very loyal to our husbands in our time because we were satisfied with our husbands. Today's generation of women is not satisfied with

their husbands, they want other people's husbands as well, such *tamaa* (obsessive desire) is the reason so many young couples are getting divorced."

She added that another major challenge to the marital home was money and the compromising things that women would do to get easy money such as having sex outside of the marriage.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nyeri explained that today's men have no respect for their wives and they demand sex from them even if they have just given birth a few days before. *"In our time, husbands respected women when they gave birth and didn't demand sex like today. Nowadays women ask to stay in hospital for an extra week or two because their husbands have a don't care attitude,"* said Priscilla Njoki. She added that men had other wives for this purpose.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi were of the opinion that today's women are just as unfaithful in their marriages as their husbands are and this has reduced the value placed on marital unions. They encouraged young wives to be more faithful in their marriages. They felt that today's generation of women are too quick to walk out at the first sign of a challenge. In her oral testimony, Njeri Mburu said, *"They need to learn to be more faithful and persevering in marriage. They need to learn to persevere more and talk through their problems instead of always being so quick to call it quits."* The women were of the opinion that young couples today are also too quick to discuss their marital problems with their peers or go to their mothers instead of trying to work through their problems as a couple.

In the face-to-face questionnaire, seventy-eight percent (78%) of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) women from Nairobi and seventy-nine percent (79%) from Nyeri advised women to respect the institution of marriage by being more faithful to their husband and learning to persevere through the ups and downs of marriage. Virginia Gitau was the only one to mention some of the challenges her granddaughters faced in their marriages. She explained that her granddaughters are both married to alcoholics and they are both forced to take on their husband's responsibilities because they are both unemployed. Virginia believes her granddaughters are casualties of modern life and the commercialization of alcohol.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi were also of the opinion that women today do not submit to their husbands but instead act and do whatever they pleased, which in their opinion, is a sign of disrespect. *"In our mother's time the man provided the*

house, the woman was submissive to the man, women were never beaten,” claims Mary Wanjiku adding that there is more domestic violence today because of societal pressures and women not obeying their husbands.

Pauline Wangeci, however, believed that women were beaten in their mother’s time but not as severely as today when a husband’s beating can land his wife in hospital. *“Our mothers never screamed when they were beaten because one was beaten while they were being directed back to the house and vice versa, they were never chased away by their husbands,”* said Joyce. She explained that women at that time were secure in their marriages and in their husband’s ability to provide for the family, unlike today when husbands fail to step up to their responsibilities as men.

The forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) focus group from Nyeri felt that women do not respect their husbands today because they are not worthy of respect and they are not what they called ‘real men’. They described a ‘real man’ as one who shouldered his responsibilities as a man and took care of his family. *“In the past men put food on the table and not women because they were taught how to behave during the circumcision period. But today’s men are useless.”* said Jacinta Nyagah, adding that in most homes the woman was the sole breadwinner of the family.

Lucy Wanjiru also felt that women do not respect their husbands the way their mothers respected their fathers because today’s men are not deserving. *“Today’s men are nothing like our fathers. If men misbehave they should be given a hot slap because they don’t respect themselves. The big problem today is men peeing in the bed because of alcohol abuse,”* she said. The majority of women were in agreement. They felt that alcohol has wasted many men who now have to be taken care of by their wives instead of vice versa.

Regina Wambui agreed with Jacinta and explained that she was living this first-hand because she had married a ‘mama’s boy’. She explained that:

*I got married to my man but he is still his mother’s boy, we cannot even discuss our things. If he brings ‘unga’ (flour but in this context means money) he will take it to his mother. If he does not come with it, he is assured that he will eat at his mother’s. That would never have happened in the past. When a man grew up, he started leaving his mother’s kitchen.*

She believed that mothers were partially to blame for this because they did not want to let their sons go. Elizabeth Nyumbura confessed that she was in a similar predicament to that of Regina and she blamed it on her mother-in-law. She noted that:

*Our mother-in-laws are the cause of all of this confusion. They are still very involved in their son's lives and they spoil them. They even cook and provide for their sons, which keeps them from growing up. How can you feed your son all the time and you know he has a wife?*

Lucy Wanjiru agreed, saying she too had suffered from the same predicament with her own mother-in-law. *"The parent is so soothing towards the son, making him listen to her a lot more than to his wife. If they acted this way in the past, the father would have beaten up both the son and the mother. But nowadays even fathers have changed,"* she noted. There was a general consensus that mothers-in-law are behind many of today's divorces.

In her oral testimony, Jane Wambui Ngang'a (50) stated that the biggest difference between her life and that of her daughter, is her daughter's relationship with her husband. *"My daughter's husband will go shopping and cook for the family when she is at work. Even when she's home, if he's hungry he'll go and cook and not wait to be cooked for."* Wambui says that her husband has never cooked even one meal in their house. She accredits her daughter's relationship to their communication style as a couple. They are friends and there is a lot of communication between them, compared to her relationship with her husband, for example, where communication is minimal. She believes her daughter's husband is open minded because he is educated and has travelled beyond the borders of Kenya.

### **5.5.2 Perspectives of Single Career Women**

In the eighty years and older' old oral testimonies, Veronica Nyawira said that single women today and single women in her time were very different. In her time women lived with their families until they got married whereas today, women move out of their parent's homes and live alone because they have money. Veronica grew up in a traditional setting whereas her granddaughters have been raised in education and capitalism and away from Gikuyu culture and values. As a result, they do not respect tradition because they are employed and have their own money. *"They even want to interfere with the dowry process,"* adds Margaret Githinji. She narrates a story of her friend's granddaughter who was getting married and had decided that she did not want her future husband to pay any dowry. She does not seem to be

aware of the deeper cultural implications of the dowry process and her mother had to tell her to not interfere with the negotiations. In the end, a dowry was paid.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nyeri saw the high number of modern career women who are successful but cannot find good husbands as a major challenge for this generation. Lydia Wanjiru said,

*Today, all the big cars are driven by girls. Look at the TV, all the big jobs have been taken by women. They have built big houses however they have no husbands and that is a big problem. Back then you could see only a couple of women driving a car and admire them but nowadays you can see one lady driving a big car and you don't admire them.*

They thought that one of the reasons for this is that the young men their age have grown up without their fathers and so they do not behave like real men. They observed that men no longer counselled their boys.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) women believed that today's generation of women are stronger than the men which makes it harder for them to find husbands. *"It's a mystery why today's men are so weak, docile and quiet. Many of them are even poor decision makers and they have lost their voice. In fact, today the women are the ones who counsel the men,"* said Peninah Wambui. The women agreed that this was one of the consequences of the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) on Gikuyu families. They believed that the Kenya Land and Freedom War (the Mau Mau war) was the greatest transition for Gikuyu culture because women became mother, father, disciplinarian and teacher to all her children. Mary Nyumbura agreed with Peninah and said that this is happening across all the levels of the community. *"Today in most major functions (weddings and funeral) the majority of roles are taken by women so men are not making the decisions,"* she said.

All the women from this age group encouraged career women not to wait till they have climbed the corporate ladder before finding a husband because their success will intimidate men. They also urged women to look for a man with potential rather than one who is successful already because most of the successful men are married.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) Nyeri focus group felt that many young women today end up in the wrong company and relationships because they do not do the necessary background checks on the people they are hanging out with or even, involving their families. Mary Nyumbura noted that:

*Today young people will meet in the discos and plan to marry one another without knowing each other's background. In our time, we looked at people's background since some homes were not appreciated by the community. Our fathers would never have allowed us to marry someone whose family they did not know or have information about.*

The women from the Nyeri focus group did acknowledge, however, that it is harder to do that today because many young people in compounds with strangers or in cities away from their families.

Charity Gathoni added that young people also met one another while in college and decided to get married and parents would only be involved at an advanced stage of the process because they were seen to interfere. She encouraged young women to involve their parents from the onset because their wisdom will help them to ensure they are making the right choice and marrying into a good family.

### **5.6 Changes in Mother-Daughter Relationships**

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) women believed that they were closer to their daughters and had a better relationship with them than their mothers had had with them. Njeri Mburu explained that the way her mother treated her was different from the way she treated and interacted with her own daughter. *"I feared my mum but with my daughter we are friends, we communicate easily,"* she explained, adding that they enjoy each other's company and her daughters always come to her for advice because the channels of communication are open.

Monicah Kimiah also said she had a different relationship with her daughters because while she herself was circumcised, she decided not to circumcise them. She explained that:

*We went through the cut, unlike our daughters. I decided not to circumcise my daughters because I was educated and learnt that it was wrong. The church taught me that God created all organs intact. Back then we used to even cut the tongue which was painful to the child because the tongue helps you to discover different tastes. I remember mine was eaten by a chicken after being cut.*

She added that she spends a lot of time with her youngest daughter and they are truly friends. In fact, Monicah had come with her daughter to the interview who was helping translate the questions for her mother.

Jane Wairimu Ngang'a said that her daughters' generation was able to communicate better than hers at their age. *"One thing that stands out about my daughters is that they are able to express themselves at a very tender age. We can discuss issues with them such as boyfriends. This was unheard of in my time,"* said Jane

She went on to explain that her first daughter was not as expressive as her second daughter because she had not had the counselling skills she has now and so she used to project a lot of her anger and emotions on her elder daughter. Jane noted that,

*My first born daughter was not as articulate as the younger one but I can tell the difference when I learnt the counselling skills because I was able to see that I need to separate my issues from my children so that has made it easier for me to bring up my second born daughter without beating her. We can reason together.*

For Rose Wairimu Kamau, the greatest change from her generation to her daughters' was that they know their rights and so her word is not the law as her mother's had been when she was growing up. *"With time they come to know their rights. I don't know whether it is from school or their friends because like for us it was like we were almost begging even for the basic things. But now these ones will come and tell you that they need ABCD."* She goes on to explain that the children of her generation were never that bold as children of today because they feared their parents and particularly the severe beating they risked getting.

Anne Thairu believed that the greatest challenge as a mother to this generation is that her daughters always want their way and 'no' for them was not necessarily a 'no'. She noted that:

*The only problem I have with this generation is that I sometimes feel as though I am not fully in charge. They will argue with us which was unheard of in our time. In my mother's home her word was law. Now with my daughters I feel I have to bend here or relax this. I would have wanted it to be the way it was with my mother.*

She believed that today's generation of children pick up a rebellious nature from their friends at school, especially boarding schools because there all children are mixed in together and learnt bad habits from each other.

For Lucy Njoki, the biggest difference in her relationship with her daughters is the way they communicate with each other. She explained that:



*With our daughters we can discuss issues. I don't think I ever discussed boyfriends with my mother. The only time I discussed a man with her was when I was going to get married and even then all I told her is that there is a visitor who will come to on Sunday, blah blah blah.*

Jane Wambui Ngang'a explained that her parenting style had to completely change because the world is a dangerous place and she is forced to adjust the way she was bringing up her children in order to protect them. *"As parents in this generation, there is so much work for us to do, we have to give a lot of information to our children because whether we give it or not, they will get it, and it is better than they get the correct version from you as a parent"* said Jane. She added that parents of today have to be able to communicate very well with their children and become their friends so that they can pick up early on situations and friends that are not right for them.

Lucy Njoki noted that as a modern parent she had to learn how to be open and discuss things such as a woman's menstrual cycle with her daughters. She explained that:

*Technology has shaped their world. They know so much that I didn't know because as much as I was a girl, when we were growing up I went to school very young and I remember when we were being given talks especially about girlhood, when they were talking about periods, I would be sent out of the class. So I lost that bit and when they started, it was only that my sister was more mature and she gave me what I needed. So I now know as a parent that I can talk to my children about all those things and even my grandchildren. But those were like taboo things even to discuss with our parents.*

In her opinion this has been made possible because her generation are more relaxed as parents and therefore the mother daughter relationships are not as formal as they had been when she was growing up.

### **5.7 The Taboo of Modern Dressing**

All the women in the oral testimonies and focus group discussion for the eighty years and older (80+) generation felt that today's generation of young women dressed very inappropriately. The three main issues raised were: how tight the clothes were, how much cleavage the women showed and how short the skirts and dresses were. *"According to Gikuyu tradition, women never showed their knees so as not to attract lustful thoughts and unwanted attention from men. There is no need to over expose your body to get unnecessary*

*attention. To be honest with you, some young women make us older women feel embarrassed,”* said Agnes Njoki, from the Nyeri Focus Group.

The eighty years and older (80+) women observed that their granddaughters have more clothes and shoes than they ever had and yet they are not satisfied. According to Margaret Githinji, they also have to keep up with expensive lifestyles that cause them to accumulate material things because they are in competition with other women. *“I had one pair of shoes, my daughter changes her shoes every day,”* said Maria Wangui. She explained how her generation used to wear clothes for two days and then wash them over night, but today their granddaughters cannot do that.

Esther Murugi believed there is a big problem with the way her granddaughters’ generation dress. *“They will wear short skirts and heels and loiter around. You hear that they are selling their bodies for money because they do not want to get tired, they do not want to work hard,”* said Esther. She explained that women in their time were very modest and even if they wore *shukas*, they never exposed their bodies or put their inner thighs on display.

The eighty years and older’ focus group from Nyeri urged women to respect their bodies and dress modestly. Alice Wanjiru noted that:

*We accept that it is impossible to emulate exactly the behaviours that were practiced in the olden days, but one of the things that modern women must learn is the importance of having respect for people and for their bodies, and to make sure they dress their age. Although dressing has evolved over the years and girls are now dressing in trousers, they should at least make sure they are decent.*

The eighty years and older’ focus group from Nairobi advised women to stop displaying so much nakedness when they dress because it makes them look cheap and easily accessible.

Pauline Wangeci said:

*Dressing today can make you love or hate a woman. Therefore, I encourage today’s generation of women to dress their age and be decent. Stop being overly seductive and hide your bodies. Also hide your chest, we would have never allowed our dad’s to see our cleavage or even our children. Young women should know this is a great shame.*

The eighty years and older (80+) old women advised today's generation of women to start dressing more modestly particularly around their fathers and their children. In her oral testimony, Esther Murugi felt that part of self-respect is dressing modestly.

*These children need to be talked to. They need to be told to observe what they wear when they are doing house chores and not wear revealing clothes but decent ones, or at least tie a shuka or wear a loose trouser to do them without revealing anything. Your children are there, your in-laws are also present and you still wear short and revealing clothes. This is a big shame I will say this, the moment they know how to hide their nakedness that is when they will know what beauty is.*

In the face-to-face questionnaires, ninety-one percent (91%) of the eighty years and older (80+) women interviewed from Nairobi advised young women to stop wearing such revealing clothes and be more modest in their dressing. Only sixty-seven percent (67%) of the women from Nyeri, advised women to change their dressing which implies that poor dressing is more of an issue in cities such as Nairobi than it was in the rural areas.

