



LABOR AND GENDER EXPLOITATION IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH* NOVEL: MARXIST FEMINIST ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the Marxist feminist of the novel "Americanah" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, which examines labour exploitation and gender in the novel. The novel explores the experiences of the character Ifemelu through a critical lens, highlighting the gender inequalities that shape her life. This research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive method. The main data source comes from the novel "Americanah". The data of this research is in the form of narration and dialogue in the novel. This research applies Marxist feminist theory by Karl Marx. This analysis demonstrates how "Americanah" is an effective feminist literature that illuminates the nuanced connection between labour, gender exploitation, and capitalism.

Keywords: Americanah, feminist Marxism, gender exploitation, labour, migration.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the art of language. A language or tradition and human traditions are represented through literary works (Mahsyur, Fithratullah, Kasih, 2023). Literature can be defined as a work that has beauty in it derived from aspects of human life (Mustantifa & Nurmaily). The problems discussed in literary works can be seen as a reflection of human life problems. Literature not only gives pleasure to its readers but also teaches how to interact with other people who have power and moral values are one of the important elements in a literary work. The role of literature as a medium to communicate power can also be seen in Adichie's work.

The novel *Americanah* is one of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works. This novel tells the story of a woman named Ifemelu. This woman comes from Nigeria and then migrated to America to pursue higher education. In this case, Ifemelu experiences how she deals with differences between cultures, races and identities in a foreign country. The novel highlights the significance of labour as a vital component of economic growth. In an economy that prioritizes labour-intensive industries, the contribution of labour is essential for fostering economic development. Both labour and gender exploitation are depicted as social issues within the novel, although they carry distinct definitions and implications.

For this reason, this study focuses on labour and gender exploitation. The mentioned narrative appears to delve into the themes of labour and gender exploitation through the portrayal of Ifemelu's character. While labour and gender exploitation are interconnected concepts, they possess distinct meanings within the context of work and employment dynamics. Firstly, labour pertains to the actions or tasks undertaken by individuals to create goods or deliver services. On the other hand, exploitation arises when someone unfairly exploits or unduly benefits from the diligent efforts and contributions of others.

In the context of capitalism, labour holds significant value as a fundamental component of production. Capital owners and entrepreneurs utilize labour to create goods and services to generate profit. As said by Marx (1867 [2012]), "*The directing motive, the end and aim of capitalist products are to extract the greatest possible surplus value and consequently to exploit labour to the maximum extent possible*" (p.178). The concept of labor refers to the group of individuals who provide physical and mental effort to perform work to produce goods and services. labor exploitation the conceptual and empirical boundaries between which are arduously contested. This is linked to and in turn exacerbates the notorious lack of reliable data that exists on the nature and scope of the issue (Feingold, 2010). The tragedy of the modern woman was consequently an exploitation that existed in a twofold way and could only be overcome by political and social change.

“Goldman locates the economy of women’s sexuality firmly within the means of production and the exploitation of surplus labour. Women are not only commodities themselves but also producers of the next generation of exploitable labour, within the twin evils of capitalism and militarism (Goldman, 2014)”

The capitalist exploitation of women made Goldman also realize that birth control was a form of empowerment for women, who could decide on their own when and how to have children, without dooming the next generation to become a cog in the machine of the overall capitalist exploitation mechanism.

