



Gender Education, Virtue and Style in Zaynab Alkali's the Virtuous Woman

Ordu Stanley^{1*}, Helen Chituru Wagwu², Francis Attah Egu³, Mary Ayuba⁴, Shote Adedapo Oladeji⁵

^{1*}CHAPS

²Department of language and communication Art, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Port Harcourt Rivers State

³Languages and communication Unit, Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas, Bonny, Rivers
state

⁴Department of language and communication Art, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Port Harcourt Rivers State

⁵Department of language and communication Art, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Port Harcourt Rivers State

E.mail: ²helenwagwu@gmail.com, ³egu4ran6@gmail.com

Corresponding Email: ^{1*}stanleyordu12@gmail.com

Received: 21 July 2022 **Accepted:** 11 October 2022 **Published:** 16 November 2022

Abstract: *Gender is made up of the two sexes, especially when it comes to social and cultural differences instead of biological ones. Gender problems have more to do with how people are treated than with how men and women are made. Gender issues are not just a problem for women, as some people think. Instead, they are mostly about how men and women interact with the social, cultural, political, and economic systems of society. Gender theory was used to guide the analysis of the work. As well, a qualitative investigation was done. The investigation found that there is a gender gap in the workforce, social, cultural, and educational fields, and that women are trafficked. This led the author to say that women should be given more power through education. The work is only one book, called "The Virtuous Woman." In conclusion, women are treated unfairly in our society. Education and other programs could help women become more independent so that society can become more fair.*

Keywords: *Gender, Education, Virtue, Woman, Empowerment.*



1. INTRODUCTION

Gender is a conceptual tool used in the social sciences to examine and contrast the activities and responsibilities of men and women. The social experiences of men and women, rather than their biological differences, are central to the study of gender issues. Gender issues, which primarily address how men and women interact with the social, political, and economic institutions of society, are often misunderstood and seen as predominantly affecting women. The biological sex of an individual, the sex of another human being, one's social status, and one's gender identity are all regarded to be facets of a person's gender. Gender roles, obligations, and statuses are all revealed when relationships between men and women are acknowledged and analyzed.

Therefore, gender issues may be seen as a tool for learning about and gaining insight into the differences in the experiences of men and women in society, as well as the advantages and disadvantages they encounter in carrying out various roles. Femiojo-(1998) Ade's assertion that "African Literature is a man made, male focused chauvinistic art" provides further evidence for the widespread belief that men control all aspects of society. The ladies of Nigeria are constantly reminded that their country is stereotypically masculine. A second sign that literature is phallic is that it is produced nearly exclusively by males (authors, publishers, reviewers, etc.) who write almost exclusively about male characters and concerns and write for an audience that is overwhelmingly male. The issue of women's subjection was identified by African women, and they found that sexism, discrimination, and male chauvinism all played a key role in it. Women do new things and adopt new lifestyles to stand out. Kaplan (1995) identified three strategies utilized by women intellectuals, and she argues that women are essentially different from men and may showcase their own (superior) qualities by striking a radical contrast with the mainstream.

Kate Bornstein suggests that gender is fluid and open to interpretation. Two definitions of gender exist, and they are mutually exclusive. See how these concepts overlap below:

According to the World Health Organization, gender is the result of culturally established ideas about the appropriate actions, behaviors, and responsibilities associated with each sex. Gender roles are assigned and enforced without taking into consideration the individual's beliefs, values, and attitudes, which are based on the societal norms with which they agree. Intersections and crossings are not permitted by the societal concept of "gender." Gender is determined first by a person's natural biological and physiological traits and then by the socially created behaviors that are expected of that gender. A person's social classification as a member of one sex or the other must be reflected in the medical stamp on their birth certificate. When added to the cultural characteristics typically associated with a certain sex, the biological differences that play a role in identifying either sex and which are interchangeable with the idea of gender in the social context complete the assignment of gender. According to Ordu (2021). Because its perspectives are based on collectivism rather than individualism, the gender question involves cultural, racial, national, economic, and political concerns, as well as sexism. Normative gender expectations and biological determinism are at odds here. Differences between gender ambiguity and gender fluidity may be seen in their respective stances on culturally given gender roles. It challenges the binary of "Female" and "Male" and supports the right to identify with any gender one prefers, without



having to conform to the norms and expectations of a single gender. According to Kwazulu, recognizing and studying the differences between men and women in terms of responsibilities, benefits, status, and positions draws attention to gender issues (2001). These issues arise when it becomes clear that certain people are treated differently just because they are a different sex. Furthermore, it alludes to the varying and particular gender roles that exist in many civilizations and historical eras. Various political, economic, ideological, and cultural variables shape these positions and their distinctions and generally result in uneven power relations. Gender has nothing to do with sex, which is defined by biology. Although some individuals use the terms interchangeably, Butter (1990) argues that there is a distinct difference between gender and sex.