When it came to dressing the eighty years and older (80+) old women said in their oral testimonies that they were in agreement. In her oral testimony, Miriam Wambui Wambugu said:

*They should not show their nakedness to anybody. A woman should always think twice about her clothing. When she bends, she should have it in mind that she would not want her father to see her nakedness. She should consider the shame they would feel and that which her father would feel if he saw her nakedness. Now these children will have a do not care attitude, which is like taking trouble from the forest and dropping it in your homestead.*

Miriam believed that women today dress and act unconsciously without considering the consequences of their actions and she encouraged young women to be more mindful of how much they reveal when dressing.

According to the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) women, the biggest difference between the way they and their daughters dress is that their daughters are less conservative in their choices and they wear trousers, something they would never have worn. Peninah found her daughters modern dressing styles such as wearing trousers and tight jeans very different from her time where women never wore trousers. *"If someone has to make a trouser, why not*

*make a decent one once and for all. One that does not model the organs of a woman,”* She complains.

Mary Mwiwaki believed that her daughter’s fashion and hairstyles are completely different and less conservative than what they did in the past. For example, Mary Mwiwaki had never worn or owned a trouser because she believed that it was not right for women to wear one. *“I can never do my hair or wear trousers; I would be scorned by society,”* said Mary. Her daughter, on the other hand, had many trousers and jeans that she wears almost daily.

Monicah Kimiah was another woman from this age group who has never worn trousers. She has a daughter, though, who dresses in a similar style to her. *“I cannot wear a trouser, that kind of dressing is not mine. But I have a girl who is different, she is just like me. Even when she goes to buy dresses, she brings me a similar dress. And when she wears trousers, she cannot come to my house, she just goes to town,”* says Monicah.

The forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) generation of women were in consensus that today’s generation of women dress very indecently. They felt that the clothes they wear are too tight and often short and reveal too much skin and too much cleavage. They believed that this style of dressing is emerging from the negative influence of the movies and music videos they watch from the West. *“All the music videos and movies today show women walking half naked and girls are trying to emulate that. Boys are much better off than girls because at least they are fully dressed in videos,”* observes Virginia Kamau, from the Nairobi focus group.

The focus group from Nyeri agreed, saying poor dressing is a major issue with today’s generation of women. *“In the past you could never wear the kind of clothes they wear today, some women walk naked, exposing their bodies, their bums and their breasts”*, said Regina Wambui *“The jeans are so tight they have to be put on with soap,”* joked Lucy Wanjiru. They advised young women today to change their dressing and become more modest so that they can reclaim their self-respect. They also encouraged mothers to stop fearing their daughters but instead tell them that they will walk with them only if they are appropriately dressed. In the face-to-face questionnaires, eighty-nine percent (89%) of the forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) women from Nairobi and 88% from Nyeri advised women to change their dressing to clothes that are not as tight or revealing.

## **5.8. The Immoral Sexual Conduct of Today's Generation**

None of the women were directly asked about modern relationship or sex, but in their discussions on today's generation of women, several issues were raised by all the generations regarding how they conducted themselves in relationships with the opposite sex. All the women were alarmed at the high divorces rates and the increasing number of children born out of wedlock. They believed this is because of the way modern women carry themselves and compromise themselves in their intimate relationships.

The eighty years and older (80+) generation explained that the way modern women behave was actually taboo in their time.

The major issues that emerged from their discussions were:

- i. Public displays of affection;
- ii. Promiscuity;
- iii. Pre-marital sex;
- iv. Having children out of wedlock;
- v. Inappropriate father-daughter relationships;
- vi. Prostitution.

### **5.8.1 Public Display of Affection**

In their focus group discussion, the eighty years and older (80+) respondents from Nyeri felt that young women and men today are too public in their affections, something that would never have happened in their time.

“In fact it was unheard of for a young girl to be found walking alongside a young man, but today they will even hold hands in public. They actually have no shame as they will go to the extent of kissing and cuddling in public. To add salt to injury, nowadays girls don't bother moving from the way of elders when they are in the company of young men,” said Jacinta Muriithi.

She added that it was as though young women don't know or don't care that they are disgracing their families and disrespecting themselves. The women encouraged today's generation of women to stop kissing men in public because they are bringing shame and dishonour to their families and diminishing their own value.

The eighty years and older (80+) cohort from the Nairobi focus group felt that young women today are too open with their relationships with boyfriends who they do not even marry which is disgraceful.

“Courtship was a very discrete process in our time because girls would talk to young men in seclusion. When a young man got interested in a girl, he would inform his parent and they would arrange to go visit the girls home to formally introduce himself and his family and declare his intentions with the girl,” said Agnes Njoki.

Jacinta Muriithi added that women today see what Agnes said as old fashioned and they prefer their own way of discovering men but this often leaves them heartbroken, pregnant and ‘ruined’ without prospects of actual marriage.

The Sixty to seventy-nine cohort from the Nyeri focus group felt that today’s generation of women are too open with their relationships and they do not even respect their parents enough to hide their boyfriends from them. Priscilla Njoki explained that:

“In my time I could not take my boyfriend to the disco or be found walking with him on the streets. We never took our boyfriends home, we never even wanted our mothers to see us with them because we respected our mothers so much. If we saw someone older, we’d run away. Just like the way children ran away once a teacher visited them. It’s not because of fear but because of respect. Your generation has no respect.”

The other participants agreed with Priscilla, adding that in their time, they never saw their parents being intimate with one another either. *“Even if the wife went to the husband’s hut, they would leave so early as not to be seen by the children so we never knew where children came from,”* said Mary Nyumbura. She believed that this had kept children innocent and pure whereas today’s generation of women are being over-sexualized and spoiled by the TV from a young age.

Charity Gathoni believed that parents are partly to blame for this because they are too close to their children and their children no longer fear them. *“Young girls of standard 8 will go and introduce their boyfriends who are in standard 7 or 8, to their parents,”* she said adding that they would never have dreamed of doing such a thing in their time because it would have been a huge sign of disrespect to their parents.

The Sixty to seventy-nine generation from Nairobi also came to the conclusion in their focus group discussions that this as a major problem with today's generation of women. They explained that in their time they were never as public with boys as today's generation of women are. *"Boys and girls talked but they never got intimate and you talked far from the eyes of your parents. It was an embarrassment to be seen talking to a boy by an elder. We had our own code though although we never slept with boys before marriage. We talked in private,"* said Sophia Njeri. She advised today's women to stop fashioning their relationships and behaviour according to what they see in movies and magazines.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi also disapproved of the way today's generation of women are publicly intimate with their boyfriends. *"Today's generation is very rebellious. The boys and girl will kiss in public, in daylight. his never happened in our time. We had too much respect for ourselves,"* said Mary Wanjiku.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nyeri were of the opinion that today's generation of women is overly sexual because they can see their parents being intimate. *"Some parents do their stuff as the children watch, especially in Nairobi where families live in a single room,"* said Joyce Wambui. Jacinta Nyagah agreed with Joyce but she said that this was also happening in Nyeri. *"Parents will make love and do all their business in front of their kids and this spoils them,"* she noted. The women also attributed this behaviour to the media and the oversexualized movies and music videos that promoted such behaviour.

### **5.8.2 "Today's Generation is the Most Promiscuous Generation Ever"**

In their focus group discussion, the eighty years and older (80+) generation from Nyeri believed that there is something very wrong with the way young women conduct their relationships today. They are seen to be the most promiscuous generation that has ever existed. Mary Wangui explained that:

*Today they will sleep with a man only after knowing him for a short time and with no formal agreement between them. And that is why there is such a big spread of sexually transmitted diseases of all kinds because promiscuity is prevalent today. In our time we would never have had sex with a man before we got married and it was the same for the boys. In the Gikuyu culture, such behaviour was a big taboo that could only be reversed by elders offering a goat sacrifice to Ngai God for forgiveness.*

The women believed that this immoral behaviour corrupts the society and lowers everyone's inhibitions. It also blurs the lines for young people between what is right and what is wrong because they see so many of their peers engaging in such activities.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi believed that this promiscuity has led more and more young women into prostitution as a way to make quick and easy money. "Our children go to town to do prostitution; a lady would sustain herself yet she had no job or husband," said Susan Njeri. The women believed that the problems started when parents allowed young women and men to move to the cities alone because they had no elder person or community to supervise them and ensure they behave correctly and maintain good social conduct. *"Allowing children to go to the cities alone has contributed to all these problems. Girls starting to live alone without supervision because of employment was the start of all these problems because they had money but no mentor,"* said Beatrice Wambui.

The eighty years and older (80+) women agreed with her adding that mixing with other tribes has also contributed to this behaviour because young people do not know their own culture well enough to filter what is good and bad from other cultures. As a result, they may be swayed to accept or accommodate other people's behaviours and ways that are deemed as wrong by their own people.

In her oral testimony, Esther Murugi expressed her dismay at the open promiscuity of women of today's generation. *"You hear that they are selling their bodies for money because they do not want to get tired, they do not want to work hard,"* said Esther. She explains that women in their time lost their virginity when they got married. In her oral testimony Tabitha Nderu's noted diseases are another challenge to their granddaughter's health because of their poor lifestyles and promiscuous behaviour. *"I heard on Coro FM that they are now injecting themselves with drugs to protect themselves from illnesses and they are even closing their tubes because they also don't have children,"* she said.

Miriam Wambugu believes her granddaughters' generation do not want to marry a young man and build a life with him because they want instant wealth and success that they have not worked for. *"My daughter doesn't want a young man like her who she can grow with but an old man. In our time, we married boys of our age and grew together,"* says Miriam. Margaret Githinji also agrees that money has corrupted this generation to the extent that they will date men their father's age because they have money.



The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi felt that today's generation of women lacked the social structures which ensure that young men and women behave properly. They believed it is hard for young people not to fall into temptation because no one holds them accountable. This is especially true for the young people who have moved away from their families to pursue their education or careers and they felt that this is where young people learnt to misbehave.

They believed that women in their time were disciplined partly because of the rigid social structures such as *rika* (one's age set which would ensure that people of the same age set carried themselves with the highest respect). "*Rika's and other social structure made sure women were well behaved. If you were undisciplined, you were socially cut off and not involved in anything. This was done to punish you,*" said Mary Veronica. Unfortunately, today, what is bad is more the norm than what is good, observed the women.

### **5.8.3 Pre-Marital Sex is Taboo**

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi said that premarital sex which is prevalent in today's society didn't exist when they were young because their generation feared their parents and their *Rika* held them accountable for their actions. Virginia Kamau explained that:

*In our time, we never had sex before marriage because we were afraid of our parents. If a boy made a girl pregnant, the girl would tell an aunt who the father was and she would tell her father. Unplanned pregnancies were paid for by the boy's family.*

But this is not the case today. Jane Wanjiru noted that:

*Nowadays, most young people have resorted to this trend of sex before marriage. It is not uncommon to hear news of young people who had bright futures dying prematurely because of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. This is very difficult for the elders to witness. Unimaginable behaviour has become the norm.*

The women encouraged today's generation of women to stop having sex before marriage even if their peers are doing it.

The eighty years and older (80+) women were of the opinion that women today do not respect themselves because they do not demand men to commit to marriage before they sleep

together. *“There was nothing like a come-we-stay arrangement in our time. Society would never have allowed it. Young men and women valued their morality and honoured themselves. The boys and girls who were known to be doing that stuff never married good virgin girls or boys,”* said Jacinta Muriithi.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi agreed. They believed that today’s generation of women, particularly young women living alone in the towns and cities, do not even discriminate who they have sex with. *“A young man can come over with a girl and sleep in the room he is renting from you. We would not have done such things. I would never step into the man’s room,”* said Mary Wamuyu. She believes that somewhere along the line women have lost all sense of dignity and they don’t even know it.

The sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi felt that today’s open practice of sex before marriage is a leading problem for this generation. Not only does this behaviour expose them to diseases, but the women felt this is the reason why so many young women have children out of wedlock. *“In the past, ladies would go to the lad’s hut to visit but could not engage in pre-marital sex. Nowadays people engage in premarital sex, ending up in pregnancy,”* said Sophia Njeri.

Wanjiku wa Kiragu felt that young people today are also engaging in and encouraging each other to behave badly instead of acting as each other’s moral compass. She explained that in the past girls and boys of the same age did not tolerate such behaviours in their *rika* (age group). Wanjiku wa Kiragu said:

*In the old days, a man could not sleep with an unmarried girl and vice versa. If a man did so, he would be beaten by the girls and if the girls did so, she would be beaten up by the boys and they would not relate to her. In case a woman was sleeping around with men, she was going to get married to an old man since such a person had no respect and shame.*

The women agreed with her. She encouraged young women to develop relationships with other morally upright women so that they can support one another and hold each other accountable.

The sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi believed that one of the reasons young women fall into the trap of premarital sex is that they readily accept gifts from men which puts them in a compromising situation. They believe that money has corrupted young women today because they even take money from men their grandfather’s age in

return for sexual favours. They advised young women to stop accepting free things from men including a drink or food because there is really nothing free in this world and they will eventually have to pay it back.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi believe that media and education expose young people to sex at a very young age. *"We started knowing about sex when we knew our husbands but today a 10-year-old knows about sex. This generation sees nothing wrong with sleeping with many men,"* said Pauline Wangeci. The women agree that this early exposure has resulted in a promiscuous society which eventually leads to young women engaging in prostitution and thinking it's ok.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi were in agreement. They saw the television as the main teacher of this behaviour. Eunice Njeri explained that:

*The television today shows kids things that are over their years. When you put on the television, you see girls and boys dancing, the boys are full dressed but the girls are almost naked. What message is this sending to our young women? Western media has corrupted the younger generations and given them western mannerisms.*

They advised parents to monitor and restrict what their children *The Role of Parenting Styles in Enhancing or Hindering Children's performance in preschool Activities* are exposed to through the television so that they may salvage the next generation

#### **5.8.4 Having Children Out of Wedlock is Taboo**

For the eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi, the biggest taboo was how young women were having children out of wedlock and in some cases terminating the pregnancy through abortions. Susan Njeri explained that:

*For example, if a girl got pregnant, she would speak to an aunt and tell her who the father was. The aunt would tell the father and he would go to the Kiama and ask the young man if he was responsible. If he said no, then the elders would ask him few questions about when the young man last saw the girl. If the girl gave birth to a date that is close to their predictions, then the young man that had rejected the pregnancy would be killed. The elders would then slaughter the bulls in the bananas. Such kind of pregnancies were paid for compared to now when abortion is done.*

The participants expounded on how a promiscuous culture is burdening young women and their mothers with unwanted pregnancies because the men abscond their duties as fathers. Hannah Wanja added that young women are shamefully having children with complete strangers, particularly in the urban centres and towns. The women often do not know the father very well because they met in a disco and they have also never met his family. The women agreed with Hannah. They believed that such behaviour was very dangerous because in their ignorance, women have children with thieves, liars and murderers, passing these negative spirits onto their children.

According to Tabitha Nderu, the problem with her granddaughters is that they are unreliable and untrustworthy. She said her granddaughters cannot be trusted or relied on by their mothers because they have no plans for their lives. *“Mothers cannot trust or rely on their daughters because they have no plans. For example, my granddaughter has 4 children, that she cannot afford to take care of”* said Tabitha.

