
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gender: A Matter of Questioning in Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*

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| ABSTRACT

Particularly when referring to social and cultural distinctions rather than biological ones, gender is of the two sexes. Gender problems are more concerned with social experiences than biological differences between men and women. The misconception that gender issues are only a problem for women is untrue; rather, gender issues are primarily concerned with how men and women interact with the social, cultural, political, and economic systems of society. The work's analysis followed gender theory as a guide. A qualitative investigation was conducted, as well. The investigations find that there is a gender imbalance in the workforce, social, cultural, and educational; those women are trafficked in other fields, which has led the author to call for the empowerment of women via education. The work is limited to one novel, the *trafficked*. In conclusion, societal inequalities against women exist in our society; education and other initiatives might help women become more independent in order to transform society into one that is just.

| KEYWORDS

Trafficked, gender, education, empowerment, society

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The idea of gender is utilized in social science studies to compare the roles and pursuits of men and women. The main focus of gender problems is not the biological distinctions between men and women but rather their social experiences. It's a prevalent misconception that gender issues only concern women since they primarily address how men and women interact with the social, political, and economic systems of society. In addition, a person's biological sex or the sex of another human being, their social position, or their gender identity are all considered to be aspects of their gender. When relationships between men and women are recognized and evaluated, gender is also exposed along with their responsibilities, privileges, statuses, and positions. Therefore, gender issues are like a tool for understanding and learning more about the activities of men and women in society and the problems and opportunities that each faces in doing those activities. This position of male-dominated society is supported by Femiojo-Ade (1998) when he established that: "African Literature is a male-created, male-oriented chauvinistic art. Nigeria is regarded as male, and this is a fact that thrust in myriad ways at the Nigerian women."

Another indication that literature is phallic is the fact that it is predominately written by men -male writers, publishers, reviewers, etc. who focus almost entirely on male characters and issues and naturally target a male audience. African women came to the realization that sexism, discrimination, and male chauvinism all play a significant role in the issue of women's subjugation in society. So that they will be noticed, ladies get interested in social activities and ways of life. According to Kaplan (1995), who identified three tactics used by female intellectuals, women are fundamentally different from males and can promote their own (better) abilities by dramatically separating from the prevailing culture.

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According to Kate Bornstein, gender may be ambiguous and flexible. There are two different ideas about what gender is, and they contradict each other. Here's how the two ideas meet. Gender, according to the World Health Organization, is the product of socially formed notions about the acts, behaviors, and roles that each sex plays in society. The views, values, and attitudes that they adopt and display are the social standards that they agree with, as well as their own personal opinions, which are not taken into account when assigning gender and imposing gender roles in accordance with that gender. The social construct of "gender" does not allow for intersections or crossings of the established limits. Natural biological and physiological characteristics are taken into consideration when determining a person's gender, and then socially produced behaviors are imposed. The medical stamp on the birth certificate must reflect the social categorization of a person as belonging to one sex or the other. The biological distinctions that play a role in defining either sex and which are interchangeable with the concept of gender within the social context finish the assignment of gender together with the cultural attributes normally associated with a certain sex, according to Ordu (2021). The issue of gender encompasses cultural, racial, national, economic, and political concerns, as well as sexism because its views are centered on communalism rather than individuality.

In this situation, the socially imposed rules and the determination of a person's gender are at odds. Gender ambiguity refers to the freedom to select, control, and carve out one's own niche within any established socially built code of conduct, whereas gender fluidity outlaws all culturally assigned gender roles. It rejects the predominance of two strictly defined genders, "Female and Male," and upholds the freedom to select any gender, free from restrictions, constraints, and expectations exclusive to any one gender. Additionally, gender difficulties are highlighted when the roles, advantages, status, and positions of men and women are recognized and studied, according to Kwazulu (2001). These problems occur when it is shown that there are disparities between individuals based just on whether they are male or female. Additionally, it refers to the social roles that are assigned to men and women in specific societies and at a specific time. These roles and the differences between them are influenced by a number of political, economic, ideological, and cultural factors and are typically characterized by unequal power relations. Sex, which is determined biologically, is separated from gender.

Butter (1990) says there is a slight difference between gender and sex, though some people interchange it, he says.

Gender is not something we are born with
and not something we have been born as
a male or female to perform,
while sex means either male or female.

In other words, everyone has access to gendered performances, but these performances also come with restrictions on who may play which personae freely. At this point, gender and sex intersect, yet they are not the same. Mary (1998) further defined gender as the biological function that confers sexuality to males and females. In certain African communities, gender and sexuality are not mutually exclusive.

2. Theoretical framework

It is essential to identify a certain theoretical framework that supports the topic of gender figures and concerns because this research is primarily concerned with fictional literature. The gender viewpoint of Akachi has been portrayed in a number of different ways. For instance, how is the necessity of education and women's trafficking to be taught to Nigerian society in the novel *Trafficked*? Given the circumstances, it is essential for this research to employ literary theory that may help in the development of knowledge that confronts the current world with respect to what the novel's characters represent. This study used ideas from gender theory because the story is about gender inequality, women being left out, education, and how class differences are made worse.

