

Literature Gender and Ideology: Embu Women Reconstructing Their Identity in ‘Kamweretho’ Performance

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ABSTRACT

The paper will address the gender gap which is one of the many issues not appropriately dealt with by the myriad of sessional papers, commissions’ report and perennial researches. Some sections of the Kenyan women and specifically the Embu women have radically moved away from the elusive expectations of the government and NGO’s implementation to come to their aid in quest of emancipation. They have resolved to closet the gender gap by moving back to their cradles, their parental homes where the gender parity should start. Kamweretho is a new socio-cultural phenomenon among the Embu elite women. The name is derived from Kiswahili word; Kueleza which means speaking out or explaining something in clearly defined language. Kamweretho is a fairly recent ritual, which is usually carried out by married or adult daughters and parents and relatives on the other hand. The study will investigate why Embu elite women are speaking out and what their message is. We have employed several strands of feminist theories such as: the social eco-feminist, radical feminism, Marxist Feminist and African Feminist Theory. The social eco-feminism theory portrays the relationship between the subjugation of women and that of nature. In analyzing the oral literature used, the paper will demonstrate the kamweretho participants’ use of symbols, some of which are related to nature and to some extent they are a backup in highlighting the struggle women undergo in reconstructing their identity. In so doing, the study divulges the crucial role of symbols in portraying their totality in the work of art hence making the weaving of the text as clear as possible. The engagement of radical feminist theory helps in interpreting patriarchy as depicted in African culture. The Marxist Feminist perspective will help in analyzing the capitalistic nature of oppression of perceived weaker gender by proponents of culture. The paper will highlight how the women have protested the status- quo. It will help us bring out the gender identity, power relations and changing socio-economic trend. The African feminist perspective creates a fair gender rapport between females and males and attempts to appraise literature by using African’s aesthetic standards, worldview and experiences. The research method will be based on participatory observation, content analysis of video clips and a survey of purposively selected group members. The conclusion will be that women have a radical ideological message for the community and the nation at large. They speak out for variety of reasons such as calling out for the renegotiating of their position in society and asserting their rights. Their women’s messages are transformative and call for action to deal with the forgotten and accept the ‘new woman’ who is taking up new roles and responsibilities. For this reason women have received criticism from some churches, cultural fundamentalist and male chauvinists. They are accused of usurping male hegemony in the guise of receiving parental blessings.