She pointed out that today’s generation is very comfortable having children out of wedlock and yet they cannot take care of them. She went on to explain that her daughter is now forced to take care of her granddaughter’s young children because she cannot afford to take care of them by herself. In her time, they would have never burdened their mothers with their children.

According to the eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi, in their time, having a child out of wedlock was seen as taboo and even boys did not sleep around with girls. Josephine Wairimu noted that:

*In our time, having a child with someone you were not married to was a was a curse (Mugiro). Boys never wanted to impregnate a girl because they would be embarrassed and incur the wrath of his father. Back then, a young man feared his father and impregnating a woman was taboo.*

The sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) focus groups explained that getting pregnant out of wedlock was a curse for both the woman and the man who had made her pregnant. There was even a special goat or the *Yamirigu* that had to be sacrificed when a girl got pregnant outside of marriage in order to take the curse away. After this the man who had made her pregnant was given the responsibility of taking care of her and raising their child.

The sixty to seventy-nine years’ (60 - 79) focus group from Nairobi said the society is so corrupted today that having a child out of wedlock is not seen as a big issue. They

complained about the prevalence of absentee fathers, saying that men nowadays make girls pregnant and then abandon them. Six out of the 8 women in the focus group are helping to raise their grandchildren in one way or another because their daughters are single parents. They urged their daughters to stop giving up their virtue to men before they commit to them and instead wait and learn to *ngukindiria* (be patient, virtuous) until they found a man who is willing to make them his wife.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) women observed that more girls today have children out of wedlock with no accountability or societal reprimanding. Such situations create complications for the two families when the young couple parts ways because there is no formal bond or agreement between them to begin with.

In her oral testimony, Jane Wairimu Ngang'a said she found it very strange that her daughter is still in contact with her ex boyfriend's parents even though they are no longer together with the boyfriend. She said:

*My daughter is still in close contact with her boyfriend's relatives. They parted ways but she never cut links with the relatives and there's a time that my grandchild, who I live with, was supposed to attend a birthday party and I said I don't like this idea, I mean if you part ways then make it final.*

Even though they have a child together, Jane believed that they should cut all links with that family because they are not even helping to take care of the child financially.

In her oral testimony, Lucy Njoki advised young women to stop getting carried away by lust and infatuation as they are the ones who will bear the burden of raising the children they have out of wedlock because the fathers often run away from their responsibilities.

Lucy Njoki believed that her daughters' generation was living in tougher times than hers because they have children out of wedlock and the fathers are running away from their responsibilities. According to Lucy, the biggest difference between her and her daughter is their parenting style and attitude towards their children. She says that her life was so committed to her children, whereas her daughter does not care about hers.

She explains how her daughter left her with her granddaughter while she went to work in Afghanistan for two years. *"My generation and even my mother's would never dream of leaving their children for someone else to raise. We never did that no matter how tough the circumstances were,"* says Lucy. This implies that there has been a major shift in how Gikuyu women perceive their roles and where they place their priorities and values. Before,

a Gikuyu woman was a mother and wife first. Nowadays, however, her career comes first and takes priority in her life.

Overall, the three generations of women were concerned about the increasing cases of young women having children out of wedlock or having sex with older men for money and being kept by ‘sponsors’ who are their father’s age, as mistresses. They believed that this behaviour is as a result of adoption of western culture. But in *Polygamy: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*, Miriam Zetzen argues that these are just modern interpretations of a traditionally polygyny culture.

Many of the new marriage forms that outwardly resembling monogamy actually follow polygyny however. In urban African, polygyny is being transformed and changed by other forms of union formation such as ‘serial polygyny’, ‘informal unions’, ‘sugar daddy relationships’, ‘polyandrous motherhood’ or ‘outside marriage’. In ‘outside marriage’, men marry one woman by statutory law and also form extra-legal domestic and sexual unions with other women (Zetzen, 2008:177).

This is a mirror of what is happening among today’s generation of women particularly in the urban centres. The respondents complained about the rampant promiscuity of young women today and their lack of faithfulness in their marriages or even to young men.

### **5.8.5 The Challenge of Inappropriate Father–Daughter Relationships**

All the women in the eighty years and older (80+) generation were of the opinion that today’s father-daughter relationships are inappropriate. The women from the Nyeri focus group disapproved of the way mothers today make their teenage daughters wash their father’s clothes. *“Back then girls never washed clothes for their father nor did they cook for him. It was the mother who used to do so and in case the mother was not there, another woman would come and do the cooking,”* explains Jane Wangari. They advised mothers to stop allocating their wifely responsibilities to their daughters.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi felt that women today lack the dignity that they had had when they were younger. Margaret Njoki noted that:

*Ladies have really disregarded the importance of their dignity as women and it is becoming the new normal. In the past, something as minor as hugging between a young lady and her father was regarded as taboo. Nowadays it has become like a common greeting for the young. Westernization has really*

*affected how people live and relate with each other because everyone is trying to emulate the Europeans.*

They believed that young women in particular do not show their fathers the respect they deserve, particularly in the way they dress around the house. Today girls would wear tight jeans and short dresses in the house in front of their father. This would have never happened in the past. They also felt that women are too familiar with their fathers because girls today would even hug their fathers. *“In our time, fathers were not close to their children. We never hugged our fathers who had their own hut, only boys were allowed in our father’s hut,”* said Mary Wairimu.

The eighty years and older (80+) Nyeri focus group were of the opinion that today’s generation of women have inappropriate relationships with their fathers. They explained that in the past there was no touching or interaction between a girl and her father but nowadays it has become like a commonplace for fathers and daughters to have a relationship. Jacinta Muriithi explained that,

*Girls were not allowed to hug their fathers, in fact you were not even allowed to come close to your father in the olden days since men stayed away from the kitchen, where girls and women would spend most of their time. Men like our grandfathers had their special traditional houses and only their sons or their wives could take them food.*

Peninah Wambui from the Nyeri focus group revealed that in her time, a woman would even hide herself from her father when she got pregnant because she did not want the shame of him seeing her and visualizing how she got in that state. *“Personally, I was told not to see my father when I was pregnant since that meant disrespect. I could only see him once I gave birth. Today’s generation of women expose everything including their pregnant bellies.”*

The women from the forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) old focus group in Nairobi also believe that young women dress inappropriately around their fathers and this is a sign of disrespect. *“Picture a situation where a girl is dressed in a short dress in front of her father, exposing her legs and maybe even her inner wear, this is very wrong and should not be tolerated,”* said Beatrice Wambui. She encouraged young women to be dressed modestly around their fathers or at least throw a ‘shuka’ around their bodies when they are in front of their father and brothers.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi agreed. Loise Wamuyu felt that this behaviour was being encouraged by the modern style of raising children. She explains that:

*Today's upbringing is the problem. When the father picks up their child, that is where the respect goes because they become too intimate, especially the girl child. When she gets older she will see nothing wrong with hugging her father and yet allowing your breast to touch his chest is a curse.*

The rest of the women were in agreement.

The women were also of the opinion that today's fathers cannot be trusted to not have lustful desires for their daughters and daughters can't be trusted with their fathers. *"Fathers today cannot be trusted even with their own daughters and are daughters to be trusted with their fathers? Today's girls have no shame, they will even sleep with their fathers for money, have you seen how they dress in front of their fathers and show their bodies?"* asked Eunice Njeri. The majority of women agreed with her.

#### **5.8.6 The Increasing Prevalence of Prostitution**

The eighty years and older (80+) old focus group from Nairobi considered women who sell their bodies for money or who chase other people's husbands to be prostitutes. During the focus group discussion, the eighty years and older (80+) cohort from Nyeri unanimously agreed that this modern culture of sleeping with men that are the age of one's father for money was unheard of in their time. *"I have heard of cases of young women having children with their fathers or their uncle which is a big curse. But these are some of the behaviours we have today,"* explains Margaret Wanjeri.

Sarah Muthoni believed that's the result of bad parenting and a lack of community accountability *"Just like you have heard; ladies nowadays are having children with their biological fathers while their mothers are still around. All these things being witnessed are because of bad parenting,"* said Sarah Muthoni. The women advised young people to be content with their station in life and develop a strong work ethic so that they will not be tempted by easy money in return for sexual favours.

The eighty years and older (80+) women's perspectives of their granddaughters' behaviour were very negative. They viewed them as being irresponsible and lacking morals. Esther Murugi, from Nyeri described her granddaughters as being lazy, selling their bodies and



roaming around the streets. In her time, she explains, women were not free to move around which she thinks was a good thing. Esther believed that prostitution has become so rampant in her granddaughter's generation because they exchange their body for material things. *"The good days are gone. These children do not have good behaviours. Even these people with them should chase them away since they just bring about shame,"* she advises.

According to Margaret Githinji's oral testimony, the lack of a strong work ethic in her granddaughter's generation and the desire for things they have not worked for is the reason many of them slept with men for money instead of working hard for a living. Esther Murugi agreed with Margaret, adding that today's generation of women are selling their bodies and roaming around the streets because they are lazy and don't want to get tired. Esther believed that prostitution has become so rampant in her granddaughter's generation because they exchanged their body for material things. *"A woman is leaving a young man to go to an older man so that she can reap from his pockets,"* she said. She pleaded with young women to stop selling their bodies for money and instead go out there and find a job.

In her oral testimony, Miriam Wambugu observed that her granddaughter's generation did not want to marry a young man and build a life with him because they want instant wealth and success that they have not worked for. *"My granddaughter doesn't want a young man like her whom she can grow with but an old man who can buy her nice things. In our time, we married boys of our age and grew together,"* said Miriam. Margaret Githinji also agrees that money has corrupted this generation to the extent that they will date men their father's age because they have money.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi were of the opinion that money has corrupted society so much that daughters were now sleeping with their fathers and men their father's age for money. *"Girls today have an old man she calls a sponsor who funds her lifestyle and a boyfriend who is her age mate and who she has fun with and spends the sponsors money on,"* said Jane Wanjiru adding that money is the root of all evil. Virginia Kamau corrects Jane saying, *"money is not the root of all evil, it's the spirit of 'tamaa ya mbesha' (lust for money)"* The women pleaded with today's generation of women to pray for their salvation because that is the only thing that would get them out of this immoral way of life.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) focus group from Nyeri also believed that money is the root of all evil and has destroyed this generation because young women would do anything to

get money. *“There is a girl in my village who was given 10,000 Kenya shilling to sleep with her father. She did a lot of shopping with that money; her girlfriends were also bought for goodies. Money is the great corrupter and that is the reason they can do anything.”* said Jacinta Nyagah. The women confirmed that there is a prevalence of young women sleeping with men their father’s or even grandfather’s age for money and comfort. They said money has brought about a jealous generation that is always competing with each other and it is this competition that makes women engage in what is considered to be a taboo behaviour.

## **5.9 The Dangers Technology**

All the eighty years and older (80+) women believed that technology posed a serious threat to today’s generation of women because it programmed them to have unrealistic expectations about life. *“Today there is so much toxic content online and on mainstream media like in television that corrupts the minds of young people by depicting that a society should live some type of way to have a fun-filled life. Once they start subscribing to this kind of content, they easily get hooked and no one wants to have the fear of losing out,”* said Joyce Wangari adding that this superficial pressure is the reason why today’s woman buys so many clothes and gadgets. All other participants agreed with her.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nairobi observed that technology has changed women and made them more individualistic and self-involved. They believed that young women today are more active on their phones and computers and less interactive with real people and the real world. *“Nowadays it hard because technology and a good economy has enabled almost every young person to have a mobile phone which has turned them into introverts and barely give attention to anyone else apart from themselves because they spent so much time hooked to their phones,”* said Margaret Wanjeri.

The women observed that technology isolates today’s generation of women because they keep to themselves and they do not like to communicate with others, particularly anyone older than them. They encouraged young people to stop spending so much time on their computers and phones and instead spend more time outdoors and interacting with people. They also advised young people to put their phones away when they are having a meal with their families or when they are sitting with other people.

The eighty years and older (80+) focus group from Nyeri County believed that technology is corrupting the children of this generation by exposing them to too much negative information that is harmful and detrimental to their minds. *“Media is exposing today’s youth to so many*

*things that are bad. They spend so much time watching TV and even watching porn and this has a negative influence on them. In our time, we did not have such so we were not as influenced by external powers,”* said Jane Wanjira. They encouraged young parents to be more vigilant with what their children watch on TV and what they access on their phones.

All the eighty years and older (80+) women felt that not only has technology affected young women in a bad way, but it also has a negative impact on their children. *“The other day my granddaughter found her children watching a toxic movie. She was so furious that she took the movie disk and threw it in the trash,”* said Joyce Wambui. She went on to explain that today’s generation of mothers are completely disconnected from their children’s lives and cannot control something as basic as what they watch on the television or even the information they access on their phones. Joyce Wangari added that *“Every time you switch on the television nowadays and tune into music channels, the programs are full of ladies half naked dancing with fully dressed men,”* and this is what children watch when they are not supervised.

The majority of women above 80 women blamed westernization for this generation’s obsession with technology. Charity Gathoni was quick to point out, however, that the African has not followed European culture and technology blindly but rather has been conditioned and beaten into doing so. She explained that:

*We started with paper education and then we started learning about other mzungu things like mzungu wedding, mzungu relationships, mzungu dressing. Sometimes we copied even bad things. Discos, bars, drugs and drinking alcohol daily all came with the mzungu and has really affected how people live and relate with each other because everyone is trying to be like the mzungu. The younger generation copy foreigners so much because they believe foreigners are better. We were indoctrinated with the idea that we are second to wazungus. Education has indirect taught our children that the mzungu has more knowledge than his people.*

She encouraged young women to put down their gadgets and get more involved in their families, churches and communities.

The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 - 79) old focus group from Nyeri believed that technology has opened their children to a world of information that their parents cannot filter and the negative consequence of this is that their children are being exposed to pornography, gay sex,

drugs and other vices from a young age. *“Today we have lesbians, prostitution, drunkards, we even have girls who take drugs such as ‘miraa’ and ‘bhangi’ but this has all come with westernization,”* explained Priscilla Njoki. The women believed that Gikuyu people’s obsession with westernization is because of the superior technology but that they don’t take the time to analyse and understand the cultures they copy.

For Grace Wairimu, the biggest difference between her and her daughters is technology. She explained that her daughters are part of the digital age and she is trying to transition to digital from analog. *“My daughters are in the digital age and some of us are still analog but we are trying to catch up with them because even my little grand children know how to open the internet,”* says Grace.

Florence Mwihaki viewed her daughters’ generation as having an advantage over her generation because the whole world is in front of them and accessible through technology. On the other hand, she believed that it is very easy for them to get confused because they have access to a lot of information. In Florence’s opinion, one of the weaknesses of her daughters’ generation is that they glorified life in the USA. She said:

*I think they have an advantage over us because they have all this information coming from the world. The whole world is in front of them which we didn’t have, and as a result it is very easy for them to get confused, especially when they look at the U.S. You are here in Africa and you are looking at the U.S. and you are seeing a version of the news and movies and everything else and it is not the actual reality. People here glorify the U.S. then you end up there and you say, ‘where is America? Have I arrived.*

She was familiar with this particular scenario because she studied in the U.S.A. as part of the Kennedy/Tom Mboya airlifts. One of the disadvantages that Florence saw with today’s generation of women is that their lives are tough because the cost of living is very high while salaries remain the same. It is tough for young people to make ends meet.