Finally, this study focuses on finding social and economic issues in the novel *Americanah* by using Karl Marx's theory of labor and gender exploitation. The novel explores the complex interactions between economic, social, and cultural factors that shape the experiences of immigrant workers. Therefore, the novel *Americanah* is focused to be analyzed through the lens of social and economic Marxists to see how the conditions of society in the novel. So, to explain further by the theory of Marxist, the researcher made a study entitled *Labor and Gender Exploitation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah Novel: Marxist Feminist Analysis*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the author will discuss the significant differences between our research approach and other studies that have been conducted in this field. the author will highlight the issues contained in the research of labour exploitation and gender in the novel *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In doing so, the reader will get a clearer picture of how this research broadens the scope and understanding of this topic. The first previous description in research according to Sakinah (2014) entitled *The Image of Woman in “The Holy Woman”: A Feminism Study*, this research article is aimed at explaining the image of women in Qaisra Shahrzad’s “The Holy Woman”. It dwells on women’s issues in a patriarchal power, that is, treating women as victims. The study applies Mary Ann Ferguson’s feminist theory. Based on the analysis of the article, it can be seen that the image of women can be depicted through the portrayal of characters based on the characters displayed. The second previous description research according to Sari & Saktiningrum (2021) entitled *Non - American Black Women’s Empowerment: Fourth-Wave AFeminism Study on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah*, this research article was to find Racial issues have been a big problem in the United States of America since the slavery era. Although racism still exists in its society, many people are still migrating to America. For example, non-American Black women go there to try their luck to get a better education, a better job, and a better standard of living.

The third was described in research according to Sumardjo, Hafsah, and Prahastini (2019), entitled *Human Exploitation as Social Inequality Reflected In The Novel Oliver Twist By Charles Dickens*. The study focuses on human exploitation and social inequality as depicted in Charles Dickens' novel "Oliver Twist." The research aims to identify and describe various forms of human exploitation in the novel and to establish a connection between social inequality and exploitation. The study employs Marxism theory by Karl Marx to analyze exploitation and social inequality. The fourth paragraph discusses a research article by Rida (2020) that focuses on the exploitation of women as portrayed in Arthur Golden's novel "Memoirs of a Geisha." This research aims to analyze the depiction of woman exploitation in the novel using a qualitative method. The study looks at how women are treated unfairly, using a feminist viewpoint to check women's positions, roles, participation, and rights. The fifth previous described in research according to Ayuningtyas (2007) entitled *Child Labour In 19th Century England Reflected on Charles Dickens’ Oliver Twist*, this research thesis aims at finding out the condition of child labour, which happens to the main character in Dickens’s Oliver Twist. Besides that, this study aims at finding out whether the condition of child labour in Dickens’s Oliver Twist reflects the condition of child labour in 19th century England. By combining the findings from previous research with the theoretical basis that will be put forward, it is hoped that this research can make a significant contribution to our understanding of labour and gender exploitation.

METHOD

This research tries to find out how labour and exploitation occur in the novel *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This study applied the descriptive qualitative method as it is more suitable for analyzing the data in this research (Heryanti & Kasih, 2022) because it aims to analyze Chimamanda Ngozie Adichi's novel *Americanah*. Qualitative research is an introduction to a study that includes the purpose and research questions (Suprayogi & Pranoto, 2020). The data analyzed are in the form of texts narrations and dialogues from the novel (Kardiansyah, 2018) that address the topics of labor and gender exploitation. The data were selected and classified

to be analyzed to achieve the research objectives (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2020) researchers have prepared several steps, which consist of:

1. Reading the novel
2. Collecting the data
3. By combining all the data
4. Dividing and establishing data collected into parts
5. To elaborate on the research objectives

Given the focus on social issues, a sociological approach was adopted, incorporating Karl Marx's Marxist theory. The research followed a series of steps, including:

1. Selecting
2. Rendering
3. Analyzing
4. Evaluating

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the discussion of a novel entitled "*Americanah*" written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This novel tells about aspects of love, identity, and migration. However, as a literary work, this book also describes complex social issues, including differences in labor exploitation and gender inequality that are hidden behind the journey of its characters. In chapter four, this study will analyze in depth how the novel describes the exploitation of women as workers and gender roles play a role in shaping the life experiences of its characters. This study divides the discussion in this research into three different sections:

Gender Pay Gap

Men and women are often treated differently in the world of work (Blau and Kahn, 2007; Kochan, 2007). The gender pay gap can be defined as the gap between wages paid to men and women. This happens when he pays attention to the conditions that exist in waitress workers.