As a body of principles directing historical and other Western scholarly endeavors in the 1970s and 1980s, gender theory emerged in academia. With much fewer adherents on the European continent, it was notably successful in social history in the United States and Great Britain. This idea essentially advocated viewing masculinity and femininity as collections of traits that both men and women have independently developed and influenced their own lives. The concept that men and women behaved historically in accordance with set biological factors was replaced or questioned. In other words, it made history conceivable by erasing these categories from the field of biology. Women's history was known as "gender history" to some people, while for others, gender theory changed how they handled writing and teaching about both men and women. It is possible to speculate that the main impact of gender theory was to complicate the study of males by turning them into gendered historical subjects alongside women. Women are being exploited by men in this method, which is consistent with the idea that males treat women unfairly and that this is the origin of women's problems being marginalized in society.

3. Social Injustice of gender peddling

A notion known as social injustice refers to the alleged unfairness or injustice of a society in its allocation of benefits and costs, as well as other unintended inequities. This is different from concepts of justice in legislation that may or may not be moral in reality or constitute the notion of Justice inside a cohesive ideological framework, which places more emphasis on just process than accidental inequities. New political parties are increasingly emphasizing their opposition to social injustice as a platform. Social injustice occurs when equals are treated unfairly and unequal are treated fairly. Some authors have criticized or satirized perceived social injustice in their communities via literature. Authors like Niyi Osundare, Tatamkhulu Afrika, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and others are examples of this kind. Many people in society experience social injustices, particularly women, and this is a result of numerous obstacles that prohibit true social fairness.

Women's and children's trafficking is one of the injustices committed against women in our society. Although slavery is a practice in which individuals are held against their will from the moment of capture and denied the right to leave, refuse to work, or demand compensation, human trafficking is the movement in which individuals are treated as property and forced to work, the two are only slightly different. (*Trafficked* P56)

AkachiA dimora Ezeigbo argued that the traditional generic integrity of the novel *Trafficked* is fundamentally radicalized and exploitative as a result of the novelist's experimental approach resulting in what might tentatively be dubbed faction.

Instead of affecting both genders (male and female), society embraced the antiquated practice of slavery, which has been effectively abolished and reshaped in another way. Only women and young girls were exploited; they were coerced or tricked into the trade by deceit or blackmail. The reader will learn about the trafficked women and girls at the Oasis, particularly Efe and Nneoma, from the novel *Trafficked*. Efe was drawn into the industry via a newspaper ad, and after that, she was transferred to Italy and Palermo, where she was forced into prostitution. When telling Nneoma the tale, she stated the following:

One day, I saw an advertisement in a newspaper while I was on a visit to my cousin in Lagos. They asked young men and women who wished to Work abroad to come to a certain address to be interviewed... Quite a number of people were interviewed, some were rejected, but I was selected, but none of the men who were interviewed was taken. We took an oath to work for the agency until we had paid our debts (Transport fare); we were taken to Italy and ended up in Palermo. I was sold to a woman called madam Gold, a Nigerian... (P99)

The same thing happened to Nneoma, who was tricked into believing that someone had helped her get a teaching position at one of their institutions in exchange for assistance in finding employment. Nigeria's unemployment crisis is another factor that contributes to "Trafficked" because of women's desire to use whatever means possible to get money so they won't become a burden to their husbands, and unscrupulous individuals take advantage of this to seduce women into doing things they don't want. Unfortunately, Nneoma and her friend were taken to Italy, where they were sold to Madam Dollars, who used them for prostitution. Instead of giving them the money they make, she will instead collect the money from them and leave them penniless. Nneoma and her friend went to this person's house and quickly got passports and flight tickets for them. They also showed pictures of the schools where they would be teaching and gave them appointment letters to sign without realizing the trick.

A global organized crime known as the trafficking of women and children appears to have eluded the Nigerian government, immigration authorities, and the police (Newell, 1997). A Nigerian non-governmental group alleges that victims (particularly girls) suffer from various forms of torture, including forced sex slavery, insanity, and murder. The traffickers continue to harass the relatives of the girls in Nigeria, which makes it more difficult to stop the crime due to a conspiracy of silence and terror. However, when these girls are deported from their target country, the sensationalization of the subject in the Nigerian media further traumatizes them. It is the victims, not the traffickers, who are more frequently condemned by the media. They are featured in daily newspapers and on broadcast television. The offenders end up being the victims. In reality, catching and convicting those responsible for trafficking in women and children has been extremely difficult.

4. Women mandate

The goal is to give women the courage to stand up to social and religious pressures that have kept women down and unable to see their own time, beauty, and strength for a long time.

