Agony and Agency: Discursive Construction of Barren women in the Bible and Traditional African Society

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Abstract : Barrenness is a fundamentally agonizing condition that leads to identity disruption in its victims. In Africa, women are usually referred to as 'Mother of X,' and this causes grief to one who does not have a child to be identified with. This paper is an examination and critical appraisal of the impact of barrenness on the self-perception of women and the underlying power relations in how they are discursively constructed in the Bible and Traditional African Society (TAS). It is an analysis of expressive practices to examine how barrenness is constructed in Christianity and TAS with the aim of understanding the intersecting power systems. We approach this from an integrationism and Critical Discourse Analysis perspective that takes seriously both the radical harassment of barren women and the possibilities offered by the ensuing desperation calling for inclusive reinterpretation. We also seek to understand barren women's coping mechanisms and suggestions on how best to improve their lives. The purpose of this study is to explain how discursive construction of barrenness affects the fundamental rights and freedoms of women and what linguistic strategies they adopt to navigate through the maze of stigma. It seeks to illustrate a more nuanced complexity of barren women's lives through women's own exegesis of the Biblical accounts of barrenness and their traditions and to explore alternative narratives. We explore the linguistic strategies the barren women employ to communicate their coping with limitations imposed upon their rights by the negative constructions.
Keywords : integrationism, critical discourse analysis, barrenness, communication strategies, women rights
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