Ifemelu read the advertisement and thought, again, of calling, but she didn't, because she was hoping that the last interview she went for, a waitress position in a little restaurant that didn't pay a salary, only tips, would come through. (Adichie, 2013, p.159)

This narrative excerpt depicts a situation where Ifemelu's character hopes to get a job as a waitress in a small restaurant that does not provide a fixed salary, but instead relies solely on tips as the main source of income. The underlying reason for her being rejected, according to her friend, was that she listed a high background only for the waitress position.

Wambui had told everyone that Ifemelu was looking for a job. Dorothy, the girly Ugandan with long braids who worked as a waitress in Center City, said her restaurant was hiring. But first, Mwombeki, the Tanzanian double major in engineering and political science, looked over Ifemelu's résumé and asked her to delete the three years of university in Nigeria: American employers did not like lower-level employees to be too educated. (Adichie, 2013, p. 145)

In this narrative, an analysis of the salary gap based on the theory of Marxist feminism reveals deep gender inequality in the world of work. First, we look at the inequality when Mwombeki, a man, has the authority to evaluate the life history of Ifemelu, a woman, who is looking for work. This reflects gender hierarchies in the workplace which can result in significant pay gaps between men and women.

The gender pay gap is an important issue that has been analyzed from various perspectives, including feminist Marxist theory (Olsen, 2009). Marxist feminists argue that the gender pay gap is the result of the intersection between capitalism and patriarchy. Marxist feminists argue that Marxists must consider women's domestic work, their underpaid and insecure position as wage workers, and the familial ideology that contributes to their oppression. (Barrett, 1980, p. 30).

According to Barrett (1980), focus is placed on the way social systems operate to maintain gender inequality. This involves the key roles played by patriarchy and capitalism in creating and maintaining gender inequality. This theory highlights that patriarchy and capitalism collaborate to maintain gender inequality. Patriarchy creates a gender hierarchy where women tend to get lower-paying jobs and are responsible for unpaid work such as household chores.

Commodification of Women's Bodies

The obvious complications of gender equality in working relationships are inappropriate comments, sexual jokes and harassment (Acker, 2006). Feminist Marxists critically examine the pervasive issue of the commodification of women's bodies within capitalist societies, emphasizing the exploitative nature of industries such as beauty, fashion, and pornography. This can be seen clearly in Ifemelu's experiences using her body.

Now what I need is help to relax. If you want the job, you have it. I'd pay you a hundred dollars, with the possibility of a raise, and you'd work as needed, no set schedule. (Adichie, 2013, p. 150).

The quote above explains that the tennis coach offers Ifemelu a job. However, the job the tennis coach is referring to here is assistance work which only relaxes her and Ifemelu will be paid one hundred dollars per meeting. Not only will he be given a hundred dollars, but the tennis coach will also provide transportation costs for the train on which Ifemelu is traveling.

The phrase "help to relax" could imply tasks associated with caregiving or emotional labor, which are often associated with traditional gender roles assigned to women. Marxist feminists would be critical of how certain forms of labor, particularly those associated with femininity, are undervalued and often unpaid or underpaid in capitalist societies. Caring body-based labor tends to resist the reterritorializing that is involved in other types of commodity production because of the unalienable value in the work relationship due to the mutually experienced pleasure or well-being produced in the caring labor process, even when other aspects are exploited. (Ferguson, 2015, p. 259). On the other hand, this treatment disappointed Ifemelu, who felt that women could be seen as working only with their bodies without appreciating the skills they had.

'When can I start working?' she asked.

'Want to come over right now?'

'Okay,' she said.

She shaved her underarms, dug out the lipstick she had not worn since the day she left Lagos, most of it left smeared on Obinze's neck at the airport. What would happen with the tennis coach? He had said "massage," but his manner, his tone, had dripped suggestion. Perhaps he was one of those white men she had read about, with strange tastes, who wanted women to drag a feather over their back or urinate on them.

(Adichie, 2013, p. 160-161.)