While sex refers to either a male or a female, gender is not a biological fact about us.

Everyone in these alternate universes has access to performances that focus on one gender or the other, but they are limited in their ability to freely assume the roles of the other genders. There is a moment where gender and sex meet, yet they are still distinct. Mary, (1998) expanded the definition of gender to include the biological role that determines a person's sexual orientation. Gender and sexuality are not rigid categories in several African societies.

Theoretical framework

Because this research focuses mostly on fictional literature, it is vital to develop a particular theoretical framework that supports the subject of gender figures and concerns. Zaynab's perspective on her gender has been depicted in a variety of ways. For instance, how does The virtuous lady teach Nigerian culture about the need of education? Given the conditions, it is vital for this study to utilize literary theory that can aid in the formation of knowledge pertinent to the contemporary world in terms of what the novel's characters symbolize. This study utilized concepts from gender theory since the narrative focuses on gender inequality, women's exclusion, education, and the escalation of class divisions.

In the 1970s and 1980s, gender theory evolved in academia as a collection of guiding ideas for Western historical and other scholarly efforts. With far fewer supporters on the European continent, it was especially effective in American and British social history. This concept supported understanding masculinity and femininity as sets of characteristics that men and women separately formed and that impact their own lives. The notion that men and women traditionally acted according to predetermined biological variables was discarded or questioned. In other words, the elimination of these categories from the study of biology made history possible. Some people referred to women's history as "gender history," while gender theory altered how others wrote and taught about both men and women. It is conceivable that the most significant effect of gender theory was to complicate the study of men by transforming them into gendered historical subjects alongside women.

In this way, men exploit women, which is compatible with the notion that men treat women unjustly and that this is the cause of the marginalization of women in society.

Education

If the African girl is to perform her function in African society with dignity, her education must be tailored to her personality as an African woman. Because a well-educated woman is a valuable asset to her children, husband, parents, and, most importantly, her country, she should pursue an education that is well-rounded not only intellectually but also morally and



religiously. In the past, when the missionaries established the formal education system in Africa, they did so by introducing some patriarchal ideologies into the educational system, one of which was the notion that boys rather than girls would benefit more from the school system. As a result, young girls were expected to stay at home to practice and perfect their domestic skills, which included how to behave in an appropriate and respectful manner. On the other side, the boys received instruction in reading and writing. The first gender difference between boys and girls was therefore introduced, and it appears to have lasted over time, mostly unquestioned in Africa. The lady is also seen to be completely brainless; in other words, "she is all heart and no head" and is completely unsuited to be sent to school to engage in any major academic endeavor. Thus, time has been spent on several strategies designed to deny the woman the chance to realize her full potential as a businessperson or seasoned scholar. Emecheta's book of the same name reminds us that the story of the woman in Nigeria is essentially one of a second-class citizen. According to statistical data, inequality and severe unfairness still plague the education of girls in Nigeria. The education of girls is given high emphasis in Zaynab Alkali's texts for the same reason as Kayode Alao (2006), namely because women in Nigeria as a whole have not yet fully occupied their positions in the country's educational system. No matter a girl's circumstances, in Alkali's opinion, she must continue to pursue education. Everyone should have access to basic literacy, according to Nana Ai, the paralyzed girl among the virtuous ladies. Alkali goes on to argue that women must have the strength and tenacity shown by Nana Ai in the virtuous ladies in order to enter the Her Majesty College, which is located south of Yoruba, and reclaim the privileges that God has bestowed upon them. Male and female were created by the good Lord to complement one another and profit from one another. Furthermore, the Alkalis books' depictions of Nigerian cultural standards are blatantly biased toward men. Because girls who marry, such as Nana Ai, lose their family ties as soon as they marry, the same standards have dictated that educating females is pointless and unheard of. The protagonist of *The Virtuous Women* defies the supposedly "accepted norms" or code of conduct for women in her culture by striving to be extremely intelligent. Nana Ai, who is from the same social group as a man named Dogo, has the following beliefs:

What is the use of sending a female child to school? If she turns out well, the man she married gets the benefit of her education, if she gets spoilt in the school I get the blame, There is no use sending a female child to school. If she turns out well, the man she marries gets the benefit of her education. It's my name that gets dragged into the mud. It's my house that becomes her refuge. Whichever way you look at it, the father of a female child is the loser. Let the girls stay at home and help their mother; when it is time for them to marry, let them marry.

Alkali's work concludes by advocating for equal educational opportunities for men and women, as well as the abolition of all types of discrimination against women in the field of education. The idea that girls should stay at home with their mothers until they are ready to get married and then do just that (P47) would leave a big gap between the educational progress of men and women in the country.

