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THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES IN
SELECTED RITUALS OF THE BUKUSU OF KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Ritual discourse in Bukusu community plays an important role in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. The discursive patterns perpetuate the social structures and masculine ideologies that subordinate the status of women. Discursive practices produce unequal power relations through the ways in which they position people as evidenced in Bukusu ritual discourse. The aim of this study was to bring to light the imaginary character of ritual discourse and to sharpen awareness of dogmatic and naturalizing conceptions of ritual discourse which make difficult equal coexistence of gendered groups. The objectives were to establish how hegemonic masculinities manifest themselves in Bukusu ritual discourse, identify the various discursive strategies employed in the construction of social gendered roles and, to highlight the conceptualization of Bukusu ritual discourse and its effects on gendered roles. The study was informed by the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) which is committed to Critical Discourse Analysis. This theory considers context since discourses can only be described, understood and interpreted in their specific contexts. DHA follows the principles of triangulation. This means that the discursive phenomena are approached from a variety of methodological and theoretical perspectives taken from various disciplines. This theory was relevant to the present study in that, the analysis of hegemonic masculinities using DHA helped to uncover manipulative maneuvers in ritual discourse which aim at discriminatory exclusion of women. It also heightened the awareness of the rhetorical strategies which are used to impose certain beliefs, values and goals. The study was ethnographic which used qualitative analysis. Qualitative approach is effective in providing detailed information about the phenomenon in order to establish patterns, trends and relationships. The population of the study was the Bukusu community, a sub-ethnic group of Luhya people found in Bungoma County in Kenya. Purposive sampling technique was used to select thirty people involved in three ritual discourses. The tools of data collection were observation, interview schedules and video recording. These provided data in the form of texts for analysis. The DHA, which is itself a methodology, was used in the analysis of data. The analysis considered the immediate language texts, the social-political context, historical context and the argumentation strategies. The analysis highlighted elements of power, beliefs and ideologies which contribute to the restoration and legitimization of a social status quo in Bukusu community. The findings form an important stock of knowledge. This opens up discussions in this field which holds great potential for future work. Findings revealed that hegemonic masculinities are discursively constructed in ritual discourse, and male power remains dominant in gender relations. These can be fruitfully applied in the investigation of other ritual discourses in other communities. Exposing the uneven power structure in Bukusu ritual discourse is indeed one way of addressing discriminatory messages which in turn is an important step towards the emancipation of women.

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