The quote describes the complex dynamics from a Marxist Feminist perspective, in which Ifemelu's character is trapped in the need to work and use her body as a source of income, illustrating how power, the economy, and gender are interrelated in society. Initial question, "When can I start working?" reflects his aspiration to be economically independent, but his subsequent response which leads to physical encounters, "Want to come over right now?", indicating how the body can be used as a commodification tool in unequal social situations.

In capitalism, workers receive wages, capitalists take the profit from their work, and those who reproduce daily and generational life receive no recognition for their labor, in wages or in social value. As subjects in capitalism, they are rendered invisible or a burden to the system. (Armstrong, 2020)

"This regime is treating us like sheep and we are starting to behave as if we are sheep. I have not been able to do any real research in years, because every day I am organizing strikes and talking about unpaid salary and there is no chalk in the classrooms." He was a small, dark man, smaller-looking and darker-looking beside Ginika's large, ash-haired mother, with an undecided air about him, as though he was always dithering between choices. When Ifemelu told her own parents that Ginika's family was finally leaving, her father sighed and said, "At least they are fortunate to have that option," and her mother said, "They are blessed." (Adichie, 2013, p. 66-67)"

In this excerpt, an analysis from a Marxist Feminist perspective highlights the issue of the commodification of the female body through the depiction of a female character, Ginika's mother. The quote describes the economic and social conditions that influence individual and family decisions. Someone in the quote

expresses limitations in conducting research due to involvement in strike organizations and struggles for rights such as unpaid wages, indicating a problem of exploitation in the world of work: *"This regime is treating us like sheep and we are starting to behave as if we are sheep. I have not been able to do any real research in years, because every day I am organizing strikes and talking about unpaid salary and there is no chalk in the classrooms."* It illustrates how economic and employment systems can hinder women's self-development potential in the context of education and academic careers and illustrates the structural inequalities that can force women to prioritize their economic needs over personal aspirations.

Feminist Marxist analysis highlights how unequal social and economic conditions can result in the commodification of women's bodies by limiting choices and the development of individual potential, and illustrates how decision-making is often not purely based on desire but also determined by structural limitations and exploitation in the world of work.

"My new features editor has come from America!" she said, hugging Ifemelu. It was difficult to tell her age, anything between fifty and sixty-five, but it was easy to tell that she had not been born with her light complexion, its sheen was too waxy and her knuckles were dark, as though those folds of skin had valiantly resisted her bleaching cream. (Adichie, 2013, p. 401)"

In the narrative quote above, the sentence *"My new features editor has come from America!"* In certain situations, a person's appearance and ethnic background can have an influence on how the individual is assessed or perceived in various contexts. For example, in the world of work, especially in appearance-heavy industries such as media or publishing, a person's ethnic origin or nationality can be viewed as either favorable or unfavorable, depending on existing cultural perspectives and preferences. In addition, in sentences *"her light complexion, its sheen was too waxy and her knuckles were dark, as though those folds of skin had valiantly resisted her bleaching cream"* illustrates that the use of whitening creams is a common cosmetic practice in several cultures. This is often related to social and cultural pressures that lighter skin is perceived as more beautiful or valued. Then, on to the narrative excerpt *"It was difficult to tell her age, anything between fifty and sixty-five"* The use of unpredictable age descriptions (between fifty and sixty-five years) reflects how a person's age can be a factor influencing the way people perceive and value them in society.

In the context of the commodification of the female body, this means that there is strong social pressure to maintain a youthful and attractive appearance. The importance of a "youthful" appearance in the context of the commodification of the female body refers to a beauty culture that often emphasizes the desire to remain young and physically attractive. Wolf (2002) illustrates how beauty is perceived as a value system that plays a significant role in social and political contexts. She claims that beauty is used as a tool to maintain male domination, and in modern society, the concept of beauty is a fundamental belief that supports existing gender hierarchies, and this occurs through the influence of the beauty industry and the media that change views of the female body and make it as objects that can be traded to achieve beauty standards determined by society.

