

Socially Constructed Discourse on Chihera: An Asset or Liability in Zimbabwe's Envisioned Gender Equal Society

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Abstract

The Chihera gender disposition in Zimbabwe is an interesting phenomenon. In most cases, Chihera is portrayed as one who thrives on gravitating against socially constructed gender norms. Our chapter endeavours to take stock of the positive and negative traits and behavioural attitudes in the Chihera social construct in a bid to instil a sense of equality and agency among the Zimbabwean indigenous women. The main argument proffered in this chapter is that ignoring an exploration and failure to take stock of Chihera phenomenon's genderedness is tantamount to leaving un/desirable gender learning to chance. Informed by the Social Reconstruction Theory, the study attempts to uncover the genderedness of Chihera discourse particularly amongst the Shona in Zimbabwe. This is a qualitative study relying on information collected through textual analysis-critical content and discourse analyses of purposively sampled gender texts from the social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. The main conclusion reached in this study is that the Chihera phenomenon in Shona discourse is a religio-cultural and traditional intangible heritage asset that defines woman/hood for those belonging to the Shava-Mhofu totem. Above all other women of other totems found in Zimbabwe, Chihera stands out in a unique and distinctive fashion. Thus, she possibly can be a valuable religio-cultural and intangible heritage asset that helps in rethinking, reimagining and redefining Shona gender arrangement and invoke the much-needed sense of equality and agency among Zimbabwean men and women.

Keywords: Afrocentric paradigm, Africana womanist theory, Chihera social construct, Gender equality, Shona discourse.