The forty to fifty-nine years’ (40 - 59) focus group from Nairobi believed that technology has exposed children to too much information without providing any filters or controls. *“A child of class 5 can google anything, even porn and bad stuff which pollutes our minds. Our children have so many influencers that we are unaware of.”* They believed that the danger of technology is that it can negatively influence children without their parents knowing, particularly with this generation where parents are increasingly absent. The worst of these

influences is the exposure to sex and pornography online. *“Children are so exposed to sexuality that they are being oversexualized. Porn DVDs are even sold on the road,”* said Loise Wamuyu.

Pauline Wangeci agreed with Loise, adding that this desensitization has completely polluted the minds of the youth. She explained that:

*We started knowing about sex when we knew our husbands but today a 10-year-old knows about sex. Before children went through stages; they were allowed to be children and grow up slowly but today’s technology is forcing children to grow up very fast and miss out of the vital stages of being an innocent child.*

Eunice Njeri agreed, adding that western media made bad behaviour seem cool or fashionable and this misleads the young people. She noted that:

*The television today shows kids things that are over their years. Every time you watch something on the television nowadays and tune into music channels, the programs are full of ladies half naked dancing with fully dressed men. Western media has corrupted the younger generations and given them western mannerisms.*

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 - 59) old focus group from Nyeri were in agreement. They felt that the mobile phone is corrupting today’s children. *“The mobile phone is destroying children, even a class one pupil has a phone and can Google and watch anything and we can’t control the content. They can look at bad stuff including nude picture, etc.”* said Alice Wanjiru. Regina Wambui added that children are always on the phones which are educating them in ways their parents do not even know.

### **5.10 Today’s Generation’s Abuse of Drugs and Alcohol**

According to Veronica Nyawira, the one big difference between the eighty years and older (80+) women and their daughters and granddaughters, is that they drink alcohol from a young age and they even frequent bars. Girls and women in traditional Gikuyu society drank alcohol only on two occasions: during circumcision and at their dowry ceremony. She believed that her granddaughter’s generation is disobedient because they grow up watching their own mothers drinking and misbehaving.

Tabitha Nderu believed that her daughters and granddaughters are more irresponsible than they had ever been because they do not plan for or think about their future and they are lazy. Tabitha alleged that the regular consumption of alcohol is one of the reasons for this. Esther Murugi agreed that this is a major problem for their daughters because it was taboo for women to drink alcohol. She explained that in her time, alcohol couldn't be drunk by anyone and in fact, girls only drank during their dowry and circumcision.

In the eighty years and older (80+) face-to-face questionnaires, eighty-four percent (84%) of women from Nairobi and eighty-seven percent (87%) from Nyeri, urged today's generation of women to stop drinking alcohol because it is at the root of many of their problems; ninety-four percent (94%) of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 - 79) women from Nairobi and eighty-nine percent (89%) from Nyeri agreed with them and pleaded with today's young women to stop drinking alcohol regularly because it abuses their bodies, lowers their inhibitions, and leads to promiscuous behaviour.

The women from the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) age group were all concerned with the increasing prevalence and accessibility to drugs and alcohol in these modern times. The focus group from Nairobi felt that young people's exposure to drugs and alcohol is one of the greatest challenges for today's generation of women. *"Discos aren't bad, we also went in our time but today there is drugs and alcohol,"* said Sharon Wamuchii.

In her testimony, Jane Wambui Maigwa observed that her daughter love socializing and going to bars and nightclubs and Lucy Njoki concurred. *"They party like they don't have a care in the world. They use all their money for clothes and going out and do not plan for tomorrow,"* she added. Anne Thairu adds, *"I don't know if it's because of technology or whether we have allowed too much freedom but the things that are happening now are getting out of control; you find children in drugs and alcohol and even sex at a very young age."* All the women agreed that drugs and alcohol are ruining today's generation at the prime of their lives.

In their responses to the face-to-face questionnaires in the forty to fifty-nine age group eighty-four percent (84%) of the women from Nairobi and seventy-three percent (73%) from Nyeri encouraged young women to stop consuming alcohol because it is harmful for their health, lowers their inhibitions and causes them to make bad choices.

## 5.11 Conclusion

This chapter explored women's hopes, aspirations and advice for today's generation. The main advice that they gave centred on changing the way today's generation conduct themselves, their relationships and how they raise their children. There four major themes emerged, namely: the need for a cultural revival, a change in parenting styles, respect among young people and an end to modern sexual habits.

Table 5.1 (found on the next page) indicates that there was advice common to all three generations, whereas other advice was expressed by only one of the generations.

As seen at the top of this table, all respondents felt very strongly about young women today returning to their roots. The women believed that there is an urgent need for a cultural revival so that today's generation may salvage the tradition of their people before it disappears forever. They encouraged today's generation to: learn Gikuyu and teach their children as well by speaking Gikuyu in their homes, holding cultural seminars so that the elders can impart their knowledge on the emerging generation, seeking the coaching and mentorship of older women, teaching about Gikuyu spirituality in terms of what *Ngai* has done for the Gikuyu and the importance of facing mountain Kenya when praying, giving teachers cultural training and returning to the traditional diet.

The women were also very concerned with the bad way today's parents bring up their children. They urged modern parents to: put their children first, stop having adult conversations and relations in front of their children, unite with others parents and reintroduce collective responsibility, raise their children with a strong value system so that they would not be misled by the world, discipline their children instead of trying to be their friends, join a church that will help them to establish a spiritual foundation for their children, and balance education with traditional knowledge and life skills.

Table 13: Summary of Women's Advice for Today's Generation

WOMEN'S ADVICE FOR TODAY'S GENERATION		
GENERAL ADVICE		
<b>ALL WOMEN'S ADVICE:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ learn your culture,</li> <li>➤ Respect for husbands, elders and women</li> <li>➤ Re-introduce collective responsibility</li> <li>➤ Get closer to God,</li> <li>➤ Seek advice from grandmothers,</li> <li>➤ Be better parents,</li> <li>➤ Stop being victims of the negative effects of technology,</li> <li>➤ Dress decently,</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stop copying western style &amp; behaviour</li> <li>➤ Inculcate a good moral character,</li> <li>➤ Stop embracing religion blindly,</li> <li>➤ Change your attitude,</li> <li>➤ Return to a traditional diet,</li> <li>➤ Teach your children good values,</li> <li>➤ Avoid peer pressure,</li> <li>➤ Stop drinking alcohol</li> </ul>
<b>women above 80 Generation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Connect with extended family</li> <li>➤ be content with family's financial situation</li> <li>➤ be strict with children.</li> </ul>	<b>60 -79 years' Generation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ balance education &amp; Traditional knowledge</li> <li>➤ Have Societal values,</li> <li>➤ Find a Mentor</li> <li>➤ Be morally upright</li> <li>➤ Be trustworthy</li> </ul>	<b>40 - 59 years' Generation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Have a good character,</li> <li>➤ stop spoiling children,</li> <li>➤ counsel bad children</li> <li>➤ have more children.</li> </ul>
RELATIONSHIP ADVICE		
<b>ALL WOMEN'S ADVISE:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Respect your marriage</li> <li>➤ Honour your husband</li> </ul> <b>Single Women:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ stop public displays of affection,</li> <li>➤ stop being promiscuous</li> <li>➤ stop premarital sex</li> <li>➤ stop prostitution.</li> </ul>		
<b>women above 80 GENERATION:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Respect your husband</li> <li>➤ Stop having children out of wedlock</li> <li>➤ Be faithful to husbands</li> <li>➤ Carry yourself w/dignity</li> <li>➤ Stop dressing indecently</li> <li>➤ Stop inappropriate relationships w/fathers.</li> </ul>	<b>60 -79 years' GENERATION:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stop over-familiarity with men</li> </ul> <b>Single women:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ stop working hard &amp; find a husband</li> <li>➤ Do background checks on potential husbands</li> </ul>	<b>40 – 79 years' GENERATION:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Respect your husband</li> <li>➤ Stop having children out of wedlock</li> <li>➤ Stop sleeping with older men for money</li> </ul>

Thirdly, the respondents believed that modern women do not display any respect for people. They encouraged them to respect themselves, their parents, their husbands, elders, other people, and respect and unite with other women. Finally, the women were very disturbed with the rampant sexual immorality in society today, particularly: public displays of affection, promiscuity, pre-marital sex, having children out of wedlock, inappropriate father-daughter relationships and prostitution.



Overall, some of the advice given to today's generation demonstrates in many ways how women are still trapped in the patriarchal system both physically and mentally (Hooks, 2004). This is evident in some of the perspectives offered by the women such as when they felt that today's generation of fathers are too involved in taking care of their children and babysitting them; or when the respondents perceived today's generation of women to be lazy because they have no reproductive roles and a lot of free time. Such perspectives confirm the importance of continuously recording women's self-images and their perspective so that eventually it is the women's voices that define what is important to women's self-images, without borrowing their image from male perspectives.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Gikuyu women's self-image has evolved and changed from 1900 to 2000. This was done through the examination of three generations of women's social gender roles across their lifetime, their views of physical image, beauty and style and their hopes and aspirations for today's generation of women.

The literature review demonstrated that Gikuyu women's self-images had not been recorded. It also revealed that in the current patriarchal system, women's self-images were often defined from a male perspective and in terms of what made a woman attractive to men (Berger, 1973). The literature on the Agikuyu exposed how colonial education and Christianity replaced traditional culture with western culture (Likimani, 1974). It also confirmed that Gikuyu women had to contend with patriarchy, racial oppression and gender discrimination, which is defined as the intersectionality of oppression in African feminism. Hence, African feminism was the theoretical framework used because it reflected the struggles Gikuyu women had faced and continue to deal with today.

Three different tools were used to conduct case studies in Nairobi and Nyeri counties. Specifically, thirty (30) oral testimonies were recorded by key informants; one hundred and twenty (120) face-to-face questionnaires were also conducted and they provided empirical support for many of the key findings from the oral testimonies. Lastly, six (6) focus group discussions were carried out that provided perspectives on the collective images of Gikuyu women. The Oral testimonies and focus group discussions were analyzed using a thematic analysis and the face-to-face questionnaires were interpreted using frequency distributions.

The following sections present key findings in response to the three objectives, provides conclusive statements and proposes several recommendations.

#### **6.2 Summary of Key Findings**

The research showed that over the last three generations, Gikuyu women continued to be overburdened by their triple roles, namely reproductive, productive and community roles. They remained solely responsible for all domestic chores and they were not critical of these

social gender roles because they had been socialized to see this work as part of their roles as women. The women also still valued the image of *mutumia ngatha* or a virtuous woman. Contrary to western literature, they also found dark skinned women to be beautiful. They felt that today's generation of women were too immersed in western culture and called for a cultural revival that would encourage young people to return to using their language, eating traditional foods, and embodying the values of the past such as respect for others, etc. The key findings for each of the three objectives are discussed further below.

### 6.1.1 Women's Perspectives of Social Gender Role

One of the objectives of this thesis was to examine the women's perspectives of their social gender roles. Using Caroline Moser's Framework, the women's social gender roles were defined as reproductive roles, productive and community roles. In addition, the study examined women's free time and how they spent it. Women social gender roles were explored from three perspectives: their individual social gender roles, their generational perspectives of the roles from their grandmother's time to their granddaughter's generation today, and their social gender roles compared to men.

The key findings on this particular objective were that: women's reproductive roles had remained the same from 1900 to 2000. Women's productive roles were also still centred around farming in Nyeri but in Nairobi, more women were engaged in casual labour and other low-income earning jobs. When it came to their community roles, women continued to help one another meet their basic needs and with the organization of ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and church functions. Lastly, women did not have any free time and even when they called it free time, they actually used that time to do their reproductive work.

The study confirmed that from 1900 to 2000, women's **reproductive roles** have remained the same. Women were overburdened by these responsibilities throughout their lives and even as grandmothers, they still cooked, cleaned, took care of their grandchildren and of their homes. Research confirms that women had very little time for themselves because their reproductive roles kept them busy from dawn to dusk. Some particular tasks such as fetching water or collecting firewood took all day and this is why the famous Gikuyu saying says: *Muthenya wa Ngu ni wa Ngu* (the day for collecting wood is just for collecting wood). While this proverb is used in contemporary society to mean that when you commit to something you commit to it fully, it reflects a living reality for women in traditional Gikuyu society and in

the lives of many women in rural areas, even today. In addition, the respondents' perspectives revealed that women saw their reproductive roles as normal duties for women.

The social gender analysis looked at the distribution of social gender roles between women and men across their lifetimes. When it came to reproductive roles as children, girls had seven reproductive roles whereas boys only had two. Therefore, girls were seen to be overburdened with their reproductive roles compared to their brothers who had fewer roles and more free time. One of the consequences of this burden of reproductive roles was that many girls were denied a chance to go to school and when they did, they often did not perform as well as the boys. This is because girls had to wake up early to perform some of their domestic chores before school and when they returned home from school, there was work waiting for them.

As adults, the women emerged as the ones solely responsible for all the reproductive roles while men's sole responsibility in the homestead was taking care of livestock. Even if women had house helps, like an insignificant number did in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 – 59) generation, they were responsible for paying them and assigning them work. In all three generations, women were overburdened by their reproductive roles whereas men had almost no roles at all.

Aside from their reproductive roles, women also have productive and community roles – what Caroline Mosser refers to as the tripple roles of low income women. From 1900 – 2000, women's **productive roles** had gone from bartering and trading foodstuff for skin, beads, jewellery, etc. with neighbouring Kamba and Maasai women to working as low income earners, either as casual labourers, peasant farms, etc. The majority of women in the rural areas still engaged in farming whereas women in the city engaged in low paying jobs as casual labourers, cultivators, coffee and tea pickers, etc.

Today, many of the women describe themselves as either being unemployed or working as casual labourers to make money for their daily survival because they no longer have access to resources such as land, like they had had as young women. As a result, they are also not in control of their own food production and they were forced to look for money in their old age to survive in Kenya's market economy.

In the social gender analysis of productive roles, there were more husbands who had productive roles as low income earners (casual labourers, messengers, etc) than their wives. In the eighty years and older (80+) generation, in particular, most of the paying jobs were

exclusively for men. Women's employment opportunities were limited to teachers and nurses and both required training. For the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation, however, many of their husbands were either in jail or involved in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) and women were still being discriminated against because there were limited opportunities for paid work, or the wages were poor and the work conditions inadequate. This discrimination extended to the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation of women.

In terms of **community roles**, the eighty years and older (80+) generation engaged mainly in cultural activities, collective work and they also assisted one another as women when a woman gave birth or was unwell. Many of them were also living on colonial farms where they engaged in forced labour and also tend to their domestic chores.