Akachi Ezeigbo, an erudite professor and gender-expert insists on calling a spade a spade; she stated that;

It was in the larger society I saw that women
Were rated second class citizens, even at work
At times. There was a time I felt I Ought to
Have moved up the success ladder faster than

I was doing. Though I wasn't totally sure

If it was due to gender bias or tribal bias.

(Women of Valour, 2006).

If women want to advance to the upper echelons of organizations, they need to be psychologically and physically empowered to build their confidence and help themselves at work. Undoubtedly, an educated woman would need to learn how to manage her profession and her personal life, which is why Akachi plays the important role of Nneoma. Despite being a poor girl who is still insistent on attending school after being trafficked, she refuses to be a burden. And this is what is required of every woman: she must not put herself through hardship for the benefit of others.

A woman will need her man's support in order to meaningfully balance her work and her family, though. She would gain a lot of power from this. So, it is very important to get more women to write and publish books, especially in Nigeria, so that religious and cultural taboos don't hold women back both physically and symbolically.

Additionally, more feminist critics are required to do the crucial task of nurturing and evaluating the writings of African female authors with due consideration. Second, the most effective means of empowering women and people of African descent has been education. In order for a woman to succeed in life, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo advises that her spouse should assist her, whereas Alkali suggests that education is the certain solution to the majority of issues facing women in Northern Nigeria. Men's education is also crucial since it will transform their attitudes towards women for the better when they have a decent education. Additionally, gender stereotypes that have long kept African women in traditional servitude would shift. This is a call to both male and female authors to write stories that will help change society, give women more power, and give people freedom in the physical, economic, and political realms.

5. The styles

Akachi Dimora Ezeigbo has written novels with strong female characters and themes that focus on the problems women face and the things they do. She stands out as one of the best writers of her time. She had made a name for herself as one of the best modern novelists of the third generation. Her language and background aren't like anything else in African writing. Language is the way an author expresses his or her ideas. Akachi Adimora uses imagery, idiomatic expressions, flashbacks, and historical allusions to back up the literal meaning, make the choice of words pleasant for the reader, and paint a vivid picture of what happened. In the novel *Trafficked*, Ezeigbo uses idiomatic expressions and metaphors. For example, when Ofomata caught Okpo and his mother cooking, he says, "I will cook nsala for your father tonight. His father always got the lion's share."

'Lion share' means the largest share of the meat.

The author also used past African history and tried to relate it to modern days; she does this through the mind of one of her characters Ofomota, the oldest undergraduate;

Ofomata looked up from time to watch the
heavy traffic on the mainland bridge, which had
been constructed by one of the military governments
that ruled the country between 1966 and 1999 – expect
for the four intervening years between 1979 and 1983
when president Shehu Shagari become first
democratically elected president. But the solders
handover throne him and taken over again as if to
rule was their birthright (P35)

Most of the time, the author uses flashbacks, which gives the work a lot of suspense and makes it stand out. Ezeigbo also uses Africanism, which is when language, culture, and traditions from Africa are used in work. For example, the word "nsala" is a kind of Igbo soup made with fish stock (Okpo). And "Boubou," "Agbada," "Adire," and "Ankara" were all African clothes that showed their culture.

The language used by the author in *Trafficked* is simple and straightforward, but Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo has a way with words that makes her novels hard to put down, except for the strong parts. Since *Trafficked* is the middle part of a trilogy, a reader may be disappointed after finishing it because he or she won't be able to figure out how the story ends. Instead, the reader will have to figure it out on his or her own.

6. Conclusion

The goal of this work was to find out why women in Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's novel *Trafficked* were treated badly and put down. A womanist view recognizes the good things about black life while also raising questions about the humanity of black African women. Ordu (2021), the author is so angry about the difference between men's and women's worlds and the society that made them. Civilization has changed the world from the way it used to be to the way it is now, so the way women are treated should also change for the better.

But we found that women are no longer willing to sit back and let their husbands do everything for them, as they did in the past, or to let their husbands tell them what to do. Women are getting to a place where they can't let men walk all over them like their great-grandmothers did. Now, a woman lives in the worlds of books and circles. The author Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo doesn't offer solutions to all of the problems women face. Instead, she encourages them to get to a point where they can take care of themselves financially. She said that women should be able to stand up for their rights in a patriarchal society and that men should learn to treat women with respect and not as slaves but as equals in everything.

As Akachi Ezeigbo has rightly pointed out, the marginalization of African women and the subjugation of their gender has led to a number of works of literature that are now aimed at redefining African womanhood in the right way. The stereotypical view of women as passive beings has been replaced by a view of women as strong, articulate, and goal-oriented. There is no doubt that the image of women in African literature has changed from "object" to "subject" as many writers, especially women, have given their female characters "agency." Amadi (1999). There is a clear change in the way women write, which is caused by changes in materials, the way women think, and the way newer women writers see the world. Also, women didn't want to be seen as second-class citizens, and now they're starting to get more access to social things. And because of this struggle, they are able to get titles like the ones people have always had.

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