Women’s Experiences as Sources of Public and Legitimate Knowledge: Constitution Making in Kenya

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1.0 Introduction and Context

Betty Friedan in her essay, Model Making-Knowledge notes:

“All human beings have a biased and limited view of the world: biased in that it begins with self and limited in that it is restrained by experience. This means that there are many ways of seeing the world….”

African women’s view of the world is one of those ways, a perspective that needs to be made visible and integrated in our definition of how we see the world. We need to bring this contextual knowledge to visibility. African women have created their own governance structures and generated knowledge which remains outside the mainstream knowledge, policy and Institutional development in Africa. We continue, in our region, to refer to and use theories and frameworks whose basic assumptions do not include African women’s worldviews. Theories of power, political and other, need to be interrogated from the African women’s experiences point-of-view. Looking at such novels as Margaret Ogola’s The River and The Source (Kenya), Mariama Ba’s So Long a Letter (Senegal) and Lena Elieshi’s “Parched Earth” (Tanzania), among other novels, will help us understand what this means. The story of women’s participation in the review process in Kenya and indeed in Africa south of the Sahara will help us see how they have moved the process of naming, ordering and making sense of the world for themselves and for society.

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1Betty Friedan, For the record, Page 10