The virtue

Virtuousness is defined as being good, righteous, and pure according to moral and ethical



principles and accepted codes of conduct. Goodness also involves the innate virtues of compassion, benevolence, and generosity. Based on Proverbs 31:10

Who can find the virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need for spoil she will do him good and not evil All the days of her life... Strength and honour are her clothing, And she shall rejoice in time to come. (86)

One of the central tenets of the ethnical thought of many western philosophers has been the notion that virtue is in some way gendered, that the standards and criteria of morality are different for men and women; however, the roots of those notions of a "female ethnicity," of feminine nature, and of specifically female kinds of virtue, which have formed the essential background to a great deal of feminist thinking about morality, can be traced to the eighteenth century.

With changes in the social status of women, the eighteenth century witnessed the birth of a preoccupation with issues of femininity and female awareness. For middle-class women, working from home was becoming less common. A woman's only path to (sort of) security was a marriage in which she was completely reliant monetarily, and the outlook for single women was quite poor. The eighteenth century witnessed the beginning of an idealization of family life and the married state, which remained dominant throughout the nineteenth century, but at the same time women were becoming more and more dependent on men in terms of practical and material matters. A significant portion of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy came to be dominated by an image of the submissive but idealized wife and mother, whose particularly feminine attributes both defined and anchored the "private" realm of domestic life. The philosophy of Alkali, for instance, placed a lot of emphasis on the notion that virtue is gendered. The virtuous woman is where Alkali presents her most direct interpretation of feminine nature and goodness. The virtuous woman by Alkali describes the kind of upbringing that would aid in creating the ideal citizen and allow him to develop qualities of autonomy and self-determination. The book also presents a rural family in a northern state and the seclusion and simplicity of domestic life that she believed were essential to civic virtue in the region. In the book, Nana Ai is described as having the qualities of independence of mind, tenacity, and self-sufficiency. Above all, she must have the ability to think for herself and be unaffected by other people's opinions. She also has a duty to uphold an impeccable reputation. Though she is a lesser vessel, the virtues of knowledge, grace, and fear of God make the virtuous woman a powerful woman. A virtuous lady is perhaps more rare because she is not commonly sought after. Instead of looking for godly interior value, they hunt for achievements and other exterior traits. It is clear that God is always impartial since a woman who is subservient to her husband can still go directly to God and ask for everything she needs or wants and receive it just as swiftly as a man would. Furthermore, society denies that Eve's sin was caused by her deception of her husband Adam in eating the forbidden fruit, despite the fact that he was aware of the consequences but she was adamant about the consequences. This is despite the fact that society believes that women are more frequently led into spiritual error than men. The main reason God told her not to usurp authority over men is to keep her safe from false doctrines. Submission to one's husband is another aspect of womanly virtue that serves as an umbrella of protection. When a wife rejects her God-given protector, she leaves herself open to a false teaching, and it was



once thought that when a woman takes the spirit, she is led into spiritual error. Morality and good taste in clothing are further aspects of a woman's virtue. Religions, particularly the Islamic faith, frown upon women who are dressed indecently. Women are required to dress differently from men, which means they are not allowed to wear clothing that is meant for men. According to Badamsiuy (1998), the religious clothing code for women is as follows:

She is to cover all her body when going out of the house to attain the high morality in the society which Islam seek to achieve and combat corruption and lewdness

The Qur'an commands believing women to cover every part of their bodies when they leave their homes or are in public, with the exception of their faces and hands (Qura'an 24:31; 33:59). And Zaynab Alkali used this passage from the Quran in most of her works, maybe since she comes from a Muslim background. She used this approach for the majority of her female characters, including Nana Ai in "The Virtuous Woman" and Li and Faku in "The Still Born." Nana Ai, for example, felt regret when her scarf was blown off by the wind in the presence of Abukakar and Bello.

They were caught in a whirlwind. The boys held into their caps while the girls struggled with their wrappers and scarves, a feat that proved too much for Nana Ai, her scarf flew off, exposing one of her greatest physical assets, a mass of black, silky hair she was embarrassed... (P57)

The men (Bello, Abubakar, and Major Lawan) respect and honor Nana Ai more than Laila, who is too lousy and saucy, despite the fact that she is paralyzed, and it is also advisable for women to be reserved. This is not to say that they should not speak up when it is appropriate, but rather that they should try and limit their reactions rather than overreact.