The women implied that most of the community work fell on women and yet they were not involved in any of the community decision making. None of the eighty years and older (80+) women interviewed mentioned any leadership or decision-making role in the community, with the exception of when women went on expeditions to trade with the neighbouring communities, or when women supervised the food collection during the Kenya Land and Freedom war.

In terms of the social gender analysis for community work, the respondents were of the opinion that women were more involved in the community than men, throughout their lifetime. There were also more women involved in cultural activities, collective work and volunteering at the church than men. Overall, women felt overburdened with community work and yet they were not included in the community decision-making whereas men were less involved in community work and yet they were exclusively responsible for all the community decisions. While a few women had become elders in church, none of the women talked about being elders in their community whereas some of their husbands were.

All three generations of women did not have **free time** because of their triple roles (reproductive, productive and community roles) and even when they called it free time, they actually used that time to do their reproductive or productive work. In the eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation, women had no free time primarily because they always had reproductive roles whereas the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 – 59) generation had no free time primarily because of the demands of their productive roles or doing a mix of reproductive and productive work.

When discussing free time, women confirmed that the men had free time but they had no free time, across their lifetimes. This was primarily because of the burden of reproductive roles that fell exclusively on women's shoulders, in addition to their productive and community roles. As children, the boys played while the girls went to church, engaged in cultural activities, knitted, and did their reproductive roles. As adults all three generations were kept busy by their triple roles while their husbands enjoyed their free time.

In summary, the women felt that they were over burdened by their reproductive roles, productive roles and community roles. In terms of their free time, the women had no free time because of their social gender roles.

When it came to the women's **generational perspective** of social gender roles, the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation saw their grandmothers as always being busy with reproductive roles although their work was less because they lived with their goats in one house and their shambas were in the same compound. This is despite the fact that their grandmothers still spent many hours fetching water and firewood. Their mothers were perceived to be completely dependent on their husbands and at the same time responsible for all the reproductive roles, while their husbands did all the productive work and provided for the family financially. Some women envied their mothers because their husbands took care of them and they had that financial stability. They believed that the husbands of their mother's time were '*real men*', as Njeri Mburu (77) put it, because they took care of their families and they were responsible, reliable and dependent.

Other women did not like how dependent their mothers were on their fathers and they believed that it was important for women to have their own money and own their own property. This shows a shift in some of the women's self-image within one generation, from being dependent on one's husband to desiring financial independence. Therefore, out of necessity as well, women had to become independent.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation said their grandmothers valued hard work and were always working around the house. They felt that the women's work had remained the same from their grandmothers' times but what had changed was the size of the families. While the respondents had one to two children, their mothers and grandmothers had between six to nine children and more. This was confirmed by the results from the face to face questionnaires which showed that seventy-two percent (72%) of the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation had one to two children, twenty-two percent (22%) had three to four

children and only six percent (6%) had five to six children. Some women believed that the smaller families were a result of the high cost of living, the results suggest that it also had to do with the fact that only forty-eight percent (48%) of the women were married. Women saw themselves as continuing to be burdened with reproductive work, but their mothers burden was bigger because of the number of children they had.

Some of the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation saw their mothers as being married to progressive husbands who encouraged them to continue going to school after they got married. Some husbands even paid for house helps to assist them their wives with the reproductive roles while they were in school. The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) daughters, on the other hand, were perceived to be very lazy because they did not like to do any work around the house.

When it came to productive roles, the eighty years and older (80+) generation's said their grandmothers and mothers grew surplus food that they used to trade with the Kamba and Maasai in return for animal skins, beads, and other goods. Their daughters, however, had their own careers and were more ambitious to the point that they spent most of their time working. Overall, the women felt that their mothers were better off because they lived a simple life, they had an abundance of food and they were healthier. They felt that their daughters were worse off because they had to work and earn money just to survive and the high cost of living made it very hard for young families to make ends meet.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation, said their grandmothers never had to leave their homes for money. They were always working on their shambas and they were food secure. Their mothers, on the other hand, were evicted from their shambas and homes and forced to engage in free labour and live on colonial farms, or they had to work because they were now food dependent. Their daughters needed a job to survive because they were fully immersed in the money economy and their life was challenging because of the high cost of living.

The women involved in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) believed that since the war, women's lives had gotten harder. They felt that their mother's lives and their own had been the toughest because of the Kenya Land and Freedom war (Mau Mau war), being evicted from their farms, being forced into labour camps, getting arrested and enduring great torture and abuse and then being left to raise young children with no money and in most cases, no husband.

Less than 10% of women from the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation managed to continue with their school and get degrees. They perceived their lives to be tough because they were among the first women to have careers and they encountered gender discrimination in the workplace. They were not only minorities in the workplace but they also had the tricky task of managing both their careers and their homes.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation felt that their grandmothers never left their homes to look for money. They did however, engage in similar activities to their grandmothers to sell for money. Their grandmothers made *ciondo*'s whereas they crocheted for money. Their mothers were financially dependent on their husbands and they spent most of their time on their reproductive roles and were also able to spend more time with their children. A small percentage of their mothers, who would be in their seventies and eighties today, were also supported by their husbands to continue their studies after getting married. The women perceived their daughters to be more exposed and as having more career opportunities, particularly national and international ones. Overall, the women felt that their mothers had had the best life because they were taken care of by their husbands and never had to find a job. They also had time to spend with their children although they were very formal in their relationships with their children.

For the community roles, the eighty years and older (80+) generation felt that their grandmothers had no community life because they were isolated from the rest. Their mothers participated mainly in cultural activities and volunteered for the church and some women's community roles were limited to church activities and activities with other women. They felt that their daughters had greater participation outside the home and also greater exposure than they did. The eighty years and older (80+) generation felt that women were overburdened with their community roles but that community activities helped bring women together. They admired the way their daughter's generation were involved in *chamas* and other women's organizations that helped women financially. While women had always come together to work collectively, from 1900 to 2000, these organizations had become more financially based over time.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation of women observed their grandmothers assisting other women with communal activities such as preparing for cultural events (weddings, circumcision ceremonies, traditional dance ceremonies, etc.) collective cultivation, collective roof thatching, etc. Their mothers were involved in church activities in addition to the collective roles mentioned above. Some mothers replaced their cultural



activities such as circumcision and traditional dance ceremonies with their church activities because their religion shunned them. and their daughters were even more involved in the community than any other generation and they participated in community work, church, *chamas*, women's organizations and charity organizations. Their granddaughters, on the other hand, weren't as involved in community work because they were not as interested in it.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation perceived their grandmothers and mother to be very involved in community work and being the generations that engaged in collective work and started the women's groups. They felt that their daughters are as involved in *chamas* and other community and church organizations as they were but their granddaughters were not involved in any community work because they had no interest or they were too young. Their perceptions show that since their grandmother's generation, women's community roles have evolved and changed to match the changes taking place in society, particularly with Christianity and the new money economy.

When it came to free time, the eighty years and older (80+) generation said their grandmothers lived very restricted lives with many rules and regulations. They had no free time or freedom of movement. Their mothers, on the other hand, were more involved in cultural activities during their free time and they had more time to play with their children because everything was in the homestead. They viewed their daughters as having no free time but at the same time being free to move and interact with anyone. Since their grandmother's time, women have progressively gotten more freedom of movement although they have no free time.

The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation said their grandmothers and mothers had no free time because of their triple roles. Their daughters, on the other hand, spent their free time going to bars and consuming alcohol or going to the salon to do their hair and nails. Some daughters, however, had no free time because of their careers. Overall, the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation felt that women had gotten more free time since independence but they spent that time engaging in taboo behaviour. The women explained that it was taboo for a woman to drink until she was old.

The forty to fifty-nine years (40 – 59) generation felt that their mothers had less free time because of their reproductive roles. They also believed that they had to be busy and they did

not have as much freedom of movement as the respondents did. Some women saw their daughters as having less free time than them because of their productive roles while others said their daughters had more free time to socialize and hang out with friends. This implies that while women's social gender roles have reduced among today's generation giving them time to engage in other activities.

Overall, all three generations of women felt that women's reproductive roles had remained the same from 1900 to 2000, their mothers were overburdened by their reproductive roles and this continued till today. Their mothers' main productive roles were trading their surplus food with neighbouring communities, working on their shambas, doing casual labour, etc. These productive roles changed as women received a western education and started to work for money coupled with Kenya becoming a capitalist nation. Women's productive roles were also placing increasing demands on their time and capacity. Since 1900, women have continued to help each other meet their basic needs through collective work, community partnership, and women's groups. Lastly, women had no free time. One of the positive changes from 1900 to 2000 is that women had more freedom of movement and interaction, they had access, though limited, to their own money which meant they could buy property as did many women's groups in Nyeri and many parts of central Kenya.

### **6.1.2. Women's Perspectives of Physical Images**

Women's of physical image and beauty represented the second objective of the thesis. The chapter summarizes issues related to *Mutumia Ngatha* (virtuous woman). The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation focus group from Nyeri believed that the characteristic of *Mutumia Ngatha* was one who knew how to cook particularly how to make porridge or *Gukia Ucuru*. This does not happen in Nairobi or if they do have it, it's *ucuru wa mukio*. However, this was not mentioned as an important trait by the Nairobi focus group. All the women in the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation believed that cleanliness was an important characteristic of a *Mutumia Ngatha*. The Nyeri focus group defined cleanliness as a woman who kept herself clean and her children tidy. The Nairobi focus group agreed, adding a clean homestead to the list as well.

In the face-to-face questionnaires for the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation, one hundred percent (100%) of the women from Nyeri believed that a *Mutumia Ngatha* valued her culture compared to only forty-four percent (44%) from Nairobi. They felt that her value was demonstrated in the way she raised her children in the culture and followed the rules and

social codes of the culture. The women's perspectives in this study showed how the self-images of the eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation of women were still based on the concept of *mutumia ngatha*.

The women described a woman with a **happy temperament** as one who was content, good natured and was peaceful. The eighty years and older' and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generations, perceived a happy nature to be an important measure of beauty because women were living in polygamous homesteads and those who were welcoming and accommodating to their co-wives and their children were the most admired. The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation, however, did not mention a happy temperament or nature as a measure of beauty in the oral testimonies and the two focus groups which suggests that it was not perceived to be an important measure of beauty for this age group. This implies that in the younger generations, a woman's self-image was defined less and less by her character and inner nature. While a happy temperament was an important quality for the older generations, it was not perceived to be as important for younger generations which also indicates that how women defined themselves was had transformed, particularly in forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation.

In the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) face-to-face questionnaires, one hundred percent (100%) of the women from Nairobi and eighty-four (84%) from Nyeri described *Mutumia Ngatha* as one who **respected her husband** in the way she treated him. However, forty-four percent (44%) of the women from Nairobi and seventy-nine percent (79%) from Nyeri believed that *Mutumia Ngatha* was obedient to her husband. This implies that the women in Nairobi perceived respect and obedience to be two different concepts. Respect was described as having a deep admiration for one's spouse and understanding they were important whereas obedience meant submitting to their husband's authority. This was a symbolic change in women's self-image because it showed that women no longer believed they should be obedient to their husbands.

**Cleanliness** was important to the women in all three generations and it was the only factor that the three age groups had in common. For the eighty years and older (80+) generation cleanliness meant keeping clean with water from the river because there was no oil or soap or shoes and clothes. For the sixty to seventy-nine (60 – 79) years, being clean was important because of the prevalence of jiggers and people had no shoes whereas for the forty to fifty-nine years , it meant washing themselves and putting clean clothes on.

Over three generations women had gone from washing in the river and sometime putting oil from goat fat on their bodies to washing in one's home daily with soaps and special cleansers for the face and special lotions and oils for the body and then putting on fresh new clothes and underwear. This also implies aside from having more 'stuff', women's living conditions had improved in the last three generations.

**Fair skin** was perceived to be of a measure of beauty by all three age groups from Nairobi. Less than half of the women in the three age groups from Nyeri, however, saw it as an important trait. Black beauty was also perceived to be a measure of beauty particularly by the eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation. These women's images of beauty were in conflict with global concepts of beauty which persistently promoted the European woman with her fair skin as the ideal image of beauty.

The eighty years and older (80+) generation also measured beauty by facial features, cleanliness, which was admired by the community, having a good heart by being kind and genuine, and dressing modestly which was viewed as a supplementary measure of beauty and meant women wore long dresses and showed no cleavage. All the above measures of beauty were based on and influenced by the community. This implied that women's self-images and ideas about their physical beauty were largely informed by the community's ideas which were basically other women's opinions since they never spoke to men in public.

The unique measures of beauty for the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation were: **natural beauty** which meant no make-up and no cosmetics, smart dressing particularly the way teachers dressed. The emphasis on no make-up was in response to what the women felt was the use of too many cosmetics by today's generation of women. They also believed that community validation through **compliments from other women**, affirmed a woman's beauty. One woman saw a slender figure as a measure of beauty although she was quick to point out that she herself didn't want to be like that. Finally, the women believed beauty was a measure for youth and not for older women.

For the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation **smart dressing** was a perceived to be a supplementary measure of beauty and was defined by long dresses and skirts that covered the body. One woman defined being fat as a measure of beauty for herself because she was very thin, weak and sickly growing up. Attention from boys in the form of teasing when younger and compliments when one became a young woman, was also seen as a measure of beauty by the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation.

In the older generations, **compliments from the community**, essentially other women, was the key external informant of women's beauty whereas in the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 - 59) generation, it started to become more directly about compliments and opinions from the opposite sex. This implied that the **external voice** that informed women's self-images had gradually changed from other women's voices to boys and young men's voices. This indicates that as women became more westernized and interacted more openly with boys, their ideas of their physical beauty and self-image in general, were increasingly influenced by the opinion of their male peers, and as a result, a desire to be attractive to the opposite sex.

When it came to the ways in which **women enhanced their beauty**, the results showed that Gikuyu women had always enhanced their beauty by embellishing their faces and wearing necklaces, bracelets and earrings. What had changed were the methods of enhancement. The eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) women enhanced their facial beauty through **face cutting** and **drawing chalk on their faces** whereas the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) and today's generation of women wore **make-up**. Some of the women in the eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generations had also **cut their ears and embellished them with beads**, removed their front tooth to create an artificial gap or *thenya*, and stayed clean, in order to enhance their beauty.

Some of the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation and the majority of the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation adopted western regiments for enhancing their beauty such as relaxing their hair, applying make-up and getting manicures and pedicures on a regular basis. Women still wore necklaces and bracelets although now they wore either expensive jewels such as pearls and gold although some still wore beads but not in the same fashion as the older generations.

The women's perspectives show how western education and culture had changed women's lives in the last three generations, particularly when it came to their own personal beauty. In the eighty years and older (80+) generation women had no soap, no inner garments, no shoes and either a shuka or a dress that they washed every other evening, dried overnight and wore the next day. By the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation women had numerous dresses and shoes and different soaps and other hygiene products for their bodies. Yet this was still not seen as the core of women's beauty.

The eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generations both described how women cut lines on their face to embellish their facial features, and cutting

their ears and putting hangies to embellish their ears. They also plaited their hair. For the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation, the women also painting their bodies with chalk – particularly for special occasions, having a gap in the middle of their teeth, wearing clothes and plaiting their hair. The women of the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation, however, got their hair done regularly at a salon, used make-up, wore traditional jewellery from their fathers and husbands or western styled jewellery, dressed modestly in long dresses and skirts, getting manicures and pedicures regularly and exercising to keep their bodies fit and trim.

The Gikuyu women's perspectives confirmed that women had always worked on **enhancing their faces, their ears and their hair** but over the last three generations, the methods women used are different. For example, women no longer cut small lines on their faces or plucked out their middle tooth, but they used make-up, tattoos and even cosmetic surgery to enhance their facial features and other features to fit modern standards of beauty. Over the last three generations, women had also started to enhance their hands and feet with coloured polish.

All three generations expressed their concern over today's standards of beauty, particularly the amount of time and resources today's generation of women spent to enhance their outer appearance at the expense of their inner character.

When it came to **influencing factors on women's style**, the eighty years and older' and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation had the same influencing factors, namely tradition and religion. **Tradition** was the biggest influencing on their style and several women from the eighty years and older (80+) age group had only stopped wearing traditional clothes recently. The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation extended the traditional dress to included long skirts and dress. **Religion** was the second biggest influencing factor for both generations of women, especially for those who converted to Christianity. The majority of women in these age groups had never worn trousers or jeans because they felt they were immodest. They also complained about the revealing fashion that today's generation wore.

The eighty years and older (80+) generation were influenced by **the way teachers dressed** and they adopted this style when they became young women whereas for the sixty to seventy-nine years (60 -79) generation career women or women's career were seen as an influencing factor, particularly in Nairobi because this was the first generation of women to have their own careers. Lastly, several women from the eighty years and older (80+) generation preferred western dressing because it covered a woman's entire body whereas for the sixty to

seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation they saw it as starting to influence way women dressed, particularly career women.

**Western style** was seen as the top influencing factor for the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation and women in this age group were among the first to start wearing trousers, mini-skirts, etc. The women also felt that their education determined how they dressed and they especially admired the way their teachers had dressed and carried themselves in school. Finally, they felt that western media and music was an influencing factor on their style because it determined the clothes they bought.

The women's responses show that from 1900 to 2000, **women's dressing** had been significantly influenced by their environments. Their dress was also a reflection of the dominant culture on their generation. For the eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generations, the dominant cultures were tradition and a religious, educated culture. As the literature suggests, both of these cultures were at war with each other. "The *athomi* culture brought with it European ways and led to profound changes in the way Kikuyus dressed and adorned themselves, the kinds of food they ate, the songs they sang, and the dances they performed. Everything that represented the local culture was enthusiastically replaced," explains Maathai (Maathai, 2006). This explains why women were either influenced by tradition or by religion but not by both. By the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation, the dominant culture was western culture and all women based their fashion on how western Europeans and North American dressed and looked.

In their **generational perspectives**, all three age groups believed their mother's style was influenced by tradition and religion only. The eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine (60 – 79) generations described their mothers through their lack of clothes. The eighty years and older (80+) generation saw the biggest difference between their style and their mother's style as being the size of women's wardrobes today. The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation said their mothers never had any shoes, soap or lotion because there was no money and westernization had not reached them.

The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation said their mother's never wore trousers because they believed they should be reserved for men, they had no make-up and kept it natural and simple and they were conservative. This implies that women from older generations did not have many material things such as clothes and shoes but nevertheless,

they were very conservative and modest in their dressing. It also shows that their mother's self-images were very limited and self-discriminatory.

According to the women, what was different about the older generation of women was their relationships with one another. According to the eighty years and older (80+) generation when a woman got a new dress it was commonplace for her to lend it to other women from her village when they had a special occasion. This comradery suggests that women were not in competition with one another, like they are today, but rather, they were willing to share even their most prized possession with each other. This relationship among women, however, significantly changed from 1900 to 2000, from being about sisterhood, unity and sharing in the older generations to becoming about women competing with one another and trying to outdo each other with the latest dress or bag.

The three age groups had similar perspectives on today's generation. The women blamed the **sexual promiscuity** that they felt was rampant in today's generation on their exposure to western culture through new technology such as the internet and mobile phones. They perceived today's generation as being **promiscuous in their dressing** because they wore very revealing clothes. The sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation felt that this kind of dressing ignited lust in their fathers and they never wanted to be corrected whereas the forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation believed they dressed this way because of their exposure to western culture and a lack of proper guidance from their parents. Nonetheless, these perspectives confirm that today's generation of women had become completely westernized in their style.

The respondents explained that historically, colonial education had taught the Agikuyu to love western culture and despise their own way of life. They were of the opinion that **technology and western media** were corrupting children and adults alike because it made bad behaviour look cool and normal. They also felt that today's generation of women were more involved with their phones and less interactive with people and this made them loose touch with reality and develop unrealistic expectations about life.

The women from all three age groups felt that the kinds of TV shows, movies, and music today's generation of women watched gave them false ideas about marriage, relationships children, and even their values, particularly because women informed their life decisions from what they watched. Having limited interaction with older women meant that many of their misperceptions were going uncorrected. They encouraged today's generation of women



to stop spending so much time plugged into the technology of the western world through their mobile phones, televisions and computers so that it did not spoil them completely.

The respondents believed that today's generation of women were the most **exposed to negative vices** and the least protected by their families and their communities like they had been. They believed that as a result of westernization, the natural security that one's family and the traditional community provided for women against criminals, thieves and other questionable characters in society, was completely gone.

Today's generation of women had also **lost their discernment** because modern standards of beauty overlooked a person's true character and inner nature. As young women ventured away from their parent's homes to look for work in the cities and towns alone, they became easy prey for negative characters that their traditional lives would have shielded them from because they had been socialized to look for external beauty rather than on how to discern a person's character and personality.

Each of the age groups had their unique perceptions of today's generation. Only the eighty years and older' generation felt that today's generation has been **heavily influenced by western media** to the point of even conducting their relationships like in the movies. They also saw today's generation as being **heavily influenced by education** because they spent most of their time learning and imitating both the good and bad fashion of the foreigners. The sixty to seventy-nine years (60 -79) and forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generations both felt that western fashion trends created competition among women and made many live beyond their financial means.

Overall, the women's generational perspectives of beauty demonstrated that women's self-images had remained constant in relation to women's perspectives of inner beauty and *mutumia ngatha*. They measured physical beauty by a woman's personality and good manners, happy temperament, respect for their husbands, compliments from the community, etc. Both fair and dark skin were considered to be measures of beauty. Women also continued to enhance their beauty across the three generations. What changed was the what women used to enhance their features and the way they did it. All three generations were critical of today's generation particularly their promiscuous dressing and obsession with western culture. This age group's perspective is missing because they were not part of the cohort for this study. It would be important to do further research on this generation in order to see their views on what they older generation perceived them to be.

### 6.1.3 Women's Hopes & Aspiration

This section looks at the advice that the study participants had for today's generation of women as per objective three of the thesis research. Women gave advice on cultural revival, sex before marriage, dressing, marriage, how to relate to men and to stop spending too much time on western media. They saw these as the priorities for today's generation of women.

The first thing that the women advocated for was a **cultural revival**. They believed that there was an urgent need for this because Gikuyu culture was diminishing because of westernization. They believed that this was apparent in the way today's generation of women was completely disconnected from their culture and even their mother tongue. The women defined culture as their people's traditions, beliefs, customs, values and social rules. They believed that the cultural revival needed to start through cultural programming in schools, on local TV and radio stations and through public forums such as cultural seminars. They also felt that all teachers should receive cultural training so that they respected and promoted their student's traditions.

They encouraged young people to **learn their language** and speak it at home with their children because language was linked to their cultural identity and not speaking Gikuyu disconnected them and/or their children from their tradition and their grandmother's generation. They advised today's generation of young women to seek out older women for coaching and mentorship and to also find a workable balance between western education and cultural or traditional education. They also counselled today's generation of women to re-educate themselves on their culture while becoming aware that colonial education was designed to replace their culture with western culture. They believed that today's generation of women should return to the traditional diet that was primarily vegetarian and consisted of a lot of boiled food.

The women interviewed also felt that today's generation of women are failing as **parents** because they do not spend enough time with their children and they leave teachers and house helps to raise their children because they are too busy with their careers. They also don't want to discipline them and they want to be their children's friend instead of parent. They observed that today's parents have adopted too many western methods of raising children such as wanting to negotiate with a child instead of taking their place of authority.

They instructed today's generation of parents to: put their children first, stop having adult conversations and arguments in front of their children, find a way to connect with other

parents and foster collective parenting in their neighbourhoods, be a disciplinarian to their children instead of a friend, to ensure their children had a strong spiritual foundation by joining a church, and to balance western education with traditional knowledge.

Another concern that the women had for today's generation was their **disrespectful conduct**. The women believed that there has never been a more misbehaved generation than today's generation of women. They advised today's generation of women to start by respecting themselves in order to gain respect from other and to avoid snares and traps that came with living a contemptuous life. For the respondents, self-respect meant carrying oneself with dignity, behaving with honour (not raising one's voice or behaving promiscuously) and dressing decently.

The women directed today's generation of women to **respect and honour their parents** so that they could receive blessings from them. They urged them to also respect their elders and offer them their seats in the matatu if they saw them standing or politely move out of their way if they saw them walking down the streets. They encouraged today's generation of women to respect other people and in particular other women, adding that today's women were not united and this worked against them.

When it came to **marriage**, the women interviewed were of the opinion that today's generation of women are no longer submissive to their husbands nor do they obey them. They also felt that today's generation of women do not persevere in their relationships because they are too quick to abandon their homes and leave at the first sign of trouble. They believed that their generation was more persevering in their marriages because they endured all kinds of verbal and emotional abuse and their marital difficulties and challenges without ever thinking of divorcing their husbands. They admitted that separation and divorce were looked down upon in their time which made it very hard for women to leave their husbands whereas today's generation of women had the support of modern mothers who were welcoming and understanding, and divorce was no longer regarded as taboo.

There was a general consensus that today's generation of women are too casual with their husbands and they have even turned them into babysitters. The respondents from the two older generations in particular, noted with concern that today's generation of women involve their husbands too much in taking care of their children. They added that in their time, their fathers and husbands never held their children or changed their diapers but.

There was a general consensus that marital dynamics had significantly changed over the last 100 years. While for the older generation their husbands had been the leaders of the home and the authority figures, in today's generation these roles were becoming blurred as men and women became equal partners in their marriages and in some cases, women became the sole breadwinner for the family. While African feminists might view the emerging dynamics between women and men as a victory against patriarchal and gender oppression, the women from the older generations were alarmed by this progressive behaviour because they felt women would eventually lose respect for men.

Some women were of the opinion that today's generation of women do not **respect** their husbands but that the husbands also do not deserve their respect because they do not provide for their families financially and some are even alcoholics who stay at home all day and do not work. The eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation described their husband as 'real men' who always provided for their families financially and supported their wives. They did, however, advise today's generation of women to learn to be faithful and submissive to their husbands and to stop pushing their roles as a mother onto their husbands. They also advised women to stop discussing their marital problems with their friends and family but instead find ways to communicate and resolve any challenges with their husbands. The women in the eighty years and older (80+) and sixty to seventy-nine (60 – 79) generations, directed women to be more persevering in marriage and to respect the institution of marriage by being more faithful and loyal to their husbands.

The way today's generation of **women dress** was another critical concern for the women interviewed. They observed that today's generation of women had more clothes than their generation ever had and yet they were not satisfied because they were in constant competition with other women. They also felt that today's generation of women do not dress appropriately because they adopt western styles of dressing regardless of whether they are good or bad. Based on the African Feminist theory, these perspectives demonstrated the continued impact of racial discrimination on women's self-images which promoted all things western as good and all things local or traditional as outdated, old-fashioned, or bad (Bryant, 2013). They advised today's generation of women to stop wearing tight, revealing clothes, jeans and trousers that put their entire bodies on display and to also discern and choose the aspects of western fashion that complemented their bodies without over-exposing them.

While the women were not asked directly about **sex**, it emerged as a major concern for the women interviewed. The first point of concern was the way today's generation of women kissed and misbehaved with their boyfriends in public. They advised young women to stop kissing men in public because it was disrespectful to their families. They also warned them to stop being so open with relationships with boyfriends who they did not even end up marrying. Lastly they advised married couples to stop having sex in front of their children even if they thought the children were asleep, but to find time away from their children to be intimate.

The women interviewed unanimously agreed that today's generation of women are the most promiscuous generation ever, and this is seen in the prevalence of prostitution and the increasing number of children born out of wedlock. They also felt that today's generation of women has inappropriately intimate relationships with their fathers and they also dress in tight revealing clothes around them which is wrong. It is important to note here that this category of women haven't provided their own perspectives of their behaviour and this is exclusively the opinion of the older generations of women.

The women warned today's generation of women to stop having sex before marriage even if their peers were doing it because it was taboo and led to many problems such as unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. They also urged women to stop engaging in casual sex with strangers in the cities because they did not know if they were sleeping with thieves, drug addicts or murders and if they had children with such men, the children would become like their father. It was interesting that their reasons for young women not having sex with strangers was based on their self-protection.

The respondents explained that according to Gikuyu custom, having a **child out of wedlock** was a big curse for both the mother and the father. It was also burdens young women and their families today because this generation of men does not financially support their children and they are irresponsible and unreliable. The women complained about the prevalence of absentee fathers and told today's generation of women to be very careful and think very hard before indulging in sex because today's generation of men cannot be trusted. They would impregnate a woman and then abandon her to raise the child alone. Several women from the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation added that having children out of wedlock also limited woman's educational and career options and made a young woman's life very tough while also overburdening her own parents.

Today's generation of women were instructed to avoid being too intimate with their fathers because at the end of the day they are still men, and to also cover themselves with a '*shuka*' when they are working around the house so that they do not attract the lust of their fathers or older relatives. The women linked the increased prevalence of rape and incest among young women to their inappropriate dressing. They reiterated that the increasing cases of young women sleeping having sexual relations and even children with their own fathers or older uncles was extremely taboo in Gikuyu culture and would have never happened in their time because daughters never mixed with their fathers, they never cooked for them, cleaned their hut or even had any physical contact with them. In fact, if girls saw their father or a man their father walking on towards them, they would immediately get off the path and let them pass as a sign of respect. Today's generation of women, however, would be seen hugging their fathers or would dress inappropriately around them, which all the respondents found to be wrong.

The respondents criticized the increasing number of young women who were engaging in prostitution either on the streets or by becoming an older man's mistress for easy, quick money. They told young women to stop pursuing older men for money but instead look for a young man their age who had potential and whom they could grow together.

Lastly, the women interviewed were very concerned with the way today's generation of women drink **alcohol** on a regular basis and even frequent bars. They believed that this has made them more irresponsible because they tend to live for today without planning for tomorrow. They urged today's generation of women to stop drinking alcohol altogether because when they are intoxicated, they lose their inhibitions and make questionable decisions. They also warned women that consuming alcohol regularly will damage their bodies.