Labor Dynamic's

Labour dynamics refers to the various changes, interactions and related to the work environment and the way work is done in it. Through a Marxist Feminist perspective, understanding labour dynamics involves an analysis that includes aspects of gender, class, and social power. In this case, feminist and Marxist views are combined to understand how capitalism affects gender roles in labour (Hartmann, 1981). Heidi Hartmann sees solidarity between women and men and between different classes as the key to addressing gender inequality in the workplace and in society. It promotes greater social change through mutual struggles between genders and between classes.

"Look, I've two more people to interview and I'll get back to you."

"Okay. Thank you." Ifemelu knew she would not get the job and for this she was grateful." She repeated "I'm Ngozi Okonkwo" in front of the mirror before her next interview, at the Seaview restaurant. (Adichie, 2013, p. 136).

This sentence can be interpreted as part of employment dynamics in the context of a job search or recruitment process. Although it does not clearly describe the movement of jobs as a whole, this sentence does reflect how individuals, like Ifemelu, are involved in the job search process. Quotation *"Look, I've two more people to interview and I'll get back to you,"* reflects the power dynamics that exist in the job interview process. Employers have significant power over job seekers, and the competitive nature of the job market is evident, with many candidates competing for the same position. This reflects the unequal relations in capitalist societies, where

employers wield power over job seekers, and individuals must compete for limited employment opportunities (Lopez, 2021). Ifemelu's response, "Okay. Thank you," showing resignation and understanding that he might not get the job. This reaction can be seen as a result of the historical economic discrimination faced by women, as demonstrated by Marxist feminism.

Expression "she was grateful" because not getting the job shows complex emotions. In a capitalist society, some jobs can perpetuate gender stereotypes and unequal treatment, which can be detrimental to women's well-being and self-fulfillment. From a Marxist feminist perspective, this response can be seen as an awareness of the limitations of certain job opportunities and an acknowledgment of the need for a more just and empowering role for women in the world of work.

Ifemelu's repeated actions "I'm Ngozi Okonkwo" in front of the mirror before the next interview at the Seaview restaurant has significance from a Marxist feminist point of view. By asserting her identity and using her full name, Ifemelu tries to represent herself confidently and challenges the potential marginalization of women's voices in the workplace.

'I have good news. Kimberly called me to ask for your phone number. The babysitter she hired just left. She wants to hire you. She wants you to start on Monday. She said she wanted you from the beginning but Laura talked her into hiring the other person. So, Ifem you have a job! Cash! Under the table! Ifemeco, this is great.' (Adichie, 2013, p. 165).

In this sentence, some elements reflect changes in the dynamics of work. Quotation "She wants to hire you" has the implied meaning that someone wants to invite you to work under their supervision. Term "hire" indicates that the person plans to give you a specific job or position. From a Marxist feminist perspective, the sentence can invite discussion of capitalist issues such as gender roles in the world of work, therefore, by employing women, capitalists hope to benefit from their skills and contributions. This job offer announcement has the potential to bring about changes in the way Ifemelu interacts with his work. For example, Ifemelu may need to rearrange her schedule and take on new responsibilities as a caretaker for children, which could affect her day-to-day life. In addition, the fact that this work is informed as "Cash! Under the table!" pointed out that this work may not involve formal processing or tax reporting, creating a unique dynamic in the relationship between Ifemelu and Kimberly, the employer.

On the other hand, the sentence "Laura talked her into hiring the other person". it notes that initially Kimberly wanted to recruit Ifemelu, but Laura managed to convince her to sign someone else. In a feminist view, this can be seen as a dynamic where women (Ifemelu) may face competition from other women (Laura) for limited jobs. Therefore, the reproduced workers including themselves return the next day ready to sell their labor-power to the capitalist. The use-value of this reproductive labor is the daily renewal and generation of workers. However, the exchange value of women's work in the family is nothing. (Armstrong, 2020).

The following sentences describe the dynamics of gender inequality in the workplace and how this inequality can be reflected in the reasons used to make decisions. The manager said to Ifemelu,

'I'm sorry, Ngozi,' she said, "But we decided to hire a more qualified person. Good luck!" (Adichie, 2013, p. 149).