Style

The writing style of Zaynab Alkali reflects "ideas and attitudes" that can be categorized as feministic and naturalistic, respectively. She is a naturalist in the sense that she offers a realistic perspective on humans as powerless victims of the natural world, their behaviors shaped both by these forces and by the social context in which they live. As stated previously in the previous chapter, Zaynab Alkali's books reveal something extremely significant about her characters. She is especially interested in female characters who have been mistreated by their social surroundings. All of her writings, including *The Virtuous Woman* (1986), *The Still Born* (1984), *The Cobweb and Other Stories* (1997), and *The Descendant* (2005), promote the idea that women are just as capable of handling the hardships and obstacles of life as their male counterparts. Alkali deserves praise for her imagistic adjectives, regardless of whatever stylistic flaws she may have, but her greatest strength comes from her skillful language use. In the debate over transliterations and Africanism in her works, the distinctiveness of Alkali's use of language is strongly viewed as the penetration of the English language on her native tongue. It's important to quickly talk about how Alkali's *The Virtuous Women* uses Africanisms and transliterations:

“The two girl were the only ones admitted in to the collegi, of ingila ” (p4) the underlined words denote ‘college of England’. Don’t you know Lizabetskul of ingila? (p4)

‘Don’t you know Elizabeth school of England’“he wore arichly embroidered kaftan, adipcharima cap...” (p26)



Kaftan and dipcharma cap in dictate traditional African dressing of Muslims, especially worn by Northern Nigerian men.

Hakuri (p35) means ‘patience’. This is a local Hausa words ‘Allah kiyaye’ (p35) ‘God protects’” Allah Sarki” (p62) ‘God is king ‘.

Alkali employs regional terms because there aren't any English equivalents. She uses several terms in their traditional indigenous forms, as seen above, to convey the flavor of (Northern) Nigerian reality even if she writes in English. Alkali thus modifies the English language while commenting on experiences in the Northern Nigerian community. .

2. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine why women in *The Virtuous Woman* by Zaynab Alkali were mistreated and degraded. A womanist perspective acknowledges the positive aspects of black existence while simultaneously questioning the humanity of black African women. The author of Ordu (2021) is furious at the disparity between men's and women's worlds and the society that created them. Since civilization has altered the world from its pre-existing state to its current state, the way women are treated should likewise improve. However, we discovered that women are no longer content to let their spouses do everything for them or tell them what to do. Women are reaching a point where they can no longer allow males to walk all over them, as did their great-grandmothers. Currently, a lady inhabits the realms of books and circles. The author Zaynab Alkali does not provide remedies to every issue women confront. Instead, she pushes them to reach a place where they can financially support themselves. In a patriarchal culture, she argued, women should be free to assert their rights, and men should learn to treat women with respect and not as slaves but as equals in everything. As Zaynab has pointed out, the marginalization of African women and the oppression of their gender have led to a variety of literary works that today seek to redefine African femininity accurately. The traditional idea of women as passive beings has been replaced by a vision of women as powerful, eloquent, and goal-oriented. There is little question that the image of women in African literature has shifted from "object" to "subject" as a result of the "agency" granted to female characters by several authors, particularly women. Amadi (1999). (1999). Changes in materials, how women think, or how newer women authors perceive the world have led to a discernible shift in the way women write. In addition, women did not want to be considered second-class citizens, and now they are gaining more access to social activities. And as a result of this fight, they are able to get titles similar to those that have always existed.

3. WORKS CITED

1. Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of literacy terms*. Harcourt Brace College Publishers. (1969).
2. Adewoye, S.A *The role of women in traditional literature*. University of Ilorin press. (1980).
3. Adimora-Ezeigbo, T.A .*A companion to the Novels*. Vista Books Limited. (1993).
4. Adimora-Ezeigbo, T.A. *Women’s Empowerment and National Integration*:
5. Mariama Ba’s *so long a letter*. Kraft Books. (1994).



6. Adimora-Ezeigbo, T.A Gender issue in Nigeria: A Feminine perspective. Vista Books Ltd.(1996)
7. Alkali, Zayna. The virtuous woman. Longman Nigeria. (1986)
8. Amadi, E. Estrangement. Henemann Educational Books Limited. (1991).
9. Chris P. Language and gender: making the differences. Oxford University press. (1989).
10. George K. Linguistic process in socio-cultural practice. Oxford University Press. (1989).
11. Lasisi, R.O and Akanji, M.A .History and philosophy of sciences in general studies division. University of Ilorin. (2009).
12. Mary M.B, “Feminine socialization: Women as Victims and Collaborators”. Violence against women, Macmillian press. (1998)
13. Newell,S. Writing African Women; Gender population culture and Literature in west African.
14. Hefriclitin publisher. (1997).
15. Nwanekah, P.C Changing Role of African women in Akachi Adimora
16. Ezeigbo’s novels, University of Ilorin. (2003).
17. Ordu, S. “Womanism and patriarchy in Chimamanda Adichi’s Purple hibiscus.” Litinfinite
18. Journal, Vol 3, issue-2, 2021.
19. Taiwo, O. Female novelists of modern African. Macmillian press (1989).