Overall the three generation were very critical of today's generation of women. They believed that today's generation of women were becoming increasingly disconnected from their culture and they called for a cultural revival that would teach young people their language and provide mentorship and coaching opportunities for young people, etc. They also encouraged young people to return to the traditional diet which was primarily boiled, vegetarian food. They felt that today's parents were doing a poor job in raising their children and encouraged them to make their children a priority, spend more time with them, teach them good values, discipline them, etc. They felt that young women needed to learn to be more respectful of themselves and others and of their husbands and the institution of

marriage. They advised women to stop dressing promiscuously, drinking alcohol regularly and having sex before marriage. All of these were described as taboo behaviour.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

From 1900 to 2000 women's reproductive roles as well as their self-image as a homemakers and mothers remained the same. Women continued to be overburdened by their triple roles, reproductive, productive and community and as a result they continue to have no free time. While the women remained particularly overburdened by their reproductive roles, they were not critical of these roles because they have been socialized to see them as normal by the patriarchal society. One positive outcome, however, is that from 1900 and 2000, women have progressively gotten more freedom of movement and interaction. Women also started having their own money and property.

Women's perspectives of beauty and physical image also remained relatively constant from 1900 to 2000. It was also revealed that women had and continue to enhance their beauty through making up their faces and adorning their ears and neck. The research reveals a conflict between the Gikuyu women's perspectives of their beauty and the western ideals of beauty that promoted the European woman as the ideal standard of beauty. Contrary to literature such as Susan Bryant's *The Beauty Ideal: The Effects of European Standards of Beauty on Black Women*, that suggests that black women in general had adopted these western ideas of beauty, the Gikuyu women's self-images proved that women still had their own standards of beauty. It also showed that both fair and dark skinned women were admired and described as beautiful by the women.

From the sixty to seventy-nine years' (60 -79) generation, women started talking more about how their generation was losing their culture as well as their respect for their husbands and other women. The forty to fifty-nine years' (40 -59) generation, over seventy percent (70%) of the women had gone to school. Many of today's generation of women, particularly in Nairobi were perceived to be increasingly disconnected from their culture because they did not speak Gikuyu, they did not interact with the culture, they did not know their history and they appeared to have no interest in it either. The women felt that their values, behaviour, relationships and dressing all resembled western culture. In Nyeri County, however, while young women were described as dressing western, they still spoke Gikuyu and interacted with their culture, although they participated in fewer cultural ceremonies.

One thing that the women's advice for today's generation of women revealed was that they saw themselves as being a valuable addition to teaching young children today and useful sources of traditional knowledge. They also saw themselves as having the skills ability to coach young women today and guide them on correct living.

This study set out to examine the perspectives that Gikuyu women had about themselves but what was encountered was a self-image that had remained relatively consistent between 1900 to 2000. The women who participated in this study felt that while today's generation of women appeared to be better off because they no longer had to be part of polygamous unions, they no longer got circumcised and they owned their own property and they had their own money.

Today's generation of Gikuyu women were seen to have lost their honour, dignity, pride and self-value because they had immersed themselves in western culture and adopted taboo behaviour such as dressing promiscuously, drinking alcohol regularly and engaging in premarital sex. While the women felt it was impossible to return to traditional culture, they believed that women needed to learn about their culture so that they could redefine their self-image to be the best of the western and traditional worlds. But this generation of women was not interviewed. It would be interesting to know what they think of themselves but that is a story for another day.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

The results from the social gender roles clearly demonstrated that women remained overburdened by their triple roles. I appeal to county governments to look at ways in which they can ease the burden of women's reproductive roles by providing global access to basic services such as running water in all the homes and low cost energy alternatives for cooking, childcare services, etc. Such initiatives would help to free up women's time which is taken up travelling long distances to fetch water and collect firewood and cannot go to work because children have to be taken care of. In terms of food security, the government should consider making small parcels of government land available for women to rent at a nominal feed so that that they could grow their vegetables or ensure food subsidies and materials for small scale traders among other strategies.

Most of the community based women's groups were designed by women to help one another meet their basic needs. The government should review the various funds and programs they have for women, for example the *uwezo* fund, affirmative action fund, women's fund, youth



fund, to see how they could partner with such women's groups in ways that would have a tangible and sustainable impact on their lives and ease the burden of their basic needs. They should also design specific programs that empower these women's groups to grow beyond meeting basic needs to becoming viable businesses that helped to transform women's lives over time through strategic initiatives.

When it comes to women's perspectives of physical image and beauty, further research is needed in the area of African women's perspectives of beauty so as to examine whether the global western standards of beauty are universal among African women and whether women are negatively impacted by the promotion of the Caucasian woman as the beauty idea, as some of the literature suggested.

It is the hope of the author that the hopes and aspirations expressed by the women in this thesis be implemented in society today in order to save the traditional societies from the aggressive onslaught of westernization. There is a need for young people to be taught about their people and tradition because the majority of youth are following a western culture that is racist, biased, discriminatory and does not accommodate their people's knowledge and viewpoints. A cultural Renaissance is urgently called for particularly when it comes to preserving the Gikuyu language. Parents should be encouraged to speak to their children and enrol them in Gikuyu language classes because within the language is the culture of the people.

The disconnection of today's generation from their language also means that they cannot interact with the elders of their community. The government, the church and local NGOs should initiate programs that bring the elderly and young people together. The elderly should also be promoted as the institutions of traditional knowledge and culture that they are and encouraged to share the valuable information they keep in their hearts before they depart from this earth.

The advice given by women concerning cultural seminars should be adopted by county governments who should provide regular cultural seminars and workshops on the different ancestral communities found in their counties. Such seminars should involve both male and female elders with an aim of connecting them with school children and youths so that they can share their traditional wisdom and knowledge.

Kenya is currently revising its national primary school and high school curriculum for the first time in three decades. The policy makers should consider tapping into the extensive

knowledge that older women have and look for a way to incorporate into the curriculum so that they can be sources of knowledge and wisdom for local schools and even possibly facilitated to teach young people about a wide spectrum of traditional knowledge, such as values and character, etc.

There is no doubt that globalization and westernization are at war with indigenous culture and therefore the researcher encourages appeals to men and women from other communities to consider doing similar studies so that the valuable traditional culture of each community can start to be recorded and shared with the nation. It is also important that this research be duplicated in other communities so that women from these communities can better understand themselves and to provide an anchor for younger generations of women to base their self-image and cultural identity on. As Nancy Weisstein says in her article entitled *Psychology Constructs the Female*, it is important to record the stories of women all over the world so their voices can be included in defining who they are (Weisstein, 1968). This means that the citizens of Kenya must learn to celebrate the incredible diversity the nation enjoys and realize that all indigenous cultures are under threat and must be preserved at all costs.

The women's perspectives of today's generation, was that they were heavily influenced by the western culture and they were disconnected from their own cultural identity. It is important to note here that this category of women was not part of the cohort for this study and therefore haven't spoken for themselves. Further research needs to be conducted on these young Gikuyu women (below forty years) who were not covered by this research. It is also important that this research be duplicated in other communities so that women's changing perspectives of themselves are documented.

In addition, I recommend to the government to compensate the women who were part of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) for the incredible sacrifices they made for this country. Many women even sacrificed their own joy of motherhood so that they could fight and give birth to a free Kenya. It is a shame that many of these women have not been recognized by the government or adequately compensated and many live and die in extreme poverty and hardship. The government and the nation at large must come together to celebrate and honour the few remaining members of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) because without their courage and perseverance, we would not be enjoying the incredible fruits of their sacrifices today.

In terms of methodology, Caroline Mosser's Gender Planning Framework was designed to measure the social gender roles of low-income women and to review development policies targeting but it proved less adequate when trying to measure the social gender roles of women in urban centres. This methodology should be reviewed and updated to also capture the social gender roles of the increasing number of middle-income women and high income earners.

## APPENDICES:

### Appendix I: RESEARCH TOOLS - Oral Testimonies Questionnaire

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[this questionnaire was tailor-made for each age group]

#### **PART 1: BIODATA**

- 1.1 Name
- 1.2 Age
- 1.3 Place of Birth
- 1.4 Number of Siblings
- 1.5 Marital Status
- 1.6 Number of Children
- 1.7 Education Levels
- 1.8 Occupation

#### **PART 2: SOCIAL GENDER ROLES**

This section examines the roles of women and men at different stages of their life cycle. The social gender roles are divided into the following categories:

1. Reproductive Roles
2. Productive Roles
3. Community Roles
4. Free Time Activities
5. Leadership roles

**Examples of Reproductive Roles:** child rearing & raising; REPRODUCTIVE chores such as: fetching water, fetching firewood, food preparation, cleaning the house, repair & maintenance, looking after sick & aged, etc.

**Examples of Productive Roles:** farmers, peasant farmer's, wives and wage earners, income generation, employment, work done for money or in kind, trading

**Examples of Community Managing Roles:** (voluntary work for the community such as participating in the church, weddings, initiation ceremonies, etc.)

**Examples of Leadership Roles:** (community leadership, cultural roles, political roles, roles with in advocacy and lobby groups)

## 2.1. AS GIRLS

1) As a girl, what tasks did you do at home? Why? (probe)		
2) What tasks did your brothers do at home? Why? (probe)		
3) Did you do any work outside the home?	YES { }	NO { }
• If yes, what work? / If no, why?		
4) Did your brother work outside the home?	YES { }	NO { }
• If yes, what work? / If no, why?		
5) Did you do any community work?	YES { }	NO { }
• If yes, what work? / If no, why?		
6) Did your brothers do any community work?	YES { }	NO { }
• If yes, what work? / If no, why?		
7) Did you have any leadership roles among your peers?	YES { }	NO { }
• If yes, what work? / If no, why?		
8) What did your brothers do in their free time?		

## 2.2. AS WOMEN

9) As a woman, what tasks did you do at home? Why? (probe)		
10) What tasks did your husbands do at home? Why? (probe)		
11) Did you do any work outside the home?	YES { }	NO { }
• If yes, what work? / If no, why?		
12) Did your husband work outside the home?	YES { }	NO { }

- If yes, what work? / If no, why?

13) Did you do any community work? YES { } NO { }

- If yes, what work? / If no, why?

14) Did your husband do any community work? YES { } NO { }

- If yes, what work? / If no, why?

15) Did you have any leadership roles among your peers? YES { } NO { }

- If yes, what work? / If no, why?

16) What did your husband do in his free time?

### 2.3. As GRAND MOTHERS

17) As a grand mother, what tasks do you do at home? Why? (probe)

18) What tasks does your husbands do at home? Why? (probe)

19) Do you do any work outside the home? YES { } NO { }

- If yes, what work? / If no, why?

20) Does your husband work outside the home? YES { } NO { }

- If yes, what work? / If no, why?

21) Do you do any community work? YES { } NO { }

- If yes, what work? / If no, why?

22) Does your husband do any community work? YES { } NO { }

- If yes, what work? / If no, why?

23) Do you have any leadership roles among your peers? YES { } NO { }

- If yes, what work? / If no, why?

24) What does your husband do in his free time?

## **2.4. WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL GENDER ROLES**

This section explores women's perspectives of their social gender roles. What do you think about the work you did as a girl, as a woman, etc. in comparison to what boys and men did?

### **2.4.1. How would you compare what you did to the what your brothers did as children?**

- a) Reproductive Roles:
- b) Productive Roles:
- c) Community Roles:
- d) Free Time Activities:

### **2.4.2. How would you compare what you did as a woman compared to your husband?**

- a) Reproductive Roles:
- b) Productive Roles:
- c) Community Roles:
- d) Free Time Activities:

### **2.4.3. How would you compare what you do today compared to your husband?**

- a) Reproductive Roles:
- b) Productive Roles:
- c) Community Roles:
- d) Free Time Activities:

## **2.5. GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN'S SOCIAL GENDER ROLES**

How have the social gender roles that women had changed over the years and what have been the influencers of this change? The following section asks women to compare their lives to their mothers and to their daughters.

### **2.5.1. How is your life different from your mother? (explain):**

- a) In General:
- b) Reproductive Roles:

- c) Productive Roles:
- d) Community Roles:
- e) Free Time Activities:

**2.5.2. How is your life different from your grandmother? (explain):**

- a) In General:
- b) Reproductive Roles:
- c) Productive Roles:
- d) Community Roles:
- e) Free Time Activities:

**2.5.3. How is your life different from your daughter? (explain):**

- a) In General:
- b) Reproductive Roles:
- c) Productive Roles:
- d) Community Roles:
- e) Free Time Activities:

**2.5.4. How is your life different from your granddaughter? (where applicable)**

- a) In General:
- b) Reproductive Roles:
- c) Productive Roles:
- d) Community Roles:
- e) Free Time Activities:

**PART 2: PHYSICAL IMAGE, BEAUTY and STYLE**

This section explores women's body image, that is, how women see themselves physical and what they think is beautiful about themselves. It looks at the internalized sense of what we look like as women and what influences our physical image.



1. a) What makes a woman beautiful?  
b) Have these characteristics changed with young women today?
2. a) Do you consider yourself to be beautiful? Why?  
b) How did a woman know she was attractive?
3. a) What do you do to look beautiful?  
b) How do women in your generation enhance their beauty?
4. What or who was the biggest influencing factor on your style & body image? (example: tradition, religion, my aunt who was education, media, western style, etc)

### **PART 3: WOMEN'S HOPES & ASPIRATIONS**

This section records women's hopes and aspirations for future generations of women.