On sentence "I'm sorry, Ngozi, but we decided to hire a more qualified person. Good luck!". Taken as a whole, the sentence reflects the role of labor dynamics in job-related decision-making, competition in the job search, and how candidate qualifications affect the outcome of the hiring or filling process. The manager ends the sentence by saying "Good luck!" to Ngozi, indicating that they wished Ngozi all the best in his quest.

The manager's statement also reflects the strong influence of patriarchal and economic structures, which can sometimes affect their preference for male candidates in the hiring process.

'The first time Ifemelu went there, her counselor, Ruth, a caramel-skinned African American woman, asked, 'What do you really want to do?'

'I want a job.' "Yes, but what kind?" Ruth asked, slightly incredulous.

Ifemelu looked at her résumé on the table. "I'm a communications major, so anything in communications, the media."

"Do you have a passion, a dream job?"

Ifemelu shook her head. She felt weak, for not having a passion, not being sure what she wanted to do. Her interests were vague and varied, magazine publishing, fashion, politics, television; none of them had a firm shape.
(Adichie, 2013, p. 211)

In a Marxist Feminist perspective, this sentence can also be interpreted as a description of inequality in society related to work. Hartmann (1981) argues that in the work environment, women often face injustice based on their gender. These types of inequalities can vary, such as differences in wages between women and men doing equal work, limited career opportunities for women, or social norms that view women as less capable or less suitable for some types of work. Also related to access to certain jobs or the education required for those jobs. Some groups may face barriers in accessing the jobs or education needed to enter certain employment opportunities.

'My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky.'

Later, after she breezed through the job interview, and the woman shook her hand and said she would be a "wonderful fit" in the company, she wondered if the woman would have felt the same way had she walked into that office wearing her thick, kinky, God-given halo of hair, the Afro.

She did not tell her parents how she got the job; her father said, "I have no doubt that you will excel. America creates opportunities for people to thrive. Nigeria can indeed learn a lot from them," while her mother began to sing when Ifemelu said that, in a few years, she could become an American citizen."
(Adichie, 2013, p. 214)

In this passage, Ifemelu reflects on the intricate dynamics of appearance, racial identity, and labor disparities during a job interview. Ifemelu's thoughts about her hair reflect the social and cultural expectations placed on individuals, particularly women, in terms of their appearance. In the context of Ifemelu who accepts a job that is considered not by his qualifications, Hartmann's (1981) view of gender inequality in the workplace can provide significant insight. Social norms and gender stereotypes also have a role to play in the way jobs are placed and how a person's abilities are judged.

In addition, inequality in career opportunities is also an important issue. If Ifemelu is not provided with work opportunities that match his qualifications, this can limit career development and equal recognition in the work environment.

'What do you mean, why? Why not?'
'Better you send money back. Unless your father is big man? You have connections?'
'I've found a job there,' she said.
(Adichie, 2013, p. 16-17)

From a Marxist feminist point of view, this narrative can be interpreted as part of the issues of inequality in the world of work and inequality in opportunities for access to decent work. In this context, finding a job and achieving economic independence are important steps to overcome the economic inequality that may occur in the capitalist system. Therefore, individuals may feel limited in their opportunities if they do not have strong economic resources or significant relationships.

CONCLUSION

The previous chapter has discussed in detail the issue of labor and gender exploitation in the novel *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The author explores the themes of labor and gender exploitation through the lens of feminist Marxism. The novel follows the story of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who moves to the United States to pursue her education and career.

Drawing on the insights of Marxist feminism, this chapter will examine how Adichie's novel highlights the intersection of labour and gender exploitation. It will explore how Ifemelu's experiences reflect the broader issues of gender inequality and exploitation within capitalist societies, and how Marxist feminist theory can help us to understand and address these issues.

Overall, *Americanah* emphasizes the importance of recognizing the social construction of gender and its impact on our identity and social interactions. It highlights the need to challenge gender-based inequalities and power imbalances in society and suggests that confronting gender exploitation is necessary for women to assert their agency and autonomy.

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