1. What do you think of today's generation of women?
2. What advice would you give to today's generation of women

**Appendix II: RESEARCH TOOLS – Face-to-Face Questionnaire**

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**PART 1: BIODATA**

- |                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Name:.....<br>.....         | 8. Husband's<br>Education:.....  |
| 2. Age:.....<br>.....          | 9. Mother's<br>Education:.....   |
| 3. Place of<br>Birth:.....     | 10. Father's<br>Education:.....  |
| 4. Number of<br>Siblings:..... | 11. Occupation:.....<br>.....    |
| 5. Marital<br>Status:.....     | 12. Spouse's<br>Occupation:..... |
| 6. Number of<br>Children:..... | 13. Mother's<br>Occupation:..... |
| 7. Education<br>Levels:.....   |                                  |

**PART 2: SOCIAL GENDER ROLES**

1. As a girl, what tasks did you do at home? (mark all that apply)			
	Reproductive Roles		Reproductive Roles
	Cooking		Cleaning The House
	Fetching Water		Fetching Firewood
	Working On Family Shamba		Taking Care Of Siblings
	Taking Care Of Goats / Cows		Other(Specify)

2. What tasks did your brothers do at home? (mark all that apply)				
	Reproductive Roles		Reproductive Roles	
	Cooking		Cleaning The House	
	Fetching Water		Fetching Firewood	
	Working On Family Shamba		Taking Care Of Siblings	
	Taking Care Of Goats / Cows		Other(Specify)	
Why did YOU & YOUR BROTHER do this work? (probe):				
3. Did you do any work outside the home?(If yes, mark all that apply)			YES	NO
	Productive Roles:		Productive Roles	
	Coffee / Tea Picking		<i>Kibarua</i> (Casual Labour)	
	Working On Shamba		School	
	FORMAL EMPLOYMENT (Specify)		OTHER(Specify)	
4. Did/Does your brother work outside the home?(mark all that apply)			YES	NO
	Productive Roles		Productive Roles	
	Coffee / Tea Picking		<i>Kibarua</i> (Casual Labour)	
	Working On Shamba		School	
	Formal Employment (Specify)		Other(Specify)	
5. Did you do any community work? (mark all that apply)			YES	NO
	Community Roles		Community Roles	

	Church Activities (Choir, Etc)		Cultural Activities (Weddings, Etc)		
	Community Policing		Taking Care Of Elderly		
	Entertaining (Singing & Dancing)		Collective Hut Building/Shamba Work		
	OTHER (Specify)		OTHER (Specify)		
6. Did your brother do any community work? (mark all that apply)				YES	NO
	Community Roles		Community Roles		
	Church Activities (Choir, Etc)		Cultural Activities (Weddings, Etc)		
	Community Policing		Taking Care Of Elderly		
	Entertaining (Singing & Dancing)		Collective Hut Building/Shamba Work		

7. Did you have any leadership roles among your peers?				YES	NO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If yes, what role?</li> </ul>					
8. Did your brother have any leadership roles among his peers?				YES	NO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If yes, what role?</li> </ul>					

	OTHER (Specify)		OTHER (Specify)		
--	-----------------	--	-----------------	--	--

9. Did you have any free time? (mark all that apply)				YES	NO
	Church Activities (Choir, Etc)		Cultural Activities (Weddings, Etc)		
	Play		Knitting, Crocheting, Etc		
	Practicing (Singing & Dancing)		Sports		
	OTHER (Specify)		OTHER (Specify)		
10. Did your brother have any free time?				YES	NO

	Church Activities (Choir, Etc)		Cultural Activities (Weddings, Etc)
	Play		Knitting, Crocheting, Etc
	Practicing (Singing & Dancing)		Sports
	OTHER (Specify)		OTHER (Specify)
<b>11. As a woman, what tasks did/do you do at home? (mark all that apply)</b>			
	Reproductive Roles		Productive Roles
	Cooking		Cleaning The House
	Fetching Water		Fetching Firewood
	Working On Family Shamba		Taking Care Of Siblings
	Taking Care Of Goats / Cows		OTHER(specify)
<b>12. What tasks did/does your husband do at home? (mark all that apply)</b>			
	Reproductive Roles		Productive Roles
	Cooking		Cleaning The House
	Fetching Water		Fetching Firewood
	Working On Family Shamba		Taking Care Of Siblings
	Taking Care Of Goats / Cows		Other(Specify)
<b>Why did/does YOU and Your HUSBAND do this work? (probe):</b>			
<b>13. Did/do you do any work outside the home?(mark all that apply)</b>			YES
			NO
	Productive Roles		Reproductive Roles
	Coffee / Tea Picking		<i>Kibarua</i> (Casual Labour)

	Working On Shamba		School		
	FORMAL EMPLOYMENT (Specify)		OTHER(Specify)		
14. Did/Does your husband work outside the home?(mark all that apply)			YES		NO
	Productive Roles		Reproductive Roles		
	Coffee / Tea Picking		<i>Kibarua</i> (Casual Labour)		
	Working On Shamba		School		
	Formal Employment (Specify)		Other(Specify)		
15. Did/Do you do any community work? (mark all that apply)			YES		NO
	Community Roles		Community Roles		
	Church Activities (Choir, Etc)		Cultural Activities (Weddings, Etc)		
	Community Policing		Taking Care Of Elderly		
	Entertaining (Singing & Dancing)		Collective Hut Building/Shamba Work		
	OTHER (Specify)		OTHER (Specify)		
16. Did/Does your husband do any community work? (mark all that apply)			YES		NO
	Community Roles		Community Roles		
	Church Activities (Choir, Etc)		Cultural Activities (Weddings, Etc)		
	Community Policing		Taking Care Of Elderly		
	Entertaining (Singing & Dancing)		Collective Hut Building/Shamba Work		

17. Did/Do you have any leadership positions?		NO	YES. If yes, what role?	
18. Did/Does your husband have any leadership positions?		NO	YES If yes, what role?	
19. Did you have any free time? (mark all that apply)			YES	NO
Church Activities (Choir, Etc)		Cultural Activities (Weddings, Etc)		
Play		Knitting, Crocheting, Etc		
Practicing (Singing & Dancing)		Sports		
OTHER (Specify)		OTHER (Specify)		
20. Did your husband have any free time?			YES	NO
Church Activities (Choir, Etc)		Cultural Activities (Weddings, Etc)		
Play		Knitting, Crocheting, Etc		
Practicing (Singing & Dancing)		Sports		
OTHER (Specify)		OTHER (Specify)		

**PART 3: WOMEN’S PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL GENDER ROLES**

This section explores women’s perspectives and perceptions of their social gender roles.

What do you think about the work you did as a girl, as a woman, etc. in comparison to what boys and men did?

**1. How would you compare what you did to what your brothers did as children?**

**a. REPRODUCTIVE ROLES**

I did most of the work	My brothers did most of the work
The work was equally distributed	OTHER:

**b. PRODUCTIVE ROLES**

	I did most of the work		My brothers did most of the work
	The work was equally distributed		OTHER:

**c. COMMUNITY ROLES**

	I did most of the work		My brothers did most of the work
	The work was equally distributed		OTHER:

**d. FREE TIME**

	I had more free time		My brothers had more free time
	Our free time was equal		OTHER:

**e. IN LEADERSHIP ROLES**

	I was more of a leader		My brother was more of a leader
	We were both leaders		OTHER:

2. Why was this the case? (probe)

3. How would you compare what you did/do to what your husband did/does?

**a. REPRODUCTIVE ROLES**

	I did most of the work		My husband did most of the work
	The work was equally distributed		OTHER:

**b. PRODUCTIVE ROLES**

	I did most of the work		My husband did most of the work
	The work was equally distributed		OTHER:



**c. COMMUNITY ROLES**

	I did most of the work		My husband did most of the work
	The work was equally distributed		OTHER:

**d. FREE TIME**

	I had more free time		My husband had more free time
	Our free time was equal		OTHER:

**e. IN LEADERSHIP ROLES**

	I was more of a leader		My husband was more of a leader
	We were both leaders		OTHER:

**4. Why was this the case? (probe)**

**PART 4: How Have Social Gender Roles Changed Over the Years?**

How have the social gender roles that women had, changed over the years and what have been the influencers of this change? The following section will explore this question by asking women to compare their lives to their mothers and to their daughters.

**A. YOUR GENERATION vs. YOUR MOTHER’S GENERATION**

1. Did your generation do the same things as your mother’s generations as girls?				
At Home:		YES		NO Explain:
Outside The Home:		YES		NO Explain:
In Your Free Time:		YES		NO Explain:
In The Community:		YES		NO Explain:
2. Did your generation do the same things as your mother’s generations as young women?				

At Home:		YES		NO	Explain:
Outside The Home:		YES		NO	Explain:
In Your Free Time:		YES		NO	Explain:
In The Community:		YES		NO	Explain:

1. Did your generation do the same things as your mother's generations as women?

At Home:		YES		NO	Explain:
Outside The Home:		YES		NO	Explain:
In Your Free Time:		YES		NO	Explain:
In The Community:		YES		NO	Explain:

2. Did your generation do the same things as your mother's generations as mothers?

At Home:		YES		NO	Explain:
Outside The Home:		YES		NO	Explain:
In Your Free Time:		YES		NO	Explain:
In The Community:		YES		NO	Explain:

**3. YOUR GENERATION vs. TODAY'S GENERATION**

6. Did your generation do the same things as today's generations, as girls?

At Home:		YES		NO	Why?
Outside The Home:		YES		NO	Why?
In Your Free Time:		YES		NO	Why?

In The Community:		YES		NO	Why?
7. Did your generation do the same things as today's generations as women?					
At Home:		YES		NO	Why?
Outside The Home:		YES		NO	Why?
In Your Free Time:		YES		NO	Why?
In The Community:		YES		NO	Why?
8. Did your generation do the same things as today's generations as mothers?					
At Home:		YES		NO	Why?
Outside The Home:		YES		NO	Why?
In Your Free Time:		YES		NO	Why?
In The Community:		YES		NO	Why?

## PART 5: PHYSICAL BEAUTY

This section explores women's body image, that is, how women see themselves physically and what they think is beautiful about themselves. It looks at the internalized sense of what we look like as women and what influences our physical image.

### 1. What makes a woman beautiful?

	Her personality		Her smile
	Her fair skin		Her hard work
	Other (specify)		Other (specify)

2. IS this true for today's generation?                      YES { }      NO { }

3. Why / Why not?

**4. What was the biggest influencing factor on your generation’s style & body image when you were younger? (mark all that apply)**

	Influencing Factor		Influencing Factor
	Tradition		Education
	Religion		Western Style
	Career		Western Media / Music
	Practicality		Other (Specify)

**5. What was the biggest influencing factor on your mother’s generation’s style & body image? (mark all that apply)**

	Influencing Factor		Influencing Factor
	Tradition		Education
	Religion		Western Style
	Career		Western Media / Music
	Practicality		Other (Specify)

**6. What is the biggest influencing factor on your daughter’s style & body image? (mark all that apply)**

	Influencing Factor		Influencing Factor
	Tradition		Education
	Religion		Western Style
	Career		Western Media / Music

	Practicality		Other (Specify)
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#### **PART IV WOMEN'S HOPES & ASPIRATIONS**

This section records women's hopes and aspirations for future generations of women.

1. Name three things that this generation should know about the generations of women that have come before them?
2. Name three things you would change about this generation of women

## Appendix III: RESEARCH TOOLS – Focus Group Discussion Guide

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### **PART 1: List of Participants**

#### **1. NAME AND AGE OF PARTICIPANTS**

#### **2. SHORT INTRODUCTION BY EACH PARTICIPANT**

(Please introduce yourself / Tell us something about yourself)

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### **PART 2: Women's Collective Image (probe each question)**

- 3. In your time, what characteristics made a woman beautiful?** (probe: was this the same for your mother's generation? For your daughter's generation?)
  - 4. Who was considered to be a noble woman (*Mutumia wa Ngatha*)?** (probe: was this the same for your mother's generation? For your daughter's generation?)
  - 5. What were society's expectations for women?** (probe: what do you think of these expectations?)
- 

### **PART 3: Women's Aspirations for The Next Generation (probe each question)**

- 6. What would you preserve about the women in your generation? What would you change?**
- 7. What would you change about today's generation of women?**
- 8. Having witnessed all the changes that have taken place since your lifetime, what would you want for your daughter / granddaughter?**

## Appendix IV: Advice for Today's Generation

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### General Advice

1. A call for a Cultural Revival, where young people would:
  - a) Learn Gikuyu
  - b) Return to traditional diet
  - c) Listen to Vernacular radio stations to learn about Gikuyu culture
  - d) Hold cultural seminars
  - e) Teach about Gikuyu Spirituality
  - f) Coach young women
  - g) Give teachers cultural training
2. Stop drinking alcohol,
3. Get closer to God,
4. Improve your diet by introducing components of the traditional diet,
5. Exercise respect for yourself, your bodies, your husband, your parents, elders and your culture,
6. Change your attitude by learning to be polite & kind,
7. Cultivate a good character by being morally upright and trustworthy,
8. Be better parents by:
  - a) Making time for your children,
  - b) Being strict with your children,
  - c) Teaching your children good values,
  - d) Advocating for bad children to be removed from classrooms and counseled,
9. Have more children
10. Make time to connect with extended family
11. Re-introduce collective responsibility,

12. Create social structures that ground today's society in a set of values
13. Avoid peer pressure
14. Dress decently
15. Seek advice from grandmothers and look for a mentor
16. Be content with family's financial situation and
17. Stop drinking alcohol
18. Be more faithful in marriage,
19. Dress decently,
20. Re-introduce collective parenting,
21. Stop being a victim of technology,
22. Stop embracing religion blindly,
23. Stop copying western style and behaviour,
24. Balance your education with knowledge of your people people and culture

#### **Advise on Relationships & Sex**

1. Carry yourself with dignity
2. Respect your husband and inculcate mutual respect in your marriages,
3. Be more faithful in relationships,
4. Stop engaging in public displays of affection,
5. Stop being promiscuous, participating in premarital sex, and sleeping with older men,
6. Stop having children out of wedlock,
7. Stop dressing indecently around your fathers and having inappropriate relationships with them,
8. Stop being overly familiar with opposite sex,
9. Career women should stop putting their work first and make time to find a husband



## Appendix VI: List of Research Assistants

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### NAIROBI

Name	Area Covered
i. Veronica Kinyanjui	(Overall Coordinator)
ii. Salome Wambui	Dagoretti South
iii. Ann Wanjiru	Mathare
iv. Grace Kirina	Kangemi
v. Chris Michuki	Makadara
vi. John Mugo	Embakasi
vii. Esther Mwaura	Dagoretti North

### NYERI

Name	Area Covered
i. Margaret Nyathogora	(Overall Coordinator)
ii. Mary Wamuyu Wamui	Othaya
iii. Rose Wairimu Kamau	Nyeri Town
iv. Njambi Murage	Tetu
v. Amos Kinguku	Kieni
vi. Jane Wambui Ngaina	Mathira
vii. Ndung'u Muchai	Mukurwe – Ini

**Appendix VII: Letter of Introduction, University of Nairobi**



**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI  
AFRICAN WOMEN STUDIES CENTRE**

**P.O Box 30197-00100**

**Tel: (+254-20) 3318262/28075; 725 740 025**

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**Website: <http://awsc.uonbi.ac.ke>**

**Nairobi, Kenya**

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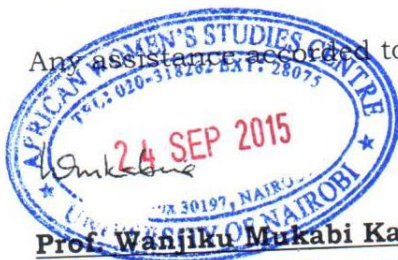
**Date:** September 24<sup>th</sup> , 2015

**To:** The County Commissioner  
Nyeri County

**SUBJECT: INTRODUCTION LETTER FOR MS. YVONNE MUMBI KIGWE WETTSTEIN**

This is to confirm that Ms. Yvonne Mumbi Kigwe Wettstein is a registered PhD candidate at the African Women Studies Centre, University of Nairobi. She is currently working on her research proposal entitled, "100 Years of Agikuyu Women's Self-Images: A Case Study of Nairobi & Nyeri County (1900 – 2000)".

Any assistance accorded to her during her research period is highly appreciated.



**Prof. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, EBS**  
**Director, African Women Studies Centre**  
**University of Nairobi**

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